Milan Fogel

THE RIGHTEOUS WITHOUT A MEDAL

ANNEX:
THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS WITH THE MEDAL
AFTER 2010

JOZ
Jewish Community Zemun

IMPRESSUM

THE RIGHTEOUS WITHOUT A MEDAL
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THE RIGHTEOUS WITHOUT A MEDAL
AND
THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE MEDAL

Zemun, 2019.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018 the Jewish Community in Zemun celebrated the 20th anniversary of the introduction of its publication activities. During that period we have issued over 30 different titles of various types of publications. Apart from the editions that keep track of our regular 2-year activities (7 catalogues) and books of various contents, a special place in this collection is reserved for books and exhibitions dedicated to the history and the sufferings of our community from its founding in 1739 right up to the end of the Second World War (World War II).

The edition we are particularly proud of is the book "Righteous Among the Nations – Serbia". As a result of a 2-year long period of research and writing, in 2010 we published the book by writer Milan Fogel, which was pronounced a capital work of prose by the City of Belgrade. The publication "The Righteous (With and Without) the Medal" is a sequel to the previous book and is a continuation of his work dedicated to the commemoration and remembrance of the courageous people of Serbia who, during World War II, saved the lives of their co-citizens, Jews faced with the fate of extinction.

Since 1963 the World Centre for the Remembrance of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem, has been awarding Medals of the Righteous to people who saved the lives of Jews, as a symbol of recognition and appreciation for their acts of humanity and utmost courage. During the research period of gathering material and data for writing the stories of the people who were awarded the Medal, we came to the conclusion that there still existed many cases of saving Jews which had not been recognized and the protagonists involved were thus deprived of the Righteous Award. The idea and the task which we have now placed before us is to collect as much relevant evidence about them as possible so that they can be acknowledged as the Righteous, or if not, at least prevent their deeds from being forgotten.

With the breakup of Yugoslavia during the 90's of the previous century, we were faced with the fact that Yad Vashem had divided its existing list of the Righteous of Yugoslavia according to the newly-founded states. The criteria used for this division was unacceptable to us in Zemun. We believe that the only possible method was to apply the territorial principle, i.e. a division according to the place of habitation of the saviour and the place where the act was performed (in the territories of the newly-founded states), and not the principle of nationality by which certain Righteous have subsequently been relocated to the lists of their new national states. It is unacceptable to us that Slovenes, Hungarians, Slovaks, Albanians, the Roma, Germans, Croats, are excluded from the list of Serbian citizens, although they were or still are, citizens of Serbia. As an example we here state the case of Arslan Reznici from Kosovo and Metohia, who at the request of his family, was transferred to the Righteous of Albania by Yad Vashem. Another case relating to Kosovo and Metohia is that of the Croatian Ana Jakić, who was transferred to the Righteous of Croatia. A third case is the transfer of

Andrej Tumpej to the Righteous of Slovenia. On the other hand, Yad Vashem transferred the Serbians who saved lives in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Righteous of Serbia. Such transfers are also unacceptable to us.

Due to the constant relocation of certain Righteous from one state to another based on the criteria of nationality as already stated, we endeavour to make Yad Vashem acknowledge that the most acceptable method of listing the saviors is the "territorial principle". Until this is accepted, our list of the Righteous will deviate in some respect from that of the official list of Yad Vashem. In the list which is given in this book by the Jewish Community in Zemun, only the Righteous who saved Jews on the territory of Serbia are noted.

At the time when the book in question was in print (December, 2018,) Yad Vashem had recognized 26, 973 Righteous from 51 states. The degree of commiseration which the citizens of Serbia felt towards their co-citizens, Jews, is best illustrated by the fact that Serbia, according to the number of recognized Righteous, is placed high on the list of Righteous, taking the 14th position among the already mentioned 51 states worldwide, with its 139 Righteous. These are official facts stated on Yad Vashem's site and they, as we have already mentioned, differ from our own list. According to our territorial principle, Serbia has 138 Righteous.

The work of the Yad Vashem Commission for recognizing new Righteous continues to this day. We hope that our research will be recognized and lead to new Award Medals.

The President of the JC Zemun and editor of this book,
Nenad Fogel

THE RIGHTEOUS WITHOUT A MEDAL

THE END OF THE NIGHTMARE

This is the story of Rahela Ferari and the rescue operation during the Holocaust in World War II (WWII) that kept her alive. To eliminate all doubt from the start, Rahela Ferari was the artistic name of the renowned Yugoslav actress Bele Rohel Frojnd (Bela, father's name, Rohel, Yiddish, Ruža in Serbian and Rosalie in German, which was at the time the official language in part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy). Her stage name, Rahela Ferari, Rohel accepted at the start of her career in Novi Sad, before she went to the theatre in Budapest to acquire her theatrical knowledge – evidence of this can be seen in a travel document where these details were written in her own hand. She was and is remembered by that name in the territories of pre-war and post-war Yugoslavia.

When she got married, the priest gave her the name Marija; thus Rohel Frojnd acquired another new name. To keep up with the history of her name, I mention here in advance, that Rahela acquired a new surname as well when in 1943 she married the well-known pre and post-war actor Aleksandar Aca Stojković. In order to avoid any confusion with her many names, since she had quite a few as dictated by various circumstances, throughout this life story we shall call Rohel - Rahela Ferari.

Bela and Emilija Frojnd, nee Leiner, lived in Zemun at the onset of World War I (WWI). With their family of seven children the Frojnds lived on the outskirts of Zemun town.

Janika, Bela, Emilija, Emil, Johana, Rahela, Julija and Etel Frojnd

Being a family with scarce means, nobody ever thought of buying toys for the children. However, a childhood bereft of toys did not deter Rahela from finding amusement for herself. She would go out into the street and stare at the ants passing by the wooden fence. For the future actress, just like for many other professions, a vivid imagination was essential. Rahela used to play with the ants, inventing stories, and thus found amusement for herself. Just like a miniature Disney theatre, as Rahela much later on recollected, playing with the ants in a world of fantasy, she was the overpowering director who arranged their lives for them. She would place hurdles made of tufts of grass before them and they would have to fend for themselves in new and unpredictable situations

It did not take long before the Frojnd family also faced obstructions, since someone else was now dictating the way they would live. They were forced to find ways to

overcome the newly-arisen situation, in quite a different manner than that of the ants.

Bela and Emilija were born in Bačka Palanka. Bela was a tailor and since there was not enough business for him in Bačka Palanka, they moved to Zemun. Rahela was too young to comprehend why certain persons unknown to them, were raiding her father's store, why they threatened him in the street and hurled uncivil words in his face. The reason for this was not the fact that Emilija and Bela were Jews because at this time anti-Semitism was not yet life-threatening; Emperor Franz Josef had as far back as 1868 acknowledged the rights of Jews to their religion, thereby making them equal to all other citizens living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand and his wife were killed in Sarajevo, the attack on Serbia marked the beginning of World War I. At the time Zemun was a border town of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The persecution of the leading men of the occupied peoples began and the fact that Bela Frojnd was a man of modern ideas, a socialist, was reason enough for the hardships he had to endure, ending with his banishment to his place of birth. The Frojnd family was living in Bačka Palanka when World War I ended.

From an early age, Rahela loved to sing and dance, and so she became a member of the Bačka Palanka local choir. When Rahela came of age to go to school, it coincided with the end of the five-year banishment period, which in any case had lost its legality since the defeated Monarchy was already dismembered. The Frojnds moved to Novi Sad.

Rahela enrolled in the State school and her matriculation was approaching fast when the pupils were given the chance to choose their future vocation. "A teacher or an actress," was Rahela's statement in front of the entire class, which produced a burst of laughter among her peers. However, the form teacher had words of consolation for Rahela: "To be an actress is a beautiful and inspiring calling."

However, fate, if that is the term that can be used to describe her parents' lack of means to send their child on for further education, left Rahela devastated since she wanted to become a teacher. On the other hand, it destined her to another vocation which would eventually bring her fulfillment and many joys.

Rahela was ten years old when she got to know Lajoš Leiner, a cousin of hers, better. Lajoš was stage properties manager in the Serbian National Theatre. When Rahela began appearing as an extra at the Serbian National Theatre in 1930, she had already learned by heart all the musicals and other plays from the theatre repertoire. She was noticed at once for her inherent talent for acting, so the following year she became a regular, full-time member of its cast. With references from the Yugoslav Embassy in Hungary, Rahela left for Budapest in 1938 for further studies of the art of acting (in the "Nemzeti Sinhaz" Theatre, which at the time dominated the European theatre scene) and after one year of study, with newly-gained experience, she returned to Novi Sad.

It did not take long before Rahela was invited to join the actors' company of the Arts' Theatre in Belgrade. The Arts' Theatre was at "Kolarac" and Rahela acted as one

of its actresses from 1939 till 1941. Along with her, other members of the company were actors like Viktor Starčić, Mavid Popović, Milenko Šerban, Mira Stupica, then Todorović, and others. Rahela, now an experienced actress, played prominent roles in three productions. Then 6 April1941 came along and with it the bombardment of Belgrade. The war, which only a couple of years before seemed far away, was now taking its toll on innocent victims left inside a defenceless city.

At the beginning of World War II, Rahela was in Belgrade while her whole family was in Novi Sad. When her sister, Julka, married a Serb, Vasa Surdučki, which happened at the end of April, 1941, there was no way that Rahela could go to Novi Sad. With the new border line which had been drawn between Serbia and Hungary she had lost contact with her family in Novi Sad: the division of the war spoils left this city in another country.

Immediately after the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the occupiers brought with them their racist laws to the carved up country and the marionette government of Serbia transformed them into regulatory measures. These measures immediately singled out all Jews: the duty of wearing the yellow band on one sleeve, the prohibition of buying basic food outside the time frame designated (when there was little left inside the shops including bread, and the open markets were half empty), the ban to use public means of transport and many others.

Despite all prohibition and orders, Rahela refused to place the yellow mark on her sleeve. From then on her life was confined to one of illegality. It was a courageous heart and the will to defy the situation she was faced with, that enabled her to somehow make her way along the Belgrade streets. Although she had already gained the appreciation of the Belgrade public, Rahela's acting career was now terminated. She remained in close contact with her colleague Aleksandar Aca Stojković, whom she had met in the Arts' theatre, and a few other actors who cared little about her origins.

Rahela and Aca Stojković, 1943

On one occasion Rahela had overstayed the curfew that applied equally to all citizens of occupied Belgrade. The incident occurred in Profesorska kolonija close to the street she lived in. The stomping boots of a German patrol that suddenly appeared at the street corner which Rahela had to pass were a signal

of her approaching end. As she was passing by a gate she heard a voice coming from the other side; an energetic half-whisper said "In here." Inside the yard a family was sitting around the table. When they invited her to join them, Rahela could not overcome her impression that everyone along the street sat waiting for late-comers, people who had overstayed the curfew, to save them from the maltreatment of the German patrols. Rahela thanked her host, saying that she had already eaten and her characteristic voice almost gave away her true identity. "But you are Rahela Ferari," one of the dwellers said. "I listened to a play on Radio Belgrade." That was very possible, since before the war Radio Belgrade had broadcasted some live theatre performances in which Rahela had also played a part. However, Rahela did not want to endanger her hosts if by any chance it became known that they had harboured a Jewess. "Many people have told me that my voice resembles that of the actress," Rahela responded, and once the German patrol had passed, she hurriedly left for her apartment.

Rahela no longer felt safe in the apartment beside which German patrols often passed. At the time Crveni krst on Vračar was considered a suburb of Belgrade; still, it was relatively easy to reach other parts of the town from there in no time at all. At the suggestion of a friend, Rahela found a place to stay with Magda, an illiterate woman of good heart, who never asked many questions about the identity of the young woman looking for a place where she would only sleep at night. At the time Rahela had a fake pass stating that she was Ruža Ferari.

Magda only had a kitchen and one room in a larger building where there were a number of flats. The caretaker had noted how Rahela came to Magda's abode every evening and cautioned her that he must put her name up on the list of lodgers where all the names of the tenants stood, for he did not want any problems when a police patrol came along; it was his duty to present the book with the list of lodgers. Rahela did not do what was asked of her. She kept repeating the same story, that she was only there for the night and that she would not come again. When one evening the police really appeared, the caretaker told them that there was an unregistered young woman in Magda's apartment and that he did not know who she was.

Magda and Rahela heard the stomp of feet approaching their door, and since they were already in their beds there was little they could do. The policemen entered the flat without knocking and said "Good evening" to the astonished Magda who had no idea that she had let a room to a Jewess.

Before leaving her room Rahela, frightened to death, knew what awaited her if it became known that she had a fake ID. She walked up to the mirror pegged on the wall: "Be elegant," she told herself defiantly and began arranging her hair. Her hand stopped in mid air as she looked hard at herself. The face in the mirror belonged to someone else; looking back at Rahela was a completely grey-haired young woman, unknown to her.

Rahela quickly forgot her bouncy red hair, a smile lit up her face and that was how she presented herself to the grumbling policemen.

“I am not registered here,” she said immediately. “I’m registered with a friend of mine and have come to Magda’s just to sleepover. I’m waiting for information from the Pančevo theatre whether I have been cast in their play.”

What was Ruža Ferari, an actress, looking for in this shanty abode, the policemen had no time to ask as Rahela’s friend, Smilja Marjanović, burst into the room like a hurricane.

“Ruža, say thank God!” flustered and breathless Smilja announced, completely ignoring all present. “A telegram has just arrived saying that you are to report to the theatre tomorrow. The boat sails out for Pančevo in the early morning. Pack your things and you’ll sleep at my place for the rest of the night.”

With no thought of packing in her mind, the overjoyed Rahela jumped around, hugging the bewildered policemen. “You brought me luck,” Rahela said taking leave of the policemen and together with Smilja, rushed out of the house.

“She is an actress after all,” a policeman grumbled watching Rahela and Smilja running fast through the neighbouring gardens towards Crveni krst.

“I can’t believe that you arrived just in time,” Rahela said once they caught their breath.

“I wouldn’t have, if my neighbour hadn’t told me of an ongoing raid,” Smilja smiled. “He is a policeman too, and I really have no idea what possessed him to come and tell me about it.”

In May 1942 the last inmates of the Staro Sajmište camp were killed in the gas chamber truck, (“dušegupka”), on their final trip to the mass grave in Jajinci. Berlin was informed that in Belgrade and the occupied and carved up Serbia there were no longer any Jews left. However, the truth was somewhat different.

Rahela was one of those Jews who evaded the executioners, contriving ways to avoid getting into their hands.

Somewhere around mid 1942 news reached Rahela that her father Bela was ill and had gone to Subotica for treatment. Without any valid documents, Rahela, in constant danger of being arrested, barely making her way through the streets of Belgrade, had no means of travelling off to a different state to visit her ailing father. When news reached her that Bela had died at the beginning of June 1942, Rachela confined within the big city, mourned her father’s passing; she had not been able to say her last ‘good-bye’ to him.

Rahela moved a number of times from one place of abode to another, but the Special police were not idle either. In regularly staged raids, or information given by “conscientious” citizens, they knocked on her door one day at the start of November 1942.

“Are you Rahela Frojnd?” one agent asked, showing no civility.

“I am,” Rahela answered impulsively.

“Come with us,” ordered the agent.

"Now wait," Rahela gathered her wits. "My mother is German, we are granted certain benefits... I was born in Zemun and can present to you my birth certificate from the Zemun church in no time at all."

It was for the best that the agent did not ask her from which church, as Rahela would not have known how to answer; again her talent for acting came to use but unfortunately it was of little help this time. The agent persisted in his duty to arrest her: "We'll see about that at the station."

Once they reached the police station, the agent was somewhat in two minds how to proceed: he rang up his chief, who had broken his arm and was absent from work. He retold Rahela's story to his chief, who with a broken arm probably had little interest for anything, and who responded by telling him to let Rahela go with a warning to bring her mother's birth certificate, proof that her mother was German.

"And don't you even think of running away," the agent threatened Rahela. "Your whole family will perish should you do so!"

Rahela, drained to the core, almost smiled: "Don't worry, I have been thinking about them the whole time." She knew that they were in another state, in Novi Sad, which was now Hungarian, and that the agent could not reach them. Someone else would "see to them", eventually.

Nevertheless, Rahela could not discern a way out of the situation she was now in. Kapitalina Erić, an actress and friend of hers, tried to console her, but Rahela had had enough of the whole situation. "Kapitalina, please find me some strychnine; I'll just swallow it and all my troubles will be over."

Kapitalina understood Rahela very well, but the thought of obtaining strychnine never crossed her mind – that was for rats, not people.

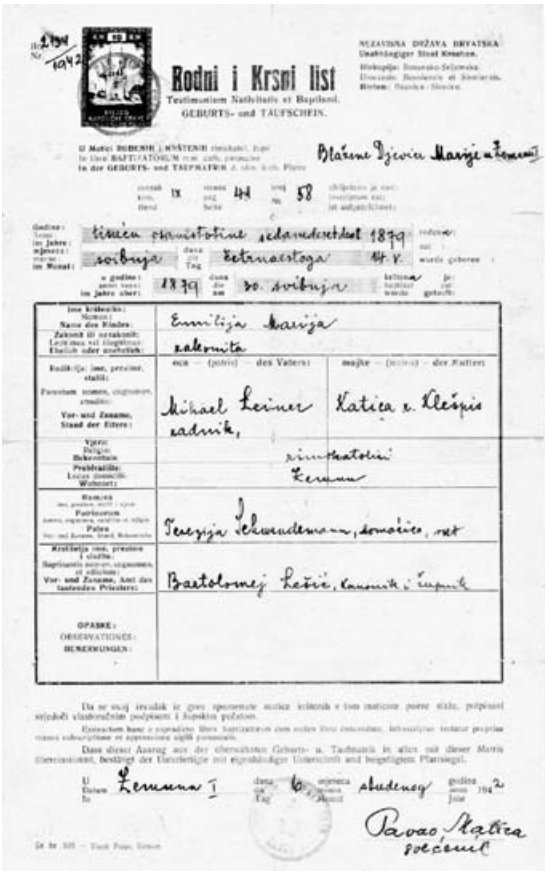
Kapitalina was still by Rachela's side when Oleg came on to the scene; he managed to pull a few strings and reach the priest of the Blažene Djevice Marije Catholic church in Zemun. The Catholic priest Pavao Matica, on 6 November 1942, issued a copy of the birth and christening certificate from the church books, certifying that Emilija Marija was born on 14 May 1879, (to this day it is a custom that children are given two names in the Catholic church) and that she was christened a few days later in the same church. Rahela could finally breathe a little easier and present the persistent agent with proof that her mother was a German of the Catholic faith. In truth, the priest had given Oleg a blank certificate, stamped as required, and Oleg had filled in all the data the police expected to find in the document.

Shortly after this experience with the police, Aleksandar Aca Stojković and Rahela, now very close, decided to get married and thus end Rahela's misery.

In the vicinity of the Stojković house there was an Orthodox church, Hram Pokrova Presvete Bogorodice. The Stojković family knew the parish priest, but certain problems had to be overcome. Rahela did have her mother's birth certificate but not one in her own name. Aside from this, according to her mother's birth list, it was evident

that the Frojnds were Roman-Catholics. However, the priest, Ljubomir Kostić, truly wanted to help them and decided to turn a blind eye to the facts; the wedding took place on 21 January 1943, and, according to her mother's second name, the priest renamed Rohel - Marija.

Still, when the newly married couple decided to leave Belgrade temporarily and seek shelter in the place where Aca was born, Rahela realized that beside the wedding document, she had no other. It was necessary to obtain proof that Marija was of Orthodox religion. Again the priest, Ljubomir Kostić, solved Rahela's problem. Already on 26 January 1943 she was "transferred" from the Roman-Catholic to the Orthodox faith and in the certificate from the records of converted believers, the new name Marija she had been given during the wedding ceremony, was written.



Rodni i Krsni list

Testimonium Nativitatis et Baptismi.

GEBURTS- und TAUFSCHEIN.

Birth Certificate in Emilija Marija´s name

Aleksandar Aca Stojković was born on 22 September 1915 in Mladenovac, where his parents Budimir and Darinka, nee Radak, with a number of other citizens of Belgrade had found refuge from the turmoil of World War I. Father Budimir was a clerk in the Belgrade Railroad Directorate and they lived in their house at Crveni krst at 8, Mladonagoričanska Street (today Branka Krsmanovića). The onset of World War II found the Stojković family living in Belgrade in their house on Crveni Krst.

Aca's older brother Ljubomir, an officer of the King's army, shared the destiny of most officers and soldiers of the King's Army, when he became a prisoner of war (POW) and spent the war in German camps. His wife and two children, who had stayed at his mother Darinka's home at Crveni Krst , welcomed him on his return.

Although Rahela had stopped performing at the very beginning of the war, many people knew and recognized her, so that walks around Belgrade presented a constant threat that she would be exposed. With their new documents, Aca and Rahela decided to leave Belgrade and go to Mladenovac. However, their neighbours' curiosity and the frequent Chetnik patrols in search of Communists and Jews eventually pushed them

further on. They kept changing their place of abode and eventually Rahela lost all contact with her family in Novi Sad.

At the start of 1944, in March, Nazi Germany occupied Hungary. News had reached Hitler that the Hungarian government was negotiating with the Allies to switch to their side. It was evident to all that the war was nearing its end, but at the same time that Hitler had no intention of surrendering. He was seeking for a way out through negotiations with the Allies in order to deter the Communist threat spear-headed by Russia, whose army was already on their march to Berlin. At the same time Hitler was dissatisfied with the mild stance of Hungary towards Jews, so he sent Adolf Eichmann to Hungary to "solve the Jewish question". This solution implied the extinction of the Jews from the occupied territories. By mid 1944 a ghetto was opened in Subotica through which by the month of June around 4,000 prisoners, mainly Jews, passed.

When the Jews of Novi Sad were deported to Subotica, Julka, although married to a Serb, was arrested. On 20 April 1944, Julka converted to the Orthodox faith; however, this was not enough for the Hungarian occupying authorities to leave her free. The occupiers only recognized conversions that had taken place up to 6 April 1941. Still Julka was lucky enough not to be deported to Subotica from where the majority of imprisoned people were by route of Baja sent to the death camp Auschwitz. Julka spent two months in prison and her Vasa visited her daily. When she was released from prison, she had to wear the yellow band and report to the police each day. In the city, in which there were no more Jews, nor any relative of hers, Julka scarcely left her home. She wrote to Rahela, but her sister and Aca were far from Belgrade.

Rahela had no notion of what was happening in Novi Sad, not even that her mother Emilija, and her sisters Ethel and Johana had been deported to Auschwitz. Julka also had no knowledge of their whereabouts, although she had managed to visit them once in Subotica and Baja and had taken them some food and other necessities. They only learned of their fate after the war, when Johana returned home after the liberation of the inmates of Auschwitz.

At the same time both of Rahela's brothers, Janika (Janoš) and Emil, were deported first to Subotica and then to Baja. From there they were sent to forced labour in the Workers' Battalion no. 105/12 to the Eastern Front. The majority of those who were sent to the Eastern Front lost their lives in the campaigns of clearing mine fields or were just simply murdered. Many died of the inhumane conditions in which they had found themselves, however Janika and Emil were determined not to give up and decided to make a run for it. In mid winter they swam across the freezing river Don and joined up with Red Army troops.

Unfortunately, Janika fell ill and died. Janika's wife Iboljka (Ljubica), nee Weiss, and son Djordje (Djurica, born in 1942) perished in Auschwitz.

On his return from Russia, Emil was hospitalized in the Military hospital in Smederevo from where, on 17 April, he sent a postcard to the Jewish Community in Novi Sad. He asked the employees there to send word to his wife that he had returned from

Russia. At the time Emil was unaware that his wife Piroška, nee Kraus, with their adopted son Ivica had been deported to Auschwitz in 1944. After the war Emil returned home, but his wife and son did not.

Avoiding a sojourn in one place for too long, Rahela and Aca reached Svilajnac. Rahela was pregnant and on 24 September 1944 was lying in hospital.

The Germans seemed persistent in their search for Rahela. The same night the Luftwaffe bombed Svilajnac.

At the same time Belgrade was also bombarded almost every day. The family of the famous painter Pavle Beljanski was in Belgrade. They had relatives in Svilajnac and decided that they too, would move to a safer place. Only Pavle stayed behind in Belgrade. In an onrush of the German aviation, twelve people were killed in Svilajnac. Among them was the entire family of Pavle Beljanski, all seven of them.

When the bombardment of Svilajnac began, the people fled for their lives. How were they to know that the planes with their deadly cargo would never return and they all hurried to leave town.The hospital was evacuated and everyone who could stand on their feet was running away from the target of an eventual raid. Rahela was taken out on a stretcher and someone placed her onto a peasant wagon which was passing by at that moment. However, the bumpy road was more than she could bear. She asked to be taken off, which was promptly done, and she was left all by herself on the stretcher beside the road.

Suddenly out of nowhere, out from the darkness some unfamiliar people appeared, picked up the stretcher and took Rahela to the nearest village. It was the village Dublje and it was only then that Rahela and her saviours could take a closer look at each other. Some friends of hers from Novi Sad, who had been imprisoned in the mine of Bor as forced labourers, brought Rahela to the village. What had happened was that the Partisan units had attacked the Bor mine those days and prevented the leading of the second group of inmates away. This group was saved from the fate of the first one; most of the inmates of the first group were murdered.

Rahela gave birth to her son Darko in Dublje.

By the end of 1944, the greater part of Serbia was liberated and when, on 20 October, Belgrade was liberated as well, Aca and Rahela could begin their journey back home. They returned to Darinka, Aca's mother's house on Crveni Krst. Joy mixed with tragedy and stories of survival were cut short by Rahela: "The nightmare is over." Whether she really said this or not, is unimportant; life had to go on from where it had stopped four years earlier.

The war was still on when Rahela found herself in Novi Sad again. Theatre life was once again beginning to find its way to the public in the liberated cities. At the time it was clearly expected that actors also had a role in the reconstruction of the country. During the day Rahela was an active worker in the rebuilding of the country but in the evening she was an actress in the restored Serbian National Theatre. The performances were acted in front of full audiences. The repertoire was in keeping with the

contemporary situation.

Rahela found time to be with her family, too. In 1946 her, second son, Saša was born.

In 1947 the Yugoslav Drama Theatre was founded in Belgrade. Rahela Ferari found herself among the prominent Yugoslav actors who had been invited to join the newly formed cast. This theatre was her second home up to the end of her life. Rahela received the most prominent Yugoslav recognition awards an actor could acquire.

Adolf and Johana

Rahela's sister Johana, who had lived through the horrors of Auschwitz, married a Holocaust survivor, Adolf Štern, who had spent the war in forced labour units and in 1948 the two of them went to live in Israel sailing on the vessel Kefalos. They lived in Ein Karem, a district of Jerusalem.

When her brother Emil got married for the second time to Jože, nee Vajs, they also went to live in Israel in 1948 where their son Avram was born. In time Avram got married and now lives with his wife and three children in Rišon Lecion.

If we had to choose one person who could be a Righteous Without a Medal, it would be an impossible mission. Smilja Marjanović, nee Popović, acted heroically when she came out of her house during the curfew in search of Rahela to inform her of the approaching raid. But at the same time, as we can see from the story, there are many people, known or unknown, who had shown their humanity at a time when saving a life was performed in the direst circumstance.

For this story and the photos we are indebted to Rahela's daughter-in-law, Branka, nee Djenić, and her husband, Rahela's son Saša, as well as Rahela's grandson Lazar.

Tereza was the daughter of Moric Bergel, a wealthy tradesman dealing in wheat (grains) from Senta. Contrary to her brother, who had dedicated himself to becoming a pharmacist, Tereza had time both for study and amusement. Her father fulfilled all the wishes of his favourite so that as early as 1928 Tereza drove a car at top speed along the dusty roads of Senta. She went to Vienna, to Budapest and Karlove Vari but, naturally, not by car.

Tereza Bergel nee Hacker, Suzane Nećak´s mother

Dr Kalman Haker came from a poor family. He studied ancient Greek and Latin in Vienna and got his PhD at the Faculty of Philology. Tereza had no interest for wealth, she had more than enough, so when she met the handsome, clever, young man she fell in love head-long and very quickly the relationship led to marriage. A considerable length of time passed before their first child, daughter Suzana (1915) was born, since in the meantime Tereza had chosen to go and visit the sites of the Egyptian pyramids. For a very long while the standing joke in the family was that Suzana resembled the queen Nefertiti for this reason.

Suzana was a keen student, but also adventurous like her mother. When she finished her schooling in Bečkerek (renamed Zrenjanin after the war), where she had made new friends, like Lili Elek at the girls' boarding school, she continued her education at the Subotica Grammar school. In 1932 she met a young officer, Dušan Nećak, in Subotica. She was only seventeen when she got married to Dušan.

Dušan Nećak was born in 1910 in Lika, village Glavce near Otočac. He lost both his parents at an early age, so he went to live with his uncle in Zagreb, where he began his schooling. When the time came for him to choose his future calling his uncle decided to enroll him in the Military Academy in Belgrade. There he was received by his older brother, an officer of the King's Army residing in Belgrade. Being poor, there were not many options for Dušan to choose from.

After he finished his studies at the Academy, he was given the rank of an officer, quartermaster. His first post was in Subotica. There he met Suzana. Dušan was a merry fellow and a little scared of meeting Suzana's parents. She was a Jewess and he a Serb so he had no idea how they would react to the news that he had already asked Suzana to marry him, and she had accepted his marriage proposal.

But there was no reason to worry. She was primarily a self-sufficient young woman, and once she came to a decision, there was no one who could change her mind, plus her mother sided with her. The future son-in-law and Tereza were both free-thinking people and very quickly found a common language. The two young lovers soon crowned their love by a wedding ceremony.

Suzane and Dušan Nećak´s wedding

Senta was not far from Subotica; however, it was not fated for the young couple to remain there for long. The transfer had little to do with the needs of the service: as previously mentioned, Dušan was a jolly fellow and had for the umpteenth time spent a whole night with a tamburitza (string) orchestra, but this time he ran out of luck. He was seen by his commander in the early hours of the morning making his way home in the company of the said musicians. At short notice he was transferred to Prilep, a town which was at the time in Southern Serbia.

Their daughter Marina was born in Prilep, but this did not deter grandmother Tereza from travelling the long road from Senta to see her granddaughter.

Dušan was overjoyed. “Where’ve you been, old girl?” he commented, “You’ve come just in time to save us from starving to death!”

Tereza only smiled, “Well, that’s what you get when you marry a young girl whom I haven’t had time to teach how to cook anything else but noodles!”

Dušan was a very efficient quartermaster and he soon proved his qualities working in Prilep. He advanced in his service and soon the family Nećak found themselves in Novi Sad where, in 1938 the heir, Alexander was born. They all called him Saša for

short.

In a very short time, in 1939, the family moved to Belgrade where Dušan received recognition for successfully performing his duties and was promoted to the rank of captain.

Suzana with Dušan Nećak on her left, Prilep 1934

If it is true that exceptions exist only to prove a rule, than this was embodied in Saša. They say that Jews are born tradesmen. Saša was still a young child when he got a present from his father: a toy tank. The tank moved, fired, and threw sparks in all directions. Some older children happened to be passing by the garden fence and noticed the firing of the tank. They asked Saša if he would sell it to them. How Saša's self-importance grew! He too, had something to sell, so he could trade like his great-grandfather from Senta. The business was done in no time. Saša pushed the tank under the fence and in exchange got a real coin. The children went their way, and Saša rushed up to his parents to boast of the good deal he had just completed.

"And where's the money?" his father asked.

"That small coin? What do I need it for? I just tossed it into the neighbouring yard."

They all laughed, Saša was not rebuked, but was also left without a tank.

However, very soon real tanks bearing the Nazi cross came and the trade known as the 'black market' was the only way to survive, especially for citizens living in large towns.

Due to the rejection of the Tripartite Pact, Hitler's vengeance came in no time.

Without any declaration of war, Hitler's armada with the help of his allies known as the Axis Powers - Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Italy - in the early morning of 6 April 1941 attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The capital was heavily bombed, thousands died and were left lying in the streets of Belgrade. Other towns were also bombed, coupled with the onslaught of ground forces. It took only eleven days for Yugoslavia to surrender notwithstanding the heroic resistance in certain parts of the country. However, it was impossible to deter and fight against the might of such an enemy, at least not at that moment.

Tens of thousands of soldiers and officers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were taken prisoners and sent to prison camps situated in Germany. Among them was Saša's father, Dušan Nećak, a captain of the Yugoslav King's Army. The King and his retinue were not endangered; they had run away from Belgrade in time, as far as they could, from the war and their kingdom.

Dušan Nećak could not accept his capture and war time imprisonment. He had no real knowledge of his whereabouts, but nevertheless, he took the first chance he got and escaped running as far as possible from those less lucky than himself. However, luck is a deceptive thing, which very soon became apparent. Unshaven as he was, he must have been a fright to see. On his wandering way, Dušan offered somebody his uniform, together with the heavy overcoat, in exchange for a civilian suit of clothes. Thus he managed to reach Fiume (Rijeka) which was under Italian occupation at the time. He had no money, but he still decided to get on a train heading for Zagreb; from there he would somehow find a way to get to Belgrade. He was overjoyed when he met his army class colleague on board. He paid no attention to the Ustashi uniform since, generally speaking, friendships made in the army are almost always for life. Thus Dušan never even noticed when his friend informed the train conductor that there was a POW escapee on the train. At the Zagreb station there was a group of soldiers awaiting his arrival and from there he was taken directly to an Ustashi prison in Savska Street. Dušan was no longer in uniform and was only a Serb from Lika, and for such persons there was accommodation (temporary) in the death camp Jasenovac. In front of the camp inmates, who were forced to watch Dušan's execution, in 1942 he was killed by a mallet blow to his head and then just thrown into the river Sava. Saša and Suzana learned of their father and husband's fate and of his horrible death only after the war.

Saša and Suzana Nećak, Belgrade 1940

Soon upon the entering of the Germans into Belgrade, Saša and Suzana escaped from the rented flat in Divčibarska Street. The surname Nećak declared that they were citizens of Serbian nationality, but a neighbour, a refugee from Russia, knew that Suzana was of Jewish origin. When the persecution of Jews began in

Belgrade, the Russian began blackmailing Suzana. She paid her off with a large sum of money well aware that it was not the end of the matter.

Each day Suzana would take Saša out for a walk and that was how they met Mr. ("Uncle") Djoka: his son and sons-in-law used to socialize with Suzana's husband before the war. She told him of the situation she was in and Uncle Djoka, Djordje Djordjević, a pre–war high official in the Ministry of the Interior, upon learning of their circumstances, without any misgivings made them an offer to move in with him. So when the following day Suzana and Saša again went off on their customary walk, they never returned to the flat in Divčibarska Street. Their new hosts introduced them to their neighbours and friends, saying they were relatives from Vojvodina.

Uncle Djoka's large family lived in Kneza Miloša Street in a big apartment which spread throughout the entire top floor. Uncle Djoka's wife was affectionately called Aunt Tika. Aunt Tika was a German who on her wedding day accepted the Orthodox faith. A timid woman, she always wore black for the son she had lost; he had committed suicide for unrequited love. Her other son was an officer in the King's Army and had fallen prisoner. He returned home after the war. Uncle Djoka and Aunt Tika had four daughters of whom three were Communists. The flat was full of children and thus Saša acquired the company of his peers.

According to his political beliefs, Uncle Djoka was a monarchist, but he turned a blind eye to his daughters' activities. Suzana, who spoke a number of foreign languages, also became a sympathizer of the Communists. She felt it was her duty to fight against the Nazis. A high-ranking German officer lived in the flat below them. Thus the members of the underground Resistance movement considered that Uncle Djoka's flat was the least conspicuous for their secret meetings. The forbidden broadcasts of radio London were listened to in there as well as those of radio Moscow. It was from this flat that those involved in actions against the occupier went off on their missions.

Among those who gathered in Uncle Djoka's apartment was Branko Bulat, a mechanic, who actively participated in the assassination of the notorious Djordje Kosmajac. Kosmajac is remembered as one of the interrogators who applied the cruelest torture on Communists in the Investigation prison of the Belgrade Administration (Glavnjača). When Kosmajac was shot dead, Obrad Zalad, an agent of the Special police, was killed with him as well. In the search that followed their death all four of the assassins were captured.

In the general raid staged in search for members of the Resistance in Belgrade following up this action, someone exposed the group that had been meeting in the flat of Uncle Djoka. He managed to obtain the release of some members of the Resistance movement who had not actively been involved in the murder of Kosmajac from the Banjica Camp; however, Bulat, along with the other assassins, was shot by a firing squad. As an act of further retribution, 96 prisoners from the Banjica Camp were also shot. The group that had been meeting at Mr. Djoka's flat had to find a new place where they could plan new actions. Suzana and her son also had to leave the flat which was

hereafter under constant police surveillance.

Mrs. Vukica Djordjević lived with her daughter Olivera – Olja, in a flat near Slavija, in Alekse Nenadovića Street. Mrs. Vukica's husband, the sons-in-law of Uncle Djoka and Saša's father were all officers and knew each other well. They kept company and had taken part in many manifestations that were held in the officers' clubs in Novi Sad and Belgrade before the war. Suzana and Saša found a new safe haven in a relatively modest apartment owned by Mrs. Vukica.

In contrast to the people who used to gather in Uncle Djoka's flat, frequent guests of Mrs. Vukica were well-known intellectuals, the "cream" of Belgrade society, doctors, lawyers, professors, but also some black marketeers.

Saša would listen to the stories of the learned people who naively believed that the war was almost over. It was nice to listen to the talk that the agony would soon be over, but more important than that were the black marketeers, who supplied citizens with indispensable goods in the occupied city.

Among other provisions the black marketeers brought Vukica some unknown grains, supposed to be a substitute for coffee. One can only imagine the taste of the "coffee" served, but the delicate porcelain cups were still there.

It was fortunate that Suzana and Saša always had money at hand. Grandmother Tereza used her own connections and regularly sent money from Senta through some friends in Zemun. The money would then come to Mrs. Lučika, Suzana's childhood friend. It was this money that enabled them to live, pay black marketeers and support themselves.

Mrs. Lučika was married to a diplomat and lived in a villa on Senjak.

On one occasion when Suzana came to take the money from Mrs. Lučika, sent by grandmother Tereza, someone rang the doorbell. Into the drawing room where they had been sitting, Mrs. Lučika led in a man in German uniform. When Suzana saw the German officer with a necklace from which a metal plate with the wording Feldpolizei hung suspended, she was left speechless.

"So this is the end," was the first thought that crossed Suzana's mind; she was worn out from the constant hiding and running. The only thing that she hoped for was that they would not find her son Saša and that Mrs. Vukica would see to it that he was safe.

When Lučika saw Suzana's agitated look, she hurriedly began to explain the presence of the German officer. "This is our friend, Herr ("Good") Fritz, who is helping us to obtain the necessary papers so we can leave the country."

Suzana sighed with relief and Lučika at once came to the idea that Good Fritz could help Suzana, too. Good Fritz murmured something to himself and said that he would come again in a few days time.

And this he did. Lučika and Suzana anxiously awaited the arrival of Good Fritz to see what he had done. In front of them both he tore up Suzana's file from the police

evidence. At the same time he gave them new papers for Suzana and Saša, but said that they immediately had to move from the place they were staying in. He refused any mention of compensation in money or praise. All he possessed was his conscience that had led up to this one good deed of saving two innocent lives.

On many occasions Saša could hear people calling the Nazis by the derogatory nickname Fritz, so he could not discern where "Good Fritz" came from. Quite some time passed before he asked his mother what Good Fritz's real name was.

"I don't know and it's for the best that we stay ignorant of it." At the mere thought that they could be found out Suzana's hair stood on end. "Who knows, had I been arrested, I don't know whether I could have endured the torture without giving him up. He would then have perished together with the two of us."

Thus the true identity of their saviour was never revealed.

Suzana and Saša had to leave Mrs. Vukica's apartment as soon as possible. A group of young "illegals" helped them make it to the last floor, in reality a mere attic, in Kneginje Zorke Street. The new abode was a far cry from the comfort they had been living in up to then. Constantly warned that he must never say that he was a Jew, Saša matured much faster than other children. He had to hide his fear, never letting anyone notice it. However, each time he heard footsteps on the staircase, he would sweat heavily believing that they were about to be killed, although the phenomenon of death was something still unfathomable to him.

Suzana had taken Good Fritz's warning to heart. Beside Saša's bed in the attic where they slept there stood a prepared small backpack with a few basic pieces of clothing packed inside, together with Suzana and Dušan's picture so in case anything should go wrong, Saša would remember his parents.

His mother's warnings were ever present in Saša's dreams: "If I don't come back home on time, you must take the backpack and immediately leave for Uncle Djoka's." In his dreams he would meet an elderly woman in the street and plead with her to take him to Kneza Miloša Street, and he would take care not to be followed or seen entering Uncle Djoka's house. Awake or in his sleep he would repeat his mother's instructions and whether he had understood them correctly. His mother would not miss a chance to repeat with him that they had come from Vojvodina; but since he was too small at the time, he was to say that he did not remember them or their names should anybody ask about his grandparents. Simply nothing had to be said or done that would point to their Jewish origin.

One of the most brutal battles of World War II was the battle for Stalingrad. It was the battle that showed the vulnerability of the invincible Nazi Germany. The year 1943 was the year when the situation in the battlefields reversed, when Nazi Germany was heavily defeated and the Red Army began its onslaught to Berlin.

The defeat that was unavoidably coming ever closer from the Eastern Front, the Americans who had already landed in Sicily, by no means deterred Hitler's intention to destroy the Jewish community of Europe. The thorn in his eye was Hungary where

up to that moment half a million Jews were still living: Hungarian Jews, if one can call them so, and Jews who had found shelter in Hungary from various East European countries. Hungary was still adverse to the idea of the "final solution of the Jewish question".

Mikloš Horti, who ruled as regent since before the war, realized that it was nearing its end and tried to reach a peace agreement with the Allies. When this information was brought to light, Hungary was virtually occupied and Horti was interned in Bavaria where he was kept in house arrest till the end of the war. In the spring of 1944, Hitler sent Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking SS officer, to solve "the Jewish question" in Hungary. The solving of the "Jewish question" also included all the territories that had up to then been occupied by Hungary.

In Subotica a ghetto for Jews from the north of Bačka was opened. Grandfather Kalman had fallen ill and died before the war, while grandmother Tereza, together

Saša Nećak with his neighbours,
Novi Sad 1939

with her mother Sirina and numerous family members were deported from Senta to the ghetto in Subotica. Not all of them, actually. Tereza's brother, a pharmacist, and his wife, realizing what was in store for them, took their own lives by drinking poison. The ghetto in Subotica was only a place for gathering Jews from where they were transported to the death camp Auschwitz by way of Hungary. Almost half a million

Jews from Hungary and the occupied territories never returned home.

By mid October 1944, the Red Army from the north and the units of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia from the southeast were approaching Belgrade. Heavy battles with the occupying forces lasted for six whole days. The enemy was slowly retreating from Belgrade. The citizens of Belgrade once again went down to their cellars and other places of shelter. In the mouldy basement in Kneginje Zorke Street, Saša and Suzana survived to see Belgrade liberated.

Once they finally came out of the cellar, Saša clung hard to his mother's skirt. In the streets there was general rejoicing and merriment, however, he was afraid that he could still lose his mother although the war had ended. It was only then that Saša learned and saw what death was really like. He had seen it before too, when a friend of his from the neighbourhood, nicknamed Slanče, was thrown out of the shelter into the street by a bomb during the Allied bombing. But he had really heard more about it from the talk of the grown-ups than seen it happen. Now he watched as the dead were gathered and piled up into heaps, but they attracted very little attention from anyone.

How can one get so used to death so quickly, Saša often asked himself later on. He remembered how in the vicinity of their house a parked tank stood and next to it some Russian soldiers were eating their breakfast. From the attic of the house, where the Hungarian Embassy is today, somebody fired a gun and hit a Russian soldier. The people were agitated by this event while there was no show of panic at all among the Red Army soldiers. On the contrary, two Russian soldiers calmly took their rifles and went inside the building from which the shots were fired. Soon they brought out two Germans, led them some fifty metres ahead, stood them up before the fence of the Chetnik headquarters and shot them. Then they calmly returned to their unit and continued their meal.

A large number of Germans was taken prisoner. The citizens tried to spit at the line of prisoners, but the soldiers would not let them. From the start of the war Suzana was an anti-Fascist, but she did not condone the spitting and could not keep quiet:"Where were you all when it was really time to do that?" Her voice was lost among the patriots who were celebrating liberation, trying to forget all the horrifying moments they had lived through.

Righteous Without the Medal – "Good Fritz", his true identity has remained a secret indefinitely

Mrs.Lučika

Djordje Djordjević, a pre war high-ranking official in the Ministry of the Interior and his wife Tika, as they used to call her, of German descent

Vukica Djordjević and her daughter Olivera

Members of the Resistance Movement

Jozef Eberle, a German by descent, lived in Kačarevo near Pančevo. He was married to Christina, nee Jahraus, and they had five children. One of the five was Kristof, born on 4 August 1913.

Kristof learned the craft of a watchmaker as an apprentice. In search of work he came to Zemun. There the handsome young man met Marijana Leon, a beautiful Jewess.

Marijana was one of the two daughters of Olga and Emil Leon, a Jew. She was very young when her father, a physician, was killed during World War I in the town of Mostar. When Kristof met Marijana, her aunt Hermina, her late father's sister, was living in Zemun as well as the numerous family of Marijana's mother Olga.

Marijana, Kristof and Rihard Eberle

Almost instantly love flared up between the two young people and Marijana and Kristof decided to make their relationship official by getting married. However, Kristof was torn with worry. He remembered what his father used to say to him before he left the family circle. "You can bring a black-faced Roma to the family, but not a Jewess." Finally Kristof sat down and wrote a letter to his father. He informed Jozef that he intended to marry a Jewess and invited his parents to come to the wedding. Jozef was tormented, but in spite of everything, he decided to come to the wedding. When he met his Jewish daughter-in-law, he changed his opinion about Jews instantaneously. Whether this extended to Jews in general is not that important, however he immediately took Marijana to heart and forgot everything he had said up to then. The wedding took place on 29 May 1939, in the Evangelistic church in Zemun.

For a short time the young married couple lived with Aunt Erna, her mother's cousin, at her place in 4, Tiršova Street, until Kristof bought a flat in Karadjordjeva Street.

When the young couple's son Rihard was born in 1940, the Volksdeutschers, domestic Germans, were already well organized in the Kulturbund, an organization whose members, speaking about the majority of them, were already awaiting their "liberator" - Hitler's armada which was already winning the war in Europe. Although

he was under pressure to do so, Kristof would not let himself get entangled with the Kulturbund.

The German troops marched into Zemun in April 1941 and the repression of the Jewish townsmen began immediately. All physically able Jews, with no respect to gender, were compelled to forced labour; all Jews had to wear the yellow band on their sleeve with the word Jude stamped on it; they were forbidden to go to any public places, and there were many other derogatory prohibitions. Kristof would not let Marijana wear the yellow sleeve band, but this restricted her movements solely to their apartment. Marijana and Rihard could not go out into the street. Of course, Marijana also evaded forced labour duty but her sister Ruža had no chance to avoid it.

Ruža Leon in the Forced Labour Group

Still, Kristof did not forget his wife's sister Ruža nor their aunt Hermina with whom Marijana had lived after their mother died at an early age. He helped them as much as he could, but then the fateful 27 July 1942 came along: the majority of Zemun Jews and Jews from the surrounding neighbourhood were taken to the railway station, from where they were deported to the death camps of Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. Ruža and aunt Hermina found themselves in the cattle wagons. In Stara Gradiška both of them were killed very soon.

In the newly-existing circumstances and the hostile environment, Kristof

assessed that his family, in view of the fact that he was a domestic German, would be safer in another part of the city, the Franctal, where for the most part Volksdeutschers lived. He bought a house with a garden in Franc Prešern Street where finally Marijana had a chance to catch a breath of fresh air and it was a yard where little Rihard could play.

The appearance of safety was dispersed one night when Volksdeutschers came to their door in search of the Jewess who was inside the house. Kristof would not open the door so the Volksdeutschers kept banging on it the whole night while at the same time they threw lime at their windows. The next day Kristof went to the police to report the brutal behaviour of his German neighbours. Even though Kristof tried not to get mixed up in politics he remained a highly appreciated watchmaker and the vandalism expressed towards his family was never repeated.

However, when it was evident that the war was nearing its end, the pressure on Kristof to join the Volksdeutscher formations was gaining momentum. Forced mobilization of the Volksdeutchers was a common thing and Marijana, fearing for her husband's life, went to seek help from Dr. Kovačević who worked in the Zemun hospital. Marijana knew about the saving of her friend Jakov Čelebij , a Jew whom Dr. Kovačević had operated on without any medical cause and thus saved him from being deported to Jasenovac. After the operation, Čelebij, who had meanwhile obtained false documents, left Zemun and managed to stay alive through the pogrom. Dr. Kovačević, who was ready to help anyone he could, admitted Kristof into hospital, where he stayed up to the liberation of Zemun. Zemun was liberated on 22 October 1944; still, the war in the territory of Yugoslavia was not over yet. Kristof enlisted as a volunteer in the VI Lička division and lived to see liberation day as a Partisan.

Marijana and Rihard Eberle, Francstal 1944

Kristof Eberle´s Military ID

Upon the war Kristof Eberle returned to Zemun where in 1946 his daughter Olga was born. Not long after that, he found himself in Urinje near Rovinj and Marijana joined him there. In 1950 in Rovinj their daughter Erna was born.

When Kristof got a job in Šabac, Marijana returned to Zemun. Kristof died in 1954.

This story has found its way amongst the chapter about the Righteous Without a Medal, since it tells how a Jewess and her son were saved. Still, according to Yad Vashem's rules Kristof cannot be proclaimed a Righteous since he was saving his own wife and child.

However, we came to the conclusion that Dr. Kovačević should be nominated to receive the Righteous Medal; a suggestion which Mr. Nenad Fogel has already written about in his book about the Zemun Firefighters. He brought to light the fact that Jakov Čelebi, the one firefighter Jew who lived through the war, was saved by the same doctor.

IN AN OUTHOUSE, AN OUTHOUSE IN ORAŠAC

"I haven't received any word from you for quite some time. How are you? How was the harvest ...? I want to know about everything that's happening in your village, Orašac where I spent…the hardest days of my life together with my family. I thank God for helping me find good, decent people who protected and saved us from Hitler's band of outlaws."

This is how in 1966, Jehoshua Bochner, alias Bogdan Pavlović, wrote from Jerusalem to his friends Mileta and Radojka Stojanović from Orašac near Arandjelovac, the saviours of his family and of himself.

Let us start from the beginning.

Beside the horrors that the war had brought with it a year earlier, the summer of 1942 was arid. In the part of the countryside where Orašac is situated, the maize gave little crop; it was proscribed to hand over a part of the harvest to the occupiers, but this time there was not even enough to meet the amount required. The family Stojanović was sitting on the wooden bench in the yard in Orašac and talking about what could be taken to Kolubara in exchange for corn flour, which had to be handed over to the Reichskommandatur in Arandjelovac. It was hard for peasants, even when there was crop to give, since the demands per household were big and the village people were simply forced to manage as best they could.

It was a mild September day when suddenly four grown-ups, two of them middle-aged and two visibly younger, appeared in their yard, holding small bags in their hands. They greeted the hosts and without being invited, sat down beside them.

Already seated at the table were grandfather Ljubomir, Mileta and Radojka Stojanović and their children, Žarko and Dragoljub. Well, not really children any longer; sitting at Žarko's side was his wife Ljubica, holding their two-year-old daughter Ruža in her lap. Dragoljub was still a bachelor, a young man of twenty.

Mileta and Radojka Stojanović with Jela and Bogdan Pavlović (The Bochners) 1943

"Who are you people?" Mileta asked the uninvited guests. "What brings you to these parts?"

The Stojanović house was situated on the edge of a forest, while on the other side it was surrounded by fields of crops. The nearest houses were almost a kilometre away.

"We are refugees from Croatia," the man in his fifties replied. "This is my family, my wife, son and daughter." He made no mention of their names.

Not to keep you in suspense, it was the family of Jehošu Bohner (Jehoshua Bochner), who had fled from Zagreb in 1941 when the persecution of Jews by the Ustashi began.

"There I had a small factory, a nice apartment, but when I saw how some of my friends were taken off to the camps, we packed the bare necessities and with the ready money we had, we escaped to Serbia."

"So where have you been up to now?" Mita asked.

"We've been in a number of places in Serbia and we're just coming from Stojnik, the neighbouring village."

Jehošua recounted how a man had appeared in Stojnik, who wanted money from him, and after he made an attempt to rape their daughter, who was eighteen years old, they somehow managed to leave Stojnik unobserved and ended up in their yard.

"Would you take us in to live here? We'll help you with all the field work," Jehošua asked his host.

There was an outhouse in their yard, some 25 square metres, with one bed in which Dragoljub had slept with his parents when he was born. No one had slept in the outhouse for a long time and it was all that the host could offer them. The Bohners had no other choice and grandfather Ljubomir and Mita agreed to take the refugees into their family household.

At the beginning of the war a large number of Serbian refugees from Slovenia and Croatia came to Serbia, but Jehošua did not want to keep his secret from his hosts any longer. He had come to trust them and a few days later revealed the truth that they were persecuted Jews.

At that time Dragoljub was working as a scribe in the Municipality and asked the President, Radomir Joksimović, for help. He told him what had happened and pleaded with the president to issue fake identity papers bearing Serbian names for the Jews. The president already cooperated with the Resistance Movement and frequently hid Partisan groups of three in his dugout. He immediately agreed to do what he was asked. The Stojanović fam-

Mileta and Radojka Stojanović

ily had already told their neighbours that their guests were distant relatives of their mother who had had to run from Osijek. In order to keep everything legal the Bohners had to be christened first. The christening took place in the village of Crkvine near Markovac. Their new papers stated that they were Bogdan, Jela, Milica and Stanko Pavlović.

From then on the Bohners breathed easier since nobody in the vicinity had any doubts as to their origin. They assisted in the field work, ate sparsely and life went on from one day to another.

Jagoda and Dragoljub Stojanović

Žarko and Ljubica got a son Milan whom Jela (from now on we shall speak of the Bohners by their new names) would bathe regularly. Dragoljub met Jagoda, his future wife.

It was crowded in the outhouse from the start for a family of four, and eventually Bogdan asked Dragoljub if he could find someone with whom his son Stanko could stay. In the autumn of 1943, Dragoljub with the help of his aunt Milinka Nedić, arranged for Stanko to move in with Stanimir Nedić who had no children of his own. Stanko stayed there up to the autumn of 1944 when he went off and joined the Partisans.

In order to give Bogdan and Jela more space inside the outhouse, their hosts found accommodation for Milica not far from their house at the place of Ljubiša Starčević, who was at that time the President of Orašac Municipality. Ljubiša had two daughters of the same age as Milica. They got on well together, grew to like Milica so much that she stayed with them right up to the end of the war.

The Bochner - Pavlović family

After the war ended Bogdan, Jela and Milica moved to Arandjelovac. Bogdan became the manager of Bukovička Banja and Jela also found employment. Stanko, who became an officer in the army, asked to be demobilized and afterwards joined his family in Arandjelovac.

When permission was given in the newly founded Yugoslavia for Jews to emigrate to Israel, the Bohner family packed their bags and by the end of 1948 emigrated to the new/old country of Israel. Before they left they thanked the Stojanović family for everything they had done for them. The final 'good-byes' were said on Kalemegdan, where Dragoljub and his wife Jagoda came to say farewell.

On reaching Israel the Bohners kept close ties with the Stojanović family for years. However, we were not able to reach any descendants of the Bohners. Bogdan and Jela, Mita and Radojka are no longer with us, but the story remains written down to preserve the memory of a friendship which had been struck up at the hardest and most fateful part of their lives. Letters we discovered which were sent by the Bohners to Serbia are a proof that everything happened as it is written down here. From the letters and Dragoljub's story we found out that Stanko ended his career as a colonel in the Israeli Army and that Milica finished medical studies but that she never married.

We shall, however make further attempts to find Bohner descendants and if we succeed, we will add the new findings to the story in some other, future publication.

Marica Žager and Josef Hercl (Herzl) were married in Zemun in 1926. Marica was a Catholic and had to convert to the Jewish faith during which ceremony she was named Mirjam.

Josef was a sales assistant at the "Braće Petrović" textile shop. He lived in a small apartment in Dubrovačka Street with his mother Adela, nee Šulman (Schulmann), a sickly aunt Roza (Rosa), and his brothers Hugo and Žak (Jakob). Josef's father had died in 1912 of tuberculosis, at that time an incurable disease.

Josef had yet another brother, Emanuel, who had moved to Zagreb and there met and married Matilda, a Catholic. In 1928 she gave birth to their first daughter Mirjana and then in 1930 to their second one, Silva. In the years of terror in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II the family was spared since the children had been born in a mixed marriage; this saved Emanuel's life as well.

The Hercl brothers also had a sister, Juliš, who had succumbed to an illness and died at a young age before the beginning of the war.

Until the arrival of Marica into the family circle the only one who had a regularly paid job was Josef. They had all managed to live on one salesman's salary very sparsely. When Josef married Marica, who was a seamstress, she began contributing money to the house budget and thus made it easier to make ends meet. Marica was an excellent seamstress and the low prices she charged for her work very soon attracted many interested customers.

Although being poor, nothing could dilute the happiness felt throughout the house when on 2 August 1931 their son Aladar was born.

When Marica went into labour, some complications developed and once the midwife realized that she would not be able to bring the child into the world alone, she hurriedly sent Josef off to bring the doctor.

Dr. Arnold Šen (Schön) came immediately; he had specialized obstetrics in Dresden. The doctor was well liked in Zemun. When anyone needed his help, be it day or night, he would answer the call immediately taking no notice of the social status of the caller. He equally helped the rich and the poor although in the case of the latter he was frequently aware that he would not get paid. The same thing happened when in the middle of the night he delivered Marica's child. Josef asked him how much he owed him, but Dr. Arnold just waved his hand aside implying it was nothing. At the entrance to the house he

Aladar (Zvonimir) Hercl in the backyard of the Dubrovačka St. house

almost collided with Hugo and Žak.

"Here come the uncles in the early hours," said the doctor,

Hugo and Žak looked at each other not realizing instantly what the doctor was talking about.

"So where have you been up to now?" the doctor commented smiling, at the same time informing them that Marica had given birth to a healthy boy.

When he heard the news, Hugo instantly took a 100 dinars out from his pocket, at that time by no means a meager amount, and tucked the banknote into the small pocket of the doctor's jacket.

Just as quickly the doctor took the money out and placed it into Hugo's pocket. "What were you thinking of, you are both unemployed and here you are throwing your money around!"

"Doctor, look here - we've been working till now, a night shift," they spoke in one voice. "And we get paid for what we do," Hugo added.

"Where have you found employment?" Dr. Šen was pleased to hear the news, but somewhat surprised, too.

"At the hotel "Central"."

"And just what kind of work do you do there?"

"We play poker, Herr Doktor. It went on longer than we expected, it's already past three in the morning, but it was fruitful."

"You young rascals! Good night!" The doctor turned his back on them and went home.

The Brit Mila was performed at the Sephardim Synagogue in Zemun. Josef's wealthy uncle Emil held Aladar in his arms; he was not squeamish about the fact that his sister Roza was being looked after by this poor cousin. Aladar had no memory of his grandmother Roza, who died exactly one year after his birth.

To tell the truth, Hugo and Žak's "job" at the Central was going just fine. The most modern pram, deep and with all the necessary belts on it, was bought for Aladar; he was a mischievous child and had to be tightly belted to prevent him from falling out of the pram. The perambulator was also highly useful for shopping in the market, goods could be placed beside Aladar, and it was time to buy provisions that would be prepared as preserves for the winter in larger quantities.

Josef was a well-respected worker at the "Braće Petrović" establishment where the working hours were divided in shifts, morning and afternoon, just like in the other shops in Zemun. When required Josef would step in as the store manager, supplier and salesman and when at noon he handed in the keys to the shop, he went home to have his lunch. The store was near the house, but that day Josef was late coming home. Hugo and Žak were waiting for him there.

"Since we've been waiting for you this long, maybe you could go to the pantry and

fetch us some pickles," Hugo said.

There was a surprise waiting for Josef in the pantry: a brand new Wanderer, a German bicycle with a small seat fitted on for a little child.

The house at 17, Dubrovačka Street, where the Hercl family lived, had a large yard where children from the neighbourhood would come to play. It suited Marica that her son was always near her while she sewed for her customers. Aladar, together with the other children, made a fine racket, but the leader was a boy of eight, his senior Jakši Šober (Schober), a Volksdeutscher, who dictated the rules of the games played.

Though young, another episode of playing with Šober stayed forever present in Aladar's memory, but we will come to that later on. Children's games can at times be quite rough and maybe this was the reason why Aladar's fondest memories were the rides on the bicycle which he took with his father down to the banks of the Danube, where from a boat tied to the shore they fished and caught perch, before returning home for their Sunday lunch.

And then everything changed for Aladar. He began attending school. He did not like his classes much; everything else seemed more interesting than the school curriculum.

Uncle Hugo got a job in the Insurance company Feniks, and so only Žak was still unemployed.

When, on 27 March 1941, the people together with the army denounced the Tripartite Pact, which had been signed by the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Vienna two days earlier, it was crystal clear that Hitler's wrath would soon fall on Yugoslavia. In Belgrade a military coup had taken place and soon after mobilization for the defence of the country began.

However, against such a formidable enemy, who had already been joined by the surrounding countries, all of which had in turn signed the Tripartite Pact, without any military help from those who were anti-Fascist: the USA and Britain, Yugoslavia could not defend itself.

Emanuel, Hugo, Josef and Jakob Hercl, 1940

The three brothers Josef, Hugo and Žak (Jakob) were mobilized just before the war began. Jews, loyal citizens of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, shared the fate of the major population, the Serbs.

Thus came 6 April 1941. From across the Danube echoes of horrendous explosions could be heard. The Nazis bombarded Belgrade, which had been

declared an open city, i.e., unprotected, destroying the bridge that was the main link with Zemun and afterwards dropped their deadly bombs on the Zemun airport as well. Zemun was spared since nearly a third of its inhabitants were of German descent – Volksdeutschers. Five days later German troops occupied Zemun and handed over the governing of the city to the Volksdeutscher, Dr. Hans Mozer. A number of Zemun Volksdeutschers donned the German uniforms that had stood waiting just for the right moment to be presented to the defenceless population. One of them was Jakši Šober.

It took only eleven days of war for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to capitulate and be carved up. Tens of thousands of soldiers and officers became prisoners of war. A major of the King's Army advised Josef and Hugo to surrender and not to attempt returning to their homes; the major evidently knew of the fate that awaited Jews. Josef took his advice and stayed prisoner protected by the Geneva Convention, but Hugo decided to return to Zemun.

Schools were closed for some time and Aladar once again found himself in his backyard in the company of his peers. By that time the family had already moved to 6, Dubrovačka Street. Jakši Šober also came by the yard but this time as a winner, although he had no real connection with the war. Jakši was a young man of eighteen, a member of the Kulturbund in Zemun. "Now you'll see what's in store for you!" he said to Aladar and went out of the yard.

Aladar was then ten years old and did not quite understand what Jakši wanted to say to him. He told his mother what he had heard, and Marica instantly set out to seek the lawyer Oskar Kamacint (Kamazint), to get advice about what to do concerning the situation that she was faced with.

Lawyer Kamacint lived across the street from their house. His lawyer's office was also there and being a friend of Aladar's father, he visited them frequently.

"Don't wait a second longer," the lawyer was outspoken. "Pack the necessities you need and leave Zemun while there is still this chaos going on with the borders. Soon you will need passes to go round freely, and I believe you won't be getting them."

"Where are we to go?" Marica asked anxiously.

"Go somewhere where nobody knows you," the lawyer answered.

On returning home Marica told her mother-in-law what the lawyer had said and advised. Her mother-in-law instantly agreed that they should leave Zemun at once.

However, the preparations for departure and packing took two or three days, and at the very moment they were ready to take off, a thin, unkempt man, unshaven, in torn pants, with muddy boots, in a coat that hung on his sparse frame, appeared at the door. When he spoke, mother nearly fainted. It was her son Žak - Jakob. Pubi, as his mother fondly used to call him, went to take a bath, shaved, had lunch and went off to bed to sleep. Nobody entered to wake him up till ten in the evening, when someone energetically started to knock on the window of their apartment. They were all in bed by then and Marica got up to open the window.

"Does Jacob Hercl live here?" a voice from the street asked.

Marica nodded her head in agreement.

"He must come out at once!" the voice ordered.

"Why?" Marica asked.

"No questions asked! This is the police. He must come out at once."

They had planned to leave in the morning, but her mother-in-law changed her mind: "You go… I'll stay and wait for Pubi."

Marica and her mother-in-law sat in total silence. Aladar was still sleeping when Žak came home at eight in the morning. He was as white as a sheet, had not slept, and could not eat his breakfast. At the police station no one had asked him anything, nor given any explanation as to why he had been taken there. They had locked him up in a cell from where they took him out at two in the morning. They gave him a pail of water and a rag and took him to a room with blood splashed all over it. There was so much blood that Žak spent two hours cleaning it up; it was the blood of the citizens of Zemun who had been taken into it for interrogation. They took him back to his cell and at around half-past seven in the morning they let him go home, cautioning him that he was forbidden to leave it.

After Žak retold the events of the previous night, he managed to eat his breakfast and decided that he would make a run for it. He knew that the police would not let him alone anymore. He said 'good-bye' to the family and went off to the rowing club on the Danube. He knew the warehouse keeper who saw to the rowing equipment and counted on being taken across the Danube in a boat. From there he would somehow reach Pančevo and go into hiding for awhile. However, fear had crept into the hearts of the town citizens. His acquaintance did not dare to take a boat out onto the river Danube, nor let Žak borrow a scull to make the passage alone.

Disappointed, Žak returned home. That evening the police returned and took Žak away again, but this time he did not come home in the morning.

Rumours of raids, arrests, merciless beatings of next-door neighbours, rounding up of people for forced labour, very quickly spread throughout Zemun. Marica knew that she could not wait any longer. All inducements that they go away together were useless; her mother-in-law did not want to leave the house. She never learned that Žak would not return home; he was shot by a firing squad in Banjica on 14 July 1941.

Carrying two suitcases Marica and Aladar got on a train leaving for Zagreb.

Before setting off on the journey Marica had not been able to get in touch with Josef's brother Emanuel who lived in Zagreb with his family. She kept thinking throughout the journey of how they would be received once they arrived in Zagreb; she was not sure how Jews lived there, whether they were in a better position than Jews in Zemun. Anyway, the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) was well into the preparations of taking the territory of Srem under its jurisdiction where the future border would be the Sava and Danube rivers. Zemun did, in fact, soon become a part of the ISC, and

Marica who had been forewarned of what was in store for Jews, wondered what would happen to Emanuel and his family and consequently to them as well, if they went to live there. The train had already reached Kapela when Marica changed her mind. They boarded another train and went further into the countryside of the territory of Croatia, up to Slavonska Požega. There they knew no one and nobody knew them.

When they arrived in Požega, Marica left their baggage in the station luggage room and went in search for a place to stay. They spent one night in a rented apartment and in the morning went to the police station to register with them.

"It never crossed my mind to think about documents once the horrendous bombing started," Marica had already thought through what she would say to the police clerk.

"What's your name?" the policeman asked.

"Marija Hercl."

"And your son's?"

"Zvonimir Hercl," Marica in no time renamed Aladar - Marija and Zvonimir were frequent Croatian names.

"Hercl (Herzl)? So you are German by descent, aren't you?"

Marica nodded her head in agreement. The lie she had told that Zemun had been bombed did not matter to the uninformed police clerk.

It took less than an hour for Marica to get new identity papers stating that she lived in Slavonska Požega.

It was nice to be accommodated in a well-furnished flat, but one had to earn a living in order to get by. Marica wrote a letter to her mother-in-law asking that Hazardi, the best man at their wedding, who worked for a forwarding agent, pack their things and send them to the new address. Hazardi packed their bedroom furniture and together with other things sent them off along with Marica's sewing machine. It took seven days for the sent objects to leave Zemun and reach Slavonska Požega.

In the meantime Marica had found an unfurnished flat and when the truckload arrived, they moved to the new address. The apartment was near the railway station.

Zvonimir primarily had to get used to his new name, which was not so hard to do, since no one called him by his old one. A greater problem was attending school. First he had to learn the Latin alphabet (reading and writing) and then in a very short time to catch up with religious lessons so that he could in September 1941, start going to the 4th grade of elementary school. His mother had got him an old, Catholic prayer book from which he soon learned a great number of prayers as they were a part of the compulsory religious lessons. Zvonimir was a clever child and soon quite prepared to continue his schooling.

In July 1941 Marica received a letter from her mother-in-law in which she informed her that Hugo had returned home and that Josef had been taken to Germany as a POW.

Her mother-in-law had no intention of ever leaving Zemun; she was still waiting

for Pubi to come home.

Three months later a postcard sent by Josef with a printed text and a return address arrived at the house in Zemun. Hugo answered back sending Marica's address in Požega to his brother. From then on Marica and Josef regularly corresponded as much as the circumstances allowed.

That Marica was an excellent seamstress soon became known. Word got round quickly and in a short while she had so many customers that she had to take in three apprentices to help her. She sewed for the Ustashi, the Domobrans, the Kulturbund members, for the entire "elite", all the time fearing that they might be found out. The apprentices learned their trade and at the same time were obliged to run around the neighbourhood in search of Zvonimir if he stayed out of his mother's sight too long. At night mother would for umpteenth time explain to Zvonimir that the school and their yard were the safest places for them where they would not be exposed. Once out in the street someone might try and obtain information from the boy which was not meant for everyone's ears. In fact, for no one's at all.

Once a month, Josef sent a letter which was brought to the house by postman Jovica. Jovica was a Serb but he had been spared since his marriage was a mixed one. His wife Marta, a Croat, owned a photographer's shop in Slavonska Požega and was respected by the town folk.

Jovica knew that the neighbours were curious as to where Marica's husband was, some being very persistent in trying to find out. The postman however, never asked. "Here's a letter from uncle Jova. No one has touched it, Mrs. Hercl," he would say and leave. Josef wrote the letters under the name of Jovo Herkl, and for the postman who knew where the letters were coming from, everything was crystal clear.

However, their first neighbour was the wife of a Domobran officer, Sergeant Šime, and she would not leave Marica alone. The questions: where Marica's husband was, when he would be joining them, whether he was alive, and hundreds of others were constantly pressurizing Marica into keeping her on the alert not to utter a wrong word.

In the meantime, as Marica was earning a fair sum of money, Zvonimir got a violin teacher. It was Prof. Vojtech Stetka, a Czech, who upon leaving the Prague Opera in 1926, came to live in Slavonska Požega. Here he obtained the job of a church organ player and founded the choir "Vijenac". He gave private lessons to children, got married and managed to build a villa not far from the centre of the town. The real reason why he had left Prague was never revealed, although there were various stories going around. This was of little importance to Zvonimir. He learned quickly and the professor himself recognized in him a wondrous talent. "Wunderkind", the professor would call him and soon others also realized this fact.

It was getting hard for Marica to see her curious neighbour on a daily basis. The neighbour freely shared her doubts with the other lodgers, so Marica decided that after a year spent in the house, she would move to a new neighbourhood, on the other side of town. It was not far from their old place, but far enough not to be obliged to meet

the neighbour every day. This happened in July 1942.

During the night between the 26th and 27th of July 1942, the rounding up of the Jews in Zemun was carried out and they were driven to the railway station. The men were separated from the women and children. Men were thrown into cattle-wagons destined for the concentration camp Jasenovac and the wagons of women and children headed for Stara Gradiška. Hugo never saw his mother again. As she suffered from diabetes it is highly doubtful whether she made it to Stara Gradiška at all, but as to her further destiny, as well as that of Hugo, there are no survivors who could tell us anything more than these bare facts. Among those who did not return from the camp was her brother Emil, who had previously been stripped of all his possessions, and his wife Marijana.

No one can say for certain whether Jakši Šober was among those who saw the trains off; in the meantime he had changed his uniform to that of the Wehrmacht and could have already been sent to the Eastern Front. He never returned to Zemun nor was seen again.

Adela Hercl

Marica and Zvonimir moved from their lodgings to another, smaller apartment also in the vicinity of the railway station, but far enough from the curious neighbour.

Zvonimir had his first public appearance at a performance held in 1943. The violin professor and the teachers especially, were extremely pleased to have such a talented student in their school. The year before Zvonimir had successfully finished the fourth grade of elementary school and was to continue his education in the grammar school. However, a birth certificate, which Marica dared not show to anyone, was required to apply for enrollment in the first year of this secondary school.

The old school program envisaged that children from poorer families were to take up a craft. Prior to this they were required to finish their education in the 5th and 6th grade of elementary school, the so called "Opetovnica". There was nothing Marica could do but inform the teachers that she did not have the financial means to send the talented Zvonimir on to the grammar school; and that he had to learn a trade in order to earn money to live on.

And then the bombing began once again. The Allies from the air and the Partisans on foot were closer to Slavonska Požega each day. Marica concluded that they would quickly have to leave the flat near the railway station since it was a definite target for the bombs. Consequently, Marica and Zvonimir, who was sad that he had to leave a yard full of children, moved to the outskirts of the town, to the foot of the Požeška Gora (mountain). There was no one of Zvonimir's age around, he was the youngest child and their only neighbour was the owner of the house, the dwelling which was well dug into the foot of Požeška vineyards.

Zvonimir completed elementary school successfully, the opetovnica, and just when he was about to choose a trade to learn, on 12 September 1944 the Partisans entered Slavonska Požega. Zvonimir managed to enroll into the first year of grammar school without his birth certificate.

Zvonimir Hercl 1953

While the Communists were in power, the new age liberated the children from the obligation of attending church; religious studies were taken out of the school curriculum, they were all equal at school and no one asked questions about one's faith. The Kozaračko kolo, a dance and slogans kept ringing out at meetings. The one who stood out was Branko, who would come up with a slogan and all the children had to do was follow up with a shout: "Long live…" or "Down with him…" So when Branko yelled, "Down with the murderer Ante Pavelić!" the children would yell in response, "Down with him!" Then again, "Long live comrade Tito!" and the children yelled: "Long live!" in return. And then suddenly something got mixed up in Branko's head and he yelled, "Long live King Peter, bandit and traitor!" and the children, trained to do so, shouted: "Long live!" After that event Branko never voiced a slogan again.

However, liberation lasted for a very short time in Slavonska Požega. The war was nearing its end and the Nazis were securing the passage way for the retreat of their troops to Germany. In February 1945 the Nazis, together with the Ustashi, Domobrans and Cherkessi, Hitler's Russian collaborators, were once again in Slavonska Požega. The lessons in schools were terminated, the Wehrmacht had taken over the Grammar school building and once again raids were taking place. The police and soldiers barged into flats taking away anyone who was suspicious. There was a long queue in front of the Town Hall and Marica stood among the people, too. The occupiers were checking everyone's papers to determine who the citizens of Slavonska Požega were.

Zvonimir learned from his neighbours that his mother had been taken away. He ran all the way to the Town Hall and saw his mother in the line waiting patiently for her turn. Marica saw Zvonimir too, and imperceptibly gave him a sign to get away as fast as possible. When she entered the Town Hall, she did not stay long. On seeing her "German" descent, they let her go at once. Marica and Zvonimir returned home together.

The Day of the ISC was celebrated on 10 April. In front of the Town Hall there was a line of soldiers standing at attention, dressed in new uniforms. The officer commanded the gun salute. Once the three rifle shots had been fired the group of soldiers left the square. Three days later the Partisans finally liberated Slavonska Požega.

Josef Hercl reached Slavonska Požega in July 1945. British soldiers had some time before liberated the prisoners of camp Stalag – VI c in Germany and the freed prisoners were given British uniforms to wear. Dressed in this manner, Josef and his wife travelled to Zemun to learn what had happened to his mother Adel, Hugo and Žak and to see how their flat in Dubrovačka Street had fared. They came upon a group of poor people with a large number of children living in the flat on some broken and tattered furniture, since their own had been stolen during the war; they could see fear in the eyes of the lodgers as to what was to going happen with them. The Hercls assured them that they had come to seek information about the fate of their own family and that they could keep on living in the flat. During the four days they spent in Zemun the Hercls stayed with their friends, the Hazardi family.

From their old friend, the lawyer Kamacint, they learned of the tragic fate of their closest family members.

Sometime later on, after their return to Slavonska Požega they learned about the possibility for them to emigrate to Israel. The Jews of Europe were asking for a safe haven far from the horrors of the Holocaust which only a minuscule number of them had survived. The Hercls decided to start a new life in the land of their forefathers. They were already packed to set off when Zvonimir fell ill and had to be operated on immediately. They postponed their trip and since the period of recovery lasted for some time, Josef decided that he would be the first to leave, to prepare everything for Marica and his son's arrival.

In Israel Josef found work on road construction. He was glad that he had somehow managed to get a job. However, the toil and strain of the work and the climate to which he could not get accustomed to drained Josef to the point where he ended up in hospital. After a month of recuperation he was back at his old work. The foreman of the site saw that Josef was weak and gave him the job of warehouse keeper. Each morning Josef would hand out tools and in the evening take them back. During the night he slept in the warehouse facility to guard the tools from thieves. Out of his small salary he could only send a couple of pounds back to his family.

Marica continued to sew, but the need for new clothes was getting less and less by the day. Zvonimir took to playing music and during the summer would earn decent wages; but when put together it was far from enough to live through one year. They could not even earn enough for Zvonimir to buy school books for his education.

Realizing how adverse their situation was, Josef decided to return to Slavonska Požega where he got a regular job.

Professor Zvonimir Hercl, a descendant of Theodor Hercl, the founder of the State of Israel, is a pensioner today and lives in Pakrac, Croatia. He is married to Nada, nee Polčić, and they have a son, Edvard.

From this story it is evident that sometimes advice from a friend can be of crucial help at such a time when unfortunately, it was not possible to help all of those who were in desperate need to survive.

FILIP DAVID: A FAMILY CHRONICLE
- how we saved ourselves –

My mother was born in Kragujevac in a family of Sephardim origin. Her father, my grandfather, had a trade store in Kragujevac. It was a large family, seven brothers and sisters of very patriarchal traditional upbringing. Mother Roza met my father accidentally. He was called Frederik (Fred for short), an Ashkenazi Jew, who was born in Lvov (Lemberg) in Galicia, but had spent the greater part of his childhood and teenage years in Sarajevo. They met at one of those Jewish gatherings, in 1934 or 1935, the attraction was mutual, and this eventually led to marriage. In order to get married they had to overcome a whole series of hindrances since father came from a well-to-do family, Ashkenazi, while mother's family were Sephardim traders. In those days and in those circumstances an almost insurmountable difference. Marriages between the Jewish Ashkenazi and Jewish Sephardim were very rare and undesirable. They were two different cultures with different historical backgrounds. The resistance came mainly from my father's side as they were related with the Vienna Jewish aristocracy.

My father's family lived partly in Vienna and partly in Lemberg, i.e. in Lvov. Lvov is a town in Galicia which frequently changed names as a result of the change of those who held it and were in power. At times they were the Russians, then Poles, then Austrians. By my father's lineage there were family ties with the Freud family, the one of the famous founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. When my father was born, a congratulations card was sent by the Freuds coupled with some gifts. Later on when my father had some adolescent problems he went to the famous Freud for treatment and the talks he had with him had a great impact on his recovery from some traumas.

My father was a jurist, a judge, and his first appointment was in Peć, Kosovo. However, they spent only a few years there and already in '38 he was transferred to Sremska Mitrovica, some eighty kilometres from Belgrade to the north of the river Sava at the foot of the mountain Fruška Gora. It was the only mountain in that region, a fact of great importance for the fate that awaited us later. When the war began, my parents were in Mitrovica and went through everything that befell Yugoslavia at the time, in 1941. With the Nazi occupation and carving up of Yugoslavia, Sremska Mitrovica became part of the territory of ISC (Independent State of Croatia). At first my father was not threatened since he worked in the court and the people round him were loyal, including the domestic Germans, the Volksdeutschers. However, very soon the anti–Jewish laws were made public and the persecution of Jews began. My father was warned by the clerks below him in rank that he must be vigilant.

Nevertheless, very soon he could no longer hold his position, nor his job. The Germans sent all adult Jews to obligatory forced labour. Thus my father was ordered to load barbed wire into boats. It was a strenuous task which went on from morning till night. On one of these exerting days my mother went down to the docks to see whether she could be of help to him. When father was thirsty, mother brought him a jug of

water. A German, overseeing the work, stepped in front of her telling her to go away. She curtly answered in Serbian - for she could understand only a little German - that what they were doing to the people was terrorizing and insolent. Someone was there on the spot and promptly translated her words; the German, furious and angered by her stance, decided to punish her. My mother was holding me in her arms since I was only one year old. The German ordered her to leave me in one of the neighbouring houses and then to take a bucket and scrub the boat deck.

This incident was of vital importance when mother and father decided to flee to Belgrade. One could go to Belgrade only with special permits - it was another country, the German occupation zone. With the help of one of his trainees, a judge who was close to the German authorities, they obtained a pass. They went to Belgrade but did not stay long there. They felt even more insecure in this town, they had no relatives, and it was almost impossible to find good and safe accommodation. In the meantime, a letter from Sremska Mitrovica arrived from the already mentioned trainee telling them to return as they were not endangered any more. Father was apparently to work for another fortnight and then would be pensioned off with an ample severance pay on which one could live. The fugitives deliberated for some time what to do and finally made a decision to return to Sremska Mitrovica. Father really got the job, he worked for some fifteen days and upon that was sent into retirement. However, he never received a single dinar of his pension since at the time the rigorous Ustashi anti-Jewish laws were introduced and meticulously applied. One of the first orders to be announced was that Jews must wear the yellow band. My father never put the band on, not even for a day, nor did my mother. Once again they began thinking about what they should do, where to go. In the hard times that once again faced them, Dr. Lendner, a family friend came to a solution. He was, curiously enough, a German by descent; nevertheless, he offered them refuge in his house at the foot of Fruška Gora, some twenty kilometres from Sremska Mitrovica, and said that later on, using certain channels, he would transfer them to a safer place.

Roza, Filip and Frederik David, Mandjelos 1942

Doctor Lendner was a member of the German minority, but a very good old friend prepared to be of help no matter that he was putting his own life at risk. In prewar times my parents used to go to this same village house for holidays. They knew that he was against Hitler and that they could trust him. The organizers of the Partisan Resistance movement gathered and held meetings at his house, and according to an arrangement agreed on, someone was to be waiting for us there to take on the respon-

sibility of looking after us from then on. At the time my parents were in no way under the influence of any ideology, they were just afraid for their lives and how they would survive. The Partisans were the ones to be trusted as a guerilla group since they were not nationalistic in their outlook and ideology. A liaison of doctor Lendner sent us to the village Mandjelos which was grouped with other villages such as Pećinci, Putinci, all of them villages of some fifty houses, at the foot of Fruška Gora. These villages were pro-Partisan and sympathizers of their movement. It was agreed that mother and I should stay in the village under an assumed name in the house of the village swine-keeper, while father joined up with the Partisan Fruška Gora unit. Father would frequently come to the village at night - that I do remember clearly. Before going to bed I would kneel down beside it and pray to "the good Lord" to keep my father safe. Father would on each occasion when he came by bring a cube or two of sugar, which was a much appreciated sweet, some food, and then in the morning he would return to the forest. So life went on for some time.

As far as I can remember from my mother's stories, the swine-keeper, with whom we had found refuge, was called Vasa Kalenić and his house was situated at the very edge of the village. My mother would tell everyone who was interested that she was his wife; she had changed her name from Roza to Ruška which sounded more Serbian. I was told that from then on, if anyone asked me what my name was, I should reply: Kalinić. The villagers knew who and what we were, that we were there in hiding from the enemy, but kept the fact as a major secret and there was never any danger that someone would betray us. However, life under occupation was never peaceful. The Germans and Ustashi would at times charge into the village and then the entire population would rush for shelter and return only after the enemy forces went away. On one occasion awaiting a new Fascist raid we went into hiding in Fruška Gora. There we teamed up with the Partisans waiting for the enemy offensive to end. The Germans had surrounded Fruška Gora. Their circle was closing in tighter round the Partisans and the people in hiding. It was impossible to get out of the trap. During the night the Germans would light up fires on the skirts of the mountain, the flames lighting up the neighbouring space, knowing all the time that the Partisans were there, so they kept on tightening the noose round them. During the day time there was no chance to break out of the encirclement since the enemy was so strong. One night it was decided that an attempt should be made to move out of the ring. That meant walking in a column, single-file; there were fighters there, old people and women with children - all of them were to pass between the German fires in total silence somehow. And at one moment when the fires could be perceived close by, desperately tired after not sleeping a couple of nights, I began to cry and make a racket –I wanted my bed! At that moment the Partisan commander came up and told my mother: Strangle him! It would not have been the first case when a mother suffocated her child in order to save the rest. However, my mother refused to do so. She pushed him away with all her might. Then she turned and went the other way contrary to that which the others had taken. Father joined us too. We started off blindly, not knowing where we were, into uncertainty. Straight ahead,

just keep on going on straight ahead and down the slope. Mother later said that at one moment they saw, I was asleep at the time, the German fires flickering some twenty metres ahead of them. German soldiers were sitting round them, shouting, so that little attention was paid to the immediate surroundings and a slight sound could be taken for a deer or a doe. Thus we managed to pass through. An agreement had been made before the breakthrough of the encirclement began that those who managed to stay alive would meet up at the old mill. When in the morning mother and father came up to the mill, there were only a few fighters there; many had perished when they ran into a German stake out. An exchange of fire began and many people were killed.

What happened after that? Mother and father had nowhere to go. However, not far from us was the farmstead (salaš) of uncle Pera, whom they had visited before and had at times stayed with meaning that they had known each other before the war. So they decided, since it was close by, to set off to the farm. They did not go immediately, since it was daytime and dangerous, but waited for night fall and only then started toward uncle Pera's. We came up to the farmstead making our way through the maize field keeping out of sight. There was no one to be seen, only two large dogs in the yard. Mother and father knew the dogs from earlier visits and the dogs recognized them. They patted the dogs, the dogs enjoyed it and we entered the house; it was fully furnished, everything seemed in order, only there was no uncle Pera to be seen. We turned down the beds and lay down to catch two to three hours of sleep; somewhere around mid-night father said that it would be better for us to leave, something felt wrong - everything was in its place but there was no sign of uncle Pera. At around three or half past three in the morning, we got up and left the house and hid in the maize. In about half an hour, maybe an hour or so, dawn was just breaking, when shooting rang out from the house. Shots came from all sides. We kept still and soon after a peasant came by, so my parents asked him what was happening and he replied: "Well, you know, the Germans have taken uncle Pera off to a camp and they have laid an ambush for the Partisans. They were up in the attic and since the night was long must have gone off to sleep, counting on the dogs to start barking if anybody came close. When they came down in the early morning they saw the unmade beds and concluded that the Partisans had been inside, since one of them had forgotten his flask (that was my father). Wild with anger they started firing in all directions.

Filip David in Mandjelos 1942

After a couple of days the Germans retreated. When they left, there was peace again for a couple of months and people would return from their hideouts. Thus mother and I went back to the village of Mandjelos.

Sometimes during German raids they would round up all the village people and hold them captive in the village church yard or head them off to Sremska Mitrovica, some eighteen kilometres away, and then keep them there in a provisionary camp. During one such raid mother tried to hide and just as she was thinking how she had made it, all the others were all already taken away while she had hid behind a wall, an Ustashi soldier noticed her and made her march off, so she followed all the other people down the road towards Mitrovica, tagging me along by the hand and carrying my younger brother, Miša, born during the war. I was three years old and my brother, born in 1942, was barely one, and she was carrying him in her arms. I remember to this day how hard it was for me to walk (these are my first early recollections of war, the constant fear of someone or something) but whoever lagged along or stopped would be mercilessly shot on the spot in front of us all. At one moment I shouted that I could no longer walk so fast – the road was dusty, the heat scorching and I felt exhausted. Mother shouted: There, do you see that tree at the end of the road, it's a big cherry tree (she knew that I adored cherries) so we have to reach it before all the others do; if we come last, there will be none left for us. I summed up the last dregs of strength in me in order to reach the tree. Of course, we only passed by the tree and went on our way. The road was eighteen kilometres long. All the running, that martyrs' way up to the camp and the "lie" my mother told me, inspired me later to write my first literary work, I was only eight, I described the event and in a contest of the paper "Pionir" in 1948 I received the first prize; out of 4,000 pieces that had been sent to the competition mine was singled out. Once we reached Sremska Mitrovica with enormous difficulties, the Germans started dividing the people they had brought along: the elderly, the mothers with little children, the middle-aged, who were either killed or taken away to a camp. And then, a German stepped forward and said: We should kill all you women with small children, but this time we are letting you go so you can return to your villages and tell your Partisan husbands that next time there shall be no mercy; they have to surrender, this is our last warning. So that was how everything ended favourably for us that time, but to this day I remember the yard full of worn-out people, I remember the man whose head was bandaged; how they took him to a fenced in space and shot him in his underwear. I was only three at the time, but I remember it all clearly.

Filip David in Mandjelos 1943

During that time father was with the Partisans in the forest. Sometime in 1943 the unit crossed over to Bosutska forest in Slavonija, on the other side of the river. Father came less frequently. One strange story dates back from that time. Namely, one day some women from the village came to visit my mother and invite her to come to the

house where all the other women of the village would meet in a sort of traditional gathering (poselo) and where they prayed that everything that was happening would end happily. That day some women soothsayers were expected to come, women that could foresee the future. Mother was in two minds what to do, whether to go or not, but finally decided to go and see what was happening there. She came into a room where there already were some twenty women. The two soothsayers were there as well. They prayed first and then at one moment, one of the two women fell into a trance and started saying what would happen to each of them; when she turned to my mother, still in the trance, she spoke: "You, madam, are under the protection of the Holy Mother, nothing can happen to you if you hold on to the golden cross that is now with your husband." Mother could not make any sense of this: we were Jews and had no cross, particularly a golden one. Anyway, she heard the story out, listened some more to what was going on, and then returned home.

The next evening father came home unexpectedly from the Bosutska forest. He was very worried since he had heard that the raids would begin once again, he could not keep still as he had not seen us for quite some time. He pleaded with his commander to let him cross the river Sava and see that everything was all right for himself. He had an escort with him, a soldier. Father got on a horse, they started on their way through the forest and when they were nearing Fruška Gora, father dismounted and said to the soldier: Your turn to ride. At the same moment he felt he had stepped on something, and as he moved his foot, he saw a golden cross. He lifted it up and put it in his wallet. By the time he reached the village that evening, he had forgotten the entire episode. However, while they were talking, mother off-handedly mentioned the women's gathering and the prophecy about the gold cross which was to protect them, since they were supposedly under the protection of the Holy Mother. Father opened his wallet and said: Look, I found this gold cross on my way here. And another thing connected to all of this was that the women had mentioned: You know, that time in the forest, when you and your husband and child were saved, the Lord's hand was on your shoulder. And then mother said that she had actually felt at one moment while they were finding a way out of the encirclement, that a hand was on her shoulder, a slight touch that she had never been able to explain until this woman had enlightened her.

Neither father nor mother were fervent believers and especially not superstitious. Prior to the war father had been the president of the Jewish Community of Mitrovica and he was certainly not well-versed in Christian symbols. Nevertheless, father kept the cross in his wallet for a long time. After his death in the seventies, when mother started to search for the amulet, she could not find it. And she never came across it again. It could simply be said: Easy come, easy go. I mention this as one of the many experiences that escape any rational explanation. It must have been in fact a mere series of accidental events, bizarre coincidences, but even so, such a web of events is somewhat close to a miracle.

There were other events that also took an unbelievable turn, such as the one when my mother was returning from Pećinci where she used to find food. She was walking

along the road when she saw a German patrol some fifty metres ahead and she had no papers with her. She could only expect the worst from such an encounter, in all probability she would end up in a camp. She closed her eyes and said to herself: I'm going ahead, I have no thoughts at all for this moment, there is nothing I can do, what is meant to happen will happen. There was a gully by the side of the road and one of the Germans was down in it calling out to the other two: Komm hier! Komm hier!! He had come across a spring and as they were all thirsty, the other two also made haste to quench their thirst. They went down into the gully and mother passed by unnoticed. So here again was this sequence of unbelievable events which in hopeless situations open up a doorway to salvation.

The war was coming to its end when once again something similar happened. Mother along with us children was driven by force to a gathering site in a nearby village. Anyone who fell behind was beaten up with the rifle butts of the Germans and Ustashi and thrown into the ditch by the road where they were either killed or beaten some more until incapacitated; it was horrific and cruel. My mother with the two of us in tow began to lag behind. She could go no further. One Ustashi soldier was walking right behind her. She turned to him and said: Kill me, I can go no further. And then, at the very moment when she could expect that final brutality to befall her, the Ustashi said: Get down there and hide behind that bush, but remember that it was I who spared your life. One day, if necessary, I'll refer to you and tell of how I saved your life. Thus mother kept still and quiet while the column went on its way. She never saw that Ustashi again, never ran into him, and wondered at times if he had stayed alive. Most probably not. Thus such things do happen that in a moment of time, when one's life depends on one man, the man shows mercy, he saves you in order to save himself. So you see, there were several occasions such as these. And then it was the end – liberation came. My father was one among the first liberators who entered Novi Sad in

The Davids in Belgrade after the WW2

1944. And I still remember a calendar, the first for the year 1945. On it was a picture of Partisans entering Novi Sad, and there in the column of soldiers my father could clearly be seen. Half of them were infantry men, half cavalry, entering Novi Sad. In Novi Sad we moved into an abandoned German flat.

Out of the many family members, numbering over fifty people on both my mother's and father's side, there were some five or six survivors. Regarding those on my mother's side, she had known about the death of the greater part of her family since the end of 1941. She used to write to those who had stayed in Kragujevac as long as it was possible. All at once there were no more letters. She could not understand what had happened and then a letter from a friend arrived. It was addressed to my father and he was indecisive for some months whether to show it to mother, since it was written inside how in October 1941, in the well-known massacre in Kragujevac, her father and two brothers had been shot by a firing squad (she had four brothers and two sisters) and that the others had been taken to camps in Jasenovac and in Djakovo. They all perished inside these camps. No one survived. Father hesitated for a long time to tell her the truth about their fate, and there came a day when he could not keep it from her any longer; when she heard him out, mother lost her voice, she simply could not speak. It was a month or two before she could talk again. In the meantime she walked around as if she had lost her mind. One of the villagers came by each day to comfort her, talk to her until she finally found her voice again. Once she began to speak she cried for a couple of days. It was a terrible blow. Out of her numerous family, only one brother who had been taken POW, another who had joined the Partisans, and one who was in America survived. Father learned the fate of his family only when the war was over. All of his family had also been taken to camps, his father, his mother and his relatives. Not a single one of them returned.

THE ROSENZWEIGS IN MANDJELOS

You have most probably already read the story of Filip David, "The Family Chronicle" telling the story of how in Mandjelos, a small village at the foot of mount Fruška Gora his family managed to stay alive and survive World War II.

Likewise, Josip and Margita Rosenzweig also sought refuge in Mandjelos, but their story ended differently. Their grandson Ivan Ninić wrote their story down for the edition: "We are survivors", and all that is left for me to do here is to retell it with minor insertions and a few photos. This chapter of the book bears the name: "The Righteous without a Medal" and all the natives of Mandjelos who provided help during the length of the war by keeping the secret from the Fascists that there were Jews hiding in their village, are certainly worthy of the award.

In the thirties of the last century Margita and Josip Rosenzweig were living in Novi Sad. They had two daughters and a son. Daughter Irma, Manci as they used to call her, was living in Belgrade married to Miodrag Ninić and at the end of 1932 their son Ivan was born. They nicknamed him Hanzi. However, the marriage to "Handsome Bata", as Ivan's father was better known, did not last long. Manci was only 22 at the time and she sent Ivan to Novi Sad to stay with his grandmother and grandfather.

The younger daughter Valerija married Rudi Fassbender, an Englishman, who worked in the Embassy of Great Britain in Belgrade.

Their son Viktor studied the law in Belgrade but because of his leftist activities he had to move to Zagreb. In March 1941 he was already locked up in the notorious Kerestinec in Zagreb.

In 1940 Manci got married again, this time to Oto Zahnbauer from Novi Sad, a man without any prejudices who accepted both her and her son. Purely by coincidence her parents moved to Belgrade that same year and so Manci and her family were left to live on their own in the family house in Novi Sad. Josip Rosenzweig was a sales representative for a carpet factory from Banat, and life in Belgrade offered more opportunities for his work.

When, on 27 March1941, the citizens of Belgrade in vast numbers supported the military coup, during which the govern-

Manci and Valerija, Belgrade 1940

ment of Cvetković-Maček and the Tripartite Pact accepted in Vienna two days previously were rejected, schools stopped working. Ivan, who had grown up beside his grandmother and grandfather wanted to spend the holidays in Belgrade. Many were aware that the war was approaching fast, but at the same time it was impossible for many to believe that it would actually happen. Manci let her son go to spend his unexpected holiday with his grandparents in Belgrade.

Valerija was fully aware that war was unavoidable and together with the staff of the English embassy she was getting ready to leave Belgrade in haste. She asked Manci to allow Ivan to go with her to England but the mother would not agree. Valerija's husband was one of the few from the diplomatic corps who stayed on in Belgrade.

On 6 April Ivan with his grandmother and grandfather lived through and survived the horrendous bombing of Belgrade. They spent some time in a village near Belgrade, Mali Mokri Lug, while Hitler's troops, joined by their allies, were breaking down the resistance of the King's army rapidly. The Nazis were soon in Belgrade where on 17 April the unconditional capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was signed.

When Josip, Margita and Ivan returned to Belgrade already awaiting them were regulations ordering all Jews to report to the Special police. Josip did not want to put the yellow band on his sleeve nor did he want to report to the Special police. Grandmother and grandfather decided to escape to Novi Sad with Ivan. They came up to Petrovaradin where the Hungarian occupying army was already controlling the passage of people over the Danube. That part of Danube represented the border between the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) and Hungary, which had annexed the occupied territories of Vojvodina. The new Hungarian authorities would not issue the passes that would allow Josip, Margita and Ivan to cross over the river to Novi Sad. Still, they did not know quite what to do with them, so that night they left them to sleep in the office where permits were issued.

The Rosenzweigs in Ruma: Margita, Manci, Josip, Valerija and Viktor

In the morning the Hungarian clerks continued their daily tasks, paying little attention to the refugees from Belgrade. All at once, Ivan thought he had heard his mother's voice. It really was Manci, who was returning from Belgrade where she had gone to fetch her son. The joy of seeing each other lasted for a short while,

since the occupying authorities would not issue passes for Manci's parents. She could only obtain a permit to cross over to Novi Sad with her son.

Josip Rosenzweig was born in Mandjelos, a small village on the slopes of Fruška Gora. In the division of occupied territories, Srem, stretching all the way up to Zemun, came under the authority of ISC. Josip and Margita were afraid to return to Belgrade and after a touching parting with their grandson and daughter, they set off for Mandjelos. Manci's husband Oto was taken POW and Manci and Ivan were left all alone in Novi Sad. Oto was released from captivity, but was soon mobilized by the Hungarian army.

Josip and Margita reached Mandjelos and found a place to stay in a village house as tenants. When they arrived in Mandjelos, one can say freely, a Serbian village, they met yet another Jewish family there, namely Frederik and Ruža David and their sons, Miša and Filip. The children were very young and Ruža stayed in the village while Frederik, whom they called Fred, was somewhere close in the vicinity since he had decided to join up with the Fruška Gora Partisan units.

Josip had worked all his life, but what he knew best was of no use in Mandjelos. Still, living in the countryside he learned how to weave baskets and this brought in earnings they could live on. From Belgrade they had brought along with them as many belongings as they could, but the money they had with them was of no value in Mandjelos.

Although an out-of-the-way village, isolated in a small valley in Fruška Gora, it was perhaps for the same reason a perfect target for the amusement of the Ustashi and Domobrans. Instead of hunting dear and rabbit in the woods of Fruška Gora, they searched by night for Jews who had taken refuge in the village. Not only Jews, they killed Serbs as well, for no reason at all. The village folk were already used to spending the night in the forest, while in the morning they took to their regular country chores that had to be completed. There were Jews in the hideouts with them, too. Josip and Margita, however, got tired of running to the cover of the woods each night.

Viktor Rosenzweig

Josip and Margita never learned that their son Viktor was shot by a firing squad in Kerestinec, Zagreb, on 9 July 1941, together with Božidar Adžija, Otokar Keršovani and seven other intellectuals. One night Margita and Josip were arrested and taken to the prison in Sremska Mitrovica. In the announcement (Oglas) no. 1553-42 of the "Hrvatska Mitrovica" from 8 June 1942, it is stated that "…Josip Rosenzweig, 56 years old, and Margita Rosenzweig, 52 years old, were pro-

nounced guilty of taking to the woods where they had fought against the Domobrans, Ustashi and German Army with hunting guns and firearms." On 24 June 1942, the itinerant court martial sentenced them to be executed by firing squad. The sentence was carried out on 7 July 1942.

Margita Handler, married Rosenzweig, a Jewess from Vojvodina, was born in Parabuć. She spoke Hungarian, German and very little Serbian. Josip Rosenzweig was born in Mandjelos and he spoke German and Serbian. He did not know a word of Hungarian. Their children born in Ruma spoke German and Serbian. German was the mutual language they all shared and spoke in the family.

Viktor, Valerija and Irma Rosenzweig, Ruma 1922

Eugen Jene Freudenfeld was born in Kragujevac in 1901. He had two brothers and three sisters. While still a young man, his mother, Antonija, a relatively young woman, decided to relocate the family to Belgrade. Eugen completed his schooling and very soon found his place in the world of trading. He was the representative of Pelikan in Belgrade and he imported wooden pencils from Hungary. Eugen also had a store "Angro i detalj" (Wholesale and retail) in which he sold office stationary and school necessities.

Eugen Freudenfeld

At the same time he was a passionate stamp collector so he sold stamps in the shop, too. Those that were the most valuable he kept in his flat in Kralja Petra Street which he had rented upon his marriage to Lili Grünberger. Eugen's brother Josef was married to a Christian, a Hungarian, but they had no children. The youngest brother Pavle was a doctor and had not yet married.

Lili Grünberger, the daughter of Paula (her mother) and Moris (her father), was born in 1909 in Novi Sad. She had a sister Elisabeth, married Göre, whom they called Eržika; she also moved to Belgrade. She had been widowed while still young when her husband had died during an operation. Eržika and their son Djuri were left without a husband and father.

Lili and Eugen had two daughters, Edita born in 1930 and Verica born in 1935.

Eugen's shop was in the very building they lived in, but an ill-tempered neighbour induced them to move to another apartment. They rented a flat at 12, Topličin venac and Eugen rented yet another shop at Zeleni Venac.

Lili Freudenfeld, 1938

The racist politics of Nazi Germany had forced many Jews from Central and East Europe to seek refuge in other countries. Serbia was on the path of the refugee route leading to Palestine. The Jews of the capital city of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and not the only ones from Belgrade, helped the refugees on their way by giving them food, medicine, whatever they had, still unaware of what fate was awaiting them.

The Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia faced with the threat of her neighbouring countries that had already agreed to the Tripartite Pact, decided that Yugoslavia too, would join the forces of the Axis - Germany, Italy and Japan. In Vienna on 25 March 1941, the contract on the joining the Tripartite Pact was

signed; however, two days later the people came out into the streets, a military coup took place, and the Tripartite Pact was rejected.

The reaction of the furiously angry Hitler came in no time. In the early dawn of 6 April, the bombardment of Belgrade and a number of other places in Serbia and Yugoslavia began. In a short time the armed forces of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated.

When the bombing began, the Freudenfelds and Lili's family rushed out of the city. They tried to find shelter with a friend of Eugen's in the countryside of Serbia. However, the friend refused to take them in, so they returned to Belgrade.

Once the bombardment, which lasted a couple of days was over, on their return home they were overwhelmed by the sight that met their eyes. Belgrade, previously declared an open city, was in ruins. One could still see the dead lying in the streets of the town.

The house in which they lived had not been damaged, but a bomb had fallen on Eugen's shop. Everything was demolished, including the safe in which there had been money and stamps. This did not worry Eugen much. He was first and foremost a good economist and Lili a thrifty housewife. There was still money left in the flat, and also food reserves which Lili regularly kept in check and in supply.

However, Eugen would not rest and wait to see what was going to happen. After the Jews who were fleeing from Central and East Europe, came their pursuers bringing along heavy artillery. It was then that they realized what would happen to Jews in Serbia. He left for Sarajevo taking his family along. They soon found shelter and accommodation with a Muslim family. However, Sarajevo was soon bombed, too. They made it quickly back to Belgrade.

The fact, that Eugen was unaware of, was, that on entering Belgrade one of the first things the Nazis did was to send Jews to forced labour. Among all the debasing things they thought up for Jews to do was to force them to remove the dead from the ruins with their bare hands: bodies that had already begun to decompose.

Immediately upon this, by the end of April 1941, came the order for all Jews to wear yellow bands to single them out from all the others. Posted on notice boards were all the things Jews were prohibited from. They could not ride in the vehicles of public transport, buying basic food for life was allowed only when all the other citizens had done their shopping, of course if anything was left in the bakeries or stores. Jewish doctors could only treat Jews, and all the other doctors were forbidden to render them medical help. There was no question of going to the theatre or cinemas. Anyway, a new stage was already set for Jews, one where they would have the leading role.

When they returned to Belgrade, Eugen's friend, a Hungarian officer suggested that they should immediately leave for Novi Sad and from there on to Budapest. Eugen was unwilling to leave behind his numerous family, and since he spoke no Hungarian, they decided to stay in Belgrade.

Then one day the whole town was plastered with new notices stating that all Jews had to report to the Special police, Department for the Jews. Eugen was the first to go and do as ordered. He reported and never came back home. He was taken to the provisional camp Topovske šupe; Lili had no idea where he was and what had happened to him.

Their daughter Edita, who was 11 years old at the time, told her mother to prepare a backpack for her and went in search of her father. She was not obliged to wear the yellow band, since she was not yet 16, so she went from one barrack to another until she reached Topovske šupe. From the guards there she learned that this was the place where the Jews were imprisoned. She returned home and told her mother, and she in turn immediately informed the Jewish Community in Belgrade where the missing Jews were. The Community leaders began negotiations with the Germans to allow visits to the imprisoned Jews and grant permission to bring them food.

Lili visited her husband a few times taking the children along with her. On their last visit he told her that he was going to Germany and since he spoke the language fluently he would get an office job for sure. He went no further than Jabuka, where he was taken with others and they were all shot by a firing squad. Of course, Lili had no idea of what had happened. She waited for her husband to send word for a long time.

Soon it became clear to Lili that all the men from their large family had disappeared without a trace, yet she still believed that they would receive news from them one day. Since she was now alone without a husband, she decided that she would send her children to Novi Sad.

It was fated that Eržika, Lili's sister, had also lost her husband. She was left with her son to bring him up on her own after her husband had died before the war during a medical operation. Since both Lili and Eržika were born in Novi Sad, Lili felt that the children would be safer there and that Eržika could easily find an apartment for them. And she was right. Eržika and her son Djuri went off to Novi Sad. Soon Eržika sent word to Lili that they too, could come to Novi Sad. "I'm thirty-two years old and I'm staying here and waiting for my husband," Lili replied. Nevertheless, she made preparations to send the children off to live with their aunt.

Lili found a Zuska (cleaning lady) from Pančevo who was prepared to risk her life to take the children to safety. Dressed in a traditional Slovak folk costume with many underskirts on her, the Zuska brought the same attire for both girls. Lili threw a shawl over her yellow band with the Star of David on it, and saw the girls off at the Danube bank. However, Verica, who was then only five and a half years old, would not hear of leaving her mother. She stayed with Lili, who was standing on the bank of the Danube waving and crying as if she knew that she was taking leave of her elder daughter forever. Zuska introduced Edita as her daughter. Edita had to keep quiet for the length of the journey, since she knew no Slovakian. Thus they reached Novi Sad by boat and the Zuska handed Edita over to her aunt Eržika .

All this happened in a very short time. Among those who heroically fought against

the occupier were a number of Jews who, with the other Serbian prisoners, were sent to German prison camps. From the moment the Nazis entered Belgrade in mid-April, 1941, by the month of October, all Jews who were fit for work had already been isolated. Only the women and children and the old were left in Belgrade. Before the end of the year, on the other bank of the river Sava, the Sajmište (fairground), once the pride of Belgrade, had become a camp for the internment of Jews still living in Belgrade.

Margita and Josip Freudenfeld, 1938

Lili would not leave their flat. She was still waiting for her husband to return home, but the frequent checks made by the Special police told her to keep her guard. When, at the beginning of December 1941, notices appeared throughout the city telling all Jews to report to the Special police in Džordža Vašingtona Street from where they would be deported to the camp at the former Sajmište, Lili decided to take Verica to Margita's. This happened only a day prior to the rounding up of women and children to be sent to Sajmište. Of Josef, Margita's husband, as well as his brother, Lili's husband, there was no trace whatsoever and Margita was alone in the flat.

The very next day after Lili had taken Verica to Margita's, the rounding up of women, children and the old began. They were being taken to Sajmište. Margita, realizing what was happening, immediately relocated Verica to Novi Sad to stay with Eržika.

When Margita came home the caretaker, who knew that she had no children, reported to the Gestapo that there was a Jewish child in hiding with her. Due to her origins, Margita was spared from the severest penalty, but she was thrown out of the flat, and from then on her wandering round for a refuge lasted right up to the end of the war.

The children were taken to a safe place, at least that was what they wanted to believe, but their mother Lili was taken to Sajmište together with the rest of her family and that of her husband. Only uncle Pavle had managed to stay a free man for the time being.

In Novi Sad it was hard for Eržika to cope with three children. Lili had given her the addresses of all Eugen's business associates just before they left for Novi Sad. Among them was his partner from Budapest, his supplier of wooden pencils.

Upon the capitulation of Yugoslavia when the spoils of war were divided, Hungary gained Baranja and Bačka. Hungarian administration had been set up in Novi Sad and it was under constant pressure of the Nazis to solve the "Jewish question". The business associate from Hungary completely understood the situation that the children of his friend, who sadly, no longer had any way of helping them, were faced with. He sent Eržika some money for subsistence but that did not last long. Even as a child Edita had a highly enterprising spirit and found herself a job almost at once. She began to do

needlepoint making tapestries for a store-owner and she was paid by the hour.

The January of 1942 is remembered as exceptionally cold. The Danube had frozen over and one could cross over it in a horse-drawn carriage. The big operation of liquidating Jews and other undesirable elements for the new regime, later known as the Raid (Racija) began on 21 January. On the Štrand, the Novi Sad bathing beach, a column of Jews, Roma and Communists slowly made their way towards the manmade hole in the frozen Danube. They went to their death patiently waiting for their turn to come. On the third day of the so-called Raid, aunt Eržika and her son Djuri stood in the column together with Edita and Verica.

The tears had long dried up when the Hungarian Nazis began to look around in bewilderment. An order had arrived from Budapest saying that the massacre should be immediately stopped - the massacre that had already taken thousands of lives down the Danube. The survivors were sent off to their homes. Eržika and Lili's numerous relatives - the members of the families Zor and Fogel, Kronstein…had perished in the Raid. Eržika was no longer in any doubt as to what they should do. She packed the children and escaped to Budapest.

At the time there were very few Jews in Belgrade. A small number of them were in hiding with friends, others had joined the Resistance movement and again there were some, like Edita's and Verica's uncle Pavle Freudenfeld, who was working at the Jewish hospital, which was by mid 1941 relocated to the building of the Jewish Women's Society in Dorćol. The hospital was under constant surveillance of the Gestapo. It was one of the measures for isolating Jews who were prohibited from being treated in any other health centre. At first the hospital was equipped fairly well; however, the Nazis constantly looted the sanitary material, instruments and medicines, so that the hospital barely managed to achieve what it was supposed to do. The hospital succeeded in staying open only with the help of donors, among whom there were quite a number of Serbian citizens, who secretly brought food for the sick.

Beside the other patients, inmates of the Sajmište camp who were ill were brought to the hospital, mainly women and children. Soon there were two sick people lying in one bed, while the Gestapo constantly pressed the doctors to return the inmates back to Sajmište camp. Once the Gestapo men realized that among the sick women there were also those who were pregnant, they ordered the doctors to immediately terminate their pregnancies. Dr. Testa and Dr. Freudenfeld, under the threat of the death penalty refused to make a forced end to the pregnancies especially those that were nearing their term.

By means of a measure that had become practice, the Nazis let it be known that the hospital was relocating to Poland, which was a lie. Namely, at that time a truck, actually a mobile gas chamber, known as "dušegupka", had arrived in Belgrade. This vehicle initiated the mass liquidation of the Sajmište Jews.

Very soon it was the hospital's turn to be taken away by the truck. For a few days it was the patients who were being taken away and then it was the turn of the doctors

Dr Pavle Freudenfeld

and the medical staff. Prior to this, in just one night, all family members of the medical staff were arrested in their flats. A smaller number of the staff was taken to Sajmište camp. The greater part along with the patients, were taken by the "dušegupka" up to Jajince, where mass graves awaited the suffocated passengers. It will never be known into which grave Dr. Pavle was thrown. Of the entire Freudenfeld family, only Edita and Verica were still alive.

When Eržika arrived in Budapest with the children, they reported to the Jewish Community. At that time Jews from Romania, Poland, Slovakia, even from Bulgaria, where they were relatively better protected, kept coming to Budapest. They could not obtain any new documents nor did they dare show their old ones.

In the centre of Budapest there was a home for orphans. The Jewish Community had rented the two upper floors for Jewish children who had lost their parents. Separated from the other children, Edita and Verica found themselves there.

The first week of their stay in the home was hard for Edita; the period of accommodation to the new surroundings was not easy. Communication was difficult since the children spoke various languages and when they saw the two large suitcases where Edita's beautiful clothes were packed, they became jealous. When Edita suddenly got painful cramps in her stomach, a doctor was called in to examine her. There was not much he could do since he concluded that the pain was caused by psychological stress. Edita was twelve years old and the oldest in the group. With the help of the governess, in a relatively short time she adapted to the new surroundings.

The children had some sort of free passage; they could go to school, but could not obtain a certificate to show they had completed the class they were attending. In the orphanage itself, Jewish Zionist organizations, especially the HaŠomer HaCair, were very active. The children were encouraged to wish to return to their historical homeland which would later, for those who were lucky enough, prove of great importance to their lives in Israel.

Eržika and her son Djuri were given a place to live in the flat of a baron, who had abandoned Judaism and adopted the Christian faith. The large apartment was in the centre of Budapest. Eržika cooked and kept the flat in order but could not leave it and go outside into the street like Djuri. However, at times she would venture out with him to meet Edita on her way back from school. Although they were separated, she kept a close eye on what was happening to the children. Djuri would take the baron's dog for a walk each day, buy provisions for the house and serve the guests.

Edita was not the only one who had psychological problems in accommodating to the new life they were living since it was in many ways similar to living in a Ghetto. The Hungarian authorities gave permission for the children to go on an organized holiday once in three years. Their last and only holiday Edita and Verica spent in Hungary

staying with a Jewish family in a small place far from the eyes of the public. The stay in the countryside meant a lot to the children and their hosts, who had no children of their own, would talk to them about life in the Palestine. The two of them had already bought some land there and were waiting for a chance to get to Palestine.

At that time there was a feeling that the war would be over soon. The Hungarian Regent Horti, although he was Hitler's collaborator, was not willing to send the large population of Jews in Hungary to the gas chambers. Whether he had a guilty conscience since already thousands of Jews had been exterminated or was saving his son, whom the Germans had kidnapped, he was ready to sign a peace agreement with the Allied forces.

While the Red Army was already advancing towards Berlin and the Balkans, and at the same time approaching the Hungarian border, Hitler continued with his monstrous plan to exterminate the Jewish people. In March1944 the Nazis simply marched into Hungary and then in October 1944 took Horti to Bavaria where he was held prisoner up to the end of the war. To "solve the Jewish question" in Hungary was the task given to Adolf Eichmann. A new government which fulfilled all the Nazi orders was installed in the country. According to the well developed plan, the deportation of Jews for Auschwitz began.

Rudolf Reza Kastner, a Hungarian-Jewish lawyer who had for years been in the forefront of Zionist organizations, after a number of failed attempts to save Jews, finally managed to come to an agreement with Adolf Eichmann; in return for a large sum of money, diamonds and gold he obtained permission to transport 1685 Jews, the number that was finally taken by 35 cattle wagons out of Budapest, departed on 30 June. The transport was sent to Switzerland, from where the saved were to be taken to Bari, and then by boat to Palestine.

In Kastner's train, as it was called later on, there were intellectuals, leaders of the Zionist movement, well-known artists, news reporters and Jewish refugees from a number of countries.

When a message came to the orphanage for the teacher to select ten children who would travel along with her in the train to safety, she did not know what to do, who to choose. Edita, who was then fourteen, was her favourite, however, it was necessary to save the younger children first.

The evening before the train left the teacher entered Edita's and Verica's room with a smile on her face: "Start packing. I've got two more places!"

Edita began to cry: "Out of the question. We are going nowhere without aunt Eržika's approval."

"That is understood," the teacher quickly came up with an answer to overcome the issue. "I've just been informed that your aunt is happy you are going. If she hadn't called me to tell me so, I wouldn't have invited you."

The Jewish Community still oversaw what was happening to Jews and when they

heard the aunt had been deported and that Edita and Verica were all alone, they intervened with Kastner to place the two of them on the list of passengers. No one was willing to tell Edita and Verica the truth.

Luckily, the teacher did not mention that their cousin Djuri was also happy they were leaving, as Edita already knew that he had been mobilized for a forced labour unit. What she did not know was that Djuri had run away from the labour camp and that he was hiding in the vicinity of their aunt's apartment. The Baron, who had been informed that he would be deported to Auschwitz, knew that the Nazis had little heed for the Christian faith, especially when converted Jews were in question, and had run and gone into hiding; no one knew of his whereabouts. Their aunt had been hiding in the house, but the Gestapo quickly found her and sent her to Auschwitz on the first transport leaving Budapest.

The next day their mother's cousin was waiting for Edita and Verica at the railway station. He was from the wealthy family Kevari. He had paid for his family to be on the list for Switzerland. Husband and wife Kevari, their two daughters, a little older than Edita, found the two girls despite the enormous crowd gathered there and said from that moment on they would be taking care of them. They had suitcases full of food, soap, and many other things, as well as money which would later be of help to ease the long journey that was awaiting them. Edita was still unaware of the fact that the Kevaris had saved their lives, but at that moment there were no other options for them.

Kastner's train left Hungary and entered Austria. We said that the Jews were transported in cattle wagons. That was only a half-truth. What transpired was that up to the Hungarian-Austrian border they had been aboard passenger wagons, but from that point onward, all the passengers were transferred to cattle wagons. They travelled inside them up to Linz where they were taken out and sent to take a shower. The men were separated from the women. It was only then that the passengers began thinking that they had been deceived (the second time in Bergen-Belsen, but we will come back to that later). Why? In Hungarian the difference between the words: gas chamber and shower room is very slight. When they were ordered to take off their clothes, Edita was shocked. German soldiers passed between the naked women, both old and young, making crude jokes about them. Then they began to crop their hair off right up to the scalp. Edita wondered why they were doing this if they wanted to kill them. Her hair was shorn off too; however, there was little time for this task to be completed, so some women managed to save the hair on their heads. Then the women were bathed.

The road further took them to Bergen-Belsen where they were once again thrown out of the wagons. They were given places on piles of straw, there were no blankets, but they were given all the things they had taken along. A barbed wire fence separated them from the other inmates but nevertheless, they were in the same camp with them. They were given only bread of a dark brown colour, as hard as stone, and turnip soup, which was probably used to feed the livestock. Fortunately, they all had some reserves of food. Unfortunately though, they met face to face with the famished camp inmates: hands that were only skin and bone reached out to them pleading for a crumb of bread.

They threw them the bread that they had been given over the fence and some of the food they had with them out of their already depleted reserves. The little children were given somewhat better food, semolina boiled in water! However, as the leading men of the Zionist organizations were in the transport, a cultural program was soon organized: they talked to the inmates, organized recitals, rabbis prayed for their souls to be saved, in one word, in all ways possible they made an effort to take their minds off the horrendous reality.

The transport was divided into two groups. It was reported that half of the transport would leave in a month and a half and the other one half a year later; the children from the home were in the first group.

As planned, they were taken to the Swiss border in the cattle wagons, where they were all taken off the train, all the gold they had with them was taken away (if any was to be found) and then they were put on board a passenger train up to Basel.


CONFÉDÉRATION SUISSE - SCHWEIZERISCHE EIDGENOSSENSCHAFT - CONFEDERAZIONE SVIZZERA

Certificat d'identité
Identitätsausweis
Certificato d'identità

No.

Signalement - Connotati

The Swiss Certificate, 1945

The dirty, tired passengers were met by the representatives of the Red Cross with a glass of milk and a bread bun. This was a treat. From there they were taken to be disinfected. With her group Edita went to a number of locations, she recalls staying in Lausanne and finally the group was settled on a hill; she could not remember the name, but knew well that it was a large boarding house rented by JOINT and that it was in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. When they arrived, they found quite a large number of young Jews already staying there, some of them even from Yugoslavia, who had reached Switzerland by way of Italy.

All the young were divided into groups according to their ties with various movements. They were being prepared for a life in Palestine by Gordonija, HaŠomer HaCair, etc. They did not attend school but were taught Hebrew. A big library was on the premises and Edita again began to read German books. There was a piano as well; cultural life was at a high level in those circumstances. The food was modest but wholesome. Once a week they had Italian pasta with mutton. And every month they received a kilo of chocolate, since at the time nobody had any heed for cholesterol. JOINT also took care of the children's clothing.

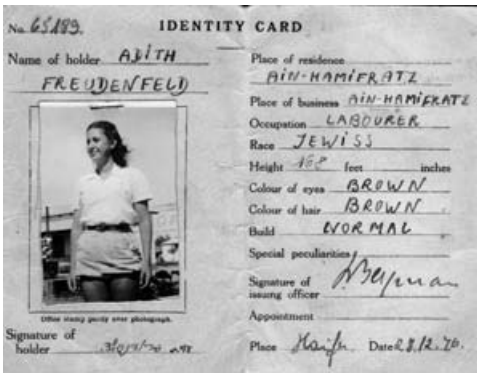
Finally, the announcement that World War II was over, was made. The joy at hearing the news was enormous - they would soon be leaving for Palestine.

Edita was unaware that back in Budapest Djuri had welcomed the Red Army soldiers with joy. The Bolsheviks were entering Budapest and Djuri had rushed toward

them to greet them. A grenade exploded nearby and the shrapnel tore almost half of his arm off. Djuri's life ended quietly at the very boots of the liberators.

The transport from Switzerland soon left for Bari. There, already prepared for them, were certificates for entering Palestine, which was still under British protectorate.

Once they were on the boat that would take them to the Holy Land, the country of their forefathers, Edita learned about the fate of aunt Eržika. She cried for a long time and then she braced up and began to prepare for their new life in the kibbutz, their new home at least for some time.


No. 65189. IDENTITY CARD
Name of holder ADITH FREUDENFELD
Place of residence AIN-HAMIFRATZ
Place of business AIN-HAMIFRATZ
Occupation LABOURER
Race JEWISS
Height 162 feet inches
Colour of eyes BROWN
Colour of hair BROWN
Build NORMAL
Special peculiarities
Signature of issuing officer
Appointment
Other marks partly over photograph.
Signature of holder
Place Haifa Date 8.12.48.

Edita´s Palestinian ID, 1946

Just to fill up any gaps in the narrative, aunt Eržika lived through the horrors of Auschwitz. She was placed in a hospital in Stockholm, Sweden. Eržika was also very interested to know what had happened to her two nieces. A friend of hers, through the channels of the Red Cross, found Edita and Verica. He reported that their aunt was very ill and weighed barely forty kilos. However, someone had in the meantime brought word to Eržika that Edita and Verica were in Belgrade. Aunt Eržika ran away from the hospital and directly headed for Belgrade. In Belgrade she met a man, who had lost his wife and his three children in the Holocaust. They became friends and soon got married. Sailing on the vessel Kefalos, they reached Haifa in 1948. By that time they had already made contact with Edita and she was there at the port to greet them.

The story has no end; Edita and Verica both got married, gave birth to their children and were an example for all how no one can ever destroy a whole people. However, for such ideals there are always sacrifices to be made. Edita's son Nimrod was killed in 1973 in the Yom Kipur War when the Arabian counties, on the holiest of Jewish holidays, once again tried to eliminate a people in a horrendous attack.

THE RIGHTEOUS WITHOUT THE MEDAL

-Zuska; her name remains unknown, but under threat of the death penalty she took Edita to Novi Sad and thus saved her from being deported to the Sajmište camp. When the war ended, there were no living souls who could tell who Zuska was.

-Margita a Hungarian, married to Josef who was taken to forced labour and soon shot dead. Margita remained alone and was not under the threat of racist laws.

- The Muslim family - The Hungarian officer

Despite the heroic resistance of many individuals, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not have the military strength to fight against the mighty numbers and arms of the enemy. Due to the rejection of the Tripartite Pact, in the early morning hours of 6 April 1941, Hitler's wrath fell from the skies on Belgrade. While the bombs ended innocent lives throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Nazi troops were faced with scattered attempts of organized resistance.

There were parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia where they were hailed as liberators. Liberators from whom or what at that moment was of little importance; those that welcomed them considered that it was better to do so for they did not want a united Yugoslavia to live in. So on 17 April 1941 the capitulation was signed and there was no more Yugoslavia, at least not up to the end of World War II.

While the Nazi allies shared among themselves the spoils of war, hundreds of thousands of captured soldiers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were placed in improvised camps and were soon ready for deportation to forced labour camps in Germany. The higher ranks of officers were excluded from forced labour duty in factories and agriculture, and among them was also Oto's (Otto's) father, Sigmund Komornik, a Jewish officer of the King's Army. How the Jewish officers fared in German captivity, was another matter. Nevertheless, before being deported, the father was allowed to meet with his son.

Everything began when news reached grandmother Gizela in Priština that her son Sigmund, Oto's father, was taken prisoner and sent to a collection camp in Belgrade. Grandmother had saved some money and Oto received 1,000 dinars from her - a sum that was back in 1941 quite enough for him to travel to Belgrade and find his father. At that time Oto was a smoker, a box of Drava cost 20 dinars, but Oto did not plan to stay long in Belgrade. Once she gave him the money and saw him off at the railway station, he began his long journey to Belgrade. Oto would not see his grandmother again right up to the end of the war.

Otto Komornik´s parents Emilija and Sigmund

Oto (Otto) Komornik was born on 11 July 1924 in Zagreb. He was an only child, a son, and had the full attention of his parents with whom he arrived in Kosovo when father was given a new army post there. His mother, a Jewess from Budapest, fell ill with tuberculosis and died at a young age. He was not yet of age when he got on the train bound for

Belgrade. He was slight in height and seemed even younger than his years. There was always a smile on his face and people accepted him without any reserve.

The assembled transport train was a relatively long line of open carriages. Even the German soldiers, who were transporting captured British soldiers from Corfu, traveled with the rest of the passengers. There were no passenger carriages in the entire train.

The trained moved along very slowly, the tracks were jammed with military transport trains, and every now and again they would stop and wait for the track to be free for further travel. The good side of such travelling was that they didn't have to relieve themselves inside the wagons where there were no toilets. The young Oto naively tried to make contact with the British prisoners. Before he received a slap across his face and was sent to the other end of the wagon, he managed to learn that one friendly Briton was called Peter. He was a corporal by rank.

They travelled the whole day and it was well into the night when the train had to stop again on the open track. The passengers were glad because they all had a pressing need to get off the wagons. The Germans kept a close watch on the Britons, with guns at the ready, and it happened that Peter was the one who had decided to make a run for it. The night soon engulfed the fugitive, and the fired gunshots did nothing to stop him.

Not to keep you in suspense about his fate, a lot of time passed, and sometime before the end of this story, Oto learned that Peter had managed to reach the Chetnik Headquarters of Draža Mihailović and was the first to establish radio contact between the Headquarters and London. It was then that Peter was promoted to the rank of captain.

After two days of strenuous travelling, Oto reached Belgrade. Although a devastated city, refugees from all parts of Yugoslavia were flooding into it. Night had already fallen and as the passengers were getting off the train they were told to go to the cafe London. Oto ran after the other travelers in order to get off the streets as soon as possible since the curfew was about to start.

The newly-arrived were registered at the cafe and were given passes of a sort which allowed them to move about the city.

"Oto Komornik, a Slovenian?" asked an enlightened clerk sitting at one of the cafe tables and busy issuing certificates for free passage through the town to the newcomers.

At that time a massive number of refugees from Slovenia were passing through Belgrade trying to find refuge in Serbia. And not only Slovenians, a lot of Serbs as well, who had fled at the last moment from the pogrom that soon began in the Independent State of Croatia.

"Yes," Oto replied; from then on, everybody would call him Slovenac (Slovenian).

With a pass in his hands Oto turned from one side to the other not knowing which way to go. Grandmother had given him three addresses in Belgrade where in the search for his father he could go and ask for help. However, the curfew had already

begun and Oto realized that he would be spending the night in the cafe. Many of the arrivals had already found themselves a place on the floor so that Oto joined them; putting his travelling bag under his head and tired by the onerous journey, he soon fell asleep. Although he had slept on the floor, Oto like all the others, had to pay for his overnight stay.

Oto had visited Belgrade as a boy, but one could say just in passing. He had three addresses written down which his grandmother had given him in order to ask for help if needed, but in the morning Oto decided that he would search for his father on his own. He asked around the cafe as to where the prison camps were situated and decided he would go to Dedinje camp to look for his father.

Oto first started off for Dedinje reasoning that if he did not find his father in the camp, he would visit Colonel Ćirić who lived with his family in a villa on Dedinje. The colonel had also for a period of time been stationed in Kosovo and Metohija by military order and was the commanding officer to Oto's father. However, they had also been friends out of working hours. His wife was a Viennese and was very close to Oto's mother Emilija, who was from Budapest, consequently they both found it easier to communicate in German. Emilija was a woman of modern views, the piano was played in the house and a group of friends who shared similar views and a similar way of life would meet in her house. However, this friendship did not last long - Emilija fell sick and died very young. Oto and Ćirić's son, whom they called Pujko, went to school together and were in the same class from the first to the fifth year of grammar school when Colonel Ćirić returned to Belgrade.

Emilija with her parents

Riding on a tram Oto came to the last stop and from there he started off for Dedinje on foot. He soon ran into a German patrol, stopped to ask them where the prisoner's camp for Yugoslav officers was, and they gave him instructions which way to go. Oto spoke excellent German. He soon reached the camp where German guards were standing at the entrance. After answering why he was there and who he was looking for, they immediately called for Sigmund Komornik, officer of the King's Army. They paid no more attention to Oto. After he greeted his father, the two of them continued to walk around the fenced-in compound. However, an order to muster was announced so they quickly had to say 'goodbye' to each other.

"Tomorrow I'll be going with one of our groups from the camp to the market place to get some greens," Sigmund said, "I'll see you there."

"Which market?" Oto had barely time to ask.

"Zeleni Venac," father replied and then they had to part.

Oto started off for the camp exit when a military Volkswagen jeep came up to him. The German soldier asked him what he was doing there and how he had managed to get into the camp. Oto told him that he had paid a visit to his father and that they had just taken leave of each other. The soldiers put Oto in the jeep, took him to the gate and told him not to come again.

So as not to carry his travelling bag around with him Oto had left it at the London café deciding he would go to pick it up later. Dedinje was unfamiliar to him, he did not know which way to take and there was no one nearby to ask for instructions. He made up his mind to go and look up the Katić family, the second address he had received from his grandmother. They lived on Čubura, in the main street beside Kalenić market, closer to the London café.

Ratibor Katić had served the student military service in the garrison of Oto's father in Priština. The student service was for intellectuals, mainly academy cadets, who began their military career as corporals with swords on their lapels, and for pupils. Promotions came each or every second year and went on right up to the rank of officer.

Ratibor, whom everyone called Ratko, was very glad to see Oto. Ratko was young, he was not yet of age for regular military service and when the war began he had not been called up for mobilization. He introduced Oto to his father, mother and sister. Ratko had frequently dined with the Komornik family since the food served to the soldiers in the garrison in was Priština poor. When Oto explained where he was staying, they told him to go and get his luggage from the café immediately and be a guest in their modest house.

However, Oto spent the night at the café again since he wanted to rise early and go meet his father at the Zeleni Venac market. He waited for Sigmund standing beside a fence. Two German soldiers came up leading a group of seven officers-prisoners, who were allowed to buy provisions for themselves with their own money at the market. At first the soldiers did not react when they saw the imprisoned officer greet the youngish Oto. Sigmund gave Oto a lot of money, such an amount as he had never seen before.

He nearly fainted and could hardly understand what his father was telling him.

"Send the money to grandmother and take as much for yourself as you think you will need," Sigmund said and when he saw that the German sentry was approaching them, he quickly signed something and gave his son a booklet which officers used in times of war to pick up their pay checks at appointed places. The German officer chased Oto away from the fence, and signaled to Sigmund to join the other officers. Up to the end of the war, father and son did not meet again.

When Oto reached the Katić home, he was not yet aware that from that moment on his life would take a completely different turn, a life he would lead in occupied Belgrade. He soon had to forget his Jewish origins. Anyway, he was listed as a Slovenian in Belgrade!

However, there were those who knew Oto, knew his origin. But he was among friends who would never tell on him. Ratko's sister, who was his peer, introduced Oto to the neighbouring children. Everything was fine, but Oto had matured much faster than other children who had no problems with their ethnicity. Very soon Oto learned what was happening to the Jews of Belgrade: yellow armbands, forced labour, the taking of Jews to death camps and there he was, expected to have fun with his friends.

Oto had spent already more than a month with the Katić family when a chance meeting initiated the idea to leave their modest abode.

On Čubura he had met Milan Jakovljević who was five years his senior, a first-year student at the Faculty of law. The money Oto had received from his father had almost all been spent. He showed Milan his father's booklet and asked where he could go to cash in the money. Milan knew a clerk in the Main Post Office, across the street from the Parliament, where pensions were paid out and among other reimbursements, paychecks for officers who were taken prisoner. They went to the post office immediately and found the clerk, who was willing to help, but on condition that Oto had a certificate stating he was not a Jew and that he was over 18 (at the time Oto was 17). Milan said that he guaranteed that Oto was not a Jew and that he was over 18 and what's more, he found two other "witnesses" who vouched that everything said was true. Once again Oto had a stash of money, as he would like to say, and mentioned to the clerk that he was looking for lodgings. The clerk lived on Čubura with his wife and her father and offered Oto to come stay with them. Oto recollected that they were fine people and furthermore, his neighbours had already begun to doubt his Slovenian origin. However, as ready as he was to leave the Katić family, he also wished to stay in the quarter where he had already made friends. Oto trusted Milan Jakovljević and gave almost all of the money to him for safekeeping.

Well, not really all. In Belgrade Oto met a family friend who was returning to Priština. He gave him the money intended for his grandmother and only when war was over learned that grandmother had received it.

Oto and Ratko stayed in contact, met frequently; winter was coming and the cold autumn already foretold of a winter that would not be a magical one.

Ratko's father had a timber-yard on Čubura. There was less and less firewood by the day and its purchase was rationed. People were already cutting down trees in Belgrade parks, when one day Ratko, on meeting Oto for the umpteenth time, asked him: "I see you've got quite a bit of money; could you lend some to my father? He wants to purchase more wood, in order to earn more. The profit's guaranteed, you'll certainly get your money back."

Oto only asked how much was needed and off they went to see Milan Jakovljević. Ratko got the loan and Oto only said "Death to Fascism!" Oto already knew how comrades from the Resistance movement greeted each other, but the Katić family was not in the Resistance. Still, they were good people who frequently helped the destitute in winter keeping their homes from being cold; thus Oto thought of them as anti-Fascist too.

Belgrade was not an exception as far as informants were concerned; they were ready to give up members of the Resistance for money, in particular Jews, whose state from that of isolation rapidly deteriorated to being taken to camps and from there on to their death. Oto was still a neighbour that raised suspicion.

That was when Oto met Zoran Jović on Čubura, the son of the secretary in the Ministry of Transport. Prior to the war he had returned from Lyon where he had been staying with his aunt, a sister to his mother; he spoke French and was somewhat vain. Still, they had reached a stage in their friendship when Zoran asked Oto to come and live with him. Oto gave notice to the flat he was staying in, a postman's flat, and moved to Zoran's house, a small villa in Cerska Street. To his surprise, waiting for him there were Zoran's parents, Jefta and Dara Jović.

"I have nothing against your living with my son, but I have to know whether you're a Jew," Jefta said.

Oto had no piece of evidence to prove he was not a Jew, but he gave Jefta his school certificate.

"That's enough for me," Jefta said and Oto could begin unpacking his things.

Once Jefta learned that Oto's father was a POW, he personally made up a few packages which Oto posted at the post office. It was sheer luck that Jefta also thought that Komornik was a Slovenian; had he not, who knows how this story would have ended.

In the meantime, the Ljotić movement was constantly getting stronger and Zoran joined them. He became an intelligence officer, and a certain dose of restlessness overcame Oto. He knew that the Ljotić members were anti–Semitic, but could not remember whether he had told Zoran that he was a Jew.

The first chance he had he told Ratko about the situation he was in. Ratko thought for a while and then decided to introduce Oto to Uča (Teacher).

Uča and Ratko had done military service together in Priština, with the exception that Uča was a fervent Communist so he was not really a frequent guest at the Komornik's house. Yet one day, when Ratko decided they should meet with Uča and

discuss what to do with Oto, it turned out that he was willing to help. Učа asked Oto about his plans, what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go, seeking any detail to see how he could be of help.

While they were talking, a woman suddenly appeared at Učа's; she was middle-aged and had a beautiful daughter. It was Vera Kapin – Kapinka as her friends called her. Učа introduced them and without any reserve told her that Oto was Jewish, the son of an imprisoned officer, who had been deported to Germany, adding that Oto could no longer stay on Čubura.

Vera was taken aback by this information; she hardly kept herself from asking out loud whether there were still any living Jews in Belgrade. She quickly collected herself and in a calm voice said: "He can come and stay with us."

Oto thanked Zoran for his hospitality and told him that he had met some distant relatives and was moving in with them.

At the time the Kapins lived in Zemun in the Independant State of Croatia and Vera was making every effort to move to Belgrade, since the Ustashi and the Volksdeutschers had taken over the government of the city, while all the others were second rate citizens.

"Don't be afraid, my husband is a musician and plays first violin in the King's Guard," Vera warned Oto. "He is a fervent National-Socialist. He has taken my son, a young child and enrolled him in the Hitlerjugend. If you meet, you just say you're my cousin or whatever you think is best. In any case I'll introduce you as such."

That same night Oto met Kapin. They spoke German and Kapin politely accepted the guest. He did not have to, it was the one and only time they ever met. Kapin had only come to pick up some things and was not seen again. It soon became clear to Oto that they were a married couple only on paper, especially when Vera found a flat in Belgrade in a house with a courtyard, on the first floor of 37, Kosovska Street for herself and her daughter. Oto helped them to relocate and then stayed with them for a time.

After a while, Vera found Ferdinand Vajberger; well, actually Vajberger found her and rented a flat for her in Grobljanska Street, a very nice flat indeed. Of course there was no place for Oto there, at least at the beginning of their liaison, and so they parted for some time.

In the meantime Oto had met a great many people. There was a coffee house on Terazije bearing the same name, where together with beverages and coffee, sandwiches were served, so a lot of people came to this establishment. Oto went there with Vera and it was there that she introduced him to Officer Nikola Milovanović. Nikola belonged to the last group of cadets that had completed the Military Academy and was a second lieutenant, very calm and relaxed when out of uniform; he inquired who Oto was, whether he spoke German, nothing of much importance. They met at the coffee house for a week or two, but this left a mark that would later be of importance.

A number of other young officers were there, too: the son of Admiral Presničar, who would later, supposedly, get as far as Cairo. Then there was Ferdinand Vajberger, who frequented the coffee house and had met Vera there, while she was still living in Kosmajska Street.

In the building in Kosmajska Street there was an establishment which Vera wanted to turn into a tea house but nothing came of it. Nevertheless, she managed to persuade the owner to take Oto into employment. There Oto cleaned, washed dishes, was given meals and was never hungry. He would not have been hungry even without the job, but Oto had no wish to walk about aimlessly down the streets of Belgrade.

Time passed and one day in February 1942, near the theatre at the corner of Francuska Street and the adjoining square, he met the second daughter of Colonel Ćirić. It was quite a dramatic encounter: "Don't say a word, we're going straight to our house," the colonel's daughter said.

His hosts insisted that Oto stay with them, although there was little space even for them in the small, one-room flat. Namely, when the Germans occupied Belgrade, they requisitioned the villa on Dedinje. Oto stuck to the agreement he had with Vera and let her know where he was spending that night. His childhood friend, Pujko, slept in the corridor and there, sharing his bed, Oto spent the night.

Unfortunately, at the time we interviewed Oto Komornik, we were left without an answer whether it was Dragoljub Ćirić in question; he had been promoted to the rank of Brigadier general and taken to prison in Germany. We left this issue to be solved at a later time, along with some other names, but Oto fell ill, was urgently operated on and unluckily died during the operation.

Nevertheless, Oto spent a few days with the Ćirić family and then met up with Ratko from Čubura. "I can't find you anywhere these days," Ratko was glad to see him. "We're going to my place immediately." Ratko's father returned the taken loan right up to the last dinar.

Once again Oto had pockets full of money and could afford to go and sit down in the coffee house on Terazije. There he once again met Vera Kapin, who was in the company of Nikola Milovanović; by this time Oto had got to know him quite well.

Nikola had his secrets, which he did not reveal to Oto, but he always found time to hang around with him. At that time Nikola was living in a rented studio in Nušićeva Street in the vicinity of Radio Belgrade. He was friends with Savica, the son of a lady who had a dressmaker's shop for expensive women's lingerie. Nikola introduced the two young men to each other and when Savica realized that Nikola had no room to take in Oto, who by that time was already fed up with sleeping in one bed with Pujko, he invited Oto to move into their flat. "We have a large apartment," Savica said; his mother had nothing against the idea that Oto should move in with them.

From time to time, as I have already mentioned, Oto would take a job doing any kind of work. Savica's father was a carpenter, he had a warehouse in Dorćol and would occasionally ask Oto to go there and tear crates apart extracting the nails from the

wood. He was a notorious alcoholic, but a good man up to the point where a drunkard can be good for his family. He regularly paid Oto wages for the work he did. Oto was never short of money. Money was slowly losing its value, but he had enough of it.

When he was not working, Oto spent his day in the coffee house and again he ran into Vera Kapin there.

As they were talking, one thing led to another and Vera came up with the idea that Oto should come and live with them again.

"You must meet Ferdo, he's a wonderful man," she said.

"Who's Ferdo?" Oto had forgotten that Ferdo could be short for Ferdinand Vajberger with whom Vera had become close friends when she moved to Belgrade.

"You know who Ferdo is, but you don't know that he is German by descent, and everything's much easier when one is living with such a man."

"A German?" Oto was astounded.

"Yes, and his wife is Jewish," Vera smiled.

Oto moved to Grobljanska Street, Ferdo found him a job and since Oto was a diligent person he took any job that came his way. He sewed and mended sacks and thus earned a little money. As already mentioned, it was not as if he had no money – on the contrary, but at least he did not sit around doing nothing.

From the time he first came to Belgrade, Oto stayed the longest at Vera Kapin's place. He socialized spending free time with Milan Jakovljević and Nikola Milovanović, who was soon promoted to the rank of lieutenant.

It was the year 1943 when in one of their relaxed conversations, Nikola asked Oto directly: "Is your father Sigmund Komornik?"

Oto answered affirmatively and Nikola said sighing: "If you are his son, living here is not easy for you."

Oto winced at these words and Nikola added: "Whenever you want to leave Belgrade, just let me know. I'll relocate you to a safer place."

There was much talk in Belgrade at the time about the Chetniks and how they were still trying to establish cooperation with General Nedić. The talks were at times successful, but then again at times Nedić had to distance himself from Draža Mihailović because of the occupiers. The easiest thing for him to do was to send money when needed, the hardest when he had to supply them with

Major Pevec and Otto

arms. These stories were interesting to Oto, it was as if they were taking place in some exotic country in Africa. When he grasped what Nikola had told him, he suddenly realized that it was happening "only a few feet away from him", and the sense of uneasiness and fear permeated his up to then tranquil life. Oto was fully aware by then how Belgrade had been "cleansed" of Jews.

A little time later on, in mid 1943, Oto found Milan Jakovljević in the coffee house.

"Where have you been, who are you staying with now?" Milan asked.

"With Vera Kapin in Grobljanska Street," Oto replied.

"Meaning you changed your address. Just so you know, last night your friend, that Ljotić follower, Zoran Jović, had too much to drink and was boasting to some students how today he would report some Jew to the Gestapo and get 30, 000 dinars in return."

"Which Jew?" Oto asked, and for the first time he felt really afraid.

"Well, you, of course, don't play the fool with me," Milan answered.

"I never told him I was a Jew," Oto tried to console himself.

"Some refugees from Priština came along with the Ljotić people and Zoran interrogated them. You know he's military intelligence and that's how he got your name."

Oto remembered what Nikola Milovanović had told him and immediately started off to find him.

"All right," Nikola said. "You'll sleepover at my place while I go and sort some things out."

Two days later a peasant knocked on Nikola's door, an invalid from the village Jančica near Čačak. He was a Chetnik courier and had brought along peasant's clothes for Oto to put on.

"Gedža (Hick)," as they called the peasant, "has thought of everything," Nikola smiled, "but I haven't got all the papers for you to travel yet."

"Well, I've thought of everything as you yourself said, I even brought an ausweiss," now Gedža was smiling too.

Nikola looked at the ausweiss issued in Čačak: Gedža and his grandson were both written in it.

"And where is your grandson?" Nikola asked.

"As soon as we passed the control post, I told him to return home. He was close to causing me great problems at the station arguing that I had promised to take him to Belgrade, what not, and he was very close to the truth. When I arrived in Belgrade there was yet another control post at the railway station. Luckily, in Belgrade, I grabbed a child by the hand to help me pass through and get to the carriages outside. The child saw I was an invalid and couldn't refuse, but instead took me by the hand for support and that's how I managed to get through."

The moment Gedža and Oto got to the village, Oto was forthwith dispatched to the mountains. Once there, he was consigned to the Intelligence Radio-technical centre of

the High Command of Draža Mihailović. It was there he also met Plesničar and a few days later Nikola Milovanović, as the liaison officer, wearing a captain's uniform arrived. Oto's father was by rank a captain too, and many people from the Headquarters knew him personally. It was not because of the rank he held, but the fact that he had been stationed at the extreme outpost, on Kosovo and Metohija. Thanks to his father and Nikola, Oto was accepted into the Radio centre without any problem.

In the Radio centre Oto met an Austrian Jew, engineer Šlezinger. Šlezinger had come to Yugoslavia before the war and had worked in Belgrade in a factory where hand grenades were produced. When Oto saw him for the first time, he was frightened by the sight of him. He had red hair, was rather ugly, and had brought along with him his wife Radmila, a Serb, to the woods. The first surprise subsided quickly and Oto became friends with the engineer. That they were Jewish was common to them both, however, Šlezinger did not want the fact to be emphasized. Šlezinger had from the first day been appointed to Draža's Headquarters.

Major Pevec, under whose command Oto was placed, had a radio station. Namely, Šlezinger's main task was to make small radio stations out of tins for jam. From where he procured parts for the radio stations, no one knew, as if it was a major state secret; what the Chetniks were only interested in was that they functioned. Thus Major Pevec had a direct line to Draža's headquarters which was some three or four kilometres away from the Radio centre.

Oto had no technical knowledge whatsoever. At times Nikola Milovanović gave him messages from London to decipher, however, Oto's main task was that of a courier, to maintain contact with the Headquarters of JVuO (Yugoslav Homeland Army). He saw Draža only from afar. Oto remembered him as a slight, rather short, thin man with a beard and glasses, walking alone round the house they were stationed in. Oto would only hand over a bag with telegrams and receive it back emptied, or with some piece of paper in it, and would then return to the Radio centre. He did shake hands with Draža, but that occurred later on.

Not really very much later; the Partisans were liberating Serbia, but the Germans had to keep control over the country for the safe passage of German troops falling back from Greece whose retreat was planned by this route.

The Nazis were joined by the Cherkessi, who were brought from the faraway Caucasus and were extremely bloodthirsty. The Cherkessi fought both against the Chetniks and the Partisans. Bloodbaths among the civil population left in their wake were not a rarity.

The shepherds would inform the Chetniks in the Radio centre when the Cherkessi were approaching. The people in the Radio centre did not have any soldiers to fight them off so they would hide in already prepared dugouts, the so called "slikovi", where normally ammunition and guns were hidden. Once the Cherkessi passed, the shepherds would send word that the danger was over and that they could go back to their work.

However, it was no longer safe for the Headquarters in Serbia. Draža decided that

they should move to Bosnia. That was the last time Oto saw Draža. He handed over the mail, and Draža, reaching out his hand to say 'goodbye', told him: "You are too young to be mobilized," were his words, "but your father is an officer and if you want to go with us, you can come along."

Oto said that he would go with them, who else was there to go with, so he was assigned to the unit of Major Stojadinović.

In the summer of 1944 Draža Mihailović returned to Serbia where he joined up with the Germans in the battle against the Partisans, but following their defeat went back to Bosnia.

During this whole episode Oto had remained in Bosnia where a typhoid epidemic had been raging for some time and many had died. Oto fell ill, too. Šlezinger, who was not stricken by the illness, remained by his side the whole time. They managed to reach Romanija by way of Sandžak and from there were transferred to Pale, where there was a hospital close by. When Oto fell ill, Šlezinger took over the responsibility of looking after him the whole time. The chief in the hospital was a Jew and Šlezinger managed to get in touch with him. The doctor admitted Oto for treatment. He first gave him some soup to eat, since there was nothing else, and then as there was no medicine as well, he placed him inside one of the cabins which were already packed with patients. Oto lost consciousness and still Šlezinger was by his side. Once he recovered, he was skin and bone only, weighing a mere 35 kilos. There was no food, however, Oto recovered enough to be able to go out alone, melt ice and boil some water. It was a miracle, but there was some salt to be had and the salty water was a substitute for broth. Šlezinger would bring some herbs which they boiled in the salty water; even so, his recovery came very slowly.

One day a small unit of Partisans found its way to the foot of Romanija, right to the spot where the ill and the convalescents were accommodated. They were a pitiful sight to see; thus the commander of the Partisan unit had no idea what to do with them. At last he invited all of those who could stand on their feet and walk to join up with them. Šlezinger decided that they should go along with them: "Maybe we'll get something to eat

Otto in the Partisans, 1945

there," he said and threw Oto's arm over his shoulder. Oto could still barely stand on his feet. Another four or five convalescents joined the column which walked steadily for some eight hours before they reached a Partisan headquarters, in fact a battalion of the 17thEast-Bosnian Peoples Liberation Head division. Once at the Headquarters, the newcomers were separated. The commissar of the battalion began to question the new arrivers who they were, which formation they belonged to…etc. Then Oto's turn came.

"What's your name?" the questioning began.

"Oto Komornik."

"Where are you from?"

"It's hard to give a short answer…"

"Do you want me to help you?" the commissar raised his voice.

"From Belgrade."

"So how come you ended up with Draža, why not find the Communists?"

"I was running away, since I was told they were looking for me and so..."

"And why were you running?"

"Well, I'm a Jew!"

Suddenly the commissar relaxed. "So it's like that," and then as an afterthought he asked Oto who had been his religion teacher at school.

"Rabii Danon Djindji," Otro replied.

The commissar only laughed. It was evident that he had some knowledge about Judaism and Oto's religious teacher was very well known.

"Take yourself along to the hospital," the commissar said and wrote something down in his diary; they never met again.

Oto never again met up with Šlezinger either. Although he did not carry a weapon, Šlezinger was sentenced for his cooperation with the Chetnik movement. The man who was more than just a friend disappeared from Oto's life forever. He had given him help when he needed it most, but soon Oto too, would learn what the word "djikan" meant. Not to keep you in suspense, djikan was the nickname for Chetniks which the people of the OZNA had given them. OZNA was the Counter Intelligence Service of Tito's army. Šlezinger was lucky enough not to be sentenced peremptorily; he managed to stay alive and after the war could hardly wait to leave for Israel.

Oto was a convalescent at that hospital when the Nazis attacked the battalion that was guarding the hospital coming up on them from the rear. Whoever of the patients could stand and hold a firearm was given a rifle and the order to fire at the line where the German soldiers were. The battalion commissar, not the one who had questioned Oto, he was from another battalion, oversaw how the sick were managing to fight the battle against a much stronger enemy. The German soldiers were taken by surprise by the resistance they were met with and assumed that a much stronger Partisan unit was

stationed there so they retreated quickly.

The commissar on seeing how Oto fought back, although he was still very weak, asked him to join his unit. After the commissar had made a thorough check of his background and learned that Oto was a djikan, he summoned Oto to speak with him and asked the same thing as his predecessor – a question which would later on be very frequently put to Oto – how he ended up with the Chetniks. Oto repeated the same story again, the one he had told at his first interrogation, and the commissar came to a decision quickly. "You are going to join the SKOJ". The next day Oto was a SKOJ member.

A Partisan early guerilla fighter, who was an illiterate man, welcomed Oto to the SKOJ. He was not the only one who did not know his letters, but he had been warned that he would be excluded from the SKOJ if he did not learn to read and write. Once Oto arrived in the unit things became a lot easier for the both of them. Oto was educated so he read and wrote dispatches for the illiterate secretary of the SKOJ. As he was still weak it suited him to be free of other duties.

At that time preparations for the final liberation of Sarajevo were taking place. After the street fights in Sarajevo and the surrounding countryside which lasted some months, on 6 April 1945, the Partisan units marched into Sarajevo without a shot being fired. Oto's unit marched in alongside the others. They settled in an abandoned barrack, but already the next day they had to leave it. Another army formation was stationed inside and Oto's unit went to a village near Sarajevo.

When, soon after, an order came that all pupils and students were to be demobilized in order to resume their studies, the war was over for Oto. In May 1945 Oto returned to Belgrade.

Once in Belgrade, he learned that the first groups of war prisoners had returned to Yugoslavia and among them was his father Sigmund Komornik. Sigmund had rented a small flat in Kralja Milana Street where he had brought his mother from Priština and the family was once again together.

Sigmund was a passionate stamp collector and later on Oto inherited the same passion; upon his father's death, he embellished the stamp collection which acquired a great value.

After his return to Belgrade, the first thing Sigmund did was to go to a stamp-collector's shop. There he met Mrs. Žegarac, who was trying to sell some stamps. The late Mr. Žegarac, her husband, was the Secretary of the Interior in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With him and Dr. Mehmed Spasa, a first Muslim long-term minister in the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Sigmund covered the market for stamps in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Mrs. Žegarac and Sigmund stayed together for the rest of his life.

However, in the liberated Belgrade new tasks awaited Sigmund; he taught lessons on fortification and ballistics at the Military Academy. Teaching there he earned his pension.

Milan Jakovljević was given back his father's shop in Knez Mihajlova Street and sold furniture there. At times he would hire Oto and pay him his wages regularly.

Vera Kapin got employment with the British Consulate, where in its Cultural centre she taught English.

And what became of Oto? He finished an intensive program, completed his grammar school education and matriculated. When he applied for entry to the Faculty of Medicine, he was refused. "This is not for you," they told him in the administration department once they saw that beside his name 'djikan' was written.

The Ćirić family also wanted to help Oto. They got him a job in the film company as assistant to the cameraman whose task was to film Tito. Upon a visit from a secret service agent, an UDBA man, he was literally "booted out". The explanation was short: "You were a djikan."

Oto would at times have his meals in the Jewish soup kitchen. Not that he was poor, but he wanted to make contact with the Jewish survivors and renew his ties with his origins and traditions of pre-war times. There he learned that an Aliyah was being prepared for Israel. He started to ask around what it was all about, but the Jewish Community activists tried to hush him: "Don't talk about it, it's a secret!"

"What do you mean a secret? What the fuck, I'm going to Israel!" Oto said and aboard the vessel Kefalos (as a joke he called it krepalos – meaning dead) on 26 December 1948, he arrived in Israel.

Oto met Mira Vekeš on board the ship. The hardships of the war and being on the boat which barely avoided a breakdown on the open sea brought them soon so close to each other that their friendship resulted in marriage. They had a son Šaj, but Mira fell ill and died in 1997.

Oto got married for the second time in 2008. His wife Ljiljana, nee Andrić, from Dobrinci in Srem, Srbija, was beside Oto when he died suddenly during an operation in 2014. Ljilja was the one who kindly supplied us with the photos which have a well-deserved, valued place in our archives.

A LETTER FROM FATHER

"Helga, a letter from father has arrived!" Elza could not stop smiling, for at last she had word from her husband. That was sometime near the end of 1946, when World War II had been over for some time.

There was no address to show where the letter had been sent from, but mother and daughter were overjoyed at the thought that Teodor would soon be home.

Eliezer Ungar, who had been with them throughout the war, was also happy.

Helga began to think back to the time when she was twelve years old and they were living in Belgrade; it was then, back in the April of 1941, that Teodor Blau, born in 1906 in Zagreb, Croatia, was sent to daily forced labour and then suddenly one day he did not return home after work. Along with many other Jews he had been taken to the temporary camp known as Topovske šupe.

Prior to the war, the Blau family lived in Zagreb where Helga was born in 1929. She adored her father who was a well-to-do tradesman, and Helga from her early years began to learn English - at that time it was considered that German was a household language - and how to play the piano. Teodor, Toša as they called him, worked at the sawmill Drach from Capraga (today a part of Sisak). Mavro Drach was by origin a Slovak and he had come to Sisak after hearing that big forests with high quality timber, from which oak railway sleepers were made, surrounded the town. He had purchased a small sawmill which developed quickly and already during his life-time he employed between 600 and 1,500 workers, while Toša, was employed to deal with the exporting of the sleepers and the wood that had been cut and steamed in the sawmill.

One day Toša decided to open his own company for the production of parquet, but to avoid becoming a disloyal rival to the firm he had been employed with for years, he decided to move to Belgrade. That was in 1938 and Toša also persuaded his secretary, Marija Gobec – Mika as everyone called her, a competent Slovenian, to help him with his work.

In Belgrade Toša, met the lawyer Dr. Ribarić and a business relationship that struck up between the two of them soon turned into a close friendship. Toša had complete confidence in the lawyer, he even gave him power of attorney, thus allowing

Teodor and Elza Blau

him access to the money he held in the bank. Toša rented a flat at 31, Prote Mateje Street and in 1939 the Blau family was once again together.

When Toša was taken to Topovske šupe, day after day mother and daughter went to the camp to visit him, bring him some food and then one day when they came up to the fence, there was not a single soul in sight.

Standing guard at the entrance there was a German soldier. They did not have the courage to approach him, but then he saw them and walked up to them.

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" he asked curtly.

"Jawohl," Elza replied for she spoke it fluently.

"What are you looking for here?" he asked in German.

"Teodor Blau," Elza replied.

The guard started searching through his pockets and finally took out a piece of paper, which looked like toilet paper, and handed it over to Elza, then turned around and left.

Mother instantly recognized the handwriting. "I'll see you after the war," father wrote. "They are taking us someplace else to work," Teodor had no idea where. "I love you," father wrote, but he also added: "I beseech you to leave Belgrade at once, get in touch with my friend Lawyer Ribarić."

Elza took her husband's advice and Lawyer Ribarić promised that he would provide fake documents for Elza and Helga. "And who is this young man with you?" asked Dr. Ribarić.

Helga and her mother Elza, 1939

"A Jew," Elza replied curtly.

The lawyer only nodded his head in agreement and within 24 hours he secured fake documents for the three of them with which they could leave Belgrade.

Erih Eliša Samlaić was living in Zemun at that time; he had married Toša's niece, Ljerka Blau, the same year when the Blau family was reunited in Belgrade. Ljerka was a violin player like Eliša, but he was also a successful young composer. Eliša and Mika had found a house on the periphery of Zemun for Elza, Helga and Eliezer Ungar to move to.

The family Blaić, that was the new surname written in the fake documents, walked over the pontoon bridge crossing from Belgrade to the other, the Zemun side, of the river. Mika-Marija Gobec

saw them off and unselfishly helped them to settle into their new home. Thus they found themselves on the outskirts of Zemun in completely new surroundings. They had not gone far from Belgrade, but by crossing the river Sava in August 1941, they were in another state, the Independent State of Croatia.

In Zemun it was the Ustashi who took Jews to forced labour. Some Jewish families had fled in time from the horrendous destiny that awaited them once the monstrous death camp in Jasenovac was opened. In May 1942, Erih Eliša Samlaić and his wife Ljerka decided to run away to the territory which was under control of the Italian occupiers since Italians had a more lenient stand towards Jews. However, at the railway station in Sarajevo, the Ustashi noticed the young married couple, who were carrying their violin cases with them. It did not take long for them to realize they were Jews. Ljerka and Eliša were sent to Jasenovac where they were killed together with the greater part of the Jews from Zemun, who had been deported to Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška on 27 July 1942.

During all this time, for two whole years, the lawyer Ribarić kept sending money for Helga and Elza to live on, but money was getting scarce. Elza never even tried to go to Belgrade and Mika, disregarding all the danger of crossing the river from one country to another, regularly brought the money Ribarić sent to Zemun.

Elza was a good housewife and she immediately thought up ways to supplement the household budget. In Batajnica Elza had managed to find, as well as purchase, something that was rare to come by in those times - white flour - and so she began making muffins. All of them would get up at four in the morning and the muffins would be baked and hot by eight o'clock. Elza took them to coffee shops and restaurants where they were in constant demand.

Aside from this new business, they also kept chickens in the yard, so they had fresh eggs every day. One year they even raised a pig and when that winter came along, they had smoked meat, bacon and sausages…They were no longer hungry, there was enough food, but the fear that they felt was overpowering.

That same fear kept them from showing anyone Helga's certificates from previously completed school years because they were in her real name. They had to invent reasons why Helga did not go to school. "I can't do everything on my own," mother would naively tell the neighbours. Still, it was not a rare case for female children not to continue their schooling in higher classes.

In October 1944 when German army mechanization was stationed in their yard, it was clear to all that the war was nearing its end. The Nazis were retreating before the Red Army, which was already in the vicinity of Belgrade. When Red Army soldiers took the place of the Nazis, the Blau family, and Eliezer Ungar along with them, had no reason to stay on in Zemun. There was not a chicken to be seen in the yard, the flour had been used up so Elza decided they should return to Belgrade.

Elza asked her Zemun neighbours to receive any mail that came to their address and she would let them know where to forward it once they had settled down. She

Helga in Zemun, 1944

Hugo Štern 1929

was waiting for a letter from her brother Hugo Štern, a close associate of Tito, who by means of Partisan liaisons had managed to locate Elza and Helga and had kept in touch with them, letting them know of his whereabouts from time to time. It was only later on that they received a curt explanation that Hugo Štern had been killed at the very end of the war under unusual circumstances. The single thing that Elza managed to learn from one of Hugo's friends was the fact that, being so close to Tito, Hugo became an inconvenience to someone. The friend would say no more and they never met again.

On their return to Belgrade they discovered that another family had been given accommodation in the flat they used to live in prior to the war. There was no choice left for them but to rent another flat, a small one near Kalemegdan.

Elza waited for her husband to return to Belgrade. She left her new address with the Jewish Community and the Red Cross and time passed by. Those that had survived the war had already returned home by then, but Teodor was not among them. When she received the note informing her that Teodor was on his way home, there was no end to their joy. Only a short time later, an unknown man sent word that Teodor was practically a few steps away from home. The same information came once again and then Elza decided to go to the Jewish Community and learn how she could check where Teodor was. First she had to recount how he was taken to Topovske šupe, how the German guard had given her the letter which Teodor had written, saying that he was being transferred to work in another place, but at that moment he did not know where.

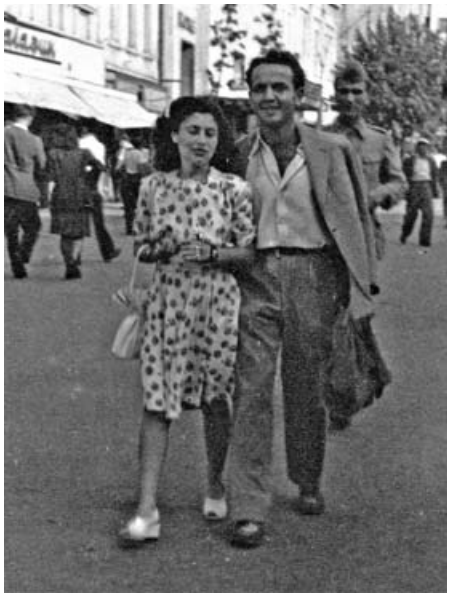
The activists of the Jewish Community only looked at each other. With a heavy sigh they had to tell Elza that the last inmates of Topovske šupe were taken to Jajince

and shot there.

"Maybe he was taken to the Sajmište camp, but none of them survived either…"

Elza had to accept the fact that Teodor would not be coming home. She could not believe that someone had been able to make such cruel fun of the family who had been stricken by tragedy. They were left without a husband and a father, yet life went on regardless of the circumstances.

Helga grew up to be a beautiful young lady, she was nineteen years old. Her long time friend, Eliezer Ungar, proposed to her. They were married in December 1948 just a few months before they and Elza set sail on the vessel Kefalos from Bakar bound for Israel.



Helga and Eliezer, Belgrade after WW2

In Israel their son Ori was born. Today, Helga Ungar, nee Blau, has four grandchildren who, for the umpteenth time, keep asking their grandmother to tell them how she lived through the Holocaust.

Why this story has found its way in the edition "The Righteous Without a Medal" does not need much explanation. In the process of saving Helga and Elza and their then young friend Eliezer Ungar, the biggest roles were played by lawyer Dr. Ribarić and Marija Gobec-Mika who, once the war was over, returned to Slovenia. How hard it is to bring a story to its end today is evident in the fact that we have not managed to learn the name of the lawyer, just his surname. Nevertheless, that does not in the least diminish his humane conduct and relations with the Blau family and Eliezer Ungar.

A HUMANE GERMAN WOMAN

When we speak of the Holocaust, like it or not, we first think of the Germans and then, when the first excitement fades away, we say we are not thinking of the German people but the Nazis, Fascists whose ideology had for its primary goal to eradicate the Jewish nation. There were among the Germans during World War II also humane people willing to sacrifice themselves and their families in order to save at least one innocent Jewish life. Yad Vashem has recognized 510 German Righteous Among the Nations. It is an imposing number in comparison with some other states. In fifty-one countries worldwide, 26,973 Righteous have been recognized so far and this is not yet the final number. In places where anti-Semitism was a key policy of the state government, the numbers of the Righteous are the highest. In Poland 6,339 Righteous have hitherto been recognized, the largest number in the world, yet it is a country in which the presence of anti-Semitism was identified even before World War II, during the war and even today. This only strengthens our thesis that in places where it was hardest to survive, humanity came to the forefront at the utmost. In any case, the number of the German Righteous is among the first nine on the list of numbers in the world. We most probably will never know how many Righteous there were during World War II – many have died, although medals are awarded posthumously in the form of a plaque and a Righteous Medal, but the number of those who can commend them is becoming lesser by the day. Still memories linger on, representing something like a monument to those who have deserved recognition, although it never reached them. The motive for this story is the fate of Vera Štajn, nee Kelemen, who survived Auschwitz together with her sister Sida, thanks to the humane German woman Hilda Miler.

Julijana, Vera, Sidonija and Josef Kelemen

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was a key policy of the state government, the numbers of the Righteous are the highest. In Poland 6,339 Righteous have hitherto been recognized, the largest number in the world, yet it is a country in which the presence of anti-Semitism was identified even before World War II, during the war and even today. This only strengthens our thesis that in places where it was hardest to survive, humanity came to the forefront at the utmost. In any case, the number of the German Righteous is among the first nine on the list of numbers in the world. We most probably will never know how many Righteous there were during World War II – many have died, although medals are awarded posthumously in the form of a plaque and a Righteous Medal, but the number of those who can commend them is becoming lesser by the day. Still memories linger on, representing something like a monument to those who have deserved recognition, although it never reached them. The motive for this story is the fate of Vera Štajn, nee Kelemen, who survived Auschwitz together with her sister Sida, thanks to the humane German woman Hilda Miler.

The family Kelemen, father Josef, who was an electrician and an entrepreneur, mother Julijana, nee Štern, born in Bačka Palanka and their two daughters, the older Sidonija – Sida and Vera lived in Novi Sad. There Vera finished primary and secondary civilian school and since she had a talent for painting she wished to continue her studies and dedicate herself to art. This all took place prior to World War II which was looming in the background of the anti-Semitic regulations that came into force in Yugoslavia, in this case the Regulation of the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on the enrollment of children of Jewish origins in the school-year 1940/41, better known as Numerus clauses, which restricted the possibility of further education for Jews to a minimum. Vera was among many others who could not continue her studies. Mother insisted that she at least learned the craft of sewing, but Vera did not appreciate what her mother‘s seamstress, to whom she was apprenticed, was doing, and very soon she remained at home helping her mother with the housework while at the same time she was able to paint and read a lot.

When in April 1941 the Hungarian Fascists occupied Bačka, the persecution of Communists, Serbs, all those who were adverse to the Hungarian regime, among them also members of the HaŠomer HaCair to which Vera belonged, and of course other Jews, soon followed.

The family was faced with the actual horrors of the war during the Novi Sad raid in January 1942 when on the banks of the Danube a large number of Jews and Serbs were killed; they were simply thrown into the icy water never to surface again. When the Kelemen family was arrested, an order from Budapest had already arrived stating that the bloodbath should be stopped, so they were taken to the Theatre house where they stayed till midnight and then all those who had been apprehended were sent to their homes. It was then that they learned that a part of their family had perished in the raid. The people who were saved at the last minute knew exactly all the names of those killed. Among the dead were mother’s relatives who had four children, three girls and a boy. The family was relatively well-off and they had kept servants, Hungarian

women, who when the occupiers came to take them away, would not let the children go. The parents were killed on the banks of the Danube, but it was fated that only the youngest girl, who was still breastfeeding, would be left alive. Namely, the children's grandmother and grandfather took them into their care, all except the youngest, Marta, who was taken in by a family from Budapest; she emigrated to Israel with them upon the war. When the last raids began in the spring of 1944, grandmother, grandfather and their grandchildren were all taken to Auschwitz from where no one returned.

Vera Štajn

The Kelemen family knew exactly when the last transports of Jews to Auschwitz would take place although at the time they were not certain where their final destination was. They assumed that they were going to forced labour duty. They had their back-packs ready, packed with the barest necessities, and when the time came for them to be taken away, they had to leave all their money and gold jewelry on the table. The hardest thing for Mama Kelemen was when she had to take her wedding band off; that was the moment she started to cry. There was no going back; as ordered they left the front door unlocked and then the long and strenuous journey past Subotica and Baja to Auschwitz began. The last time they saw their father was at the Subotica ghetto where they stayed for some three weeks. It was then that Josef Kelemen volunteered for work and along with 200 other prisoners was sent to Auschwitz. He perished in 1944.

From the concentration camp in Baja, where they were sent to from Subotica, many prisoners went off on their last journey. After three days of travelling in cattle wagons, barely alive as Vera recounts, they arrived in Auschwitz. As soon as they left the wagons, the men were separated from the women. When the separation of the women began, Vera and her sister Sida were sent to one side and Dr. Mengele took mother to the other side. That was when Vera began to cry for the first time, although at that moment she was not aware that she was seeing her mother for the last time. All this took place at the railway station before they were taken to the camp.

Once they entered the camp, Vera carefully studied what was happening in her surroundings. Women shorn of their hair, dressed in rags with a red line across the back of their scanty garments, were walking around from left to right completely dazed. Soon the newly-arrived women did not differ much from those that had already been exposed to the acceptance procedure of the camp - hairless, nearly bald, dressed in rags.

The new arrivals were taken to one of the 32 wooden barracks with around a thousand female inmates inside each of them. They slept in large, three tier beds, 13 women in each. When one of the inmates turned in the bed, all the rest would have to follow.

"The food was so awful that it could hardly have been any worse," Vera recounted. "In the morning we got some liquid the colour of tea or coffee. We had no place to wash, we felt unkempt and downright filthy. We used the tea to wash our faces." Human life was worthless, the degradation of it an everyday occurrence. Any woman who had done God knows what wrong, was leashed like a dog and had to crawl on the ground.

Vera and her sister had only one wish: to be sent to forced labour outside the horrendous camp. Their wish came true. They found themselves among the group of women who were sent to Wüstegiersdorf to work in a factory for airplane parts. The situation in the new camp was better by far, although one had to walk for a number of kilometres to the workplace every day. Each woman had her own bed, spoon and plate. They had just started to work when a few days later Vera came down with a high fever. She rested her head on a worktable while everybody kept shouting she must not do that. "I said that they could kill me if they wanted to, but I could no longer stand on my feet," Vera remembered. Surprisingly, Vera was taken to the hospital.

Hilda Miler

It was winter. The inmates had shoes with wooden soles and the snow would stick to them, so it was hard to walk to the factory where they worked. Vera's sister Sida injured her leg and she too, ended up in the hospital. The two sisters took care of each other in there, which annoyed the lagerelteste and she announced that sister Sida must go back to work.

That afternoon Sida was taken ill, she began to spit blood. Panic immediately overtook the sick inmates, but Sida's state of health could not be hidden from the woman in charge. The Komando fuhrer summoned Vera to her room. Vera was afraid that Sida would be taken to the crematorium. She was absolutely frank with the komando fuhrer telling her how Sida had been sick with tuberculosis before the war and that now her condition had worsened. The komando fuhrer tried to comfort Vera who was crying by then and promised that when Sida got better, she would be given an easier job in the barracks and would not have to walk to the factory each day.

However, it was hard to put a stop to the bleeding and the komando fuhrer gave Sida six injections of calcium. This somewhat helped Sida's condition and the komando fuhrer kept her promise. Sida did not go to work at the factory any more. Vera spoke German excellently and one day the komando fuhrer offered her the job of cleaning her room, keeping the fire going and cleaning her boots. It was a much easier job, and Vera needed time to recover from pneumonia she had contracted. Since it was not a

full day's work, Vera had free time to take care of her sister.

The sisters remained at their new jobs up to liberation day, i.e. till the arrival of the Red Army. Hilda Miler was the komando fuhrer's name. Hilda Miler, a German woman, was a humane person. She did not only help the Kelemen sisters to survive. Vera frequently went around with Hilda and saw how she took out food from her bag and gave it to the starved inmates working on forced labour duty at the factory.

But Hilda Miler showed the utmost humanity at the end of the war. The Red Army was close to the camp when the evacuation of the inmates began. Evacuation mostly meant sending the inmates to their death. Hilda did not allow the evacuation of the women, who had worked at the factory for airplane spare parts, to be carried out. Still alive in the camp, the interned women lived to see its liberation.

Vera's sister Sida died of tuberculosis in 1947.

The first interview with Vera Štern, married Štajn (Stein), was made while she was still alive in 2012. Upon the war Vera married Dr. Andrea Štajn (Stein) who had managed to escape from a forced labour camp and join up with the Partisan units.

Vera's and Andrea's daughter Miri Štajn, married Derman, supplied the missing details about the family and gave us photos to illustrate this text. Only when she turned 18 did Miri learn that on her father's side she had a sister Marika, who was only eight months old when she perished along with her mother in Auschwitz.

A JEW OF CHRISTIAN – ORTHODOX FAITH

Before World War II, Josif Levi lived in Belgrade in Dorćol, where most Jews of Sephardim origin lived. His sister Streja (Estreja), married Davičo, who at the time was already a widow, lived close by in the same neighbourhood. Streja's husband Branko Davičo, a well-known Belgrade lawyer and an officer of the Serbian Army, was killed in 1913 during the Balkan War. He was famous for his unambiguous message to the Bulgarian occupiers: "Why are you intent on sowing on someone else's field?"

Streja and her two sons were living in Belgrade when the city was occupied. Her oldest son Avram – Arsen had emigrated to Palestine before World War II began. He lived in a kibbutz, but unfortunately soon fell ill with malaria and died.

Streja with her husbant and children

When in April 1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked and shortly afterwards capitulated, the German occupiers aided by domestic Quislings began their merciless persecution of Jews; this was entirely in keeping with the racist program of Hitler's racist Germany, the program of exterminating the Jewish people in Europe.

To begin with, in Belgrade all the Jewish men were imprisoned in the temporary camp Topovske šupe and from there were taken to forced labour: the clearing up of ruins left in the aftermath of the German bombing of the city and furthermore, using only their bare hands, they extracted the decomposed bodies of those killed. Soon afterwards most of the Jews were murdered in a short span of time announcing that the realization of the "final solution" – Serbia Judenfrei, a Serbia cleansed of Jews, was put in motion. The Nazis had every confidence that they had succeeded in their plan when the Sajmište camp was opened and when all the remaining Jews, children, women and the old were taken there. This confidence was further substantiated by the fact that by May 1942 all of the imprisoned were murdered, suffocated in the gas chamber truck, the so-called "dušegupka" on their way from Sajmište to Jajince where they were unceremoniously thrown into mass graves; no last rites were said over them.

After the occupiers had taken over the government of Belgrade and when in the streets of the town the first orders restricting the rights of Jews for normal habitation appeared, Josif did not wait around to see what was going to happen next. Already in April 1941 he turned to his business friend, Nikola Trivić from Obrenovac, with whom he had established trading ties, for help.

Being an honourable and humane person, Nikola Trivić, immediately put in every effort to find a solution for Josif. In the quarter of the town called "Bošnjaci", about a kilometre away from the centre of Obrenovac, Josif was given a new place to stay in a modest family house whose owners were very pleased for the opportunity to receive a regular profit from the rent.

We have not mentioned up to now that Josif came to Obrenovac with his wife Ruža and though they were not officially married yet, to their hosts she was his lawful spouse.

Nevertheless, all the problems concerning Josif's safety were not solved by merely finding him a new place of residence. Ruža, we have not said, was Hungarian, and thus had no problems with her personal papers. Nikola saw to it that Josif also solved his problem of identification documents. Money can solve a lot of things in life, so Josif became Jovan Lazić, a refugee from Bosnia, according to the new identity procured for him by Nikola.

Josif Levi

In the neighbourhood where Josif and Ruža were situated there was a family by the name of Potić living in a big house. They were Nikola's brothers-in-law, three of the brothers of his wife Mileva; the other two were residing in Belgrade at that time. All of the mentioned three brothers were married and each of them had three children. They all lived together in a "zadruga" cooperative, as people used to say in those days, which was quite a common way of living in the countryside.

Streja and her two sons stayed behind in Belgrade for a while, but misfortune soon befell them like so many others in the city. Her son Samuilo – Bosko was taken away to Tašmajdan and was shot by a firing squad along with the first group of hostages on 28 July 1941.

The other son, Lujo Davičo, the founder of the ballet in the music school "Stanković", was sent by the Communist party to Montenegro in 1942 where he worked as a waiter in an Italian restaurant. Fulfilling the instructions given to him by the party, he planted a bomb underneath the table of some Italian officers, but was apprehended on the spot and immediately shot before a firing squad. Streja found her way to Montenegro and in the town of Nikšić discovered the details of her son's tragic fate. She stayed on in

Plum harvest, september 1942: 1. Josif Levi, 2. Nikola Trivić, 3. Nikole Trivić´s son, Dušan, 4. Dušan´s mother Mileva Trivić nee Potić

Montenegro and joined up with the Partisan units. She followed them right up to the final victory at the end of the war.

The Potić family was quite well off and owned twenty hectares of fertile land all in one piece, a plum-tree orchard measuring a whole hectare, and a "small orchard" as they used to call it, full of different kinds of fruit. They also had a sizeable quantity of livestock: several cows, numerous calves and heifers, four pairs of horses, poultry, all in all, there was plenty.

Josif was ready and willing to help this industrious family while Ruža had an easier job, one of "black marketeering". She sold the farm products of the Potić family and procured goods which were hard to come by in those times of war. Josif would spend the whole day with the Potić family, often sharing meals with them, and when night fell he would go back to his humble house to sleep overnight.

Nikola Trivić had constructed a story to tell the over-curious folk about the arrival of Josif to Obrenovac. And not only for the curious, but also for the closest relatives; not even his wife Mileva was aware of the fact that Josif was a Jew right up to the end of the war. According to Nikola's story Josif, i.e. Jovan Lazić, was a Serb from Sarajevo, his pre-war partner in trade, who was persecuted by the Ustashi. After some of his family members perished, he fled from Sarajevo and came to Obrenovac.

However, the neighbours of the Potić family harboured some suspicions: "Nikola, who in the world is this Jova you took in; could it be he's half Muslim and that's why

he slipped away from the Ustashi, to avoid being mobilized into their numbers?"

In these moments, Nikola would emphatically retort: "It wasn't me who brought him here. He came on his own accord and settled down here. Though it's true that I've known him since before the war; I used to buy goods from him in Sarajevo, and when he came to Obrenovac, he saw me at the Potić house."

In order not to raise any further suspicions, Nikola advised Josif to take off his expensive spectacles and gold watch, to stop wearing his expensive suit with his fountain-pen stuck into the breast-pocket of his jacket. Josif heeded the advice and switched his attire to a linen shirt and trousers spun out of hemp, all made at home by the peasants in Obrenovac, who wore the same kind of clothes. He further advised him not to go downtown since the citizens of Belgrade often came to Obrenovac to buy provisions, so someone might spot and recognize him. Thus Josif's space for moving about was restricted to going to the Potić farm and then back to the house he dwelled in.

Still, the talk about who Jovan was, and where he came from, would not subside; but once the people saw Josif, alias Jovan, celebrating Saint Jovan's (John's) day, all suspicions of the curious folk were dissolved. They concluded that Jovan was a Cincar, Aromanian, and of the Orthodox faith since they were the only ones, to their knowledge, who celebrated the saint's day of the saint they were named after as their name day.

The "Orthodox" Jovan lived in relative peace in Obrenovac where the end of the war found him. When it was all finally over, he returned to Belgrade and married Ruža, who had served in their household prior to the war. They had no children.

This story was written down thanks to the research of Dr. Dušan Trivić, the son of Nikola and Mileva Trivić. Nikola Trivić, who had kept the secret of Josif's true origins throughout the entire war, undoubtedly deserves to receive recognition as one of the Righteous Among the Nations.

Natan Reisinger and Rosa, nee Weis, born in Hungary, lived in Kanjiža in Vojvodina. They were born in the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire, as were their four sons and daughter. When World War I came, the monarchy suffered military defeat and was divided into two countries: Austria and Hungary. With each country separate peace treaties were signed and Hungary had to give up territories with multi- ethnic populations. Large parts of Baranja, Bačka and Banat were given over to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, which soon changed its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The entrepreneur spirit of the three brothers Reisinger, Armin the youngest, Aleksandar and Pavle, brought them to Belgrade where in 1922 they founded the company Reisinger Painters. The home-painting shop was soon renamed Kolorit and was an up-and-rising business, hiring ever more and more workers and finally registering a branch in Thessaloniki.

The Reisinger Paint Shop staff

The successful young men presented a good catch for marriage. Pavle got married in Belgrade, Aleksandar married one of Vienna's belles and the youngest, Armin, returned to Kanjiža where he married Kati (Katy) Zvekić. Soon after, in 1934, their first son Ivan was born.

The clandestine war that was already raging throughout Europe soon turned into a real war campaign in which Poland fell first. When a military coup happened in Belgrade and the signing of the Tripartite Pact was rejected, it was the turn of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In spite of the mobilization implemented, the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia could not stand up to the overpowering enemy when, in April 1941, it was attacked, and it soon capitulated. In the division of the spoils of war, Hungary regained parts of Banat, Baranja and Bačka. Serbia, together with a greater part of Banat which remained under German protectorate, was given a marionette government which closely collaborated with the occupier. Two of the Reisinger brothers remained in Belgrade and Armin, Ivan's father was still in Kanjiža, which was now in another country, Hungary.

In Belgrade Ivan's uncle Pavle had some words with his wife and, frustrated as he was, he left the house in his slippers to buy cigarettes. A proclamation caught his attention saying that all the Jews in Belgrade were to register with the Special police in Džordža Vašingtona Street and to take with them only the bare necessities. This was the beginning of the mobilization of Jews for forced labour in Belgrade and of their imprisonment in the improvised camp at Topovske šupe. Pavle did not bother to return

home. Still in his slippers, he left by boat for Novi Sad and from there went straight on to Kanjiža.

Ivan was overjoyed to see his uncle, but was surprised when he saw how inelegantly he was dressed, which was not his usual practice. He was even more disappointed when uncle entered the house and had no presents for little Ivan. In December 1941, when the deportation of the remaining Jews to the camp at old Sajmište began, the majority of the men had already been murdered in Topovske šupe. By that time Pavle was already in Kanjiža.

Dan, Kata and Armin Reisinger 1941

Kanjiža is located in the north of Bačka and the predominant population is Hungarian. The language did not represent a problem for communication, Ivan had enrolled in a Hungarian school, but non-Hungarians had in reality become second rate citizens. Already in January 1942, the so called "Raid" began in Bačka. The first to feel its brunt were the Jews and the Roma, and then the undesirable citizens of Serbian nationality. Among other acts, the Hungarian Fascists had undertaken the task to clean the banks of Tisa of all Jews.

Word of the horrendous carnage had already reached Kanjiža. Armin and Kati decided to send Ivan to the other side of the Tisa River to stay with their friend Nikola, a Serb, in Novi Kneževac. The Serbian family accepted Ivan warmly, but just a few days later, early in the morning, the housekeeper Ida woke the child up and told him to get dressed quickly. She immediately took Ivan to her neighbours and Ivan was forbidden to leave the house. The respectable Serb Nikola, with whom Ivan was staying as a guest, had been arrested. The night before, he had taken in his friends, a Jewish married couple from Kanjiža, to sleepover at his place. They were on their way home, but the ferry had stopped working for the night and so they had stayed at Nikola's place. Luckily, they left the house early in the morning, before the gendarmes, after hearing from an informant, came to arrest both the Jews and Nikola.

The news of the arrest of the host with whom Ivan was staying soon reached Kanjiža. No other news followed and the scared parents asked their Hungarian friend to cross over to Novi Kneževac by ferry and see what was happening to Ivan. He did as he was bidden, but only found a closed up house. He dared not ask around about the family of the arrested man and soon returned to Kanjiža.

The neighbour, that had taken Ivan in, also got word of what was happening. However, Ida was not in the house, she had gone into hiding somewhere and the neighbour

had no idea where to look for her. The neighbour was scared that the gendarmes would soon be knocking at their door, too. She dressed Ivan quickly and took him to the ferry. She told the ferryman that Ivan's parents were waiting for him on the other bank. No one paid much attention to the child anymore.

Ivan was already on the other bank of the Tisa River when his host was released from prison. During the search of their house no Jews had been found, so that the gendarmes accepted Nikola's explanation that it was a false accusation.

It was a time when information was sometimes true and sometimes false, and some of those who lived by the Tisa well knew that fish was caught easiest in murky waters. When times were murky, they would only see as far as their own interest went, and did not worry much about the fate of the persecuted people. Luckily, not everybody was of the same disposition.

Well, when he got off the ferry, Ivan started off for his home. For a seven-year-old child, it was a long way from the ferry to the centre of Kanjiža. Somewhere midway he met his parents, who were stopping passers-by and passengers from Novi Kneževac, asking them if they knew anything about their son's fate. Thank God, their son was alive. Soon an order came from Budapest that all persecution be stopped; however, already thousands of people had been brutally killed in the Raid.

The Fascist Hungary had its obligations towards the Third Reich which was fighting a relentless war against Russia. Hungary not only had the obligation to provide food, but also to provide men to take over the hardest jobs from the German soldiers sent to the front. Providing manpower for the forced labour units known as munkaši had begun by filling their numbers first with Jews, and then with Serbs as a matter of course. Ivan's father Armin and Kati's brother Boško were mobilized into the munkaši. That happened on 15 June 1942 and by March 1943, all traces of Armin had disappeared. In order to avoid returning to the story of Boško later on, I will say right now that he survived the war, but totally emaciated and seriously ill, he did not last long.

At the beginning of 1944, in Budapest and throughout Hungary, there were more than half a million Jews, some Hungarian, if we can say so, others from the neighbouring countries who had found refuge there. In mid March 1944, Hitler entrusted Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann to settle the Jewish question in Hungary once and for all. The first step was the occupation of yesterday's allies, which was carried out in only a few days, and then the deportation of Jews to death camps began. The majority was sent to Auschwitz. Among those deported was also Ivan's grandmother Rosa and her son Josef; they did not return home after the war.

The solving of "the Jewish question" in Hungary meant that it applied to all the territories under Hungarian occupation. At that time Ivan's uncle Aleksandar Reisinger was living with his family in Horgoš and the other uncle Pavle was still in Kanjiža. Pavle saw what was happening and suggested to his sister-in-law to take Ivan and leave Kanjiža as quickly as possible, believing they would be safer in Horgoš.

Kati and Ivan arrived by train to Martonoš when news reached them that there was

Dan Reisinger with his grandmother in front of the Reisinger Paint Shop, 1937

fighting going on in Horgoš. Kati supposed that there would be Germans with rifles at the ready waiting for them at the station. They got off the train and went from Martonoš to Horgoš on foot.

The situation for Jews in Horgoš was not any better. Ivan spent most of his time in the cellar or in the attic of Aleksandar's house. He dared not step out into the street without the yellow David star, and mother Kati preferred he went nowhere. And then one day, without any previous notice, Aleksandar was arrested and deported to the camp Theresienstadt. Aleksandar's wife was not only a beautiful, but also a very realistic woman. She was fully aware of the fate that awaited Jews. She took their son Joči by the hand and went straight to the Catholic priest.

"Joči was born in Horgoš," she told the priest.

The priest knew well what was happening to Jews and their children and without a second thought he handed over the christening sacrament to the terrified mother. Joči was written into the church birth register according to all the requirements of the church. Aleksandar was one of the lucky ones who lived to see the end of the war when he finally met up with his family.

Joči's problem was solved, but other rules applied to Ivan. Finding herself in a hopeless situation, Kati decided to return to Kanjiža with Ivan.

A Jew by the name of Dojč, had a factory for making mirrors in Kanjiža. Dojč had passed away and Mrs. Dojč had taken over the business. In the large courtyard there was a warehouse filled with wood already prepared for making frames for mirrors and pictures. Dojč's wife was a Catholic and prior to the war she was good friends with Ivan's grandfather Zvekić. In Kanjiža as well, preparations for deportation were underway and grandfather asked Mrs. Dojč to take Ivan into her home. Ivan was still small and a child's mouth could easily spill out what must not be mentioned so that Ivan spent most of the time in the wood warehouse and was prohibited to go out into the street. The wood for frames was stacked in such a way that Ivan could spend days on end in the space that was left free and no one could notice him there. He slept in

the hideout, ate his meals there and very rarely ventured into the yard. On one occasion he thought that they had forgotten all about him, but the reality was even more horrendous.

The deportation of Jews from Kanjiža was well underway. It was too late to flee for Budapest and even from there news of mass deportations reached Kanjiža. Whoever was Jewish and could find a place to hide had already done so. Pavle Reisinger did not manage to escape deportation.

Kati regularly visited Ivan in his hideout. "If they take me," Kati told Mrs. Dojč, "they won't take the child". Thus Ivan was shut inside his shelter for almost a month until the time when the raid was over.

In Kanjiža and the neighbourhood there were still some Jews in hiding, but the search for them was waning. Kati thought that she and Ivan would be safe with her relatives in Novi Sad.

In the meantime, the deportation of the Novi Sad Jews to death camps had begun. Relatives and friends did not have to persuade Kati very much to return to Kanjiža, for there, at least, the first threat had passed. For a moment Kati came up with the thought that the best solution would be to go over to the liberated territory in Serbia, but she gave it up since she had no idea how to get across the border.

Kati returned to Kanjiža and found a place for them in the cellar of Mrs. Dojč's house. Kati and Ivan were still in it when, on 8 October 1944 the liberators, the Red Army arrived. Once again Kanjiža was in Yugoslavia.

The few survivors of the Nazi camps and those mobilized forcibly in the munkaši were slowly returning home. Kati and two other Jewesses welcomed the worn out Jews. They had opened up a kitchen for them, but a very small number of mobilized and deported Jews returned to Kanjiža. Kati finally realized that her husband Armin had vanished in the cataclysm of war. It was later confirmed in a report issued by the Hungarian army where it stood that Armin had perished at the beginning of March 1943. Pavle, Armin's brother did not return home either.

Among the few survivors who returned to Kanjiža was Vig Andrej, but without his daughter and wife. They had forever disappeared in the ashes of Auschwitz. Andrej's brother and two of his sisters also came back from the camp. Andrej had been the director of the saw mill prior to the war and immediately took up his work again. Those who had lost their dearest in the past evil times best understood the pain of the survivors, but only the strongest had the will to move on. One had to start life practically from the beginning, it was often said; however, the dark memories could not be erased. Kati did not want to return to the house that had been marked as Jewish.

Time was the healer and thus it brought Andrej and Kati together. Upon their wedding, Kati sold the family house and they bought one in the very centre of Kanjiža turning their attention to the rare family members that had survived.

Ivan continued his schooling, this time in Serbian. After completing his military

course for pioniri (Pioneers), he was elected president of the Pioneer organization. When Ivan continued his secondary education in Senta, he was already a mature young man.

As soon as in 1948 the possibility was opened for Jews to emigrate to the reinstalled or newly-founded state of Israel, Kati and Vig decided to relocate. "I've done everything I could to save my son's life and to raise him in the faith and spirit of Jewish tradition," Kati said, firmly believing that their future was in Israel.

When Kati told Ivan "We're packing for Israel", he was fourteen years old and, owing to the painful experiences he had lived and gone through, he reasoned like an adult. His first thought was about what he would do once in Israel. It crossed Ivan's mind to ask the workers of Kolorit, the painting firm, the one his father had established with his brothers in Belgrade prior to the war, for help. With recipes for paint, toners, brushes and other equipment packed in a crate, Ivan was soon ready for Israel.

Before leaving for Israel, Kati and Andrej had to make a gift of their house to the new authorities in Yugoslavia. It was the condition under which they received the approval to emigrate. In the second Aliyah the ship Radnik in Rijeka took on board over a thousand Jews from Yugoslavia for its voyage to Israel. The "Radnik" reached Haifa on 30 June 1949. Kati and Ivan, Andrej and his brother, and their two sisters, were on board. They were first accommodated in an absorption camp, the embryo of Ma'abara near Hercelija.

LIFE IN ISRAEL

The War for Independence of 1948, which began one day after the adoption of the Resolution proclaiming the new-founded/old State of Israel in the United Nations, was already over, but then the persecution of Jews from Arab lands began. As if the Holocaust had not been atrocious enough, hundreds of thousands of Jews from Mediterranean countries and the Near East along with the survivors from Europe sought refuge and safety in the newly-founded state. In very difficult circumstance, a great number of the newly-arrived had to be accommodated. Luckily, the climate was such that it was agreeable for the emigrants. Ivan's family received a "Badon", a wooden frame for a house covered over with some kind of cloth, as their first dwelling place. However, there was no time for being disappointed. Ivan was fifteen and he immediately began to work as a house-painter. His stepfather Andrej helped him. That was when he had to face up to his first disappointment. He had no need to open his equipment for painting. The brushes were all that he needed. In Israel the houses were simply whitewashed and there was no interest for any colours. The painting season soon came to an end and the winter of 1949/50 began. Winter in Israel brought with it torrents of rain, there was no snow, at least in the Mediterranean part, which was practically the greatest part of the country; however, the human body is highly adaptable to the climate, so that some ten degrees Celsius soon felt equal to temperatures below zero in Kanjiža from where they had come. The "Badon" proved to be highly inhospitable. It leaked and

its inhabitants frequently slept with open umbrellas over their heads. During the day Ivan and his housemates went to the pardesa (orchards) to pick oranges. One lira a day was just about enough to live through it. However, there was not enough work even of such kind. Ivan took up his old hobby. Like his father before him, he started to paint landscapes. Soon the "Badon" was decorated on all sides.

The employees of Sohnut, the Jewish agency for Israel, had their hands full of work. They visited the immigrants and helped as much as they could. Thus it happened that they saw Ivan's "paint-work". They immediately wanted to make contact with the talented painter; however, that day Ivan was at work at the pardesa. They told his mother to send him to Becalel, the National Academy of Art, to show his pieces there without delay. The Academy was then, as it is today, in Jerusalem and it was not easy to get to it. However, nothing was a problem for Ivan when art was in question. He tucked his artwork under his arm and soon got the chance to show it to the director and the Becalel professor, artist Mordehaj Ardon. The professor looked through Ivan's work and simply said:"You're accepted." To this day Ivan remains the youngest student in the history of the Academy. He began his studies there in 1950.

Unlike today, there were no roads at the time and it was simply impossible to travel each day from Hercelija to Jerusalem. The family had to move to Jerusalem. They were lucky. In Talpiot, a part of Jerusalem near the Becalel, they got a house which belonged to a Mrs. Rajh on the condition that they renovate it. The house was in ruins, half of it demolished and in return for the task of renovating the house, they did not have to pay the rent for two years. Ivan could now start his studies; later on the family bought the house from Mrs. Rajh.

Dan Reisinger

Very soon Ivan distinguished himself in his studies and received the highest school award "Šturk".

Upon finishing his studies Ivan, who by then was already recognized under the name of Dan - the name he was given when he relocated to Israel, was mobilized for the Israeli aviation in 1954. In Hel Aviru, the Israeli aviation, he was given the task of designing emblems for army ranks which are still in use even today. He simultaneously designed the medals for bravery, courage and exceptional work in the military service. When he completed his national service in 1957, Dan was offered to stay on in the Army (Cahal).

But Dan had other plans. He moved to Brussels where the following year the

Expo 1958, World Fair, was to be held for the fifth time in Belgium – upon this World exhibition the Expo was never organized in Belgium again, although according to tradition, it should have been held in Brussels every twenty–five years. Dan of course, had no influence on the change of the World exhibition policy what-so-ever.

In Brussels Dan did illustrations for magazines and waited for his "real chance" which soon came along. His poster for science for the Expo '58 received the first award. Numerous possibilities opened up in front of Dan and that same year he moved to London. Assisted by Marks and Spencer he specialized in the Central SChool of Art and Design and then began to work on posters for the British Post Office.

Dan came up to a major crossroad in his life while in London, when he met the young Anabel (Annabelle Cammerman). Anabel's parents were taken by surprise. Was their daughter really going to marry an artist? What about the future? No one could foresee it. The young couple got married in 1960 and from then on they have been living together to this day.

For a few years Dan worked and travelled between Israel and London, but finally settled down with Anabel in Givataim where they bought a house and Dan opened an art studio.

During his fruitful artistic career Dan Reisinger shaped a great number of symbols and decorations for the Israeli State. He held exhibitions in many a world metropolis and received numerous awards. We will only state some of them:

-- 1974. Nordau Award, founded by the world organization of Hungarian Jews and the Israeli organization of Hungarian immigrants;

- 1981. The Hercl Award, for contributing to the development of design in Israel;

- 1984. The First Alumni Award from the Becalel Academy for art and design;

- 1998. The Izraeli Award, the highest Israeli recognition awarded for the first time for artistic design.

As an artist with a world-wide reputation, Dan is the recipient of prestigious world awards, as well as those of Israel, for design.

A memorial to the fallen munkaši, forced labourers from 1939 to 1945, was erected in 2017 on the Teleki Square in Budapest based on Dan's artistic solution.

Dan and Anabela live in Givataim in Israel; they have three sons and five grandchildren.

EVA AND RADE

Eva was born in 1918 in Čakovec, Croatia, in the family of Ema and Bela Kelemeni who had two more daughters, Klara and Žuža. Until 1918 Čakovec was in the territory of Hungary, but upon World War I it became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and stayed in Yugoslavia up to 1941 when the country was attacked by Germany and its allies and soon capitulated. Once the spoils of war were distributed, Čakovec again became Hungarian. Eva had grown up in a family in which, of course, Croatian was spoken but so were also Hungarian and German. She lived in a big house where there was a six-room flat on the upper floor and a large trading shop that belonged to her father on the ground floor.

In Čakovec there was an officers' school for training future officers of the cavalry troops. Radoslav-Rade Panić, a young cadet, arrived in Čakovec in 1936. At a dancing event he met Eva and without much reserve offered to be her companion. He saw Eva home and after a while their meetings began to overstep the boundary of an ordinary friendship.

However, there was Eva's mother, who was not overjoyed to see her daughter going out with a man with an uncertain future. Eva and Rade's walks were always chaperoned by her. Father also had reserves as to the relationship. It bothered him that his daughter was seeing a goyem, a non-Jew, and apart from that the young man had no capital backing. Still, Rade was persistent, so father decided to have a talk with Eva and tell her up front that he was against the liaison. Eva was also very much in love and would not break off the relationship that she had with Rade. She told her father that she was of age and that she could make her own decisions even if it meant that she would be left without a dowry. Father Bela decided to go to the rabbi for advice what to do. The rabbi advised him to talk to the young man and then come to a decision. However, the occasion for a reasonable talk never came. The minute Rade had a chance to enter their house, he fell to his knees, and, following tradition, asked for Eva's hand in marriage from her father. Father, completely unprepared for such a meeting, had no choice but to give his blessings.

This is how every story goes when it is one with a happy ending; nevertheless, to reach that goal was not simple at all. Considering that Eva was not of the Orthodox faith, Rade had to obtain the approval of the general, who was an Aide de Camp to the War Minister. He was against the marriage with a woman of another faith, a non-Serb. But at that time corruption was in full bloom (not like today when you cannot buy someone!?). The general received 50,000 dinars as a bribe to submit the paper to the Minister for his signature. Just to make it plain to everyone how big the sum of money was in question, Rade's pay amounted to 1,200 at that time and the general's was 4,000 dinars. It was only then that the road to marriage was opened.

The Orthodox priest in Skopje where the wedding was to take place was not naïve, either. He was modest and settled for only 5,000 dinars to convert Eva to the Orthodox

faith on paper so that the marriage ceremony could finally take place. In fact, the priest was unaware of the sum that was paid to the general and even if he had been the wiser, it would not have mattered much. Hierarchy was a much respected thing in those days and it was common knowledge who and how much one could "get" for certain minor favours.

The young couple settled down in Zemun in 1940 where Rade was given a position of a teacher in the Cavalry school. Rade was a master rider and began winning tournaments and trophies. The beginning of World War II was approaching fast, but nobody was fully aware of it yet. Eva's mother helped her to furnish the house and the couple had a bright future to look forward to. When, without any declaration of war, Belgrade was bombed in 1941, Rade was not yet mobilized and was still at his regular job in the Cavalry school. The Zemun Volksdeutschers put on their already prepared uniforms, as they also did in other parts of Serbia, particularly in Vojvodina. The time had finally come to show their loyalty to the Third Reich and they did so instantaneously. Zemun was not a large town, people knew each other by sight and were acquainted with each other; the Volksdeutschers had ready information about their cohabitants and were well prepared for the new situation on the ground. A citizen of Zemun, a Volksdeutscher, came up to Rade and Eva's house and started to sing Nazi songs. Rade ran out of the house ordering him to stop singing immediately and told him to keep away from his house. Those who are in power have the might so the Volksdeutscher was thrilled to the bone that he could hit an officer of the King's Army without any consequences.

Upon this episode events began to take place one after another. The Germans handed over Zemun to the Ustashi; Rade and Eva had, prior to this takeover, taken refuge in the Cavalry school along with other officers and soldiers. The commander of the school had already been informed what was going to happen and told them that the bridge over the Sava River would soon be demolished, that one should get out of Zemun as soon as possible. Rade and Eva packed with haste; they did not even take the most valuable things with them and, along with the Army, they retreated to Belgrade. They were headed for Jajinci where accommodation had been found for the school staff to settle in. Going along Karadjordjeva Street Eva witnessed a horrific scene - parts of human hands and feet hanging from the trees, the bodies of citizens that the German bombs had torn apart and scattered around Belgrade.

The minute they reached Jajinci, Rade was mobilized and sent to Bjelovar with the troops. However, the Ustashi soon came to power there as well and Rade together with his friends was taken prisoner. By nature a free spirit, he could not wait for things to happen to him. He jumped from the second-storey window of the building he was held in and managed to run away.

When the Germans handed Zemun over to the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), a new border was established and Eva could not return home any more. She went to Mala Kruševica, county Varvarin, where Rade's parents lived firmly believing that Rade would come there, too. Namely, once Yugoslavia capitulated, Eva hoped that he had not been taken prisoner and since he had nothing to look for in Zemun, he would

return to his family home.

However, there was no Rade. What Eva did not know was that he had badly injured himself during his jump from the second floor and that he was currently wandering round Slavonija. One day she told her father-in-law that she would go to Varvarin to seek an ausweiss from the German commander to go and search for Rade. Her father-in-law would not let her go alone, but at the same time he did not believe that Eva could obtain a pass for free movement across Europe. Namely, it crossed Eva's mind that Rade might have run off to Hungary and with the notion of obtaining such an ausweiss, she went to the commander of Varvarin.

Eva spoke German fluently. "Nobody here speaks German!" the German commander of the town was amazed. "Sit down here and talk about anything you wish for half an hour, and then I'll give you whatever you want." Nostalgia is a dangerous illness, but it can be of help to someone like Eva to get what she wanted. The town commander was delighted with the conversation, mostly satisfied by the fact that the exchange of words had not been a mere case of giving orders in German.

Of course, Eva did not get the ausweiss which would allow her to travel through Europe, but with the paper she got she could go to Zemun. She found some other people living comfortably in their house. They partied, broke the crystal glasses and when Eva entered the house and saw what was going on, she immediately threw them all out. She hastened to her neighbour's, the one they had a good relationship with. To her great surprise she found Rade cowering in there, all doubled up. The joy of the meeting was dimmed when she learned that he had been injured during his escape. Eva did not waste any time. She packed a few cases, found the old silver in a lavish box and a second box containing some jewelry she had inherited from her mother; it was a miracle that the things had not been looted. The Germans were a highly cultured people, but probably living in Zemun had altered them for the worst, had made them forget the value of things.

Still, for Eva the most valuable thing was the love of her heart, her husband Rade. She quickly found a man with a boat who took them over the Sava in exchange for the silverware she had.

In the cafe on Zeleni Venac, landlords were to be found. Eva entered the café and showed her gold ring with a large stone. "I have an injured man with me. Who is willing to take us to Mala Kruševica for this ring?" A number of volunteers offered their services for such a valuable object straight away and harnessed horses were standing in front as if just waiting for Eva and Rade to appear.

In Mala Kruševica Eva and her mother-in-law nursed Rade with home-made medicine since there was no other. Rade never recovered completely from the second-floor jump. The Partisans used to come to Mala Kruševica and Eva and Rade had always been leftists, socialists. Rade was not physically able to join them.

One day Rade was asked to join the Nedić Serbian State Guard. The Communists agreed that he should go and join up; they needed a man who would inform them of the

intentions of the Chetnik and Ljotić people and other enemy collaborators. Thus Rade became a Partisan intelligence officer.

Rade worked there for two months and then he and Eva set off for Belgrade. They had fake documents stating that they were Serbian refugees from the Independent State of Croatia. Eva felt free; she never gave a thought about her Jewish origin since in the new surroundings nobody knew them.

However, there was someone who did. Rade's best man, lieutenant colonel Vlajko Purić, was in close contact with the Nedić people and the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović. Through him Rade soon came by some highly secret information and each night at exactly 10 minutes to ten he would send it on to Dušan Srbinac, his liaison with the illegal movement in Belgrade. Many people were saved thanks to Rade's war engagement.

The war was over in Belgrade on 20 October 1944. Eva still had no knowledge of the fate of her parents. Namely, when Hitler, dissatisfied with Horti's stand toward Jews, occupied Hungary, he sent Eichmann there with only one task – to hasten the rounding up of Jews and sending them to their death. Among the Jews in the territory under Hungarian occupation were the ones from Čakovec as well. Eva's parents were sent to Auschwitz and never returned home. Her sisters did not live in Čakovec and they both survived the war.

Eva, Rade and their daughter

In liberated Belgrade Eva and Rade were experiencing better times. Their daughter Tijana was born. Eva took care of the child and at the same time looked after the neighbouring children as well, among them those of their good friends the Carin family. Rade was working in the Section for Internal affairs. There was a lot of work to be done and additionally the Inform Bureau Resolution soon came to the light of day. There was a major disintegration among the Communists. Those who supported Stalin had to be removed from public life. For them a prison camp on Goli Otok was installed.

There was no danger for Eva and Rade since they did not like the Russians. They were bothered by the fact that in each bureau a Russian individual was instated as an instructor and they had a great influence on the actual operations.

Eva, although a socialist, was not fond of the Russians. Namely, one day Novikov, a captain of the NKVD, who worked with Rade, after hearing that Eva was a Jewess, asked Rade to introduce her to him. Reluctantly, Rade agreed and took the captain to

his home. Then the captain told Eva, in the strictest confidence, that he too was Jewish and that the Russians had killed his entire family; he asked Eva to keep this a secret between the two of them. Although Eva knew what happened to Jews in Russia, when she heard his story, her hate for them only grew. A completely open stance towards Russian politics in those dubious times still did not mean that one could be quite certain of old friendship relations, even less new ones. Eva and Rade had already heard that people had ended up in jail on false accusations.

In the autumn of 1951, Rade started off for work as he did every day. He was by then a captain in the National police and the Commander of the sports' division in the Cavalry school in Zemun. Some time before he had injured himself and his arm was in plaster. He complained to Eva that the plaster was irritating his skin and that he had developed a rash. Eva wanted to place some cotton wool between his hand and the plaster, but Rade asked that she put a dressing instead, since he claimed he sweated a lot and cotton wool was not the right solution to the problem.

Rade certainly could not have foreseen what was about to happen that day. He was in a hurry to get to a meeting with General Drulović, when two agents of the KOS came up to him and stopped him. Without any explanation Rade was arrested. Once in jail, he found out that he was accused of being an enemy of the people, a Russian admirer. Crushed by disappointment, he hung himself the same night in prison using the very dressing which Eva had placed between the plaster and his hand to ease his discomfort.

Nobody informed Eva of what was happening. She waited for him to come to lunch, then to dinner and once the night had passed she became agitated and went out in search of her husband. It was a Saturday and those that could give her any information had left their workplace. On Sunday an agent of the KOS came and told her that Rade had hung himself. She had to go with him to identify the body. Instead of showing her husband to her, they gave her a piece of paper to sign. The paper was, in fact, a statement stating that her husband was a traitor and an enemy of the people and the statement was to be published in the newspapers. Eva vehemently refused saying it was not true. Her words were proof enough that she too, was enemy of the people; consequently, she was locked up and then sent to Goli Otok, i.e. the part for women on the island of Grgur.

Stalin died in 1953. There was no more danger from the Inform-bureau people and Eva was released after spending half a year in prison and a year and a half in the camp on the island of Grgur.

Eva lived through exceedingly hard times in the camp. When the new administrator for the women's camp arrived, Eva weighed only 38 kilos. She took pity on Eva and gave her a job in the kitchen where she began to recover slowly. Then she learned that Rade had been falsely accused by someone by the name Nikitović, a colonel of KOS, who had been working for the Russians. The false accusations of Nikitović had caused over a hundred people to be ousted. His dealings were uncovered and he was

sentenced to 18 years of prison; nevertheless, that could not bring Rade back and Eva, innocent of any crime, had done her time in prison.

The moment Eva was released she went to her daughter Tijana, who was in Lendava staying with her aunt Klara. Then the relentless fight to prove that Rade was not a traitor and a public enemy began. She managed to clear him from all accusations and after overcoming a thousand obstacles, Rade's bones were brought to his birth place, the village of Mala Kruševica.

Later Eva met Moša Pijade, a high official of the Communist party of Yugoslavia, who told her that Rade had saved the lives of at least 1,500 people from the Resistance movement. Moša Pijade saw to it that she got a flat from the state once again. When Eva returned to Belgrade, she found employment in Tekig Invest as a translator for German and Hungarian.

The years went by relatively peacefully. Tijana finished secondary school and told her mother that she was moving out of Yugoslavia. She could never accept what the Yugoslav government had done to her parents. In 1964 she emigrated to Israel and settled down in Šaar HaAmakim kibbutz. Mother visited her daughter in 1966 and decided that she too, would remain in the kibbutz. Life there was by far the closest she could get to her life-long socialist ideas. In order to be accepted permanently Eva had to pass through a preparation period and after a year was unanimously accepted as a haver- kibbutz member. Very soon upon her arrival at the kibbutz she had met Moše Nahir, a widower with two sons, who told her of his wish for them to live together and naturally get married. Eva warned him that she had only one love of her life, Radoslav Panić; still, she liked Moše and accepted his proposal. Moše was an energetic, diligent, righteous man, who was also very broadminded. He was friends with the Beduin from the neighbouring village and soon Eva became friends with them too, thus beginning a life-long friendship. At first Eva worked in the kibbutz kitchen, she was the diet planner and readily answered the wishes and needs of the kibbutzim. She even fulfilled the wish of an older member and made her knodel (dumplings) with plums. Of course, being what she was, Eva Nahir was in no time accepted and loved by all. After spending 12 years in the kitchen, she was voted the director of moadona, the club where she worked for another 13 years right up to her pension in 1988. Even after retiring she helped the old and the sick. She visited them daily, hung out with the children and with Moše's grandchildren. She managed to visit her daughter and her grandchildren who live in America. She became a savta, a grandmother to her own as well as to many other children. When we wrote this story Eva was 96 years old. She was completely independent, even more, she could still help others, young and old and she was well respected in the community she lived in and beyond. She had friends in former Yugoslavia and many people knew her world-wide.

When Eva stayed in Čakovec (2014), her birthplace in Croatia, she never expected to be proclaimed Honorary Citizen. She was pleasantly surprised that the people of Čakovec had not forgotten their pre-war cohabitants – Jews, who had left a distinctive mark in the development of the city. She walked down the streets that bear the

names of prominent Jews of Čakovec: Braća (Brothers) Weis, Najman, Vajda, Braća (Brothers) Graner… Today only two Jews still live in Čakovec, but the memory of their fellow Jewish townsmen has been preserved. Čakovec and Tivon from Isreal are twin towns, as they say in Israel, or brother towns, as they used to be called in former Yugoslavia.

On the occasion of our last meeting at the end of our talk we asked Eva if she would kindly give us the recipe for a long life. "It's quite simple," Eva told us. "Love! I was truly loved by my Rade and my Moše, the love I had for them both, and the love for all others who deserve it. That is the answer to your question."

I had known Eva Nahir Panić for some ten years, but only upon a private visit I could truly say that I had seen into her soul. My wife and I visited Eva in kibbutz Šaar HaAmakim and it was then that Eva let us see her for who she was. Eva had been living in the kibbutz since 1966 when she had settled in Israel and she had never wanted to leave it. Her life story reads like a novel, so true to the saying that life writes its own stories. It made it all the harder for me to single out what would be interesting to those who did not know her, as well as those who could recall the times they spent with her. It was hard for me to say all that I would have liked in so little a space, but Eva's story is worth the trouble, although I know that there are many things left unsaid.

Eva's story is in the part of this book about the Righteous Without a Medal, people who for various reasons have not obtained the recognition. Since they were married, Eva did not nominate Rade Panić for the Righteous Award respecting the rules of Yad Vashem.

Eva Nahir Panić died in 2015 and was buried in the kibbutz grave yard where her second husband Moše Nahir lies too. Only a day before she died, they had let her out from the hospital for a short time, she called the writer of this text and expressed her wish to meet with him and his wife Verica again. She had grown fond of Verica in the short time they spent together. Instead of the meeting with her, all that we have left now are a few photos to remember her by.

SALVATION IN KRAGUJEVAC

This story was written based on the research of Žarko B. Veljković from Belgrade, published in the magazine of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, "Menora", under the title "The Saving of a Jewess from the Holocaust in Kragujevac." Unfortunately, it is one of the stories that could not be confirmed by the descendants of those saved, although the truth of the written matter is corroborated by documents uncovered by Mr. Veljković. Namely, in the search for Mira Štajn, acting under the supposition that she was the one who had buried her parents, and obtaining her address through the appropriate registers, we came to the Hevra Kadiše graveyard in Tel Aviv, where Herman was buried in 1960 and Karolina–Dragica Keka in 1975. However, both Herman and Keka were buried by people unknown and unreachable to us. We did not manage to contact their daughter Mira. Nevertheless, this does not dispute the fact that the family Marković from Kragujevac has earned the honour to be among the Righteous Among the Nations. In our opinion, the family Stefanović deserves the same award as well.

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When Karolina Štajn (Karolina Stein) prior to World War II decided to go to Belgrade in search of her future, she could not have foreseen that she had escaped both from Vukovar and the horrible destiny that befell nearly her entire family. Karolina, who was nicknamed Keka, and so we shall call her throughout the story, was born in 1900 and was one of the nine children of Herman Štajn, a well-to-do tradesman, and his wife Fani (Fanny), nee Hercog, a clerk from Vukovar.

Keka's sister Zelma (Selma) lived in Belgrade married to Jakob Dajč from Zemun. Although Keka's rich father had bought a house for her in Vukovar, Keka, who spoke German fluently since many Vukovar Jews considered German their mother tongue, decided she would go and join her sister in the big city. At first she had problems with the Serbian language, but she soon found her ground and obtained a job.

Then April 1941 came along and everything changed overnight. Jews were taken to forced labour to clear the rubble left by the bombardment; they extracted the dead bodies of the citizens of the capital of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with their bare hands. The obligatory yellow band on the sleeve, the proscription from using public transport, the difficulties of obtaining basic food stuffs were only part of the scenario that the Germans had prepared for the Jews. Zelma's husband Jakob Dajč was imprisoned in the temporary camp Topovske šupe and one day with a group of inmates was taken to be shot dead. Although left all by themselves in Belgrade, Zelma and Keka did not lack money and that helped them greatly to manage to live in the newly altered circumstances.

By October 1941 the majority of Jewish men in Belgrade had been shot by firing squad, leaving only women, children and the old still alive.

On the other bank of the river Sava in Zemun, which belonged to the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), a camp under German control at Sajmište was being prepared for the remaining Jews. When, at the beginning of December 1941, the collecting of Jews and their taking into the opened camp began, both Keka and Zelda had already acquired fake documents. Zelda decided to hide in Belgrade while Keka with her fake identification papers in the name of Dragica Djordjević took off for Kragujevac.

Around mid 1942, when Berlin was notified that Serbia was cleared of Jews, Keka had already found a job in the factory for tinned goods in Kragujevac as a translator.

The Zvezda, can factory

The owner of the factory was Stevan Stefanović. Stevan and his wife, Dora, were humane people. Besides spending their money on the improvement of city living conditions, they also helped people who had found themselves in trouble. It was no problem for Stevan to employ Keka although at the beginning and maybe right up to the end of war, he did not know that she was a Jewess. You will soon learn in this short story what his standpoint towards Jews was. Everybody called Dora "Gypsy Mother"

since she helped the Roma who were almost as endangered as the Jews. Moša Pijade's own sister was in hiding in the house of the Stefanović family and they had introduced her to the authorities as their niece – now it becomes clear why it was of little consequence whether Keka was a Jew or not. By the end of the war the Stefanović family had managed to store up large quantities of canned food and all of it, together with the factory, was handed over to the Partisan army.

Just to be clear, we state at the same time that all of this was of no great help to them since the new authorities, due to a report of alleged cooperation with the occupier, proclaimed them public enemies. Stevan was sentenced to death by firing squad and Dora to a year in prison. The family Stefanović, and many of the Kragujevac townsfolk, directly approached Dr. Ivan Ribar with the request to pardon the married couple. In the court procedure that had been rigged from the beginning, Stevan's sentence was changed to 15 years of imprisonment; he was released after serving five years, while Dora did her time almost to the full.

So let us return to the story of Keka. She had not chosen Kragujevac by chance to seek refuge there. She had for some time been friends with Stevan's daughter, the man who was the owner of the tinned food factory in Kragujevac, where she had acquired the job of translator.

At her new job in 1942, Keka met Leposava Lela Marković, who had obtained a job in the factory through her school-friend, Stevan's second daughter (Stevan and Dora had one son and three daughters), and was helping her family. Leposava Lela Marković was only 14 years old when she began to work. Stevan's daughter introduced Keka to Lela, and Lela soon found out that Keka i.e. Dragica Djordjević, was a Jewess.

Keka and Lela after WW2

Lela and her family lived in Kragujevac: her mother Rajka, nee Popadić, father Bogosav, and her three brothers, one of them younger than she was. Living In the same house alongside them there was an officer of the Wehrmacht who had been stationed there immediately upon the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Lela's elder brothers were members of the SKOJ. Bata Marković, Lela's eldest brother was already in the Partisan units in 1941. On 19 October 1941, Bata obtained leave and came to Kragujevac to visit his parents. He was supposed to return to his unit the same afternoon, but his mother kept him back making him stay overnight. The next day it was too late; the city was surrounded by heavy German forces. The rounding up of citizens began in retaliation for the attack of Partisan units on German soldiers near Gornji Milanovac when 10 German soldiers were killed and 26 wounded.

Following the order issued by Feldmarschall Keitel from September 1941, for each killed German, a 100 people were to be shot and 50 Communists and their assistants for each wounded. Although the attack was not carried out in Kragujevac, due to a lack in the number of hostages, Kragujevac became the place where the biggest massacre of civilians in Serbia took place. Since the number of grown-up citizens did not meet the requirements, the pupils of the Kragujevac Grammar school were shot along with them. Bata Marković was among those who were shot.

After this horrendous crime, the persecution of Communists and their helpers continued and thus Lela and her second brother, known as Miro Glavonja, were arrested as members of the SKOJ. In the Kragujevac prison, subjected to brutal beatings, Miro Glavonja "disclosed" that Bata's gun was hidden with Lela, which was not true. Lela would have certainly died from the excruciating beatings she was exposed to if it were not for the prison guard, a Volksdeutscher - half Serb, who came to dress her wounds after each beating. Although they had not given away a single person from the Resistance movement, Lela and Miro Glavonja were transported to the Banjica camp in Belgrade. There the beatings continued and then father Bogosav beseeched the German officer living in their house, with whom they had become almost friendly in a way, to save his children. At the intervention of the German officer, Lela and Miro Glavonja were released and sent home to Kragujevac. This happened in 1942 before Lela started working in the tinned food factory. Aware of what she had been exposed to and had had to endure in the fight against the occupier and the fight for her own life,

POW Herman Cvi Cile 1943/44 (bottom row, third from left)

Lela obtained the consent of her parents and invited Keka to move in with them. Keka stayed with the Marković family right up to the end of the war in 1945.

Keka returned to Belgrade after the war was over, where she met up with her sister, Zelma. They were temporarily given a flat on the first floor of the Jewish Community in 71, Kralja Petra Street. In Belgrade, as well as in the whole territory of Yugoslavia, lists of Jewish survivors and of those who were never coming home were being made. Out of the large families on both their mother's and father's side, nobody had survived the horrors of the Holocaust except Keka and Zelma. All of the others had perished in Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

In Belgrade Keka met engineer Herman Cvija Čileta Šmit. Herman Šmit was born in 1892 in Djakovo and had been working in Belgrade before the war began. Then he was mobilized and as an officer of the King's Army had ended up in German captivity. He was interned in the camp at Osnabruck till the end of the war. When Herman returned to Belgrade, he learned of the tragic fate of his family. They had all perished – his wife Karolina, son Slavko, sister Jozefina, brother-in-law Jakša Orenštajn - only Herman had survived.

The tragic consequences of the Holocaust brought the surviving Jews closer to each other. Keka and Herman got married 1948 and in 1949 in the second Aliyah they emigrated to Israel. They lived in Tel Aviv where their daughter Mira was born.

Zelma Dajč remained in Belgrade. She never married again.

Upon the war, Lela Marković got married to Mihailo Dimitrijević in Belgrade in 1947. They had two daughters, Danica-Daca and Jelena-Keka.

Bogosav and Rajka Marković, Lela's parents, remained in Kragujevac at the same address where Keka had been in hiding during the war.

Just to mention one more thing: Keka kept her code name Dragica in Israel, too.

Although they lived in harmony, not all of them in the family were religious. The fact who was the oldest and who had the last word was known by all and accepted, but nobody insisted that their religious beliefs were a point to be stressed or universal. Once, when Laci's father fell ill, his mother prayed to God for his recovery. Laci's father did recover and mother firmly believed that it was God who helped him get better. From then on mother's beliefs only became stronger while father respected the Jewish holidays. Mother was a Zionist, but for each Shabbat she would light candles and father would bless the children: "Bless him God, and keep him safe." Laci's father was not poor and for the major Jewish holidays a large number of relatives would gather in their house to celebrate.

Laci's father, Mor-Moše Šporer, had a well-known factory for soap and cosmetics in Subotica which is probably the reason why his older son Mirko-Imre completed his studies of chemistry in Vienna.

Mother Serena, of the Frojnd (Freund) family, spent her time doing charity work: organizing women to take up various activities, helping the poor, and she was well-respected in Subotica.

Mor - Moše Šporer

Serena Šporer

Laci's sister Šarika had found a perfect match and was happily married and living in Budapest with her husband. However, happiness is a relative thing, and some ten years later Laci had the "honour" of bringing her back home. Never again did he speak of happiness, not because Šarika had separated from her husband, but because Nazism was knocking at their door and turning into the Holocaust which brought great losses to their family.

News reached Subotica of what was happening to Jews in Austria and Germany. Refugees on their way to the Palestine were already passing through Yugoslavia; still,

no one believed yet that the Jews in Yugoslavia would be exposed to similar circumstances. Besides, it was also wrongly believed that Jews could return to their original homestead, the land of their forefathers, Eretz Israel, whenever they wished. Only upon living through the greatest human tragedy in the twentieth century, would they be permitted to rebuild their country.

I speak of Laci's family and I have not yet introduced him. So, David Laci Šporer was born in 1919 in Subotica as Ladislav Šporer and they gave him his pet name Laci, as fondly used now as it was then. When upon the war he immigrated to Israel he changed his name and has been called David Šporer from then on. You ask why the name David? I am not really certain why, but it might be because David conquered Goliath just like the Jews survived and conquered Nazi Germany. Not that they accomplished it all on their own, but the Nazis did certainly not win. Maybe he chose it because of King David, and yet the reason may be simply because he liked the name.

When the war began, Laci was a young man and just like any other youngster did not believe that death chooses its victims. He was right, it was the Nazis who did, who had their goals and knew exactly who they wanted to wipe off the face of the Earth: Jews, Communists, no matter which nationality they were, disloyal citizens - the ones they considered as such, as well as all those who stood in their path, one way or another.

Laci's brother Mirko, upon finishing his chemistry studies, had returned home prior to the war and married Ana from the Šenberger family. In the Šporer home, meetings of the Hašomer Hacair were held frequently and Mirko was the first president of the Kena in Subotica.

The Numerus clausus decree was already proclaimed and it limited the number of pupils and students of Jewish descent to enter schools and faculties; so too was the decree which prohibited Jews from working wholesale with food stuffs, but still the Jews hoped that it would all soon pass, that the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia would persevere in its neutrality, and that it would not become an ally of the Third Reich,

Concerning the ban to trade with food stuffs, the Šporer family was not affected, as they were not in that business and the Numerus clausus did not apply to older children. Namely, Laci, who was a poor pupil, had already matriculated and had begun to work earlier on. Just as his professor had prophesized when father had been to see him to find out what kind of problems his son had with learning: "Your son studies only things that he is interested in, but don't worry, he will prosper and do well in life," was what the professor had had to say.

And it happened just that way: he matriculated in 1937 and immediately went to his mother's brother, Uncle Matija in Zagreb to work in his paper factory. His uncle was a rich man; he owned the second largest paper factory in the Balkans and was very satisfied with Laci's work seeing in him a man who would one day be in the very management of the factory. Still, after two years Laci returned to Subotica. In Zagreb

he had his first chance to see how many Jews were fleeing from Germany and Austria and was convinced that it was better for him to be back at home in Subotica. His uncle had three sons and a daughter so that Laci was not worried about who would succeed his uncle at the factory.

However, life had written a completely different scenario for his uncle's family. Laslo, his uncle's son, was an engineer for paper and would most probably have been the person to inherit the factory if he had not, returning to Zagreb one night, met his good old friend from childhood, a conductor on the sleeping car. They had a pleasant talk and just when Laslo was about to lie down and go to sleep, sometime around midnight, he heard a knock on his compartment door. Laslo opened the door and saw the anxious face of his friend. "The Italians have occupied Albania," his friend, who had just heard the news, said. This was in 1939. Laslo did not think long about what to do; it was clear to him that war would soon begin and knowing what happened to refugees, he foresaw the destiny that awaited the Jews. Father Matija died unexpectedly, and Laslo's brother Milan and sister Anuška had already gone to America. Laslo packed and in 1940 emigrated to Palestine. Only his mother Malvina and his oldest brother were left in Zagreb, but not for long. His brother was sent to Jasenovac and his mother to Auschwitz - they never returned home.

Yet the refugees were not the only reason why Laci returned to Subotica. There was a woman, Helena, the chief-accountant, working in his father's soap and cosmetics factory. She was ten years his senior and was married; however, there was a mutual attraction between them which was never seen in public, at least not until the end of World War II. During the war Helena's husband was sent to forced labour in the Ukraine from where he never returned.

The Šporers

A short time after his home-coming to Subotica, the news that Yugoslavia had signed the Tripartite Pact exploded like a bomb. There were big demonstrations, the Government was overthrown, and Hitler vented his fury on the innocent people. In the early hours of 6 April 1941, the bombing of Belgrade began and with it too the war, which ended quickly with the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The winners divided the spoils of war: parts of Baranja and Bačka in which Laci's hometown Subotica lay, were given to Hungary. Just before the war, Laci's brother Mirko was mobilized, he was an officer in the King's Army and already on 8 April he became a

prisoner; he was taken to Germany, to camp Osnabruck and was interned there till the end of the war.

When the Hungarian Fascists marched into Subotica, the Jews still had no notion of the fate that awaited them.

At the very beginning of the occupation antagonists of the Hungarian regime, plainly the occupier, were arrested. No one had touched the Jews, it was said that Horti's wife was a Jewess. Horti was anti-Semitic, but did not allow the physical extinction of the Jews. However, Jews died en masse in the work units for forced labour, and most frequently in the first lines on the Eastern Front. The others were not doomed for eradication, they only had to be obedient, but unfortunately to the regret of the occupier, they were not: they helped those who had already been sentenced to death among them and the Jews as well.

Still, at first Jews were not persecuted by the Hungarian occupying authorities like they were in other parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, i.e., Serbia which had remained under German protectorate. Only when in January 1942 the so-called Novi Sad Raid took place, when thousands of Jews and other undesirable citizens of Bačka and Novi Sad were killed, the Jews in the north of Vojvodina realized that these horrors would not avoid them either. The entire Šporer family moved to Budapest, believing that they would be better off there. However, there was a great difference in the treatment of Hungarian Jews and those that had come as refugees. Many restrictions applied to them and soon the family returned to Subotica.

As time went on, Jews in Subotica, as well as all over Bačka, were being sent to forced labour in increasing numbers and Laci was no exception. Laci's father was in prison when his son received a summons for mobilization in a work unit in 1942. The Hungarian occupiers had imprisoned ten prominent citizens of Subotica, among them his father, which measure was taken as a guarantee to forestall any rebellion against the Fascist occupier. However, the Communists had organized a resistance movement against the occupier and many young people including Jews – in just one action fourteen of them had been caught – were hanged in the Subotica Square; Laci knew most of them from his school days.

Laci Šporer, 1943

When Laci was mobilized into the work unit, he was sent to Sombor. The plan was to build a new military airport there; however, it was never opened. The mobilized men were accommodated in wooden barracks and on the whole, taking into account the general situation, the food was not bad. Laci was the lucky one since he got an office job as an "engineer". He wrote out the daily orders. He managed to build a fair relationship with the offic-

ers, Hungarians, especially with the actual engineer, who was project manager. The Hungarian would daily report to them the news of the latest events, for he listened to the BBC program broadcast by Radio London each night. However, not all who were doing forced labour had Laci's luck, nor were the Hungarian soldiers all the same. Many inmates died from exhaustion or were killed for who knows what reason or, in other words, for no reason at all.

One of the Hungarian officers, captain Žoldoš Andor (Zsoldos Andor) was an exceptionally humane person. Prior to the war he was a priest and during the war he made every effort to make the forced duties for the inmates easier to withstand. Work was carried out in eight-hour shifts and every two weeks the prisoners were allowed to go and spend Shabbat at home – in reality, they were relieved of work according to Christian customs where Sunday is a day for relaxing; the forced labourers did not care much which custom they were observing, the important thing was to go home. Still, captain Žoldoš was punished because of the help he rendered to the inmates. Upon the war, at the proposal of over fifty Jews, Laci included, Andor Žoldoš was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.

And so it went right up to the moment when the Hungarians revoked their submissiveness to the Third Reich and when in the spring of 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary. Namely, it was clear to the Hungarians that the war was nearing its end bringing along the breakdown of the Third Reich. They wished to join up with the Allies, Britain first and foremost, but the Nazis put a stop to all their plans. First, the Nazis were far from naïve, they had to secure the retreat of their troops from the Near East and the Balkans. Second, but even more horrendous, they had not yet completed the solution to the Jewish question. The most horrifying persecution of Jews began upon the occupation of Hungary. At first, everyone had to wear the yellow band on their sleeve. A part of the Jews were sent to the Eastern Front, Ukraine, and none of them came back alive. It was then that Laci realized that the Jews who had been sent to work on the Sombor airport were the lucky ones. In the first place, it was because the Nazis wanted the airport in operation as soon as possible, and secondly, because there were really good people among the Hungarian officers. One of them had even announced: "If I see that a Nazi is out to get you, I'll kill him on the spot," was actually what he said, and he took out his gun as a confirmation.

In May 1944 the ghetto in Subotica was opened and Laci's parents soon found themselves in it. Laci decided that he had to visit them at any cost. Helena and Mirko's wife Ana were also in the ghetto. In the company of a Hungarian officer responsible for the workers' camp, he reached Subotica. However, the Jews from the ghetto had already been transferred to Baćalmaš (Bacsalmas) in Hungary. In such a dire situation it is sometimes incomprehensible how people can be humane. The Hungarian officer agreed to accompany him to Baćalmaš, but once they were at the very entrance to the camp, problems arose. Laci was out of luck, the gendarme at the gate arrested him on the spot. The officer who was with him told his colleagues that it was his responsibility to bring Laci back to Sombor, that Laci was a forced labourer at the airport and was

absolutely needed there, however, the Hungarian gendarmes did not believe his story. At last they agreed to let Laci go if the officer brought a document to certify that what he was saying was true. Night was already falling and the Hungarian officer returned to the airport to get the demanded proof.

Laci spent that night in prison with a Partisan as a cell-mate. This was the first time he heard the word - partisan. They talked late into the night and in the morning the officer brought the requested document. Laci met up with his parents and following the encounter was released from the camp; it was the last time he saw his parents, who were transported to Auschwitz with all the others. SS Officer Eichmann was responsible for the transport of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Hungary and the occupied territories; they were subsequently killed in the death camps in the last days of the war.

The officer and Laci returned to the work camp and soon the unit was transferred to Segedin. Since there was not enough work there, they were again transported, this time to the work camp in Vrbas. It was a camp for the Roma and, together with them, they loaded sugar into barges which sailed up the Danube to Germany.

It was August 1944, the Red Army was already on the north-east border of Hungary and it was clear to all that the end of the war was near. Unfortunately, many did not live to see it happen. In those days, masses of Hungarian Jews in columns passed by the forced labourers; they were being returned from forced labour in the mines of Bor to Hungary. One night they slept very near them and in the morning the workers found many of them dead - some lying near the road, others in the brick plant. They were murdered by the Hungarian gendarmes, and were buried by the Roma in a collective grave near Sombor. The majority of them perished at Crvenka where the Handžar (Hanjar) division stood waiting for them; only a minor part reached Hungary and there the killing continued. The number of those that managed to survive the march from the Bor mines to their homes was very small.

It is said that the greatest tragedy is when death comes to people in the final days of the war. For Laci there was no greater tragedy than the one that befell his family, but he too, was fully aware that fate should not be tempted. A few Jews in the forced labour unit decided they would run away from the work camp. One of the officers with whom Laci had good relations, lived with a Serbian family which he had met through him. As I have already said, the end of the war was nearing and the Red Army advancing, and at that moment was only a few kilometres away from their work camp. Fearing that the Nazis would kill them, they ran away from the camp at the last moment.

Laci went straight to the home of the mentioned Serbian family. He wondered whether he should continue on, but the housewife Radica - Roza Ćosić stopped him: “You’re hiding with us here and staying till the end of the war. Your father and I are from the same village. I couldn’t look him in the eyes if I didn’t give you shelter. You’re staying with us for better or for worse,” Radica said. At that time neither Laci nor she knew that his parents would not be returning from Auschwitz.

Laci was forbidden to leave the house. The door of the house was constantly locked

and if anyone banged on the gate, he would immediately go and hide in the curing shed.

Twice Laci tried, unsuccessfully, to move to some other place and finally told them truthfully: “I don’t want to put you in danger,” but they replied: “Our fate is your fate,” and he gave up trying to leave their house.

They talked a lot, ate, listened to the news, and at times it was simply boring. In the drawer of the kitchen table Laci saw some old cards. He thought that he could amuse himself with someone from the house, but then he remembered what his mother had once told him. Namely, she had asked whether he ever played cards with his friends. Laci did not know why she was asking, he only saw that she was worried when one night he came home late. He told her that he did not play cards and insisted that she tell him why she was asking. “I’ll tell you a family secret,” mother said, “My father, your grandfather, was a passionate card player and one day he lost his entire property in a game.” Laci made a promise to his mother then and also vowed to himself that he would never lay a hand on a deck of cards in his life. Thus, this time too: he closed the kitchen table drawer and went in search for some other task in the house that would occupy him.

It was the month of October 1944 when it became evident that people were leaving Sombor in a hurry. The Nazis and the Hungarian Fascists, together with a part of the Hungarian people, scared of the well-deserved punishment for crimes committed during the occupation, ran towards Hungary and the Nazis continued from there on to Germany.

On 22 October the Red Army marched into Sombor.

Subotica had already been liberated a few days earlier, but the war was still going on. Even so, Laci thanked his hosts for their hospitality and started off for Subotica on foot. He immediately joined up with the Partisan units in the fight against the remaining Fascists; however, he was on the front for only a day and a half. He was deployed to other tasks and the end of the war found him in Bucharest, where he had been sent on a special mission.

Laci’s parents did not come back from Auschwitz. Helena and Ana returned; they had been transferred from Auschwitz to various work camps throughout Germany. Laci’s brother Mirko came back from German imprisonment. Helena and Laci finally legalized their secret relationship and got married in Belgrade. After the wedding the registrar advised them: “When you decide to get divorced, bring a ten dinar tax stamp.” They never divorced.

The Righteous Without a Medal: Radica–Roza Ćosić and her family.

Instead of an explanation why they have not been recognized by Yad Vashem as the Righteous, I here quote the words of David Laci Šporer:

"Many Jews were killed in the last days of the war. In afterthought I realized that near the end of the war I was saved by the family Ćosić, but had no way or chance to repay them. I searched for them after the war, but it was as if they had simply disappeared from the face of the earth. Of course, many years had gone by when I came to Sombor for the first time after the war, but even to this day I keep wondering how no one in the town had any idea of what had happened to them."

Čelebon Tuvi Bahar Josef was born in Bulgaria and by his first wife had three children. After he was widowed, he married Lia, nee Mašiah, from Sofia. Čelebon and Lia moved from Sofia to Pirot. Four of their children were born there. Čelebon was a šamaš, an attendant in the Synagogue, and he also cultivated the vineyards of the Jewish Community in Pirot. Later on he opened a trading business.

Čelebon died before the war and Lia from natural causes in 1941.

Of all the children of Čelebon and Lia, only the two sons, brothers Josef and Isak Tuvi Jusefović, survived the Second World War together with their families.

We know that Josef relocated from Sofija to Israel in 1948 where he continued to live with six children.

As in this book we are writing about the Righteous Without the Medal who saved Jews during World War II, we here present to you the story of Isak Jusefović and the rescuing of his family: his wife Rašela and son Tuvi.

Isak was born in 1904 in Pirot. After he finished his studies of pharmacy in Zagreb in 1927, Isak returned to Pirot and began to work for the apothecary Skacalea. Since he had a Master of Pharmacy degree, Isak served his regular army service at the Stationary Military Hospital in Niš. On completing his military service, he returned to Pirot and got married. His wife Rašela was a child of the married couple Don Abravanel Ašer and his wife Džoja, nee Bukas Mašiah. Ašer and Džoja had five sons and one daughter, Rašela.

Don Abravanel had a brother Nisim who was only fifteen when he got married to Rejna Konfino, at that time a thirteen-year-old girl. They bore nine sons in wedlock. When the war began, their sons were all adult men with families of their own. During the war, Nisim Don Abravanel, his wife Rejna and six of their sons perished together with their families.

We now return to the story of Isak and Rašela. In search of work, Isak and Rašela moved from one place to another prior to the war: first to Zaječar, then to Skopje and just before World War II began, they settled in Belgrade where Isak worked for the Master of Pharmacy, Kosta Antonijević.

When on 6 April1941, Belgrade was bombarded and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia soon after capitulated, first to feel the brunt of the Nazi force were the Jews. Forced labour, degradation and the compulsory yellow band, followed by retribution for killed German soldiers, became a reality. After a sabotage raid in which Haim Almoslino set fire to a German motor bike, 1,200 Jews came to Tašmajdan at the call of the Federation of Jewish Communities. It was only then that they learned that each tenth Jew was to be selected and held as a hostage, and Almoslino was given a deadline till nightfall to give himself up to the German authorities. Almoslino did not give himself up since he did not know that a price had been put on his head. A group of Jews, in all 122 of

them, better known in history of the Holocaust in Serbia as "the first hundred", was shot by firing squad in Jajinci on 28 July 1941, and Almoslino surrendered to the German authorities the next day. That very day he too was shot; he was only 17 years old.

Isak Jusefović, who managed to escape the tragic destiny of the first mass killing of Jews by firing squad in Belgrade, decided to return to Pirot forthwith. He escaped to another country entirely, for Pirot, in the division of the spoils of war, came under Bulgarian authority together with other parts of South Serbia, Macedonia and Thrace, since Bulgaria was an ally of the Third Reich and Axis Forces. Soon Isak's wife Rašela, after obtaining a fake pass in the name of a Bulgarian, Ružica Josifov, together with their son Tuvi and her sisters Ester and Sara came to Pirot, too.

The Bulgarian authorities considered the annexed regions as "liberated" and a part of the Bulgarian Empire headed by Emperor Boris III. The official language was Bulgarian, school lessons were held in Bulgarian, the administration and all state offices used only the Bulgarian language. The people of Pirot were immediately proclaimed as subjects of the Bulgarian State and Serbs who would not accept such terms were expelled into the Nedić Serbia. Only the Jews in Pirot remained without any citizenship. They were treated as foreigners, and Jews, whose trade shops and craftsman stores were all closed up and who were thus practically left without any income, still had to pay the new authorities monthly contributions, very large sums in money or goods. Yet their lives were still not in mortal danger.

Isak Tuvi Jusefović, lower row, second from left

Besides all the obligations and degradation that befell them, Jews were faced with further taxes and duties. In May 1942 "work divisions" were formed. "Trudovci" as they called the workers, Pirot Jews, were sent to various parts of Bulgaria, mostly to build roads. Near the town of Belov in Bulgaria there was a stone quarry where some thirty Jews from Pirot were sent to forced labour, among them the Master of Pharmacy Isak Jusefović. There were many Jewish intellectuals in the work force sent to Belov Pazardžijski, completely unaccustomed to working in a quarry. Among those

sent there was Judge Izrael Levi, engineer Leon Samual, agronomist Fetko, student of medical studies Nisim and others. Isak was in luck. There arose a need for a pharmacist in the town of Svištov in the north of Bulgaria beside the Danube. Isak was "mobilized" as a civilian, which meant a somewhat better position than a person with no citizen rights at all.

Nazi Germany had from the start, even before World War II, carried out racist politics. The ones that most bothered the pure Arian nation were the Jews. When the decision was brought known as "The final solution to the Jewish question", the camps became death factories and each day thousands of Jewish lives were extinguished inside them.

Although Jews in Bulgaria were registered with the obligation to wear the "yellow button", they were still relatively protected. The Nazi authorities had at one moment asked Emperor Boris to unconditionally deliver all Bulgarian Jews. Of course, that meant that the Jewish population would be killed and Emperor Boris, in his opinion, came up with the only acceptable solution. He sacrificed the Jews from the occupied territories of Macedonia, Thrace, and Pirot, together with parts of South Serbia.

All the Jews of Pirot, even those who just happened to be there on that fateful day, were arrested during the night between the 12th and the 13th of March 1943 and taken to a provisionary camp, a better term would be prison, in the Gymnasium Sokolana which up to then had served the town for educational, cultural and sports events.

Not all Jews were arrested, but before we continue the story, let us look back a little. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked from the east by Bulgaria. The Germans were the first to enter Pirot on 18 April 1941, and according to the Vienna agreement Klodius, signed between Germany and Bulgaria, they had handed the town over to the Bulgarian occupier.

When at the beginning of July 1941 the uprising in Serbia began, the people from Pirot and the region of Upper Ponišavlje were exposed to brutal Bulgarian terror. As the oppression grew in force, so the resistance to the Bulgarian occupier grew constantly in strength. As from August 1941, from what began as a spontaneous reaction, the resistance took on an organized form so that at the beginning of March 1942, a Youth Active of the Resistance Movement was established, consisting mostly of secondary school pupils, and one of them was Radovan Nikolić, better known as Raka Runja.

In the Sokolana 178 Pirot Jews were held captive and that number also included others who had at that moment happened to be passing through the town visiting someone or doing business. Rašela Jusefović and her four-year-old son Tuvi were among those imprisoned.

While the occupiers looted the houses of the arrested Jews, the members of the Resistance Youth looked for ways to help the Jews held in the Sokolana.

Today, when there are no more living witnesses of these events, we can only refer to the stories that have remained to this day in the memory of the oldest Pirot

Radovan Nikolić,
the last photo in his uniform

citizens. According to one version which seems probable, since only youth can do the impossible, Radovan Nikolić had put on a gendarme uniform, entered the Sokolana and managed to free Rašela and Tuvi. He was adamant that Rašela's husband, the pharmacist Isak Jusefović, was mobilized as a civilian, which was in fact the truth, and that he was staying in Svištov in Bulgaria; up to then some Jewish families had been released from the Sokolana on the same grounds.

Rašela and Tuvi were freed and Radovan saw to it that they left for Bulgaria at once where they met up with Isak. The Jusefović family stayed in Svištov right up to the end of the war.

When the remaining Jews from the Sokolana were, by way of Bulgaria, deported to the death camp in Treblinka on 19 March1943, there were only 27 Jews still left in Pirot.

We state here that among the deported were Rašela's mother Džoja, her father Ašer and her brother Nissim. When the war began, Rašela's brother Marko was living in Skopje. Jews from Macedonia and Kosovo sought refuge in Albania. Guides who knew how to cross the border illegaly and reach Albania demanded gold pieces for that service. Thus Marko started off with his gold, but his guide robbed and murdered him on the way.

As already mentioned, the numerous family of Isak Jusefović also perished in the Holocaust.

Radovan Nikolić, alias Raka Runja, with other members of the Youth Organization from Pirot was sent to a Partisan unit in 1944, and in the final push for the liberation of Yugoslavia his unit reached the outskirts of Trieste. Radovan had two sons and his son Jovan helped us to obtain relevant data about the activities of his father in the Resistance Movement.

Without the book of Ženi Lebl "Jews of Pirot" we would have been left without much of the relevant information that we have used in this story. Thank you, Ženi Lebl!

Dr. Tuvi Tili Jusefović, a neurosurgeon, has been living in Israel since 1966 and is married to Ester, nee Asaja; they have three children and six grandchildren. Only recently he has, owing to his exemplary determindness, managed to find out who had saved him and his mother from deportation by taking them out of the Sokolana, and that it was Radovan Nikolić, a member of the Resistance Movement.

THE STORY OF EDITA AND RADE

At the time we spoke to Edita Boskovic she was 97 years old. The phone frequently rang in her apartment and she spoke in English, Serbian and Hebrew. At first I thought that I might have written down her date of birth wrongly, I could not believe that she was that old. She only laughed at my remark. I was under the impression that I was speaking to someone who had just gone through the horrors of the Holocaust and remembers each detail as if it had happened the day before.

Edita Boskovic was born in 1917 in Marien Bad, Czechoslovakia. Her father Rudolf Gusman was born in Deronja, Slavonia, and her mother Toni, nee Angel, in Berlin. Rudolf was a military man in the Austro-Hungarian army and when Edita was born he was serving in Marien Bad. When the time came for her mother to give birth, Toni wanted to be beside her husband and thus Edita was born in Czechoslovakia.

When in 1933 Hitler came to power, Rudolf immediately knew that there was no future for Jews in Germany. At that time they were already living in Berlin and Edita, due to her Jewish origin could, not finish her schooling. As Rudolf was born in Deronja, he managed to obtain a Yugoslavian passport and the family moved to Belgrade.

Edita was 19 years old when she married Franja Boskovic, a Jew who was by origin from Czechoslovakia, in 1936. Franja had two brothers: a journalist Sigmund, whom they called Žiga, and Stevan, a student of agronomy in Belgrade, who was a member of the Communist Youth and had a wide circle of friends. Already by the end of 1941 Stevan played a major role in the saving of his sister-in-law Edita and her son Tomi, born in 1937.

Žiga, being a Jew, had been fired from his job even before the war, but as he was well-respected for his work, he received a large sum of severance pay. Žiga used the money from the payment to rebuild a small farmstead for the production of cheese in Mali Požarevac.

But let us get back to the beginning of World War II in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. When in the spring, on 6 April 1941 the bombing of Belgrade began, Franja and his family temporarily sought shelter on Žiga's farmstead in Mali Požarevac. Žiga's family was also there: his wife Eugenija, daughter Vera and his mother, the mother of the Boskovic brothers. The youngest brother, Stevan, was also with them. In fact, they had all left Belgrade together and walking all the way, around some 40 kilometres, reached Mali Požarevac. They returned to Belgrade in October and Franja was immediately sent to forced labour. Soon he was sent to the camp known as Topovske šupe from where he was taken together with other Jewish prisoners to Jabuka and there they were all shot by firing squad. In one action undertaken by the Ljotić men and the Nazis in Mali Požarevac, Žiga was arrested, escorted to Topovske šupe and then shot dead. On 8 December 1941, the same day that the remaining Jews in Belgrade were being taken to camp Sajmište, at the very last moment Eugenija and Vera left Belgrade and went

to Niš.

As we have already said, Stevan had a lot of friends and when, at the beginning of December 1941, it became clear what fate awaited the Jews of Belgrade - internment in the camp at Staro Sajmište - Stevan saw to it that Edita and her son Tomi left Belgrade a few days earlier and found accommodation in Vrnjačka Banja.

Žiga the journalist

To live in Vrnjačka Banja one needed a lot of money to get by and Edita's husband, while he was alive, was paid a clerks' salary from which little could be put aside. Soon they ran out of money for life in exile.

Beside this, it was a fact that in Vrnjačka Banja everybody was spying on everybody else and many were curious who Edita was and how she had come to live in the spa. Since many soldiers had been taken prisoner after the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Edita said that her husband too, had been taken to Germany. Still, Edita and her son could not stay in Vrnjačka Banja any longer.

Rade Mihičinović, Stevan's friend, whom they had always considered a member of the family, found accommodation for Edita and Tomi with an aunt of his friend in Petrovac on Mlava. Aunt Bela and her husband Uncle Pera received Edita and Tomi as if they were their closest relatives. Pera worked as a semi-skilled dentist and Bela was a highly respected woman in Petrovac and had many contacts throughout the town. Pera was a very diligent man, they had some livestock too, and Edita soon began to help with the housework. And not only the housework, she was also a dentist's assistant and saw to everything else that needed to be done in the large house they lived in.

Bela had to register Edita's stay at the Municipality office and said that Edita was the daughter of her relatives in Slovenia who had had to flee to Serbia along with her son. Edita spoke with a strange accent to Serbian ears, so that Bela's story fit in well with this fact and was credible. Edita became Radmila Pavlović, born in Brežice, Slovenia. Edita felt safe in Bela and Pera's house.

In the meantime, Stevan's friends had managed to transfer Edita's mother-in-law to Homolje, a place not far from Petrovac on Mlava. Her mother-in-law expressed a desire to see her grandson and invited them to come and visit. Edita asked Tomi whether he would like to stay with his grandmother for a while, which was granny's wish too, and Tomi agreed.

Not much time passed when Edita got extremely unsettling news. A peasant from Homolje came to see her and told her that Tomi was ill. "If you want to see him still alive, you have to come with me this instant," the peasant said. In a cart pulled by

oxen, since no other transport existed, Edita set off on the journey at once. Bela accompanied her. They found Tomi on his deathbed; he was sick with dysentery. The two women, mother and Bela, were not ready to give up on the situation at hand. There was no medicine and they dared not seek a doctor. They started to nurse Tomi with traditional medicine and thus the fight for Tomi's life began. They fed him with rice water and various herbal teas and Tomi slowly began to recover.

In Homolje various armies, Chetniks and Germans, roamed the roads in search of enemies: Communists, Partisans and Jews. Rade Mihičinović frequently visited Edita to ask how Tomi was doing. There was danger from all sides and Rade suggested a solution to Edita: "In order to have a little peace, marry me," Rade said, since as a Serb he was in a position somewhat better than they were in at that time.

Edita agreed, but the problem was that she already had an identity card saying that she was married in Slovenia. Rade obtained various kinds of ink and finally managed to write "not" in front of married. Single woman Edita could now get married again. Rade knew a priest in Požarevac and on 30 August 1942 they were married in an Orthodox church.

Edita Boskovic

However, the story does not end here. It was necessary to obtain a new identity card, and Rade was already working in Belgrade with refugee children from Bosnia at that time. Edita moved to Belgrade with her son where they lived in a rented room. As a couple living together, Edita and Rade had to appeal to the Administration of the City of Belgrade to obtain new identity papers for Edita. "We had to submit a marriage certificate," Edita recounted, "and my old identity card which Rade had previously 'doctored'. It was the worst day of my life. When we started off for the City Administration building, Rade told me to take a blanket with me! I liked him making jokes, but the mere thought that I might end up in prison, I cannot forget to this day. I thought of Tomi, my son, and what would happen to him. Even when I got the identity card, I was still unable to shake off the fear I had lived through."

Rade obtained another transfer, from Belgrade to Ribarska Banja near Aleksinac. They moved into a big, empty building where they were given a room to live in. In reality they had moved to Ribarska banja at Rade's request, since there was always a possibility looming in the air that someone might recognize Edita in the streets of Belgrade, someone who knew she was a Jewess.

In Ribarska Banja it was relatively peaceful. They were occasionally visited by Chetnik and German patrols, but Edita's unusual accent confirmed her "Slovenian"

origin. In 1943 the home in which they had been staying was shut down. Rade, Edita and her son moved to Negotin.

Edita never found out when Rade had made contact with the Resistance Movement. She remembered how one evening Rade changed into peasant's clothes and did not return home the whole night. She was frightened to death wondering what could have happened to him. On another occasion, while Edita was sleeping, he pulled out a floor plank from under the stove. Half asleep, Edita asked what he was doing. "Don't worry," Rade replied. "How can I not worry?" Edita said. "What are those papers, guns…? I can see for myself that it isn't a canon, but what's all that for?" Rade calmly returned the plank never uttering a word. "I'll take my child and simply give myself up," Edita said in desperation. "I can't go on like this, if we are to die, then we'll go together!" Rade saw the panic in her eyes. "That's not the way such things are done," Rade said. "First they would separate you, then you'd be a whore in some whorehouse, and you would probably never see Tomi again."

Edita understood the message behind his words. She changed, as the saying goes, overnight. When a Nazi was caught, as she spoke excellent German, she assisted the translator to get as much valuable information from him. She too, began to cooperate with the Resistance Movement and at that time she was not even aware of it.

When, without any comment, she went to the doctor at Rade's request to ask for a recommendation to the hospital in Zaječar, she had no idea why she was doing it. They arrived in Zaječar with valid papers. In front of the hospital there was an ox-cart and beside it stood a man who kept whistling a melody the whole time. It was the password: he had been waiting for them to come.

It was nightfall when they settled into the cart pulled by oxen. They travelled for a long time and when they reached a meadow, all of a sudden the Partisans appeared; they had been waiting for Rade.

"You'll be taken to Niška Kamenica with your son," Rade said. "Wait for me there till I come back, victory is at hand."

In Kamenica there were other women who had had to leave their homes. They were in a dangerous position, being left all on their own with their children, and their husbands were not with the Chetniks, so where else could they be, but with the Partisans. That meant they were exposed to various horrifying situations. Time passed, but there was no news from Rade, nor was there anything from the other husbands.

Two women and Edita along with her son decided to walk to Soko Banja, some 30 kilometres away from Niška Kamenica, firmly believing that they would be better off there. Since they did not dare to travel by road, along which the Nazis and the Chetniks cruised, they started off for the hillsides, meadows and through woods. They had agreed to walk five kilometres each day, which meant that it would take them around six days to reach Soko Banja, where each of them would go their own way. They hoped that somewhere along the road they would meet up with Partisans and maybe find out where their husbands were.

It was warm, that September of 1944, and after a couple of days the small group of women and the child came up to a stream. They could finally refresh themselves and wash their feet. The woman closest to the steep slope ran toward the stream, slipped on a wet stone and fell. She began to wail since she could not stand on her foot. In distress, her friends lifted her with difficulty and dragged her to a clearing not knowing whether she had broken her foot or just twisted it badly. They kept turning round trying to see if there was a house nearby, however, there was no one there but themselves; the painful whimpering of the injured woman was ceaseless. Her friends did not know what to do, but they were resolute not to leave her on her own.

Soon they were harassed by hunger. They had no food: all the food they had brought along had been eaten. Tomi found some mushrooms, but nobody dared to eat them since they could not tell whether they were poisonous or palatable.

One of the women found the courage to start along the stream, convinced that she would come up to a house, however, she soon returned finding nothing at all. The women were by then desperate and Edita told her son to walk around a little and shout: "Help! Help!" Tomi soon returned and said that he had heard a bell from somewhere. It was a cow's bell, but the women still heard nothing at all. One of them went off to one side and Edita to the other. All at once an ox-cart appeared. A man and his son were inside it. The women explained the situation they were in to the newcomers and asked for help. The man asked where they were headed, but they were hesitant. Only when he raised his voice did they say that they were heading for Soko Banja.

"With feet like that?" Their feet were covered with sores and their shoes were of no use any longer. "With feet like that you won't get far," the man repeated and took the exhausted women to his house. The man and his son had been heading in the opposite direction, but he could not leave them like that. He put off his trip for the next day, and his wife gave them some corn bread to eat and some fat to spread on their wounded feet. They threw away their shoes and bandaged their feet in jute cloth, cut out of an old sack.

"Tomi had contracted malaria, he was more ill than healthy, but we had to move on," Edita remembered. "We left the injured woman in the house and the host promised that he would take her to the nearest doctor."

The next morning the host took the two women and the child to the nearest road. They continued on foot to Soko Banja, and on the way met a Partisan unit. There was a doctor in the unit who gave Tomi some medicine. They also got some food to eat and then continued on their way.

When they reached Soko Banja, it was already liberated by the Partisans. "Comrade this, and comrade that," there were no more madams and young ladies, Edita remembered with a smile on her face. They got a nice room and coupons for food. They were allowed to rest for a time and then it was off to work. Edita was given the task to open and sew buttonholes on the new uniforms. She was close to Tomi, who was placed in a small kindergarten with other children. He knew no one there; he was

sick and cried a lot, so that his mother had to be close to him.

Together with Tomi, Edita welcomed the arrival of the Russians. It was a happy moment since it meant that the war was really nearing its end. By then they had recovered a little, but Edita still had no news from Rade, nor did he have any about her and the child.

Edita returned to Negotin, but there was no news from her husband waiting for her there either. Then she decided to go to Belgrade. She had a flat there and she had no worries about finding a job. However, some other people were already in the house. A Partisan officer with a wife, who had tuberculosis, was in their flat. They gave her permission to move into the kitchen with Tomi.

In Belgrade Edita finally found out that Rade had joined the Partisan fighting units. In their first battle Rade had been shot, the bullet was lodged in his head. He had been sent to Bari, Italy, and there he had died. Overcome by pain at her loss, by the fact that she was once again left alone with her son, Edita still did not give up, she persevered. From the new authorities, as a widow of a fallen fighter, she received an allowance on which they could live modestly.

Edita had relatives in Argentina and in England. She managed to send word to them that she was alive and that she and her son had survived all the horrors of war. They helped her as much as was possible at that moment.

Thus came the year 1948 when Edita emigrated to Israel with her son. They sailed on the boat Kefalos. “Near the shores of Greece, a storm enveloped us,” Edita recounted. “It was frightening, really frightening! We thought we would never reach land.”

Edita and her son were met in Haifa by her sister-in-law Šošana, the sister of her first husband, and her husband Šimon. They were both Zionists who had emigrated to Israel back in 1935. They placed Tomi temporarily in the Merhav kibbutz and Edita got a job in the Rambam hospital. Unfortunately, Edita very soon fell ill and had to stop working. She received compensation money from Germany and then turned her attention to her son. She never married again.

THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE MEDAL

FROM KIKINDA TO SAJMIŠTE CAMP AND BACK

This story has been written down thanks to the statements of the saved protagonists and the descendants of the Righteous Among the Nations, Vojislav Knežević. Out of the 512 Jews who were living in Kikinda before World War II, only 17 survived the Holocaust. This number includes the six Jews who were saved by Vojislav Knežević, a man posthumously recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations in the year 2012.

For centuries a mixed marriage has been looked upon with disapproval by those moralists who are deeply concerned about guarding national interests, defending the nation and its identity from all possible threats. It is not rare that spouses in mixed marriages have been called traitors to their kind and love came only secondly into the picture. The state of things is no better even in these days, only it is less commented on in public. This is a story of two mixed marriages that prove how love and humanity can prevail over prejudice even in the most difficult of circumstances and more importantly, how they can save lives.

Sabit Nuhanović was of the Muslim faith and Margit Vajda was a Jewess. Four children were born in this happy marriage: their daughters Jelisaveta, Ida and Jolanda and their son Kalman. Another married couple by the name of Knežević lived in Kikinda before World War II as well, namely Vojislav, a Serb, and Ana, a Jewess, sister to Margit, and together with them, the mother of the two women, Aranka.

Kemal, Jelisaveta, Ida and Jolanda Nuhanović

Ana nee Vajda, Ivan, Stojan and Vojislav Knežević

When in the April war of 1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated in a very short time, most of the Volksdeutschers had waited for this moment and were already prepared for the coming "liberation". It began with looting on a grand scale, first and foremost by seizing Jewish properties, and was coupled with the persecution of the Jews, Serbs, and especially the Communists.

In keeping with the Nurnberg laws on "racial purity" from 1935, the police in Kikinda received a direct order from Franz Reith by telegraph in August 1941 stating

that all Jews must be imprisoned, during which action utmost measures were to be employed to ensure that they did not hide their money or valuables, and that all Jewesses married to men of other confessions must be imprisoned as well.

Thus the Nazis arrived at the house of Sabit Nuhanović and took away his wife Margit with them. They returned sometime later to take the children away as well. Sabit was desolate; he begged the Nazis to take him too, but was prevented from joining his family by the use of brutal force.

The same night, Ana, the wife of Vojislav Knežević, and her mother Aranka were apprehended by the police.

This occurred during the night between the 14th and 15th of August 1941, when the Jews of Kikinda were locked up in the Synagogue and subsequently, within these cramped premises, the cruel beatings began. Every time the SS soldiers suspected that the prisoners were hiding money or other valuables, shrieks and pleas for help from the innocent people permeated the night air. Dr. Teodor Kovač wrote down that even the clothes were taken from their backs.

Franz Reith, the head of the Government Department for the region of Banat, was shot by a firing squad in 1947, but that was no longer of any help to the Jews in Kikinda and other places in Banat, nor could it prevent them from being transported to an abandoned mill in Stari Bečej and from there onward to Belgrade, sailing in dilapidated barges down the Tisa and Danube rivers. The unbearable heat, hunger and thirst in the overcrowded barges racked the exhausted future camp prisoners, who were met in Belgrade by the activists of the Jewish Community of Belgrade. The adult men were, for the most part, deported to the camp Topovske šupe from where they were driven, led on by false information that they were being transported to Germany to work there, to the extermination points in Jabuka and Jajince and shot by firing squad. The women and children were temporarily settled with families who provided them with food and lodgings.

This temporary freedom of the women and children did not last long. At the beginning of December 1941 the camp at Sajmište was opened and most of the remaining Jews in Belgrade, the women, the children and the old were imprisoned there along with the Jews from Banat.

Sabit Nuhanović and Vojislav Knežević spared no effort on their part to obtain the release of their families from the Sajmište camp. Sabit, who in Kikinda was known as a Communist sympathizer, could not appear in public very much which left no alternative to the desperate Vojislav but to finally plead with the Commandant of the town of Kikinda to give him consent to apply to the Gestapo in Belgrade directly in order to beg for his wife's release from the camp.

Vojislav Knežević, wartime photo

Jelisaveta Nuhanović, married Badrljica, wrote down

the following words about Vojislav Knežević: Born on 26 January 1912 in Han Kol, Municipality of Banja Luka. During World War I Vojislav and his brother and sister lost both of their parents. When the war came to an end, as war orphans they were relocated to Banat. Vojislav learned the craft of shoemaking and obtained a job with a shoemaker in Kikinda. There he met Ana, a shoe modeler, and they got married in 1938. Jelisaveta's aunt Ana and her mother were both Jewesses…

Finally, Vojislav Knežević succeeded in getting an ausweiss and set off for Belgrade. He obtained a permit to take his wife out of the camp from the Chief Commander of the Gestapo. That same day he made his way to the camp and managed to find his wife, together with Margita and her four children, as well as his mother-in-law, Grandmother Aranka. Only Ana's name was written on the permit that he had in his hand, but nevertheless all of them together headed towards the exit. The guard at the gate stopped them and ordered them to return.

Despite the danger he had exposed himself to, Vojislav decided to spend the night in the camp and wait for a more favourable opportunity. "If I have to perish, well, let it be so," Vojislav said to himself.

The next day a commotion arose in front of the camp gates. "Let's go", Vojislav said, but Grandmother Aranka, whose health had hitherto been damaged, had no strength left in her to meet any further exertion. "Just you go ahead, you must try! I'll find some other way".

Her daughters and grandchildren were perplexed by the situation and did not know what to do. Still, there was no time to wait around and, shaking with sobs, they started off towards the gateway. Grandmother Aranka stayed behind in the camp. Once they reached the gate, Vojislav stepped back and let the children and women pass in front of him and only then walked up to the guard with the papers in his hand. The guard threw a quick glance at the paper, saw the seal and signature of the Chief Commander of the Gestapo and merely waved his hand for them to pass. Vojislav picked up Kalman, the smallest of the children, in his arms and they quickly walked away from the camp: they were free.

Spurred on by fear and panic they hurried to get back to Kikinda as soon as possible. From Belgrade by way of Pančevo and Bečej, travelling by boat and by train, they reached Kikinda. Living in constant dread of being exposed, in what one might say, a state of house arrest, in illegality, they managed to survive and see liberation day on 6 October 1944. Throughout the duration of the war Vojislav provided the food, took care of them all and thanks to his efforts they survived the horrors of the Holocaust.

Grandmother Aranka was shot by firing squad in 1942.

Vida Ašerović, from a respected Belgrade Jewish family, had without the consent of her parents, married a non-Jew, Gvozden Jovašević, prior to World War II. Apart from Vida's mother, the entire Ašerović family cut all ties with Vida.

Vida was pregnant, but the marriage was unstable. Lack of money had made Gvozden go and ask his father-in-law for a dowry, but only after Vida and he were already married. Whether it was a case of a parent's principles or just a stereotype reaction of a miser Jew, it would very soon become unimportant. Had his father-in-law known the fate that would befall the Jews of Belgrade, including himself and his family too, maybe he would have reacted differently. As it was, he flatly refused Gvozden's request.

It is not for nothing that people say: "Where poverty enters, love flies out the door." Arguments soon began within the small family and Vida judged that the situation could not be borne for long, so she packed her things and went back to her family home. Her father was still offended, but her mother, like any mother, embraced the child in need. Vida gave birth to her daughter Dragana.

Gvozden was a Communist and around that time the Civil War in Spain began. At the end of 1937, Gvozden with his comrade Communists from Yugoslavia went to Spain. The Fascists won and Gvozden returned from the Civil War in 1939, reconciled with the fact that he no longer had a family.

Vida, who for quite a while had no news from her husband, but as yet was not legally separated and her husband had not filed for a divorce either, met a Slovenian, a contractor in Belgrade, with a failed marriage behind him just like her. At least that was how he represented his situation to Vida. They rented a flat, he earned good money and in a compatible relationship, their son Svetozar was born out of wedlock in 1940. Sveta, a pet name they used, reconciled his mother with his grandmother and grandfather.

The first problem in the family arose when they had to register the birth of the child. Svetozar took the surname of Vida's first husband, Jovašević. Vida did not insist that Sveta's father marry her, but when she noticed that he had begun to drink, she surmised that there must be a serious reason for it. In fact, there is no reason that should make anyone drink, but when it does

Sveta in Čačak 1942

happen, such as in this case, Vida, who although naïve, was not lacking in intelligence, just had to find out what the matter was. This is how she learned that her second husband, like herself, was not officially divorced and that his first wife and their daughter were living in Belgrade.

When one day an unknown woman with a child appeared at her front door, Vida knew that her second marriage had no future either. Again she returned to her parents' home, only this time with two children.

It was no secret to the Jews in Belgrade what was happening in Europe. The Nazi ideology of a New World Order did not envisage a place for Jews. One of the roads to Palestine, where the persecuted Jews saw their salvation, led through the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, it would soon become obvious that for many Jews from occupied Europe, Serbia would be the end of the road.

In what appeared to be a hopeless situation, on 25 March1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite Pact with the Axis powers that were in the process of changing the existing world map. The people would not accept the position of slaves which had been intended for them in the New World Order and upon demonstrations held two days later, the government fell and the agreement was rejected. Revenge came only nine days later. Yugoslavia was attacked by a disproportionately mightier military power and soon capitulated. By the distribution of the spoils of war, Serbia was reduced in territory and was practically under German protectorate. Heading the government were collaborators who fulfilled all requests put to them by the occupier. The status of Jews in the carved-up Yugoslavia was no different from that of their persecuted fellowmen in Europe.

However, the occupier had not counted on meeting with any resistance, but the spark of defiance soon turned into an uprising of the majority of the people. Although tens of thousands of soldiers and officers had been sent to German camps and imprisoned as POWs, at first a spontaneous, followed by an organized resistance force against the occupier and collaborators sprang up. Retribution measures by the occupier were first carried out on Belgrade Jews. As ever when the truth was pushed aside and hidden, Jews were to be blamed for everything including the fact that the people had rejected occupation. Although in Mein Kampf, Hitler had explicitly said what would happen to Jews once he came into power, the majority of Jews found themselves in a position in which they had no influence on their destiny any longer. The persecution of Jews began; they were sent to daily forced labour, imprisoned and killed. In just a few months the majority of the Jewish families in Belgrade were left without their male members. For the rest of them, the children, women and the old, a camp had been prepared at Sajmište, on the other bank of the river Sava. From there they were driven by "dušegupka", a gas-chamber truck, straight to their death.

At the beginning of December 1941, all the Jews of Belgrade received a summons to report to the Commission for Jews in Džordža Vašingtona Street from where they would be transported to the camp opened at Sajmište.

At that moment, residing in the home of the Ašerović family on Crveni Krst were mother Rahela, Vida with her two children, Isak's family, his wife and three children, - Isak had already joined the Partisans - and Matilda, who was pregnant. Father Ašer was in the Jewish hospital and Rahela decided that they would go nowhere. They were staying at home.

Many restrictions had been proscribed for the Jews, among other that they could only buy the food they needed after all the others had finished their shopping and in the general deficiency of goods, almost nothing was left for them. The neighbours and friends, Serbs, helped the Ašerović family, but there was less and less food to be had.

That morning Vida decided to go shopping earlier while there was still something to buy. She took off the yellow band which all adult Jews were obliged to wear, so that no one would make the mistake of considering them as human beings, and with two of the children, counting on the compassion of the people who might let them skip the queue when they saw them, started off to buy food. She bought what she could and hurried home so that she would not be recognized and reported for walking around without a yellow band.

She was already at the corner of the street when she met a neighbour, grandma Jela, who was frantically looking round and only managed to tell her to run somewhere with the children, since the gendarmes and Gestapo were already in their home, and that they were taking them all somewhere, she knew not where.

Vida had no idea which way to head with the children, but knew that Serbs were very partial to their "kumstvo" (a relationship between the best man and groom at the wedding, or a godfather at the christening - translator's comment). A "kum" was sometimes a better friend than the closest relative one had and Vida decided to seek help from Radomir Genić . Radomir Genić had christened Svetozar when he was born and kept constantly in contact with them. However, it happened that on that day Genić was in Mladenovac and Vida at last decided she would seek help from Sveta's father and his wife. It was no easy task for her to knock on their door although she had always been very correct with them, yet… That is what she finally did. Although all who helped Jews were threatened by death, Vida and the children were invited to their house. Only for the time being, since it could not be any other way.

The next day Genić returned home from his journey and Vida asked him for help. Radomir Genić had a good friend, a seal-maker, and in two days fake documents, which would enable Vida to leave Belgrade, were made for her.

One good deed deserves another and one never knows when one's kindness will be repaid. Vida remembered a young man, Milomir Manojlović, from the vicinity of Čačak who had stayed in their house for a while. Danica was a cousin of Vida's first husband, and she and Milomir were born of the same mother. Danica had asked Ašer, Vida's father to take in Milomir as a lodger when Milomir came to Belgrade to perfect his carpenter craft. Instead of paying rent, Milomir helped with the domestic chores. After a while, having admitted Milomir into their house, they all grew close to him.

Before the gendarmes arrived for the Ašerović family, Rahela divided some gold they still had in the house between them. Everyone had to sew the part they had received into the lining of their clothes; thus there were no money problems at the moment. The rest she left in a box for Ašer when he returned from the hospital so that he would not be left without means to get by.

Neither money nor gold meant anything to anybody at the camp Sajmište. Ašer never found the gold left for him by his wife. From the hospital he was taken by the gas chamber truck "dušegupka" straight to Jajinci where he was thrown into an already prepared pit together with the other Jews.

It was not much, but the amount sewn into the overcoat lining was enough for Vida to reach Čačak. Milomir had not forgotten the Ašerović family and was willing to help as much as possible. The money Vida brought with her was soon spent and Vida had to get a job. She found a job as a cook's assistant, but she also had to do everything else that her boss told her to. She worked from morning till night and had no one she could leave the children with. She simply left them on their own.

Vida's first husband was also from Čačak. Her first husband's mother heard rumours that there was a Jewess living with her children in hiding in the town. It did not take long for her to realize that it could be her former daughter-in-law with her daughter. She wondered where the other child had come from and without delay went in search of Vida. She took Dragana to stay with her immediately, but Sveta had to remain with Vida.

Milomir Mihailović

Milomir helped Vida constantly. He had found her the job and then when Sveta was left alone in the house, he went to see the child and spent as much time with him as he could. In time Vida and Milomir became very close and their relationship became much more than mere friendship. However, Milomir's parents would not hear of Vida coming to stay in their house together with her child.

Milomir had heard of the talk going round Čačak that the search for a Jewess with a child was in progress. It was evident that Vida could not continue to work and once the door-to-door check began, he quickly relocated Vida and Sveta to an attic of an abandoned house.

Each day Milomir brought food taking care not arouse any curiosity in the neighbourhood about his visits to the abandoned house; still, that was not a solution.

Milomir had read somewhere in town that they were seeking for volunteers to work in Germany and he suggested to Vida that they should apply.

Today it is easy to be wise and ask questions about the morality of the arrangement.

In those hard times a Jewess, no less, had decided to go and help Hitler in his war economy! For me, as I am only trying to acquaint you with the facts, it was an act of bravery, a way out in the struggle to just stay alive.

However, two problems arose. First, Vida's documents were forged and could not pass any serious scrutiny.

Once again Vida remembered "kum" Genić. She asked Milomir to go to Belgrade and see what could be done about them. A few days later Milomir returned carrying new personal documents. Genić had re-christened Vida: her new documents stated she was Hermina Miler, a Volksdeutscher.

The second thing, it really is unimportant in which order we choose to look at the problems, was what to do with Sveta. He could not go to Germany since only children who were above the age of 4 could accompany their parents. It was a difficult decision which Vida had to make on her own. Apart from Milomir, she had no other support and the two of them were preparing to travel to Germany.

Vida frequently saw an older woman looking after her grandchildren. "One mouth more or less to feed," reasoned Vida and was convinced that the neighbour would take Sveta in. Vida had often seen smoke rise from the chimney of the old woman's house early in the morning and she decided to leave Sveta in front of her gate. And that is what she did.

The dog, guarding the gate, began to bark. The old woman's call from the house to it to stop barking was of no consequence, so she had to go outside into the yard and see what was going on. It was an unexpected sight that met her eyes: there in front of the gate was a small bundle lying in the snow. She could not believe that it was a baby, already turning blue from the cold. Granny quickly brought the child into the house to help it to get warm, but how to feed him she did not know. She knew a lot of things, but finding milk was not easy and she did not have enough food for her own grandchildren; such were the times. The grandchildren were still asleep when she bundled up Sveta again and took him to the Municipality building.

Desanka Tomić

Sveta was not the first orphan in the community; the war was taking innocent lives, still, there was always someone, a relative, neighbour or friend who would take the children in. This was the first time they had no idea whose child it was. There was no orphanage in the municipality so they placed Sveta in the Home for the elderly. In it there was at least some food and understanding for the feeble, not much for little children though, but they took him in temporarily. Nevertheless, a

longer lasting solution had to be found.

The town drummer, who was given the task of informing the town-folk that a person was needed to take in an abandoned child, came round to the street where Desanka Desa Tomić lived with her husband.

Desa and Vukomir had no children. Vukomir was employed in the gendarme medical centre and when Desa brought the sick child home it had developed a temperature and was feverish. Seeing that Desa was not going to leave the child to an uncertain destiny, he called the doctor from the medical centre to help.

Vukomir got a shock when the doctor took the baby's diapers off in order to rub him down with alcohol and lower the temperature. The child was circumcised.

"Where did you find this Muslim child; aren't there Serbian orphans enough as it is?" Vukomir did not know what to do.

"Maybe it's Jewish," the doctor said. "There is talk around Čačak about a Jewess hiding here with her child."

"That's all we needed," Vukomir said.

"It can be Muslim or Jewish, it's mine now, and you two are not to say a word of what you have just seen," Desa's decision to take in the abandoned child was final.

In Serbia "Free of all Jews" awards were still posted for those who reported hidden surviving Jews. Many knew that Desa and Vukomir had taken in a child and the number of those, who had suspicions that it was the Jewish child everyone had, for some months, been searching for, was constantly growing. They were looking for the mother too, but by that time she was already in Germany, working.

The Ljotić people, accompanied by the Nazis, took special pleasure in searching for any remaining Jews. Desa and Vukomir realized that they had to move away as far from Čačak as they could since everyone there knew them well.

Spreading around the stroy that they were going to visit some relatives in Negotin, they ran toward Niš, to Svrljig. There both of them obtained jobs in the hospital, and just as they thought that at last they had found some peace in which they could wait for the war to end, a former

Svetozar with mother Vida

colleague on an official business visit, appeared.

"Can that be the little Jew you took from the Home for the elderly?" the former colleague asked when he saw Sveta.

Desa flew into a rage: "It's a Serbian child and I've got the documents to prove it."

Vukomir managed to calm the situation down, but by evening it was clear to him too, that they would have to leave Svrljig as soon as possible.

Desa's sister, her brother-in-law, and their children were living in the village of Stave near Krupanj. They were surprised to see Desa and Vukomir with a small child at their door. For quite a while, ever since the Tomić family had left Čačak with Sveta, they had not been in any contact. There was no choice: Desa had to tell them the truth, that she had adopted a Jewish child and she begged them to tell no one.

In the region of Radjevac, Chetniks were active at that time, but her sister and her brother-in-law guaranteed for the newcomers. Thus master Čeda rented them a house in the centre of the village. There Desa opened a small cafe and Vukomir became apprenticed to the shoemaker. They lived modestly and had enough to get by on. Dwelling in the village of Stave, they saw the end of the war.

After the war Sveta finished secondary military school and then started off in search for his biological mother. He was nineteen years old when he met her.

This story was written based on statements kept at Yad Vashem and a novelized story written by the rescued Svetozar Jovašević, published in the book "A Great Mother" by "Prosveta" in Belgrade.

Desanka Tomić was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations in the year 2014.

Mladen Perić had just matriculated when he went off to join the soldiers in World War I. When the war was over, he was ordained with the highest medal: the Albanian Commemorative Medal and the Order of the White Eagle. In the newly-founded state, which in 1929 was acknowledged as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Mladen Perić was sent from Belgrade to be the Chief of the Customs office in Koprivnica. He worked there from 1935 till 1938. While he was in Koprivnica, he got to know the cantor of the Synagogue, Leon Wolfensohn, and his family: his three daughters and a son.

The Wolfensohns - from left, upper row: son Beno with wife Clara, father Leon, the Cantor, lower row: mother Sofija nee Rosenkrantz, daughters Silva, Marta and Erna, 1930

As we mentioned, Leon was the cantor and Izrael Kon (Kohn) was the rabbi. Leon took a pro-active part in the social life of Koprivnica. He was the conductor and choir-leader of the Croatian singing society "Podravac".

Mladen Perić returned to Belgrade at the time when Nazi Germany was well under way in the realization of its plans regarding the Third Reich, which among other included the annihilation of the Jewish community in Europe.

Owing to various circumstances and fate, the young Silva Wolfensohn, born in 1915, came to Belgrade to work before the war. Mladen Perić was completely unaware that she was in Belgrade at that time.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia joined the Third Reich; however, the army upon the demonstrations held on 25 March 1941 in Belgrade overthrew the government and rejected the Tripartite Pact. The revenge of Hitler's Germany followed soon after and

upon the bombardment of the capital city and other places in Yugoslavia, the Kingdom soon capitulated, and Jews and Communists were the first to feel the brunt of the persecution by the new authorities. Of course, Silva was obliged to register with the police and wear the yellow band on her sleeve as stated in the decrees which dictated how Jews should be marked.

Silva chose not to obey the regulations. Her friend Volksdeutscher Oto, a domestic German, trader and owner of a number of mills in Vojvodina, helped Silva to avoid the destiny of Jews who were already engaged in the tasks of forced labour and many of whom, primarily men, were imprisoned in the temporary camp at Topovske šupe; from there they were subsequently taken and killed in the vicinity of Pančevo.

At the same time a camp was being prepared for children, women and the old at Sajmište, on the other bank of the Sava River in the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), where the remaining Jews of Belgrade were deported at the beginning of December.

However, not all of them. Knowing the fate that awaited the Jews still living in Belgrade and that it would be even harder to hide Silva, it was in November 1941 when Oto turned to Mladen Perić and asked him to take the endangered Jewess into his flat. Mladen was surprised when he learned that Silva was in Belgrade and at once rushed home to consult his family what to do. Although his three daughters, Vera, Mia and Ruža, were forewarned that their lives would also be threatened if word got out that they were hiding a Jewess, they immediately set out to prepare the house for Silva's arrival with no second thoughts. Silva had found a new place of refuge.

Mladen afterwards went to the police to report that a Serbian refugee from Croatia, who had arrived without any documents, was staying with him. He managed to obtain identity papers for Silva in the name of Smilja Petrović.

Silva had lost all contact with her family in Koprivnica immediately upon the occupation of Yugoslavia. She had no knowledge of the fact that her entire family had, during the night between the 23rd and 24th of July 1941, been taken to the first Ustashi camp in the ISC, "Danica", an abandoned factory for chemical products in Koprivnica. In the town where up till then total religious tolerance had reigned, one man, an Ustashi official, Martin Nemec and his band of men tortured the prisoners among who were also a number of Serbs. A few days later the surviving prisoners, beaten to an inch of their lives, were deported by cattle wagons to Zagreb and from there to Gospić, then to Kruščica, where the men were separated from the women. The men were murdered in Jasenovac and the women and children were transported to Lobograd and from there to the Auschwitz death camp. The Synagogue in Koprivnica no longer held services, the rabbi Izrael Kon had been murdered, and the building was transformed into a warehouse for the sale of confiscated Jewish property; at times when needed by the Ustashi authorities, it was a prison for hostages.

Round 250 Jews were incarcerated that fateful night. The members of the Heinrich family were among them.

The Heinrich family had, in the mid 19th century, moved from Austria to Novigrad

Podravski in the vicinity of Koprivnica. Hugo and Regina Heinrich owned a winery and were in the business of trading wine. They had three sons, Albert- a doctor, Branko, and Zlatan, who was married - his wife's name was Zlata. Prior to the war Albert had been mobilized and when the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated, together with tens of thousands of officers and soldiers, he was deported to a German camp where the prisoners were mostly French soldiers. For the entire duration of the war he kept his origin a secret. Albert, born in 1912, was the only member of the family who survived the war: the others all perished in Jasenovac and Auschwitz.

We have to state here that only 19 Jews from Koprivnca survived the pogrom, among them was Silva's sister, Erna.

Silva was aware of her looks, she was dark-skinned, and despite the documents she had in her possession, did not find it easy to impersonate a Serbian woman; whenever there was a raid, she would leave the house. Not always, but the doubtful looks of the agents who came to search the flat always warned her of the danger and kept her on her guard.

Silva Wolfensohn

Still, when in 1944 Verica Perić was married, Silva, who counted as one of the family, attended the ceremony in the Voždovac church in Belgrade

The war was over in 1945 and Silva returned to Koprivnica. The tragedy that had befallen the Jews brought the survivors closer to one another. Albert Heinrich and Silva Wolfensohn got married in Koprivnica. In 1946 their son Branko was born. Albert and Silva lived to see the birth of their grandsons Zlatan (1974) and Zoran (1986).

The Synagogue in Koprivnica

Mladen Perić and his daughters Vera, Mia and Ruža, were declared as the Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 2017, the highest award by which the State of Israel pays homage to the non-Jews who willingly endangered their own lives and were prepared to die in order to save the threatened Jews.

Prior to World War II, Bojana married Sima Judić, a Master of Pharmacy, and very soon their daughter Flora was born. Flora was nine years old when in April 1941 Nazi Germany attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

At that time, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Army could not put up any defence against the greatest military force in Europe for long, and very soon it capitulated. Germany with her allies divided the spoils of war; Yugoslavia was carved up almost along the same boundaries as in the nineties of the twentieth century, only this last time it was done without the direct influence of foreign powers.

When the Nazi troops entered Belgrade, retributions were immediately carried out towards the peaceful population. Among the first to feel the brunt of enemy hostilities were the Jews who were sent to forced labour, the clearing up of rubble left by the bombs dropped on the "open city". The dead had to be removed out of the debris since their bodies were a source of potential disease. This was a measure done to preempt health issues among the living, however, what was dubious in its undertaking was the degrading of Jews who had to do the job with their bare hands, collecting half-decomposed bodies of their fellow citizens; they also had to wear the yellow band on their sleeves to be recognized as Jews, they were forbidden to move freely around the city, they could buy food at the time when, the already rationed shops by conditions dictated by war, were empty, and at the market they could only get what was already thrown into the garbage.

Of course, first to feel these hardships were the Jews who were able to work and who could potentially resist the occupier, but there came a time later on when they could no longer return to their homes and when they were taken to the temporary camp at Topovske šupe. From there they were lured by false promises to prevent any rebellion, and taken to be shot in the vicinity of Pančevo.

Sima Judić

Sima Judić, an officer of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Army managed to evade the destiny of tens of thousands soldiers and officers who, after the capitulation, were taken to German POW camps. Sima, born in Kragujevac, where his parents lived prior to the war, would have certainly fared better if he had been taken prisoner instead of running from Belgrade and returning to his parents' house.

At that time a large Nazi raid was initiated in Kragujevac and hostages were being rounded up for retribution following the kill-

ing of German soldiers in a fight near Gornji Milanovac. The Nazis arrested Sima on 18 October and already on 20 October 1941 he was shot together with a group of Communists, numbering a total of around sixty dead. It was only one day before a greater tragedy unfolded on 21 October 1941 when the mass shooting of some 2, 778 citizens and pupils of Kragujevac, took place.

Prior to the war Bojana's mother, Rašela Milutinović, had lived with her husband in Dorćol. Unfortunately, she was soon widowed and subsequently got married again, this time to a wealthy man; already in 1918 she had moved to Francuska Street near Kalemegdan. When Rašela realized what was happening in Belgrade, she decided to turn to her old neighbours in Dorćol, the family Milutinović, with whom she was on friendly terms.

Predrag-Dragi Milutinović and his wife Ljubinka had also moved away from Dorćol before the war. They had bought a modest house on Pašino brdo (Pašino Hill) which was then the periphery of Belgrade. Their daughter Ruža, who worked as a clerk in the police before and during the war, was with them. Rašela believed that the situation would soon settle down and asked the Milutinović family to take her, her daughter Bojana and her granddaughter Flora in for a couple of weeks. The Milutinović family accepted them without any further need for words. They explained to their neighbours that the members of the Jakovljević family were their relatives from the war zone of Prokuplje and that they would remain with them as long as it was necessary.

Ruža decided that she would obtain fake documents for Rašela and Bojana, and this she did.

At the beginning of December 1941, the majority of the Jewish men capable for work had already been killed, and the rounding up of the children, women and the old began; they were taken to the camp Sajmište, on the other bank of the river Sava in the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), which was under Nazi administration. A tragic fate awaited them as well: the majority was killed in the gas chamber truck called "dušegupka" on the way to Jajinci. Their bodies were thrown into mass graves already prepared there.

However, this did not mean that the search for the remaining Jews, who had by some miracle managed to stay alive in Belgrade, was over.

On one occasion when, at the police station, Ruža overheard that a raid was in plan for her neighbourhood, she hurried home to inform her parents. She admitted to them and to Rašela and Bojana too, that the fake documents were not of the best quality and that the two of them would have to hide somewhere during the raid. There were some old things stacked in the attic and Dragi made a partition wall where it was decided that Rašela would hide. Some old sheds stood in the yard of the Milutinović family and they hastily made some improvised shelters there, one of which was for Bojana to hide in.

"Don't worry about Flora, I'll take care of her," Dragi said and took out some old documents from a drawer.

The day went on peacefully and Ruža was already thinking that the police had given up on the planned raid. In the evening they all went to bed and just as they were convinced that the danger had passed, the police knocked on their door.

Rašela rushed to the attic, and according to plan Bojana was to jump out of the open window of the room she slept in with Ruža into the garden. However, the police had already surrounded the house from all sides and no one could go out. Ruža leaped out of the bed and called Bojana to lie down in it: "Cover yourself up, Bojana!" she said quietly. She had just thrown a thick eider-down over Bojana when the agents stomped into her room.

"What are you doing in my room, colleagues?" she asked with a wide, bright smile. Ruža was a pretty young girl, wearing just her nightgown, and it did not take long for her to escort the surprised agents out of her room.

In the next room Flora watched what was going on with her eyes wide open.

"This is our daughter Mira," Dragi said and handed the birth certificate over to the agents.

Ljubinka and Dragi had had a daughter who was nearly the same age as Flora and who had died suddenly some years ago. It was sheer luck that none of the neighbours was present to hear what Dragi was saying.

Rašela with grandaughter Flora, 1941 before WW2

The threat had passed, but the raids were repeated a few times. Rašela and Bojana would hide in various places and Flora got used to her new name Mira Milutinović.

When the Allies began to bomb Belgrade in 1944, the citizens ran from the centre of the city once again. A Volksdeutscher, a woman, arrived to their neighbourhood and recognized Bojana. She began shouting and the whole street resounded with her voice: "How come there are Jews in your neighbourhood?"

The domestic German had taken shelter with one of her relatives, also a domestic German, married to a Serbian woman on Pašino brdo. It must have been his influence that made the German woman calm down, while none of the neighbours even considered reporting the Jews among them to the police. The end of the war was nearing, there had been so much tragedy already and Rašela, Bojana and Flora lived to see the end of the war in the house of the Milutinović family.

During the war Flora did not attend school. For all the neighbours who were curious about it, various reasons were made up why the child stayed at home constantly. The role of the teacher was taken up by mother and grandmother and after the war Flora finished her schooling regularly.

Along with other sources of information, this story has been written on the basis of the testimony of Flora Judić, married Sokolović, and recorded for the Spielberg Foundation.

Milutinović Predrag, Ljubinka and Ruža were recognized by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as the Righteous Among the Nations in 2017.

Prior to World War II in Zvornik, Bosnia and Herzegovina, brothers Nahman and Aron Hajon were prosperous tradesmen and restaurant owners. Notwithstanding their obvious success, Aron Hajon decided to move to Belgrade with his family in 1938, where there were, he firmly believed, new and better opportunities for work and for their children.

When Aron and his wife Sofija, nee Blam, (they had six children in wedlock of whom two had died at an early age), their two sons Isidor and Emil, and their daughter Julijana – Beba, moved to Belgrade, where their daughter Matilda was already a resident, he leased a restaurant "Good Brothers" ("Složna braća") in which mainly the members of the family worked. As we would say these days: a family enterprise. Namely, at the time people used to work and live together as families, the master of the house was well respected, or as Jews (and not only the Jews) say, "the head of the house"; however, in this story we are concerned with them. Above the restaurant Aron had rented a whole floor where his family and his wife's brother, Bernard Blam, lived.

Without any announcement of war, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked by Nazi Germany and its allies on 6 April 1941, and Belgrade, proclaimed an open city, was heavily bombarded. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia Army could not seriously stand up to such a mighty military force. In just a few days Nazi troops were already in Belgrade.

Sofija, Julijana and Aron Hajon

The people would not give up the battle easily and a Resistance Movement against the occupier was initiated. There was no excuse needed to begin the immediate brutal confrontation with Jews. The Nazi ideology was the blueprint for the humiliation and destruction of a people prior to the "Final solution of the Jewish question".

Aron's sons, Isidor and Emil ran from occupied Belgrade and reached Zvornik. They joined up with the Partisans there and in the movement of their units to Loznica were taken prisoner. Unfortunately, such things happened in 1942, they fell into the hands of murderers and were first locked up near a church, then transferred to the vicinity of Šabac, where their throats were slit.

It was only later that Aron found out what had happened to his sons, but by witnessing what was going on in Belgrade, he realized that this was only the beginning of the persecution of Jews. From the day the Nazis entered Belgrade he could no longer work, his family was forbidden to walk along the streets without the yellow mark. A quick solution had to be found for the grave situation they were in.

Money was no problem for Aron. He knew how to earn money and when times

were hard, everything that he had put aside was a means of continuing their lives. The heavy bombardment of Belgrade forced Aron to move to Višnjica, a village beside Belgrade, with his family.

Višnjica is situated by the Danube River. The houses in the village are scattered round the hillside and on the other side of the hill was marshland, an ideal place for running and hiding if the need arose.

Nevertheless, the Hajon family could not stay long there, either. The decrees of the occupier which immediately came into force once proclaimed and referred to the Jews, and that they were Jews Aron could not disguise, made him look for another place to stay. Aron decided to return to Kozluk in Bosnia, the place where he was born in 1884.

On the way to Kozluk, they stopped for some time in Bjeljina with the Semo family; after that they reached Kozluk, where a Muslim family took them in.

The stay there was not long either, but they subsequently found refuge with Aron's brother Nahman in Zvornik.

In Bosnia the Ustashi diligently carried out all Nazi plans for the total annihilation of the Jewish people, but a great number of Serbs had perished by the Ustashi cut-throat knives as well. It was soon crystal clear that the Hajon family had to flee from Zvornik and Aron decided they should return to Serbia. The family stayed in Loznica for some time and once it was no longer safe, at the beginning of December 1941, they once again returned to Belgrade. They could not go back to the previously rented flat and they found accommodation at Lela Koen's place.

Since the entering of German troops into Belgrade, from April to December 1941, a large number of Jews, men capable for work, were provisionally imprisoned in the temporary camp at Topovske šupe. Namely, from Topovske šupe the Nazis systematically took Jews by trucks to forced labour while at the same time a large number of them were driven to Jabuka, where they were shot.

For the children, women, and the old, another scenario had been prepared. The Semlin Judenlager, a camp for Jews on the other bank of the river Sava in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, but still under the administration of the Germans, was opened for them. Mass deportations of Jews from Belgrade and the surrounding territory began on 8 December and were completed on the 12th or 13th of December 1941. However, the dates were not that important since the Nazis, aided by domestic collaborators, kept on deporting Jews even from the most distant places in Serbia. By May the following year, all inmates who had not starved to death, or died of cold and illness were murdered in the gas chamber truck called "dušegupka".

On their arrival in Belgrade, Aron Hajon saw what was happening to Jews and not waiting to see what destiny was in store for those who were still alive, he tried to find a way to save his family and himself.

Some years earlier, in 1934, Bogoljub, a childhood friend of Aron's daughter Matilda, arrived in Belgrade. Bogoljub was one of the six children of Pera and Marica

Stevanović, and once he was sixteen years old, he left the family nest in search of a living.

Bogoljub Stevanović, by then a grown-up young man, twenty-three years of age, was living in Karadjordjeva Street. Bogoljub did not ask Uncle Aron how he had found him; they sat down like old friends to have a talk. He supposed that Matilda, his friend who had come to Belgrade back in 1935, must have mentioned to her father that he might be in a position to help them.

Bogoljub Stevanović

At that time Serbs were fleeing from the newly-instated Independent State of Croatia and the greater part of Bosnia and Herzegovina that had fallen under its jurisdiction, and the Ustashi knives. The greatest number of Serbs sought salvation in Serbia. They had left their homesteads at the last moment, most often not even taking their documents with them.

Aron saw a way out in the possibility of representing himself and his family as refugee Serbs from Bosnia. In order to obtain new personal documents, which would prove that they were refugee Serbs, he needed two witnesses and that was why he had sought Bogoljub out at his flat.

Bogoljub did not think twice: "And which name have you chosen for yourself?" he asked, dispelling any doubts Aron might have had about his willingness to be of help.

"Aca Marković, from the village of Pilica, near Zvornik."

"Well, it's not that very close to Zvornik, some 30 kilometres away," Bogoljub could not suppress a smile.

"I know, I chose that village on purpose. Not too near, but far enough from Zvornik. In these times it's hard to imagine that someone would go and check on the existence of some Aca Marković from Pilici."

Ljuba Blagojević

However, two witnesses were needed to verify the statement. Bogoljub knew one of their countrymen, Ljuba Blagojević, and he and Aron turned to him for help. Ljuba gave no second thought to the request either: he accepted immediately.

Soon they were all in the police station where Bogoljub and Ljuba were to give statements under oath that would enable Aron to obtain a new identity for himself and his family.

The police officer was somewhat suspicious: the

man who was now claiming he was a Serb, a Bosnian refugee, seemed familiar to him from before.

"Wait for me down at the café, the one on the corner. I've got something to see to first and then I'll meet you there," the police clerk said.

The café in which the 'witnesses' and Aron waited for the clerk was not luckily enough "Good Brothers" ("Složna braća"). Still, Aron kept looking round the premises trying to remember who the owner was, whether they had known each other before, since restaurant and café owners, like doctors, lawyers and other men of trade knew everyone in their line of business. The owner was not present, so no one was there who could possibly reveal Aron's true identity.

Aron kept wondering why the clerk had postponed the issuing of the documents. He had noticed the suspicious look on his face and was afraid that he might bring the Gestapo to the café.

"Don't worry, Uncle Aron," Bogoljub said with a wry smile on his face. "He probably just wants to ask for money. You know how it goes… small wages, small children at home, high prices…"

When the clerk came in, sat down at the table and took the papers out, Aron was relieved.

In his hands he held papers in the name of Aleksandar Marković, his wife Sofija was renamed Dara, and daughter Julijana got the name-Mirjana.

In a number of places on his way home Aron could read notices in which all Jews were summoned to register with the Special police for Jews in Džordža Vašingtona Street, from where they would be taken to the newly-founded camp at Sajmište. The Nedić gendarmes were unable to hand in a summons to Aron and his family personally since they did not know that they were hiding with Lela Koen; however, along the way, Aron made up his mind not to answer the summons.

The deportation of Jews to Sajmište was in full swing when Aron decided to send his wife and daughter Julijana to Niš. Their other daughter Matilda, along with her cousin Olga Blam, was already there. Olga Blam worked in the Jewish hospital in Dorćol and when she heard of the deportation of Jews to the camp Sajmište, she and Matilda Hajon left for Niš a few days before her aunt and cousin Julijana.

In order to be as inconspicuous as possible, mother and Julijana packed a backpack with the bare necessities and as refugees who have nothing to carry with them, set off for Niš by the first train. They knew no one there and no one would recognize them. Aron stayed on in Belgrade for the time being. He joined his wife and daughter in March 1942.

The older daughter Matilda was very close to her cousin Olga Blam and the two of them somehow managed to get by. They had obtained fake documents in the names of Milena and Olga Blažić, so that the two of them posing as sisters were hiding in Niš, but they had no contact with the Hajons.

Sofija and Julijana had already rented a flat in Niš when Aron arrived. The flat was in a house which they shared with the owners. They soon became friends, but the truth that they were Jews had to be kept a secret. It was a matter of life and death and nobody was to know that Jews were hiding masked by the identity of Serbian refugees.

Bogoljub Stevanović was pleased that he had managed to help his friend Uncle Aron and his family. He never asked where they would go next. Some things are best left unknown so that they could not be blurted out under torture, to which people suspected of helping Jews were generally exposed, and thus reveal where the family Hajon was in hiding.

However, somebody spread the word that two Jewesses, Matilda and Olga, were hiding in Niš. Luckily, the news, that a warrant had come from Belgrade, reached Olga and Matilda before the police arrived. They managed to escape from Niš at the last moment and reach Priština, from where they crossed over to Albania. Olga Blam got a job in the electrical plant. At that time Albania was still under Italian protectorate. The director of the power station was Ludoviko Donati and when the Germans occupied Albania after the capitulation of Italy in 1943, in order to save Olga, who the Nazis wanted to take away, offered her marriage. Olga accepted the marriage proposal and they all went to Italy. Olga Blam married Ludoviko Donati and Matilda Hajon met the man of her life, Wolus Zelman, in the camp in Italy; they got married after the war. Olga stayed in Italy and in the very happy marriage gave birth to four children, while Matilda and Wolus emigrated to Canada.

While Olga and Matilda were trying to survive in Albania, in Niš "the new Christians", Aron and Sofija and their daughter Julijana, had to learn Orthodox customs quickly. On one occasion Sofija had to bake a special cake for slava, "their" Orthodox saint's day. Sofija fumbled in crossing herself, unused to the practice, and this was noticed by their hosts. "In Bosnia we have a slightly different way of making the sign," and the hosts accepted Sofija's explanation.

Julijana had to serve the guests at the gathering and she kept washing her hands the whole time.

"Just like a Jewess," the neighbours commented, but Julijana acted as if she had not heard.

Each one of them had their own unpleasant experience, but Aron got a real shock when a man in the tram headed for Niška Banja (Niš spa) addressed him by his real name.

He turned around and saw the County Governor from Zvornik. They knew each other well, but the look of amazement on Aron's face was plain while he tried to convince the governor that he must have mistaken him for someone else. The County Governor Škavo Škavatić had the title of Chetnik Vojvoda (Commander in chief) and had a knife tucked into his belt, cartridge belts across his chest; he knew exactly who he had run in to. While Aron was hurrying off the tram at the first stop, whether it was because of a pre-war debt that he had never repaid, Škavo shouted after Aron not to

worry, not a single hair from his head would be missing. After that episode Aron and Sofija did not leave their house for quite some time. Had Škavo only mentioned to someone that he suspected, let alone knew for certain, he had met a Jew from their old town, who knows how the stay of the Hajon family in Niš would have ended.

In Niš Julijana got a job in the "Car Konstantin" printing house. The attractive girl caught the attention of her boss, Ratomir Ćirić. The love that sparked between them could not have been put before a more difficult test of fidelity. Julijana kept her Jewish descent a secret right up to the moment when Ratomir asked her to marry him. It was then she admitted the full truth, but he only smiled roguishly. As if he had known from the start that the small, freckled, red–headed girl was a Jewess. They got married in 1948.

The fear that permeated the life of the Hajon family was dispelled when the war came to an end in Niš.

Sofija, Aron and Julijana Hajon

Back at the time he had helped Uncle Aron and his family, Bogoljub Stevanović had no idea what fate awaited his family which had stayed on in Zvornik. Once the pogrom of Jews was over, the persecution of Serbs began. His father perished in Jasenovac, his three brothers lost their lives in the war and the fourth returned home, a 90% invalid. Only the invalid brother, Bogoljub's mother and sister survived the war. However, they did not live long. The marks left by the war soon took their toll. Both his mother and sister died, and the death of his invalid brother soon followed. Bogoljub was the only survivor of the entire family. He too, as well as the small number of surviving Jews, had to go on with the business of living. He got married and had two daughters.

It was only after the war that Bogoljub learned of the fate of the Hajon family. 47 family members from both Aron's and his wife Sofija's (nee Blam) side had perished. Only seven had managed to stay alive.

Bogoljub Stevanović and Ljubo Blagojević were recognized by Yad Vashem as the Righteous Among the Nations in 1998.

The family Švarcenberg lived in Daruvar (Croatia) prior to World War II. Herman and Julija had six children, three sons and three daughters, who were all born in Novi Sad. When the children finished their schooling, Herman decided to open a hotel in Daruvar together with his sons. He bought the hotel named "Sloboda". His daughter Micika stayed on in Novi Sad for a while, but she soon moved to Belgrade.

The hotel was doing good business, but when son Josef, who was the accountant, was presented with the possibility to obtain work in Belgrade, he decided to move together with his family to the big city.

Josef Švarcenberg (born 1899) was married to Ester (born 1908), called Nevenka by nearly everyone. Ester came from the family called Weis. Although by descent from Hungary, the members of the Weis family were by that time native townsfolk of Daruvar.

Two children were born in the Švarcenberg marriage: Dan (Danko), born in 1936, and Rut (Ruth), born in 1938. Already the next year, when Josef got employment with the chain trading store "Nama" (Narodni magazine) and became chief of the warehouse, the entire family moved to Belgrade. Ester, a Zionist in her beliefs since Daruvar, got connected with the female WIZO organization in Belgrade.

With his fair salary Josef was able to rent a spacious flat close to his workplace at 74, Strahinjića Bana Street. Josef's youngest sister Ruža (Rosa) was a frequent guest in their flat. While living in Novi Sad, both Ruža and Micika, a real beauty, were of the right age to get married. However, they had both fallen for the same young man. There was a great fight on the matter, the sisters quarreled and, as it often is the case, neither of them married the young man.

But when Micika moved to Belgrade, she met Milutin Nedeljković and they soon 'tied the knot'. Although she was married, she still could not forgive Ruža for 'stealing' her boyfriend.

Ester and Josef Švacenberg

Milutin Nedeljković was from the village of Bistrica near Lazarevac. Coming from

a numerous, poor family, he was the only one who had managed to obtain the highest education. Namely, after he had completed his national service, he also finished his studies at the Faculty of Law and became a lawyer. This was how he had come into contact with Josef, and upon meeting Micika, their ties became even stronger.

Rut, Ester and Dan Švarcenberg

When the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was occupied and divided among the countries of the Axis powers of the Tripartite Pact in April 1941, the persecution of Jews began forthwith. The Nazis, aided by domestic collaborators, in a short time almost totally devastated the Jewish population in Serbia. Milutin well knew what was happening and he did not wait to see how the Nazis would treat Jewesses in a mixed marriage. He immediately sent Micika and their children, son Svetislav, who was fifteen years old, and daughter Mira, who was seventeen, to Bistrica to stay with his brother Rajko. When he told Josef that he was preparing his family to leave Belgrade as soon as possible, Josef did not think twice on the matter. Soon also Josef's family found themselves in Bistrica with Rajko. Josef's sister Ruža came along with them. The space in Rajko's house was inadequate for the nine of them. Besides, the atmosphere was intolerable. Micika still held a grudge against her sister Ruža, so Rajko suggested that Josef, his family and sister Ruža should move to his brother Radisav's place, just across the fence.

Radisav had nothing against the idea of putting up the multi-membered family. In a shack very spare of comfort, one of those who had no right to be called a house even in those times, planks were laid down where the Josef family slept together, while Radisav slept on the kitchen table!

Radisav was connected to the Resistance Movement. In his modest abode in Bistrica, Partisans and Chetniks, who had joint headquarters in Lazarevac, would often drop by.

Micika, idle with nothing to do in the country, spent all her time thinking of how to get back at her sister Ruža for taking away her boyfriend. One day she sat down and wrote a letter to the Mayor of Lazarevac. She wrote in it that there was a Jewish family by the name of Švarcenberg staying with Radisav Nedeljković in Bistrica. When Micika gave her son Svetislav some money to go to Lazarevac by train, Rajko suddenly realized what was going on. Should the letter fall into the hands of the Germans or Chetniks, it was clear as day what fate awaited his brother and Josef's family. He

hurried and told Radisav what was going on. “Run Radisav, before it’s too late!”

Josef was tending to the goats at that time and was not at home. Radisav had no time to wait for the next train and Ester would not stay at home. They somehow had to stop Svetislav from handing the letter over to the Mayor. Bistrica was about nine kilometres away from Lazarevac. Radisav knew all the roads in the neighbourhood by heart and they ran taking a shortcut through the woods, but when they reached the office of the mayor, the Germans were already there. Each morning the Germans came in to look through the daily mail and take everything that was of interest to them. From the attendant in the Municipality house they heard that Svetislav had already been to see the Mayor, and tired to their bones, they just sat down on the chairs in front of his office. As the Mayor was saying ‘good-bye’ to the Germans, who were in high spirits, there was nothing more to be done, they just waited for the command to follow them. However, when the Mayor saw the Germans off, he went over to Radisav and Ester, took the letter out of his pocket and asked: “Are you looking for this?” He tore the letter up in front of their eyes and told them they could go home in peace.

When Josef and his family left Daruvar, his sister Cilika had stayed on. She was a hairdresser and, miraculously, during the entire war no one asked her of her origins.

Ester’s sister Katarina lived on a homestead in the vicinity of Daruvar. She was married to a Serb, Dušan, and they had two children, Mia and Darko. Dušan had gone and joined the Partisans and Katarina never found out that he had been killed in battle. She and her children were deported to Jasenovac.

Josef’s brothers, who had stayed behind in Daruvar, the oldest Ludvig - Lajoš as they called him in Novi Sad - and the youngest, Slavko, perished in Jasenovac as well.

In Bistrica life went on as it did in the majority of villages. Josef, who spoke Serbian poorly, was given the task of tending to the goats. “It’s best that you don’t run into the villagers too much,” Radisav said, while Ester helped Radisav in the fields.

Josef still had one more task to accomplish. The children could not go to school and Josef would not allow them to stay illiterate. Radisav himself was illiterate and Josef took upon himself to teach them all how to read and write.

Once Radisav was fully proficient in letters, in 1944 he joined the Partisans and went to the front. Josef and his family moved to Lazarevac. It was true that the war was nearing its end; with the help of the Red Army, Lazarevac was liberated. But there was also another reason for the move to this town. Namely, Ester had had the mishap to cut herself on a rusty knife. Josef’s family got a room for Ester in the hospital, already taken over by the Partisans, where she was treated for blood poisoning.

Rut and Dan Švarcenberg

Soon Belgrade was liberated too, and Josef decided to go there and see if he might find a job for himself. He could not believe that their flat in Strahinjića Bana Street was empty. He was able to return to Lazarevac, collect his family and they could all move back to Belgrade.

During Josef's stay in Belgrade, news that the Germans were returning to Lazarevac suddenly struck like lightening throughout the hospital. Ester, with her swollen foot, the children and Ruža, dashed away from the city. She was regretting that they had ever left Bistrica, when a neighbour from the village came across them and stopped them: "Where are you off to? You're heading straight for the Germans!"

It was a false alarm: the Germans had no wish to fight again in a war they had lost. They were merely keeping watch over the routes along which the German troops were retreating from the Near East and Greece; they had had enough of the war, besides the Partisans were already in power in Lazarevac.

When Josef returned with the good news, the family was ready to start off for Belgrade. There were no scheduled trains, they went sporadically, the crowds were enormous, but there was no other choice at hand. They somehow managed to squeeze into a compartment, when a peasant came in with a lamb in trail. "There's still a place in here," the peasant said, pushing his butt into the small space of the remaining seat and putting the lamb in Rut's lap. Rut was only six then and the lamb's fleece came right up to her nose. "Mother," Rut was trying to find a way to get rid of the lamb, however, there was nothing to be done. Rut was a quick thinker, "Mother, I need to pee."

Rut and Isak

What could Ester do but take Rut to the toilet, and when they opened the door there was a sight to see! In the toilet there was another peasant with a big sheep comfortably sitting in his lap. Relief came only when they reached Belgrade.

I have to recount another episode before I tell you that the entire Švarcenberg family relocated to Israel. Trucks with Partisans were traversing along the streets throughout Belgrade. Once, all of a sudden, a bulky young man jumped out from one of the trucks and began to hug and kiss Josef. It was a very familiar scene when, after the war, family members and friends, whose destiny had not been known while it was raging, suddenly came upon each other. Josef at first thought that it must be some mistake, he accepted the bulky youth's hug, obviously he had no choice but to do so, and only when he heard the lad calling him "Uncle Josef" he realized that they knew each other.

It was Laza Lotvin, the son of his relative, the only member of the family who had managed to stay alive throughout the war.

Upon the war Radisav Nedeljković also came to the liberated Belgrade. There was no end to the joy felt by all and Radisav stayed with the Švarcenberg family in their flat. When in 1948 Jews were allowed to emigrate to Israel, among the first to go was the Švarcenberg family. They reached Haifa sailing on the vessel Kefalos.

In Israel Dan got married and had two children, Rut married Ichak Nisim and they have one son, two daughters and seven grandchildren.

On 12 April 2011, Radisav Nedeljković was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.

LIST OF THE RIGHTEOUS FROM SERBIA

with the year of proclamation

Records of the Yad Vashem until 1-1-2018

Andeselec, Marija; ds. Natalija & Vera	1993
Arandjelovic, Vera	1991
Arsenijevic, Ljubivoje & Vujka & son Milje	2000
Baic, Klara	2007
Begic, Midhat & Mauricette	1991
Bencevic, Antun; sister Mira	1994
Blagojevic, Liuba	1998
Blendic, Djordje & Mitra	1992
Blendic, Jovan, son Nikola, grandson Nikolica	1999
Bogicevic, Mijajlo & Milica	2009
Bondzic, Borivoje & Grozdana	1980
Botic, Radovan	1989
Bradic, Sava & Jovana	1994
Canadi, Mariska	1995
Djonovic, Radovan & Rosa	1983
Djosevic-Adanja, Dara	1998
Djurkovic, Aleksandar	1999
Dudas, Palo & Anna (Hrubik)	1995
Glavaski, Jelena	1987
Gligorijevic, Milan	1996
Imeri-Mihaljic, Hajrija	1991
Jakovljevic, Andja	1992
Jankovic, Ratko	1990
Janosevic, Katica	1964
Jovanovic, Bogdan & Desanka; ch: Nemanja, Nada	1968
Jovanovic, Danica; ds. Olga & Mileva	1993
Jovanovic, Dusan	2006
Jovanovic, Pero	1993
Jovanovic, Stanko & Ljubinka	1967
Jovanovic, Tihomir & Milka	1992
Knezevic, Slobodan & Milenija	1980
Knezevic, Vojislav	2012
Kostic, Ljubomir & wife; ch: Dragoslav, Bosiljka	1997
Kovanovic, Divna	1999
Kozarski, Julis & Stevo; ch. Bato, Olga	1994
Kudlik, Bela & Katerina	1987
Kukovic, Olga	1994
Kvasina, Smilja & dght. Milena Markovic	2014
Lepcevic, Mileta	1978
Ljubicic, Lazar & Mila	1994
Macasovic, Anna & Istvan	1988
Mandusic, Ljubica (Gazikalovic) & dght. Jelica Rankovic	2007
Marinkovic, Dorde & Stanka	1996
Markovic-Levec, Martina	2000
Milenkovic, Ljubo	1999
Milenkovic, Svetozar & Vida	2002
Milharcic, Lujza (Vlahovic)	1985
Milutinovic, Predrag & Ljubinka & dght. Ruzica	2017
Mladenovic, Biserka & Vladimir	1999
Nedeljkovic, Radisav	2011
Nikolic, Rasa	1995
Novakovic, Krsta	2003
Obradovic, Stana	1989
Panic, Dr. Svetozar & Angelina	1993
Pascan, Nadezda	1994
Pejic, Dr. Mirko & Nevenka & son Aleksandar	1986
Peric, Mladen	2017
Petrovic, Aleksandar	2002
Petrovic, Kosa	2003
Popovic, Djordje & Marija	1999
Popovic, Predrag	2001
Prica, Spasenije	1991
Protic, Simeon & Miroslava	2009
Rasic, Veljko & Helena	2006
Stamenkovic Jelenko & Ljubica	2005
Stefanovic, Mile; sister Mileva Seka Svjetlicic	1992
Stevanovic, Bogoljub	1998
Stojadinovic, Dr. Miloslav	1966
Stojadinovic, Zora	2001
Stojanovic, Andrei & Katarina	2001
Stojanovic, Randjel	2009
Stokovic, Dragotin & Zivka	1996

Szagmeiszter, Laszlo & wife	1988
Tabakovic, Dr. Pavle	1978
Todorovic, Mita & Kruna	1995
Todorovic, Zika & Rada	1995
Tomic, Desanka	2014
Tomic, Marija (Sanc)	2009
Tosic, Milorad	1978
Trajkovic, Dragoljub	2009
Vasic, Predrag	1994
Vasovic, Radmila	1996
Veljkovic, Zlata & parents Miroslav & wife	1999
Zamboki, Pal	1995
Zdravkovic, Predrag & Stana	1980

N O T E

According to the territorial principle, the following Righteous) from the list of the Serbian Righteous, published on the Yad Vashem site, belong to Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H).

Aranđelović Vera - B&H
Begić, Midhat & Mauricette - B&H
Janković, Ratko - B&H
Kuković, Olga - B&H
Kvasina, Smilja & dght. Milena Marković - B&H

In total, seven Righteous people were transferred from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia.

Four of the Righteous from the previous list of the Righteous people from Serbia, the Yad Vashem transferred to Albania, Croatia and Slovenia:

Arslan Reznići to Albania, the rescue done in Kosovo

Ana Jekic to Croatia, the rescue done in Kosovo

Kirec Miroslav to Croatia, rescue done in Belgrade, Serbia

Andrej Tumpej to Slovenia, rescue done in Belgrade, Serbia.

Please note that Djordje Stojanovic, who is no. 117 on our list, has been deleted from the list of the Righteous without any explanation as published by the Yad Vashem.

Djordje Stojanovic received the Medal of the Righteous in 2000 personally from the hands of H.E. Joram Shani, the then Ambassador of Israel to Serbia.

Source: The book "Righteous Among The Nations Serbia", Edition 2010, page 134

LIST OF THE RIGHTEOUS FROM SERBIA
- territorial principle -
Records of the Jewish Community Zemun

1. Andeselić Marija - 1993.
2. Andeselić Natalija - 1993.
3. Andeselić Vera - 1993.
4. Aranđelović Čoaš Vera - 1991.
5. Arsenijević Ljubivoje - 2000.
6. Arsenijević Vujka - 2000.
7. Arsenijević Milje - 2000.
8. Baić Klara - 2007.
9. Benčević Antun - 1994.
10. Blagojević Ljubo - 1998.
11. Blendić Đorđe -1992.
12. Blendić Mitra - 1992.
13. Blendić Jovan - 1992.
14. Blendić Nikola - 1992.
15. Blendić Nikolica - 1992.
16. Bogićević Mijajlo - 1992.
17. Bogićević Milica - 1992.
18. Bondžić Borivoje - 1980.
19. Bondžić Grozdana - 1980.
20. Botić Radovan - 1989.
21. Bošnjak Nikola - 2010.
22. Bradić Sava - 1994.
23. Bradić Jovana - 1994.
24. Cvijović Mira - 1994.
25. Čanadi Mariška - 1995.
26. Dudaš Paljo - 1995.
27. Dudaš Ana - 1995.
28. Đonović Radovan -1983.
29. Đonović Rosa -1983.
30. Đošević Adanja Dara - 1998.
31. Đurković Aleksandar - 1999.
32. Glavaški Jelena - 1987.
33. Gligorijević Milan - 1996.
34. Imeri Mihaljić Hajrija - 1991.
35. Jakić Ana - 2001.
36. Janošević Katica - 1964.
37. Jovanović Bogdan - 1968.
38. Jovanović Desanka - 1968.
39. Jovanović Nemanja - 1968.
40. Jovanović Nada - 1968.
41. Jovanović Danica - 1993.
42. Jovanović Olga - 1993
43. Jovanović Mileva - 1993
44. Jovanović Dušan - 2006.
45. Jovanović Pero - 1993.
46. Jovanović Stanko - 1967.
47. Jovanović Ljubinka - 1967.
48. Jovanović Tihomir -1992.
49. Jovanović Milka -1992.
50. Kamenko Raca (dosije 11905)
51. Kirec Miroslav -1990.
52. Knežević Slobodan - 1980.
53. Knežević Milenija - 1980.
54. Knežević Vojislav - 2012.
55. Kostić Ljubomir - 1997.
56. Kostić supruga? - 1997.
57. Kostić Dragoslav - 1997.
58. Kostić Bosiljka - 1997.
59. Kovanović Divna - 1999.
60. Kozarski Julis - 1994.
61. Kozarski Stevo - 1994.
62. Kozarski Bato - 1994.
63. Kozarski Olga - 1994.
64. Kudlik Bela - 1987.
65. Kudlik Katarina - 1987.
66. Lepčević Mileta - 1978.
67. Ljubičić Lazar -1994.
68. Ljubičić Mila -1994.
69. Macašović Ana - 1998.
70. Macašović Ištvan - 1998.
71. Mandušić Ljubica - 2007.
72. Marinković Đorđe - 1996.
73. Marinković Stanka - 1996.
74. Marković Levec Martina - 2000.
75. Milenković Ljubo - 1999.
76. Milenković Svetozar - 2002.

77. Milenković Vida - 2002.
78. Milharčić Lujza
79. Mladenović Biserka - 1999.
80. Mladenović Vladimir - 1999.
81. Milutinović Predrag - 2017.
82. Milutinović Ljubinka - 2017.
83. Milutinović Ruža - 2017.
84. Nedeljković Radisav - 2011.
85. Nikolić Raša - 1995.
86. Novaković Krsta - 2003.
87. Panić dr Svetozar - 1993
88. Panić Angelina - 1993
89. Paščan Nadežda - 1994.
90. Pejić dr Mirko - 1986.
91. Pejić Nevenka - 1986.
92. Pejić Aleksandar - 1986.
93. Perić Mladen - 2017.
94. Petrović Aleksandar - 2002.
95. Petrović Kosa - 2003.
96. Popović Đorđe - 1999.
97. Popović Marija - 1999.
98. Popović Predrag - 2001.
99. Prica Spasenije - 1991.
100. Protić Simeon - 2009.
101. Protić Miroslava - 2009.
102. Ranković Jelica - 2007.
103. Rašić Veljko - 2006.
104. Rašić Helena - 2006.
105. Reznići Arslan - 2008.
106. Sagmajster Laslo – 1988
107. Sagmajster Julijana – 1988.
108. Stamenković Jelenko - 2005.
109. Stamenković Ljubica - 2005.
110. Stefanović Mile -1992.
111. Stefanović Svjetličić Mileva -1992.
112. Stevanović Bogoljub - 1998.
113. Stojadinović dr Miloslav - 1966.
114. Stojadinović Zora - 2001.
115. Stojanović Andrei - 2001.
116. Stojanović Katarina - 2001.
117. Stojanović Đorđe -2000.
118. Stojanović Ranđel - 2009.
119. Stoković Dragutin - 1996.
120. Stoković Živka - 1996.
121. Stoković Vasović Radmila - 1996.
122. Tabaković dr Pavle - 1978.
123. Todorović Mita - 1995.
124. Todorović Kruna - 1995.
125. Todorović Živojin - 1995.
126. Todorović Radmila - 1995.
127. Tomić Marija - 2009.
128. Tomić Desanka - 2014.
129. Tošić Milorad - 1978.
130. Trajković Dragoljub - 2009.
131. Tumpej Andrej - 2001.
132. Vasić Predrag -1994.
133. Veljković Zlata - 1999.
134. Veljković Miroslav - 1999.
135. Veljković Cila - 1999.
136. Zdravković Predrag - 1980
137. Zdravković Stana - 1980.
138. Žamboki Pal - 1995.

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Our work on gathering new facts and knowledge about the saving of Jews goes on.

Jewish Community Zemun

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