

# Matilda Cerge

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Belgrade

Serbia

Interviewer: Rachel Chanin Asiel

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*Matilda Cerge lives in a cozy house in a lush Belgrade suburb. Although she lives in the same two-story house as her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, she is entirely independent and vital.*

*Her vibrant flower- bed keeps her busy most of the year. While the flowers are thawed over she keeps warm and busy stoking her tiled stove*

*In the cold months her cat, Kica, is snuggled up next to the fireplace keeping her company.*



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- **Family ancestry**

My family has lived in Dorcol [1](#) for more than 200 years. As far as I know they fled from Spain [see *Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*] [2](#). I don't know how they got here, but I do know that they lived in the Balkans. I assume they came via Istanbul, and they came and stayed in Serbia while it was still under the Turks.

[Editor's note: On the border between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, the city passed back and forth several times between the two great powers, in the 17th and 18th centuries, but remained primarily under Turkish control until the Serbian independence movement began in the early 19th century Source: 'The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community,' Harriet Pass Freidenreich]

That was most likely at least 200 years ago. They lived here in Dorcol, the Jewish section. Jews lived on Solunska Street, Visokog Stevan Street, Gospodar Jovanova Street, where we lived, and so on. They didn't have to live there, that's just how they settled and lived. It wasn't like a ghetto, it was voluntary.

*[Editor's note: There is evidence that Romanioti, Jews who followed the Romans and were neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardic, lived in Belgrade already in the 13th century. Source: 'Until the Final Solution Jews in Belgrade 1521-1942,' Zeni Lebl.]*

*By the 16th century a small Sephardic community had established itself in Belgrade. One of the earliest contemporary documents to survive refers to a fire in 1560 which destroyed a number of Jewish homes in the town. The first Jews apparently lived in the western part of town near the Sava River... Most of the later arrivals, however, settled in a region near the Danube called Jaliya (the shore) and later also in nearby Dorcol. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich]*

I don't know any stories about my ancestors. You know [when the war started] I was eleven and my sister nine, and those kinds of stories didn't interest us. Had we been a little older it would have been very interesting.

Maybe 10,000 Jews lived in Belgrade at the time. I don't know what percentage this was of the whole population. [In 1931 there were 238,775 people living in Belgrade of whom 7,906 were Jews. By 1939 there were an estimated 10,388 Jews, 8,500 of whom were Sephardim and 1,888 Ashkenazim.]

In 1895 Jews constituted 5% of the population and in 1931 3%. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich] There was the synagogue on Cara Urosa Street. [At the end of the 19th century the leaders of the Sephardic community decided to build a new large synagogue in the Zerek neighborhood in Belgrade.]

*Construction was begun in a ceremony attended by King Petar I in May 1907 and the Bet Israel synagogue was completed on 7th September 1908. It was destroyed during the bombing of Belgrade on 6th April 1941. Source: Zeni Lebl]* There was the old synagogue in Dorcol where my birth was registered.

*[The Old Synagogue or El Kal Vjezo was built in the late 1600s. This building survived fires, floods, and both world wars only to be destroyed by the communists sometime after WWII.].* I know that on my baptism papers [birth record] it says 'old synagogue.'

Most Jews lived in Dorcol; I don't know if some lived elsewhere. [Until the 19th century virtually all of Belgrade's Sephardim continued to live in Dorcol. In the 1870s the wealthier members began moving out of the quarter. In 1921 there were 3,171 Jews - 65% of the city's total Jewish population - still living in Dorcol. However, the neighborhood lost most of its Jewish flavor because by then only 23% of the population was Jewish. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich]

I know that there were mainly family businesses, but there were also doctors and engineers. [Editor's note: The Jews in Belgrade were heavily concentrated in commercial activities and white-collar employment, and to a lesser extent, crafts and the free professions.]

*In the Sephardic community in 1940, among the 2,002 taxpayers, 27% were merchants, 21% clerks or employees, 8% artisans, and 4% physicians, lawyers or engineers. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich]* In general Ashkenazi didn't live in Dorcol, maybe a few. In general they were all Sephardim. [Editor's note: The Ashkenazi community in Belgrade evolved into a completely separate entity.]

*Ashkenazim began arriving in Belgrade in significant numbers only in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Ashkenazi Jews neither lived in Dorcol in significant numbers nor really formed an enclave of their own. They lived wherever their financial resources allowed them.*  
Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich]

We were a middle class merchant family.

I have a picture of Jakov [Kalef] with a fez while he was serving in the Turkish army. Since the Turks had occupied Belgrade, they had to join the army. [Editor's note: In 1869, all Serbian subjects, including the Jews, became liable for military service. A number of Jewish soldiers fought in the Turkish wars of 1876-77. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich]



My grandmother [Matilda Kalef], her sister Lenka [Koen (nee Kalef)] and brother Jakov [Kalef] lived on the same street. Our three families lived on Gospodar Jovanova Street. Not in the same apartment; each family had its own apartment.

I don't know where they lived when Nisim Kalef, my paternal grandfather, born in Belgrade in 1878, was still alive. I know that they already lived on Gospodar Jovanova when my mother married. We lived until the end with Matilda. I don't know what Nisim did, but he was probably a merchant. Neither Nisim nor anyone else wore a hat or a beard. They were all in civil clothing. They wore regular hats as was the fashion at the time. My grandmother and grandfather were both Kalefs; they were distant relatives. Nisim died in Belgrade in 1912.

Matilda was the pillar of our house. [She was born in Belgrade in 1876] Imagine she was widowed when she was 25 with three children. [Her husband Nisim Kalef] died a banal death. He had a perforation to the caecum and died. My grandmother remained to struggle with the three kids. Then two sons died and only one remained, my father Avram. I don't know the names of the boys who died.



Matilda woke up every morning at five. After she got up, she made herself coffee in the kitchen. I remember how she savored that coffee. Everyone else was sleeping. She was a big woman. She had lovely, long, thick hair. In my whole life I never saw such hair again. Her braids were like this [the interviewee motions to show a few inches thickness]. She then brushed her hair. She didn't cover her hair. She always wore it in a bun at the back of her head. After brushing her hair she went to the farmers' market.

The big market was on Gospodar Jovanova Street near Kralja Petra and Visnjiceva Streets. The farmers' market was open every day. Grandmother went to the market every day [except Saturday]. When she was done shopping she hired an Albanian to carry all the things back home. He carried the groceries in a big basket, which he wore on his shoulders. Then she put it all away. She instructed the girl who worked for us what needed to be prepared for lunch and went to the store. She came home at noon for lunch. She ate lunch with the rest of us, had a little rest and then got ready to re-open the store.

Grandmother always opened the store at four and was there until seven. On her way home she went by Pelivan, a pastry shop on Kralja Petra Street, right near the Jewish community building, close to Gospodar Jovanova Street, on the left side where the Jewish community is. There she

always bought us some sweets.

She never came home without something for her granddaughters. She ate her dinner. Then her friends from the neighborhood came to play cards. They stayed until ten. It was a mixed group of men and women. Then she got things ready for the next day's lunch until midnight or one in the morning. Her work day was about 20 hours long.

Maybe she slept for four hours. She was a phenomenal woman. Saturdays she opened the store, but she didn't work. Instead she took me to the theater. She loved comedies. The two of us watched all the plays by Nusica [Branislav Dj. Nusic (1864-1938), considered by most to be the greatest Serbian comic actor of his time], Stevana Sremca [*considered to be one of the most widely read and popular Serbian writers of the 19th century. His works are still being performed today.*], etc.

She only took me. She didn't take my sister because she was too wild and mischievous. Sunday mornings we always went to the movie matinee. We went to the Kolarac movie house. There was also a pastry shop there where we would have a cake after the movie.

Grandmother was an expert at making cakes; she was a wonderful housewife. She made such fantastic baklava and cakes in general. She made all sorts of Turkish things. Not torta [rich layer cakes] rather baklava. No other housewife ever made flaky dough like she did.

I remember very well when she kneaded it with butter, then she banged it with the rolling pin to mix the butter into the dough and flour. She made those banicika, pies. Banicika is what we called those Spanish pies. The pies were from meat, milk, spinach or as we used to call them in Spanish di karni, di leci, etc...

There was dough, filling and on top more dough, all put on a tray, and then cut. It wasn't rolled like the pies we eat [in Serbia] today. Never again did I eat pies as wonderful as those made by my grandmother. Not one housewife knew how to make them as well as my grandmother.

Grandmother prepared food for the winter and all kinds of preserves. My sister loved sweets and there was never enough for her. I don't like them as much. When fall came grandmother would make preserves out of all kinds of fruits. In the dining room we had a big cabinet. Above there were two drawers and above the glass [doors] and below there was empty space.

There, Grandmother jammed in all the jars with preserves. Every day when there was no one at home, except that woman who worked in the house, who did not dare say anything, my sister would open one jar, take a little preserve and return it. With time she had opened every jar and taken a little from each. Grandmother would have had a stroke if she had known.

Grandmother sang and had a nice voice. She sang, especially while she made all those pies. While she was in the kitchen making food she was singing. She cooked and sang. I don't remember the songs she sang, but in general they were Serbian and Spanish songs. She never told us stories. There was never time. If she had free time she went out. She used to yell at my sister because my sister was so restless.

Grandmother was dressed in civil clothes. She had very nice clothing. She had two or three things that were pure Jewish clothing. They lived so long in Serbia, and they liked the Serbs very much.

They took pictures in traditional Jewish clothing, but also in national Serbian clothing. That is how much they loved Serbia.

✖ My grandmother traveled everywhere. She went to Israel and Egypt via Greece with a group. There was even a picture of her sitting on a camel. The Germans took that picture [along with everything else we owned]. That picture was on the wall in the house.

The group she went with was comprised of Jews from Belgrade. There was also a picture of her and the group at the Acropolis. She didn't intend to live there because father was sick, immobile and dependent on other's help. I don't know if we had family there, if she had friends there, where she slept or if she brought back any souvenirs. When I look at that picture I start to laugh because I also love to travel; I am just like my grandmother - the same. I don't know if she left Yugoslavia, but she traveled a lot in Yugoslavia.

Despite all the tragedies that she encountered in life - a paralyzed son, the loss of two sons and a husband - she fought. She was the pillar of the family. She rented those apartments and maintained the stores. All of that was due to my grandmother.

Her older brother, Granduncle Jakov, helped her. We lived right next to each other, number three and number five Gospodar Jovanova. He took care of her and our family. It was as if he was our grandfather. Granduncle Jakov was on the board of the Jewish community.

He was a cantor in the synagogue. Granduncle was involved [in Jewish communal life] and he kept my father and grandmother informed about everything. Because we were like one family and he was the head of the family. [In fact,] Jakov and Grandmother were the heads.

My granduncle Jakov was one of the main people on the board of the Jewish community. He worked a lot, he was very involved. I know that he got a decoration, a medal, but I don't know what kind or what it was for. He got it from the King.

[Editor's note: It isn't known which king presented it to him, or if it was at all presented by a member of a royal family.] He even went to the palace. When King Petar [3](#) was young, 16 or 17 years old, they gathered kids his age from different families and once a week they went to play with him, to socialize with him. My cousin David Kalef always participated in playing with King Petar. I think the family must have had very high standing, if this was allowed.

I had an aunt, Regina Kalef, grandmother's brother's daughter, who married a man from Sofia [Bulgaria] named Eskenazi. I don't remember his first name. Otherwise, all the rest of our relatives lived in Belgrade.

✖ My father, Avram Kalef, was born in Belgrade in 1902. He was a wonderful child, went to gymnasium, spoke several languages and finished that academy for international trade. My father was a diabetic and had to pay a lot of attention to what he ate.

It was real trouble with Father. He was the first person to have a wheelchair in Belgrade. It was made especially for him. I don't know who made it or where it came from. There was a young man who pushed the chair, dressed him and put him in bed.

Despite all of that he was incredible: full of energy, full of humor, he didn't give up, he wanted to go everywhere. He educated himself. All kids from Jewish families, they all took great care about educating themselves: to learn languages, etc. It was very important. My father didn't wear a kippah nor did he put on a tallit. He couldn't go to the synagogue because of the wheelchair.

Father followed the local news, everything that was possible, but he was never involved in politics. My father was very funny, very social, despite the fact that he was in a wheelchair. Sometimes he went to the store to work the cash register.

He spent a lot of time in the French and German reading rooms. He read newspapers in those languages. [Many times] he told the man to take him near a park bench and pick him up in an hour, two or three, and take him home. During that time all the governesses, French and German girls who took care of kids, would gather around him. He was full of stories and they adored him because he knew French and German. He entertained them and they loved him.

My mother was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1909. Her name at birth was Antonija Ograjensek. Her mother died when she was very young and [her siblings] were scattered all around. When she was 18 or 19 she came to Belgrade to visit her sister who was living here. That is when she met my father. I don't know how my parents met. I never asked.

My mother was very pretty and young and my father fell in love with her. She met him when she was about 20. They married very soon after they met. I don't know exactly when, maybe it was 1928.

I was born when she was still 20. When my mother met him it was fashionable for young men to walk with canes. My father used one as he was already not stable. I only remember him in a wheelchair.

The whole [Kalef] family was very much opposed to my father marrying an Aryan. It was terrible. They didn't accept her, in fact. Never. She lived here and bore children, and Father supported her. Her family wasn't ✖ against the marriage. They were probably satisfied considering we were well-situated.

Father said, 'This woman and no other. Her! End of story!' He didn't want to hear about any other woman. And in the end my grandmother gave in, because of her son. I just know that they, Grandmother and the rest of the Jewish family, were very against his marrying her.

She had to convert to Judaism when she married him. When she converted she changed her name to Dona Bat Avraham. They called her both Dona and Antonija. Mainly our relatives called her Dona. And everyone called her Tonka.

I know that my mother's sisters [Minka and Justina] came to the wedding from Slovenia. Her sisters came to our house but not often. Her sister who lived in Belgrade returned to Slovenia. She didn't remain in Belgrade.

My mother didn't have time to tell us stories. She was always busy. All day long she was busy. Whenever the store was open she was there. And when she came home she didn't know what needed to be done first. In addition to the help we had she was always straightening up and helping around the house.



Mother sang very nicely. When the three of us were home we always sang together. Different songs. We were always singing. My sister sang soprano and Mother and I alto. When we were together we were singing.

Mother didn't have many friends before the war, probably because she was busy all the time.

During the summer, we went with my mother to Slovenia and the seaside and to resorts with fresh water springs. We were at resorts with my mother a few times. We went to Mataruska Springs [5 kilometers from Kraljevo]. My mother had rheumatism and went there to swim in the springs. In general we were with my mother.

I went a few times with my grandmother [to the fresh water springs]. Grandmother never took my sister anywhere. She was very restless and unruly, and Grandmother didn't like this. I was her favorite.

My mother and father never fought. My mother used to yell at us. Grandmother never did. Mother respected Grandmother. Grandmother was the authority. She took care of everything. What she said was the way it had to be. It had to be listened to.

### • My childhood

✖ I was born at home [in 1929]. My mother was taken to the hospital, but she ran away and came home. I don't know which hospital. I guess she ran away because she was scared. She came home and gave birth there. I was born prematurely, after only seven months.

There were no incubators then. It was terrible. I needed to be kept alive. My grandmother rubbed goose-fat all over me, and then she wrapped me in cotton. Only my head remained uncovered. She kept me near the stove to keep me warm. And she fed me with a teaspoon for dolls, one drop at a time.

I had no strength. Nine months or maybe a year later, I received the first prize for the most advanced child from 'Kap Mleka' [the pediatric health clinics at the time]. I have a picture of this. We went to the city's children's health clinic where they examined us.

My sister [Rahela Kalef] was born normally in the hospital [in 1931]. My sister always had a talent for acting and everything. Whenever we were anywhere, during Purim for instance, if we were at someone's place or at home and people came over, we recited verses and sang.

Since we were the youngest in the family they always made us recite passages and sing. It wasn't enough for my sister to sing; she had to be put on the table. She liked to show off. I stood off to her side and we sang duets or we recited something in duet. She very much liked to get attention.

I was called Tilka and my sister Ela. Everyone called us by these names. After the war Mother continued to call us by these names.

My sister didn't take singing lessons, only piano. She learned to sing later. She always found a way to make trouble and to start a fight with me. She didn't have one minute of peace. Our apartment had two entrances, the main one from the hallway and the other from the garden.

By that back entrance there were steps which led to the terrace. The two of us very often separated ourselves from the others. On the small terrace we had a table and two chairs and the two of us sat there. One time I was going down the steps into the yard, a part of the terrace fence was a bit bent and she started to jump on that outer edge.

I got down from the steps and she said, 'Stay there so that I can stand on your head.' I asked her, 'Are you crazy?' She said, 'Did you hear me? I want to stand on your head.' I answered, 'I don't want you on my head.' She really started to stand on my head and then she fell and cut her chin. Panic broke out in the house. We needed to quickly take her to Tadeusa Kosciuszko Street - that was Marsala something or other street [at the time] - where there was a clinic. There she was given two stitches. Terrible.

✖ They dressed us very nicely. They took good care of us. They always put curlers in our hair so we had nice curls with ribbons and other things.

I was Grandmother's favorite. She practically raised me. I went everywhere with her. She even took me with her to the spas. Twice a year she went to the spas, like Vrnjacka Spa [situated in southern Serbia, 380 meters above sea level], and she took me with her.

Once, when I was five years old, I went with my grandmother to the spa. Grandmother was very worried that her granddaughter shouldn't go hungry. We were in a hotel and we had normal meals there. But, it wasn't enough for her.

So she went to the farmers' market early in the morning to buy kajmak, the wonderful fresh cream that they make there and fresh lepinja flat rustic bread]. She went to buy these things to ensure that her granddaughter didn't lose one gram.

[While she was at the market] I was locked in the hotel room, so that I wouldn't go anywhere. While I sat there in the room, bored, waiting for Grandmother, I sat by the mirror and started to twist a brush into my hair.

When grandmother came she couldn't untangle the brush and in the end she had to cut my hair. Her granddaughter, her beauty, instead of having lovely curls was deformed, with one side longer [than the other side]. She only cut the one side, the other side she left as it was.

My mother made us drink fish oil everyday. Mother would shove a tablespoon of oil into our mouths and then quickly put a slice of an orange in or something for us to swallow. We had to do this everyday so that we could get healthy. I am telling you, practically all winter we were at home sick. If it wasn't a cold, then it was bronchitis or this or that.

We were even in a sanatorium on Fruska Gora [hilly country immediately south of Novi Sad which extends along the Danube for almost 80 kilometers reaching its highest point in Crveni Kot (539 meters)] for three months. We were young, maybe my sister was three and I was five.

After that mother was very worried about our health and she took us a lot of times to Slovenia so that we could be in the Slovenian forest during the summer to breathe the Slovenian air. During the day we laid on a hammock in the woods to breathe in the air and get better.

It is amazing how delicate we were. We were sick, we had every possible illness: measles, chicken pox, mumps, problems with lungs, everything. We were not spoiled. Maybe my grandmother



exaggerated a bit; maybe she kept us too warm. Then when we went out we got sick. And imagine this, when the occupation came, when we lived up in the attic, and when we had nothing left to eat, we were never sick.

### • Going to school

My sister and I went to the same school, but she was younger than me. We went to the Jewish kindergarten. I cannot remember where it was. In general I remember that we went there. I don't remember the teachers. I don't remember anyone from there. I don't know if there was a Jewish school.

*[Editor's note: In Belgrade at different times before WWII there was a Talmud Torah, a communal institution where boys learned until their bar mitzvah, Sephardim had a meldar and Ashkenazim a cheder, both of which were private institutions for boys until their bar mitzvah. Immediately before WWII there was no Jewish elementary school. Source: Zeni Lebl]* We were not in any Jewish organizations; we were too little.

I started elementary school here on Kralja Petra Street. It was a public school. There were Jewish and non-Jewish children. It was mixed. There were some Jews in my class. *[Editor's note: In the 1938/39 academic year there were 503 Jewish students enrolled in elementary schools in Belgrade; 450 in gymnasiums; 38 in commercial academies and 36 in vocational high schools.]*

*Jewish students constituted 4.4% of the students enrolled in the University of Belgrade. Source: Zeni Lebl]* I was friends with Muci Eskenazi and Mirjam Levi and a boy named Zak whose last name I don't remember. Zak liked me a lot and brought me flowers. We walked to school together and returned together.

He lived across the street on Gospodar Jovanova. He would pick flowers, white field chamomile from the lawn, [and give them to me]. He was killed too. I shared a desk with a Serbian girl. Mirjam and Mucika [Muci] sat in front of me. I was also friends with the Serbian girl but better friends with the other two. I don't remember any other friends from my childhood except Mirjam and Muci.

There were no Jewish teachers, only Serbian ones. I don't remember their names. We studied the normal program for elementary schools. I don't remember liking one subject more than any other. Elementary school started at eight and went until 12.

I think we always went to elementary school in the mornings. We didn't eat lunch at school. Only the poor kids ate there; we ate at home. I don't remember if we had religious lessons in elementary school. In elementary school we didn't have to wear any special clothing.

✖ I finished elementary school and then two years of gymnasium before the war. I went to the 4th Women's Gymnasium in Dorcol, on Cara Dusana Street. It was also a mixed school. All the professors were Serbian. It was normal that girls go to gymnasium like the boys. I never had any problems in either elementary school or gymnasium because I was a Jew.

At that time this type of anti-Semitism didn't exist. I don't know if we went to school on the Jewish holidays. In gymnasium we had to wear hats with our grade on it and black aprons. I cannot remember if we went to gymnasium in the mornings or the afternoons.

I went to the Jewish community for religious classes. All of the Jewish children had to go to religious lessons on Kralja Petra [Street]. I don't know the names of the teachers. There we learned about the Old Testament and the Jewish language. Clearly, I didn't learn any of that, because it was such a short time. In general I know that we Jewish children had to go to our own religious classes when the Serbian children had theirs.

This was once or twice a week. There was a predetermined time when the Jewish kids gathered in the small hall [upstairs in the Jewish community]. This is why even today I love to go to the community, especially the small hall, upstairs on the second floor, where we had our religious classes. I love this building especially because I went there as a kid. I also fondly remember the hall downstairs where we had the Purim parties.

My sister and I learned to play the piano. At first we had a Russian teacher and then, towards the end, there was a Jewish woman named Rea who gave us lessons. At the beginning the lessons were interesting like with all kids. The two of us were always singing. We sang various songs.

### • Our family life

When we were not in school we played. We spent a lot of time in Kalemegdan since we lived two houses away and didn't have a big garden. *[Editor's note: A medieval fortress and large park on the northwest tip of Belgrade where the Danube and Sava Rivers meet.]* We went by ourselves with other kids from the neighborhood.

There were see-saws, merry-go-rounds, tire swings and other swings. This was great recreation for us and we spent as much time there as possible. Of course there was a time when we had to be home, maybe at eight; we had to be home to go to sleep.

When I was a kid my favorite food was grandmother's pies, banicika di karmi, di leci, that is in Spanish for: with spinach, meat, eggs, milk.

My favorite toys were dolls. My sister and I had divine rubber dolls. Grandmother's sister-in-law, Jakov's wife, Lenka [Kalef], who lived next door at number five, loved us very much. Every year before Purim, unbeknownst to us, she took our dolls and made new dresses for them. The dresses were always different so that we wouldn't fight over them. My sister's were blue and mine pink, or the opposite. It was wonderful.

We got new clothes for the Serbian holidays, when all the little kids went out. For Vrbica we always got new clothes, since we would take a walk with our parents. We always had new dresses the same as the other kids, so that we wouldn't be different than them.

*[Editor's note: The Serbian Orthodox Palm Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday afternoon there is a procession of children carrying banners, crosses and little bells. Green branches of a willow are placed on a table in the church and remain there until the next day, Palm Sunday. Willow branches were used, thus the name Vrbica meaning willow branch, because palms were not available in Serbia when this custom began.]*

My sister and I didn't always wear the same dresses. Dresses for holidays and special occasions were sewn for us in a salon. My mother probably picked the fabrics for those dresses. Those special

dresses were the same but dresses for every day were different.

My childhood was nice, thank G-d we lived well, we were materially secure, they took us everywhere and we traveled and everything. We were middle class, not too rich and not poor. But it was terrible when father fell into comas from high glucose.

Running after the doctor, bringing Father back to consciousness, give him this and that. Very often the whole house was very excited because of this. As a child I know that I was frightened but I didn't know, actually I knew what it was about, but I didn't know if he would die or stay alive. I remember that.

We had two doctors at home. Dr. Munk, a Jew, was our family doctor. He treated my dad and us. Later we also had Dr. Siber. He came to the house to treat father's paralysis. Father had diabetes and muscular atrophy which was the reason why he couldn't walk.

When Dr. Munk couldn't come Dr. Siber came instead. I don't know if Dr. Siber was a Jew or not. He was a military doctor. He was in the neighborhood. Dr. Munk was also in the neighborhood two streets down on Strahinjica Bana Street. He had an office there where he kept files on my father and all of us. Later, when my father was very sick, he would fall into a coma because his sugar level was too high. Then whoever could come first would.

Father received insulin everyday. At the end they said to Mother, 'You give so much money to those doctors, and there is no need.' Then they taught Mother to give him his injections and she taught me. I was eleven years old when I began giving Father his insulin injections. I remember those metal needles in special metal boxes. I cooked them too. I remember the poor thing all punctured, all dotted with holes in his arm from where I had given him injections.

Father went to places for treatment. Once Grandmother took him to Vienna for his paralysis; however, it didn't help him. She heard that there was some doctor there that could help with this, but it didn't help. Right before the war, I remember that a man came to treat him with electric shocks. But then the war broke out. He wasn't in the hospital often. He was mostly at home. I told you that we had two doctors who treated his illness.

My father used to tell us stories. There were lots of them, but I don't remember them. He spent a lot of time with us, especially in the afternoon. He loved us a lot and we loved him. Everything that we wanted: 'Oh, dad we would like...' He never yelled at us. He was a wonderful father.

He was a diabetic with atrophy but he went everywhere. He wanted to see everything. We even went with him to the seaside. He went to the Adriatic Sea. We went by train. We didn't go to the sea every year, but we went somewhere. Sometimes the whole family went together, but most of the time we went with Mother.

[We lived at] number three Gospodar Jovanova Street, in a ground floor apartment with three rooms, a kitchen and toilet. There were two entrances to the apartment, the main entrance and one from the yard. When you entered there was an anteroom through which you entered into a big room, a dining room.

This is where we celebrated the holidays, Purim, Frutas and Pasqual, when the whole family would gather, including Jakov and his family. Then there was my parent's bedroom, the maid's room and

my grandmother's room, and then the kitchen and bathroom. Grandmother's room was next to the kitchen.

My sister slept in grandmother's room. [When I was younger] I slept in my parents' room. When I got bigger they put me in the dining room. There I had a little sofa bed. In the dining room there was an ottoman. The bathroom was inside the apartment. We had a tiled stove that worked on wood. Albanians brought us wood for the stove. We had a big basement where we kept the firewood and we had a big laundry room under the small apartments in the yard.

We had water and electricity at home as far back as I can remember. We didn't have a garden, just a yard. But it was full of flowerpots and flowers and plants growing up the walls. It was nice. We didn't raise any animals because there was no room.

We had a radio at home and a record player and a piano.

We always had a household help, a young zuska who worked with us. *[Editor's note: These are girls generally of Slovakian origin who took care of homes. The word was derived from the first name Zuza, common among these girls.]* A zuska is a girl from Vojvodina [4](#) who wore the traditional skirts from that region. These girls always helped us at home and lived in our house. I don't know, maybe they were Germans or Hungarians. They hired these women to work in homes.

Once a week a Roma woman came to do the laundry. The same woman came every week, but I don't remember her name. There were a lot of us, and a lot of laundry, and it all needed to be cleaned. The Roma woman only washed, it was hung up to dry and the zuska ironed it. She was always at home as help.

All the people who worked for us lived with us. We had a very big household and Grandmother prepared for everyone. There were two or three people who sewed on the sewing machines, a salesman, the man who took care of Father, then there was the zuska. Sometimes there were eleven of us in the house to feed.

They lived with us but not in our apartment. On Gospodar Jovanova Street we had apartments in the yard: not only in the front of the building, but in the yard too. They all ate with us in the house. All together. And Grandmother prepared it all.

My grandmother rented out the [other] apartments. In the yard there was the French woman and a Jewish couple, whose name I don't remember, but they were killed. I don't know what the French woman's name was and I didn't go to her place. I don't remember who was in the third apartment. In the third apartment downstairs there was a German woman from Vojvodina with her family, and one Serbian officer and his family. There were five apartments in all.

I can say that we got along extraordinarily. There was never anything unpleasant. Everyone respected everyone else. Let's say, when there was a Jewish holiday no one hung their laundry in the yard to dry. Never. And when it was their holiday we didn't hang ours.

I'm telling you, if there was that kind of harmony still today, where the world would be! How nice it would be. However, that was all destroyed and distorted. A terror. My father and grandmother got along well with the neighbors.

My parents probably voted. They were loyal citizens.

There were also Serbs who lived in Dorcol. But my family only socialized with Jews. Maybe I don't remember it all because we went to school, to the Jewish kindergarten, so we weren't home a lot. At night, after dinner we had to go to sleep while they were socializing and playing cards. I assume they played cards with Jews. They played for money. There were even fights about it. They all came to our house. When there were holidays it was the nicest.

[When] my mother and father went for walks the young man, who pushed the wheelchair, went with them. He had to. The young man always pushed the wheelchair, not my mother or grandmother. They rarely went for walks together because it was very conspicuous that she was walking next to him. In general my father went everywhere with the young man.

I don't know how many rabbis there were in Belgrade nor do I remember any of them *[Editor's note: Before WWII there were many rabbis in Belgrade. The chief rabbi for the Sephardic community was Dr. Isak Alkalaj, and for the Ashkenazi community Ignjat Slang.]*

They didn't take us little ones to the synagogue. I was in the synagogue on Cara Uroša Street twice. *[Editor's note: This synagogue, Bet Israel, was opened on 7th September 1908. It was destroyed during World War II.]* I was upstairs on the balcony.

I cannot remember the occasion when I was there; it probably was some holiday. My grandmother took us. I don't remember what it looked like inside. I only remember that we were on the balcony. I remember that we once went to a bar mitzvah, but I don't remember whose it was.

I know that my grandmother went to the market where there was a man who slaughtered chickens. Nothing was ever slaughtered in our house. There was a man at the Jovanova farmers' market. He must have been a Jew. I don't remember a shochet. Grandmother always bought kosher food. We never had alcohol or pork at home, G-d forbid.

There were no stores in our neighborhood. We were next to Kalemegdan, two houses away. There were no stores there; it was a residential area. All stores were near the market. There was one big grocery store on Knez Mihailova Street called 'Tata.' It was a big store that was opened right before the war. I remember this because when they opened the shop they gave out chocolates to the children, and we all ran up there [to get them].

We never went to restaurants. In general we ate at home. But when we went to the resorts we ate the food they gave us there. This food wasn't kosher. When I went with grandmother, she would tell me what I was allowed to eat. When we went with Mother we ate whatever was prepared for us. But with Grandmother it wasn't like that. She would say, 'this you may, this you may not.'

I was never in the Ashkenazi community, only in the Sephardic one. I was too little to know if the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews mixed *[Editor's note: There is a long history of tension between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities in Belgrade.]*

*However, according to Zeni Lebl, at the beginning of the 20th century these relations began to improve. One impetus for the change was the spreading of Zionism which crossed these borders.]* The community was a place for older people. Granduncle Jakov was in the council.

He was always there. There they jointly resolved everything that had to do with Jews and Sephardim. I know one thing and that is that Ashkenazi and Sephardic didn't like one another and they were always distancing themselves from each other. I don't know why.

I don't believe that we had a box for Keren Kayemet LeIsrael [5](#). I know that every month my grandmother gave some of our income to poor relatives. She had a sister-in-law, her brother's wife: that brother died and his widow, Djoja Kalef, was blind. Grandmother gave her part of her income so they could live better. It never happened that she passed by a poor person and didn't give him something. That is the type of person my grandmother was.

We had a mezuzah on the front doors. I have one brooch from Israel.

My parents had books at home. All kinds. My father read a lot. I don't know if they were secular or religious books. He wrote and read Spanish, and Serbian of course. He bought newspapers, but I don't know which ones. We had children's books.

We didn't have pets. Our family didn't have a car. There were people who did have them, a few people, but there were not many in our area. You know what, in general this was one middle class which lived well but was not too rich. We traveled everywhere by train.

We had an ice box in the kitchen. An iceman brought us a piece of ice to keep the food cold. I don't know how often the ice was delivered.

At one time we had three stores, then two. In my time we had just one, on Visnjiceva Street [near the market]. When we had more stores Mother worked in one of them, Grandmother in another. Later, because of Father's illness, we had to pay a lot of doctors' bills and we were left with just one store.

The shop was full of shelves with different materials from heavy textiles to chintz, everything. Two tailors, one salesman and my mother and grandmother worked in the store. Those who worked there were not our friends nor were they Jews. They were paid for this work.

I went to the store frequently. I really loved to go there because Grandmother had one big box for the remnants of materials. There were big pieces. I loved to sew for my dolls. I would sometimes take a big piece from the box, take it home and sew something for my dolls. The store wasn't far from the house, so I went by myself.

We had two or three sewing machines in the shop. In the shop there were goods by the yard and ready-made clothing. In addition to the main space in the back there were two spaces: in one they stored all the extra goods and in the other the tailors sewed the ready-made clothing. We didn't have a sewing machine at home.

The main street in Dorcol was Cara Dusana. In general most of the people who lived in Dorcol were businessmen, craftsmen. There were a lot of craftsmen in that part of Dorcol. There were a lot of poor people. *[Editor's note: Belgrade Jews, while by no means affluent as a group, were by and large gainfully employed and economically upwardly mobile. The Belgrade Sephardic community was fortunate not to have been faced with a poverty problem comparable to that of its Sarajevo counterpart.]*



*Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich*] I don't know if they knocked on the door, but I do know that whenever Grandmother went somewhere she gave money. There were people sitting on the streets begging. I was born there and love that part of Belgrade, because it is near Kalemegdan where we always played. In general I loved that section [Dorcol] where I lived.

The streets were paved with cobble-stones. There were horses and carriages. The number two tram was already working near Kalemegdan. Imagine what happened: We were at kindergarten or coming home from kindergarten or we were not, I no longer remember.

In any case, the zuska was cleaning the apartment and Mother, Father and Grandmother weren't at home. My sister left the house and went to play with stones on the tram tracks. And imagine, the tram almost came and hit her. Almost ran her over. She got away by herself, and then they found her and brought her home. She was little, maybe she was four years old.

I took the tram with my grandmother whenever we went to Terazije. I already told you that I was her favorite and that she took me everywhere.

*[Editor's note: Terazije is the most famous square in Belgrade. It started to take shape as an urban feature in the first half of the 19th century. In the 1840s, Prince Milos Obrenoviae ordered Serbian craftsmen to move out of the old town where they had been mixed with the Turkish inhabitants, and build their houses and shops on the place of the present square.*

*The Turks called their water towers terazije (scales for water) and one such tower was placed in this square thus the name. The water tower was removed in 1860 and replaced by the drinking-fountain, which was erected in memory of Prince Milos.*

*At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Terazije was the center of social life of Belgrade. Terazije acquired its definitive form during its last reconstruction in 1947, when its flower beds, fountain and tram-lines were all removed. Source: [www.beograd.org.yu](http://www.beograd.org.yu)].*

We were very busy and we didn't have a lot of free time. When we were little we went to the Jewish kindergarten and then later, when we started school, we had girlfriends and obligations towards the school. All my free time I spent with my grandmother. She took me everywhere so that I didn't socialize much with others.

My father knew a lot of languages; he learned them in gymnasium and then he was always going to the French and German missions [cultural centers] and borrowing magazines. At home, whenever there were young people, like David and Mile [Kalef], they always tried to speak French or German [with Father].

They maintained the languages in that way, through conversations. They spoke pure Spanish. That was his mother tongue. Actually, maybe it was Ladino. I don't know. *[Editor's note: Until the end of the 19th century, Ladino constituted the dominate language of the Sephardic community in Belgrade.*

In the 1895 census 80% of the Serbian Jewry declared Ladino as their mother tongue. By the 1931 census, about 54% of the Jewish population considered Serbo-Croatian to be their mother tongue and 30% Ladino. *Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich*] My grandmother spoke to us in Serbian. They also spoke to my mother in Serbian. But in general in my house they spoke Ladino. So, before the

war I understood Ladino fairly well.

✖ My father helped me with my homework. Grandmother did not. She only took me to the theater and to the resort springs. Mother was strict and sometimes she spanked us. But father never raised a hand to us.

We kept kosher. We never had pork in the house. But I don't remember if we had dairy products and meat together. We mainly ate chicken and veal. On Passover we didn't eat bread with yeast. My mother sometimes wanted to eat pork and then she needed to eat it outside on paper. She wasn't allowed to bring it into the house. My grandmother knew that she was eating it but didn't say anything. But Mother wasn't allowed to do it at home on a plate. G-d forbid.

We ate lunch every day at twelve. At that time there were two shifts in the store: from seven to twelve and from four to seven. Lunch on a normal day in our house included soup, some cooked vegetables and so on, cake or pie. After lunch, there was always coffee.

Grandmother always drank a coffee. It was like a ritual, especially in the mornings. When she opened her eyes she had a coffee and after lunch and after dinner. After lunch, Grandmother went to lay down a little and rest. I no longer remember what Father did. Mother was always working. There was always so much work in the house that she had to.

I remember that on Fridays all the silver, the candlesticks, were polished so that it was nice when the Sabbath candles were lit. I no longer remember what Sabbath was like in our house. I know that the candles were lit. I think that they were put in the windows. The candles were lit in the window of Grandmother's room. I remember that Grandmother didn't do anything that day. As I said we always went to the theater. No one ever came to our house to light the fire on Sabbath.

I don't remember what we ate on Friday nights, other than the beans. On Saturdays there was always a better lunch. My father didn't go to the temple because he was in the wheelchair, but my Granduncle went to the temple and always told us what happened there. When he came home, he would read the prayers. I remember Shema Israel that is all, nothing else.

Then his whole family would come to dinner at our house. They came on Fridays and holidays. Either Mother or Grandmother opened the store on Saturdays. All Jewish stores were open on Saturday. They only didn't work on Sundays. Our store was operating on Saturdays, but not on Sundays.

I don't remember Rosh Hashanah. I don't remember Yom Kippur, only that prayers were read. I only remember Frutas and Pasqual. Those two holidays I remember well. No one made a sukkah for Sukkot. They lit the seven candles on Chanukkah. [Editor's note: Channukkah is celebrated for eight nights and each night the candles are lit.] Granduncle Jakov lit them. We had one large chanukkiyah in our house.

In general I know that when there were holidays there was always soup, peas, roasted potatoes and something else, and always chicken. Then we used a lot of turkey in the house too. There was a turkey leg hanging from a rope drying over the stove. This was mainly it, and fish. Probably carp.

I remember Frutas well. Now, I will tell you what it was like. First everyone came for dinner. Granduncle Jakov came with his family and he conducted the whole ritual. Then we ate dinner. For

dinner I remember, there was always fish with mayonnaise with boiled spaghetti.

The children always got silk bags in all different colors. I remember red and yellow silk bags sewn from crepe-sateen. Inside there was everything possible: different fruits and tons of chocolate candies. This was the most interesting for us. And then we quickly went into the other room. [Our cousin] David Kalef also joined us.

There we traded candies: I give you the yellow one, and you give me this one... This was the most wonderful day, the most divine holiday. The table was cleared leaving just the white tablecloth. All of our relatives and neighbors came.

Grandmother then threw all the fruits imaginable on the table: citrus fruits, walnuts, raisins, peanuts, oranges, bananas, dates, carob, etc. I actually don't remember if there were bananas then. The table was full. All the guests helped themselves to these fruits.

I remember that. It was all spread out on the table. The record player was on and they danced and sang. I don't remember what music was played. I know that they danced and that we were in the other room. We were interested in the chocolate candies.

Our house was crazy at Pesach. For seven days before everything had to be cleaned. Every crumb had to be removed from the house. The first day nothing could be eaten the whole day. Only in the evening. I know that it was like that. Then matzot. I don't know where they got matzah, unleavened bread, back then. I know one thing: I know that I would sneak into the pantry and eat something. I couldn't wait and be hungry until night time. I had to take something so that no one saw me. Grandmother would have killed me.

We had guests for dinner, as always. Granduncle Jakov read the Haggadah. I don't know how it all went. But everything was prepared. It wasn't read in Hebrew, maybe in Spanish. When they all got together they spoke Spanish, not Serbian. Jakov led everything. We all sat together at the table: men and women, children, my father, everyone, except the servants.

None of the servants sat with us when there were rituals. They were in the kitchen then. They brought the food to the table and cleaned up, but never did they sit with us during the holidays. However, on regular work days, in our house we all sat together to eat. The servants were never separated. As far as I remember, there was never any degradation. Only on the holidays.

The Purim party would be downstairs in the hall [in the Jewish community]. Grandmother also went to the party. And Father. We all went together. It was nice. We always went to that show. The Jews organized it and participated as well as their friends and the actors that they hired, such as Zanka Stokic

[Editor's note: Considered to be one of the most serene Serbian actresses (1887-1947), she was a dominate force in the Serbian theater in the interwar period.] Then there was a raffle.

They had many beautiful things, expensive things. The first two or three prizes were high quality, the others were so-so. Imagine, my mom, despite all the Jews that were there, won the first prize. The prize was a big snake skin covered case and inside it had a full manicure set. The other women were annoyed that Mother got that first prize. I remember this.

I don't remember the other prizes or if we ate anything there. But I do remember that there was music. People did wear costumes but we didn't, probably because we were too little. There were prizes for those who wore the costumes. My mother didn't get dressed up but my Aunt Regina and [cousin] Mile did. Aunt Regina won prizes for the best costume two or three times. I don't remember anything else about Purim.

We didn't celebrate Christmas or Easter in our house. Mother wasn't allowed to do so. I knew that other people celebrated these holidays but we didn't.

I don't remember a funeral, but I was at a wedding. My grandmother's brother's son married a girl from Banat [6](#). They took us to the wedding. The girl worked with golden decoration in some store. I know because we got gold bracelets and rings from her as a present. I don't remember much about the wedding.

I only remember that she was a beautiful bride in a big white wedding dress. I have a picture. She was probably Ashkenazi. [The bride was most likely Valerija and the groom Moric Kalef].

### • Wartime

I remember how worried everyone was when King Aleksandar I [7](#) was killed. I was a kid and couldn't understand. Everyone put candles and his picture with a black band on it in the windows. I also remember, that my parents were very worried about the demonstrations that the Communists made in Belgrade right before the war.

We were at home and we saw when they were running, when they passed by, when they screamed, and all of that. None of us were ever included in any party. No one in the whole family was included. But we saw this. I know that they were very worried. However, as a child this is all that I remember.

I don't remember any anti-Semitism. Here, no. I don't remember any military parades nor did we need to learn any national anthems in school.

When they started to talk about Zionism and to recruit volunteers among the youth for Israel, they didn't talk about this in front of the children because they were scared that we would blurt it out. What do I know? In general, I know that they taught me this song for my birthday:

'Today is my birthday, Daddy called me, three times kissed me, And gave me this doll. It came here from the fatherland. There where the pioneers are'

I cannot remember the rest. Then I responded, 'Oh, how proud I am of you, little baby. You are dearer to me than any present.'

Did my grandmother teach me that song or did someone else in the house? I don't remember. I believe that my father's nephews were ready for Zion to go to Israel. These were my father's uncle's sons, Jakov's sons.

The family talked about the situation with the Germans, but we were little and not interested. We saw their worried faces, but we didn't know the true weight of all of this. My sister was nine and I was eleven, what of this would be of interest to kids aged nine and eleven?

The Germans sealed off our store, with one of those seals, as Jewish property, they stamped it and then they took everything.

We went to school until it was forbidden for all Jewish kids to go to school. *[Editor's note: Already in August 1940 there were signs that Jewish students were being denied enrollment in schools and expelled. On 5th October 1940 the Numerus Clausus was passed in Yugoslavia and with it the first formal restrictions on education for Jews.]*

That was terrible, very unpleasant. I don't remember how they informed us of this or when. Jews were forbidden to appear in public places, they weren't allowed to work in public institutions or go to school.

For instance, my mother told Grandmother's sister's son, Isak - we called him Red Isak [because he was a red head] - Isak Koen was his name, 'Isace, you are healthy, innocent, join the Partisans. Run to the forest to save yourself. I will help you.

I will go with you to Avala [A 511 meter peak, 18 km south of Belgrade], and you flee to the forest, so that you can save yourself.' The other young people had been taken away for work. And Mother helped him get to the forest. But instead of going further, imagine, he came back. In the end they caught him. None of them were saved.

My mother's brother [Rudolf] learned that Belgrade was going to be bombed and the day before [6th April 1941] [8](#) he took my sister, mother and me, along with his wife and his daughter, in a car to Umcare, a village near Belgrade. Grandmother and Father were left behind in Belgrade during the bombings. Father was in a wheelchair and Grandmother old, and they couldn't go with us.

The car that picked us up was a state-owned car because Rudolf worked in a state hospital while he was in Belgrade. We stayed with some man in a house there for a few days. After the bombing they immediately moved us [my sister and I] to my uncle's apartment in Banovo Brdo [a neighborhood on the outskirts of Belgrade].

In front of our apartment on Gospodar Jovanova there was a 100-kilogram unexploded bomb and a big crater. The whole house was crumbling. Father and grandmother were sitting in the house unable to help themselves. Mother left us up there [in Banovo Brdo] and then went to see what was happening with Father and Grandmother.

Then she would take us to visit Father and Grandmother for a few days. [It was during one such visit] that the German came and told us, 'Jews out!' So from the bombing [of Belgrade] until the time when the German came to evict us, we were mostly in Banovo Brdo with my uncle. Before they took Father and Grandmother, when people started to get the armbands, Mother asked the nuns to take us in, and we stayed there for three months.

Mother sometimes slept with us, sometimes with them. Most importantly she moved us and put us in a safe place. It was a small place. No one knew us there, which was important.

Rudolf's house was also bombed; I don't remember when. We were already with the nuns. When his house was bombed, he got a room in the state hospital where he was employed. He lived there with his wife and daughter. He lived [in Belgrade] until the liberation and then he returned to Slovenia.

They took away some of my relatives before they came to us and told us to leave: for instance, David and Mile Kalef, grandmother's brother's sons. We lived in number three and they lived in number five. David and Mile Kalef were picked up for these actions to clean the destruction from the bombing of Belgrade on 6th April.

At one point they came home and then after that they never appeared again. I don't know what they talked about when they came home. We were already hidden. Mother told us that for some time they still came. David and Mile's mother, Lenka Kalef, poor woman, even went to the construction sites where they were cleaning and sometimes brought them some food to eat, until they took her away too.

The two of us were small and didn't get our yellow stars, but all the others had to wear them. It was a yellow band around the arm. Mother didn't wear one but Father and Grandmother and the rest did. I don't know why Mother didn't wear one.

*[Editor's note: Jews were ordered to register on 19th April 1941 at the command center at Tasmajdan Park. At the time of registration yellow armbands with the word JUDE printed in black letters and under it JEVREJIN in Cyrillic were distributed.]*

*Somewhere between the two was a Star of David. The armbands were made from material taken from Jewish textile stores. They were made from anything from cotton to silk and came in a variety of shades of yellow. Later on the Germans decided the armbands were not enough and added yellow badges. Source: Zeni Lebl]*

[One day] a German officer came to our house and told us that the apartment needed to be emptied and everyone needed to get out. This was in 1940 or 1941. When the German came it was part of an action. They went from house to house saying, 'Out, this and that, you must get out, etc.'

I don't remember when they came to the house. I don't know where my sister was at the time. We had seen [this German] on the street but never had this kind of direct contact with him, to imperil you in your own house.

My father, who spoke excellent German, began to complain. This German took out his revolver and he wanted to shoot at him. I was horrified. I was paralyzed from fear, and then my mother began to beg. She said that he was sick and she calmed the German down and that's why he didn't kill him. But he said that we had to get out of our apartment because we had all been expelled.

My mother, completely beside herself, took us to Banovo Brdo, first to one of her brothers who lived there. My uncle helped us a little when he could, but he moved very early on. And they didn't have what to live of either. [I don't know if she moved us the same day as the German appeared or if it was later.]

In general she quickly hid us because they had to go. Mother packed things for us. [She packed] those things that were easiest for us to take. Everything else stayed in the apartment. I don't remember how we got there: by tram, or walking. It was probably by tram or some public transport.

[In Banovo Brdo] she begged a catholic priest, Andrej Tumpej, [to take us in]. *[Editor's note: Father Tumpej was born on 29th November 1886 in Saint Lavranac, Slovenia. From 1941 to 1945 he was a*



priest in St. Cyril and St. Methodius parish in Banovo Brdo in Belgrade. He died in Belgrade on 5th March 1973 and is buried in the Topcider cemetery in Belgrade.] She probably went there because she was Slovenian and thought that they would [help her].

I don't know if she knew [this priest and] these nuns before. Before we left the house, Mother took all of the documents, that is the birth certificates, deeds, marriage certificates and wrapped them up [and hid them].

We didn't have anything with us which could connect us to a Jewish family. [Father Tumpej] gave us fake documents as the out of wedlock children of Antonija [Ograjensek], so that we would have some documents. My false name was Lidija Ograjensek and my sister's was Breda Ograjensek; her birth name was Rahela.

Next to the church there was an apartment where these nuns lived. We got two beds in a room and were there for three months. Just my sister and I. They took us in and then we couldn't go anywhere. We were with the nuns for three months. We didn't leave there: we slept, ate, etc. When we were with the nuns we were the only children hiding there.

They were polite to us, very polite. And most importantly, they were thrilled because we knew the Old Testament. As Jews we learned the Old Testament. There was no pressure. I went to visit them after the war. They were up there in the railway hospital where they worked. The priest was very sick so I went to visit him.

Mother was always running around seeing what she could do for Father and Grandmother to follow what was going on with them and their condition. She slept at her brother's, Rudolf Ograjensek, who lived in Banovo Brdo, until his apartment was bombed. He moved somewhere else and Mother found a place for the three of us in an attic, also in Banovo Brdo.

My grandmother went with Father. They transported, transferred them to the old age home and mother hid us. [Editor's note: This building, located at 24 Jevrejska (Jewish) Street, was built in 1929. It functioned until 1942 when all of its residents were evicted and killed. Source: Zeni Lebl] I don't know how they were taken away.

I don't know what happened: did the Germans take them away, did they go on their own, or maybe the Serbian guards took them. I don't know any of that because I was gone. At first they were taken to an old age home somewhere in Dorcol, and later they transported them to the Jewish hospital.

[Editor's note: Immediately upon their arrival the Germans fired all Jewish health care workers. Since it was forbidden for them to practice in the public health care facilities, in May 1941 a Jewish hospital was opened in the building of the Jewish Women's Society, 2 Visokog Stevana Street. Source: Zeni Lebl] These were the last transports of Jews from Belgrade.

[Editor's note: On 19th March 1942 the liquidation of the hospital began. Trucks serving as mobile gas chambers came twice a day. On 22nd March the hospital staff was liquidated in those same trucks. Source: Zeni Lebl] They were in those mobile gas chambers. From the gas trucks they were later liquidated.

[Editor's note: The cars were constructed by Beker and Walter Rauf and made in the Sauer factory under the name 'Truck S.' The Nazis had different names for them including: Sonder-Wagen,

*Sonderfahrzeug, Spezialwagen, S-Wagen and Entlausungswagen. Source: Zeni Lebl]*

After leaving us my mother returned home to see where they were going to take my father and grandmother. Since they had nothing with them and no possibilities and my father was sick, my mother, poor thing, went somewhere and got some bread and made Melba toast for them, and packed some sacks for them thinking that if they were transported somewhere, they could survive on this and not die of hunger.

[Before mother left our apartment she stowed away our pictures and documents.] We are very lucky that the pictures were saved. This was due to the fact that my mother was so smart and wise. She wrapped all these pictures and documents in thick brown paper. She took the parcel and she squeezed it in between a beam and tiles in the attic in order to protect it.

If we survived, and if we returned, we would have some proof that we were the legal children of Jewish origin and about the property and everything. In addition to the pictures and documents that my mother hid there was also Jakov's tallit and tefillin. That was it.

Mother saved these things. One time [after the war] I was looking for something and found them. I asked her, 'why are you saving this? Let's take it to the museum.' A year or two after the war I took them to the museum.

When we were all gone the Germans took whatever they wanted from our belongings. Whatever remained they burned and said, 'Let a Jewish house burn.' Since the apartment was open and the windows and doors broken, homeless people entered, saw it was empty, and lived there. They put out what ever was still burning. I am telling you that is how our documents were saved. It wouldn't have been, had the house burned down. That is that.

In the meantime she went out to visit [Father and Grandmother]. I don't know if at that time the Serbian guard was Nedic's [9](#) or Ljotic's [10](#). Mother had heard that they were going to transfer them from the old age home to the hospital. So she asked the Serbian guard who was guarding the Jews in the old age home to allow her to bring the children to see their father one more time. He agreed.

The next day she secretly brought us there, because you know, no one was permitted to see us in Dorcol because they would recognize us and betray us. She secretly brought us there and this was the last time we saw our father and grandmother. We went inside.

She took us in and we kissed our father and grandmother. My father's last words were: 'Dona, protect my children. Take care of my children.' 'Dona, protect my children. Take care of my children.' This was my guiding principle through life. She fought so hard during the war to somehow keep us well, feed and save us.

After that they were transferred to the Jewish hospital. [In the hospital there] were women who had just given birth, the elderly and the sick. Mother heard that [they had been transferred] and decided that we should try one more time to see Father and Grandmother.

Across the street from the hospital lived a Serbian friend of my mother's. Very early one morning, around six, she took us to this woman. She lived across the street in a building on the second floor. We hid there behind the drapes so that we could see Father one more time when they threw them into the trucks. However, the street was blocked off for 40 meters on two sides.

I don't know where that hospital was; I was very little. After this I never asked Mother where it was. I know that it was somewhere on the corner, close to Kalemegdan. No one could get near while they were throwing people into the trucks for suffocation.

They pushed them up some wooden steps. We could just see the feet climbing up onto the truck. My father couldn't walk. They either threw him in with his wheelchair or without it. This was our last chance and in the end we didn't manage to see Father or Grandmother.

This was in 1942. It was the last transport of Jews from Belgrade. I don't remember when I saw Father the last time at home before Mother took us away. *[Editor's note: By the end of May 1942 the last phase of the 'removal' of Jews was completed. In a correspondence from 29th August 1942 a German officer boasted: 'The Jewish question as well as the Gypsy question are totally liquidated. Serbia is the only country in which the Jewish and Gypsy question have been solved.' Source: Zeni Lebl]*

That priest [Andrej Tumpej] made it possible for us to go to school in Banovo Brdo with the false documents. We went to school and then we came home. Then there were no textbooks and we had no supplies; I have no idea how we went to school.

The people in the school didn't know about us. Imagine this: the priest asked the school director to accept us in the school. We had no documents because I told you that Mother packed up all our documents. We had nothing. No documents or diplomas with which to prove that we had been in school. The director accepted us and only he knew we didn't have documents. The priest brought us there. He accepted us on his personal responsibility.

Now I will tell you about my experience in school. Today, I still get the chills when I think about this. It was the third grade of gymnasium because I finished the first two at the 4th Women's Gymnasium. When I entered the classroom, the teacher said, 'We have a new student.

Stand up and introduce yourself to the class.' I stood up but at that moment my brain froze out of fear-I was so scared I forgot my name. It was terrible. I still get the chills today. I turned as red as a crab, I couldn't remember my new name and I couldn't say my old name. I stood before them like someone who had lost her senses. The kids looked at me and I didn't know my name. At one moment I guess I remembered and I stuttered out 'Li-di-ja'. And today I cannot forget that moment.

After that the kids accepted me. But I am telling you that we had nothing. No supplies. Whenever we managed to visit the priest he always gave us fruit because he knew how hungry we were. When we were in school we socialized with the other children. However they didn't come to our house. We only socialized outside.

✖ [Andrej Tumpej] was an exceptional man. He hid two [other] Jewish girls. Up in Banovo Brdo there was a German cemetery. This was in 1942. During the day they hid in the cemetery and at night they came to him. He gave them a place to sleep in one big hall so that they didn't freeze. Imagine this, then he, who had good relations with the Serbian priests, through them got these two papers that they were Serbian women going to work in Germany.

With this, I think, he thought he helped save them. He obtained all that for them. When they got to the train station as two Serbian women to go work in Germany a Volksdeutscher [11](#) recognized them and turned them in. They were arrested and transported. We never saw them, and I don't

know their names.

He told us this during the war. After this the Germans locked him up for one, two, three months in Belgrade. He also hid Dr. Vajs, a pediatrician. She was with the Partisans. She also came to him in Banovo Brdo and slept in the big hall.

He helped everyone a lot. He died after the war, but I don't remember what year. When he was in prison a German asked him, 'How could you dare to do this, to hide Jewish girls?' and he answered, 'And tomorrow if you were in that kind of situation I would do the same for you.'

He was a great man and he got along very well with the Serbian priests too. They hugged and kissed when they met each other. There was no hatred. He was a man in the true sense of the word. Exceptional. We have a picture with him after the war with a group of kids.

After three months mother found us an attic apartment in Banovo Brdo. When we lived in the attic, a man, who made purses, lived below us in the house. Sometimes my sister, poor thing, went there to help him and got a few dinars so we could buy something to eat. I don't know how much he knew about us but he was entirely OK. He let us use the space without any compensation. He had children but we didn't socialize with them.

When we were in the apartment we were not with Mother a lot. Poor Mother left us there and she went from village to village to gather what was left on the fields because we didn't have what to live of. Nothing. They took everything from our place and she couldn't take things to sell them.

Not the store either. Everything was blocked, it was all taken away. I tell you, the poor thing went from village to village, gathered the remains from the fields and brought them to us. I have no idea how we survived. In general she was out of the house. Then she would drag branches to cook with. We had a stove. To this day, I have no idea how she managed.

Mother sometimes smuggled goods so that she could resell them somewhere else. Some sausages. She truly suffered. Then it was forbidden to be outside at night. There were defined hours when people could move around.

*[There was a curfew in Belgrade. Serbs were allowed to be on the streets from 5am to 8pm and Jews from 6am to 7pm which was quickly reduced to 6pm. Source: Zeni Lebl]* So, when Mother went to the village to get things she had to sleep there. Four times she slept in a pigsty. She snuck into some hog breeder's stable and slept there.

We lived in this attic until Banovo Brdo was bombed. Then a shell hit and destroyed the roof [of the house where we were living]. We were not at home at the time. After that a woman on Radnicka Street let us use a space where her girls slept, her household help. This was also in Banovo Brdo, so we were able to stay in the same school until the end, 1945, I think.

#### • **Post-war**

In 1945 we returned to our house. I must tell you this sad and unpleasant story. When we returned home, Mother said, 'Go and see who is left from the old tenants.' We had five apartments in the garden. But everything was changed. Only one family remained. Mother was so excited when she saw that at least someone had remained from before the war.

She said to them, 'I am so happy that you remained.' Then she saw our couch in their home and said, 'Oh, you saved our things for us, that was so nice since we really have nothing.' He said, 'Excuse me, if I hadn't taken it, the Germans would have taken it.' Mother said to him, 'You are miserable and miserable you will remain.' You know how they got it?

The Germans put a seal on the door so that no one could go in until they cleared out the things. But we had a main entrance and a side entrance. They took the things from the garden entrance, so that no one saw them. They took some things but couldn't take too much; otherwise it would have been too obvious. That's how our couch came to be in their house.

There were eight apartments in our building. [After the war] all of our property was nationalized. Those people who had entered our apartment during the war received occupancy rights automatically when the Communists [see KPJ] [12](#) took over. We came [to the municipal authorities] and told them we didn't have a roof over our heads.

In 1945 the Stari Grad municipal authorities allotted us one part [of the apartment]. They gave us the maid's room and the anteroom and we lived there. Those others kept the rest of the apartment including the toilet. For fifty years, until democracy came, my mother had to go to the yard to use the communal toilet.

The other residents didn't let her use the toilet [in the house]. At one point Mother built a door between the two rooms so that she didn't bother us. And then we sealed up the maid's room to be more secure.

Of course all this bothered her, but we didn't have the possibility to kick them out as long as the Communists were here. Mother fought for two years to get the apartments denationalized. She proved that there were three owners, not one. [At that time] one person had the right to own one larger apartment and two smaller ones.

If there was one owner with eight apartments they would be nationalized. [She succeeded] in getting the apartments denationalized. This was during the 1960s and 70s. Those who had occupancy rights [to the apartments in the yard] left one by one. As they became vacant Mother sold them for very little, just so that they wouldn't be nationalized again.

When the democratic government came in the 1990s, I requested that she get her whole apartment back. After two years of fighting with the authorities we managed to relocate the person living in Mother's apartment. That's how we liberated Mother's entire apartment. One apartment upstairs was also liberated and one 70 square meter apartment is still occupied.

Mother could finally expand her living space. I only wanted her to feel free. You know what she did? The tenants didn't want to go even though they were provided with a nice new apartment. They were thrown out by force from the apartment.

She stood there and asked to immediately break down the door and one wall so that she could get into that part of the apartment. We told our mother that it was not safe: 'please don't sleep here!' Those people didn't want to leave the apartment and we were scared about what they might do.

However, she took an ax and said, 'No one else is going to ever throw me out of my apartment.' She didn't actually break down the wall, someone else did. She was so excited. And she slept there.

We asked some man to take care of her for a few days to make sure no one attacked her. You know how people are. While we lived with this family, whose name I don't know, they were constantly threatening us saying, 'better that they killed you.' Today, my daughter uses that apartment as an office.

For four years we lived in hope that someone would return alive. When we returned in 1945, no one else came back. Only Aunt Regina came back to Belgrade and then moved to Israel with her family. We saw each other for a short while. She didn't stay here long before moving to Israel. [Immediately after the war] she fought to get Jakov's house back. She sold it and went to Israel. She didn't sell it to us. My mother didn't try and fight for their apartment.

Mother began to work; she had to. We didn't have what to live of. She worked in a state-run shop as a saleswoman.

I finished gymnasium and went to study to be a dental technician. I chose to become a dental technician because my mother thought it best for me to do something which would make money so we could live more easily. I went to a private dentist and I learned a little with him and then passed the test in the state institution.

At the time there was no formal school in this field. That was formed only later. I worked as a dental technician making bridges, crowns and artificial teeth. I worked on Oblicev Venac Street, in the laboratory, for thirty years.

✖ In 1948 I got married and left home. I met my husband [Onton Cerge] during the war in Banovo Brdo. He lived there. We both knew the same people and that's how we met. I guess he knew that I was a Jew from the priest. He also knew the priest. But he didn't say anything.

In 1946 I went to Slovenia to my uncle, a dentist, to work a little there. But I didn't last long there, and in 1947 I returned to Belgrade. I got a job at the dental clinic. Onton came to visit me, this and that, and in 1948 we married. I went to live [with him] on Topcidarski Brdo. We married on 8th September 1948 at the Savski Venac municipal office. My mother and sister were not present. There was no celebration after the ceremony.

I had a desire, I always had it, to live in Israel; however, my husband was here and I stayed here in Yugoslavia. If I could be born again, I would like to marry a Jew and live there.

Very soon [after the war] my sister and I joined the Jewish community. We were working and couldn't go often. We went periodically. Now that I am free I can go more often. But all the time we were members of the Jewish community. My sister even sang with the choir and went to Israel with them in 1952, '54, '56, '58. Breda was also in Israel for six months performing with the Israeli Opera Company from September 1964 to March 1965.

After the war we didn't keep any Jewish traditions. Since my husband was Slovenian we celebrated Christmas and Easter at home. For some time, he went to church and then he stopped going. I almost never went. He worked as a business administrator for Elektrometal. We lived with his mother in the same house [our entire married life]. She even outlived him by a year.

After the war I guess Mother had more friends than before. It is amazing how my mother got used to life in Serbia and to this environment in general. And she loved Jews so much. After the war, G-d



forbid someone should say something against Jews. Against Slovenians it was OK to say whatever you wanted but against Jews no. She would jump up and react immediately. If someone said something against Jews, she would poke his eye out. She was heart and soul loyal to Jews.

Mother spoke with us in Serbian and Slovenian and a little in that Spanish. She spoke Serbian OK, well. We always answered her in Serbian. You know she lived in Serbia for almost 70 years. She came here when she was 17 [or 18], married [soon after] and died when she was 91. That means she lived in Serbia for almost 70 years.

My husband and I have a daughter [Edita]. We never put pressure on her to identify herself as a Jew or not. We left it up to her to decide. She was a member of the Jewish community as long as I paid for her. I no longer pay for her. We live under the same roof, but we have our own apartments. My daughter built an apartment in the attic for herself.

I was never a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. I simply was not. We weren't members during the occupation and afterwards, during socialism, we were still not. When democratic parties were formed then I joined the Democratic Party. I'm still a member but I don't do anything.

My husband followed politics but he was never active. Mother wasn't with the partisans. When I was at work I had one very unpleasant situation. During the 1971 war in Israel [the interviewee is most likely referring to the Yom Kippur War [13](#)], there was talk here that our army would be sent over there.

My co-workers were talking about this when one woman stood up and said, 'If our children start dying over there, then no Jew has a place over here anymore.' I will never forget these words. I talked to my husband about this and he suggested that I not make a fuss and let it go. It was very unpleasant.

We traveled very often to Hvar [Croatia]. Mother bought an old house there more than 35 years ago. She renovated it. In fact my brother-in-law, Breda's husband, is an architect, and he made the plans for the renovation. We, my husband and I, my sister, mother, and the children with their friends, took turns using the house, so that there wouldn't be too many people at once.

We weren't there for nine years during this war. *[Editor's note: From 1991 to 1995 Yugoslavia was dismantled in a series of bloody wars. In the end each republic gained statehood. The fighting ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords]*. We couldn't go there.

Our house wasn't destroyed and no one took anything, so we were able to start going again. I was there for the first time in 2000. I go there but I don't socialize a lot with the local people. Mostly I am at home, go to the beach. The main contact is when I go to the store, and I haven't had any problems there.

The first time I went back, they looked at me like I had just landed from Mars. They said, 'How come that you returned?' I said, 'Normal. I got a visa, they checked me out, I am not an enemy, and they permitted me to come.' That first year I didn't get electricity. I had to use butane gas during my stay. The next year they fixed it and I had electricity.

When my daughter turned twenty, I started to go on trips abroad with different travel agencies. I was a few times in Israel and in Holland and Spain. I went with my girlfriends as my husband was busy. My daughter was already twenty so she also didn't go. My husband traveled a lot for work.

When the summer came and I wanted to go some place outside [of Yugoslavia], he would say, 'I want to stay home.' The time we spent on Hvar was wonderful but it was also extraordinary to go somewhere else. He said, 'When I go there for work I don't spend time; I must work.' So I said, 'OK, if you don't want to go, I will go.' And then I made an agreement with a friend.

I was in Israel three times. The first time was in 1971. When I went some asked me, 'Are you normal?' I think it was when there was a disagreement with Egypt. That is when I went. *[Editor's Note: The interviewee is most likely referring to the Yom Kippur War.]*

*On 6th October 1973, during Yom Kippur, a two-pronged attack on Israel was launched. Egypt struck across the Suez Canal while Syria advanced from the north. Iraq, Jordan, Libya and smaller Arab nations also joined in the attack. Israel managed to push out the aggressors but at a high cost in human life. A cease-fire was brokered and resulted in the resumption of diplomatic relations between Israel and Syria and Egypt.]*

I had a very unpleasant experience. Let me tell you: I went to Russia; it was a study trip with all the dental technicians from Yugoslavia. We went as a group to visit the laboratories in Russia. It was 1971 or 1972. We went to Kiev by plane and then to Moscow by train.

When we arrived in Kiev, imagine they didn't search anyone except me. They strip-searched me. They opened the chocolates I had brought to share with the colleagues from the labs. It was all unclear to me. Wherever I had traveled before no one ever searched anyone.

Then in Leningrad we had a guide who was a Jew. He knew Serbian so I confided in him. I tell him, 'Imagine that something like that happened to me. I don't know why.' He says, 'Let me see your passport.' Before [this trip] I wanted to go to Israel and had a visa in my passport.

They searched me because of this, because they thought I was a spy. I wanted to go to Israel before this but didn't go because I went to Russia instead. They searched me in this way; it was horrible. And he told me it was because of this. I was in Holland. I was in many places.

I really tried to go wherever I could. I always went with a group through a travel agency. This is why I laugh when I see my grandmother's pictures from Israel and Athens, the Acropolis. I start to laugh and say to myself, 'Now I know who I take after, Grandmother Matilda.'

The first time I wanted to go to Israel so badly; I can't explain it to you. My sister had been, but I had never had the opportunity. Since our country was one of the non-aligned nations and in discord with Israel there were no organized trips there.

I was telling this to my aunt who lived in Ljubljana [Slovenia]: 'I would so much like to go to Israel but I can't. Over here they don't have anything organized.' And she says, 'In Ljubljana we have organized trips.' I say, 'No kidding. Please tell me as soon as you hear that someone is organizing a trip from Ljubljana.'

Call me and immediately reserve me a place. I will come to Ljubljana and join the group.' She called me and told me that a group of pilgrims, in fact Putnik [a travel agency], was organizing a group via Trieste [Italy] with Lufthansa. I immediately said, 'Please reserve me a place, I'm coming to Ljubljana.'

I slept one night at her place and the next day joined the group. That was the first time I saw Israel. This was such an experience for me! When the plane landed at the airport, I had such deep feelings that I can't explain it. After that I was there another two, three times with different agencies.

### • Life today

Every year I go to Greece for summer vacation. We go to Hanioti, a place near Halkidiki [a peninsula southeast of Thessalonica]. It is a place which is very comfortable and inexpensive. Before the season it is always very inexpensive.

I go there with my sister and brother-in-law and friends - always with people. I have been going there since the beginning of the break-up of Yugoslavia, when we could no longer go to Hvar. The sea is warm in June, which is very important, and exceptionally beautiful. We go by bus, that's why it's so cheap.

My mother died in 1990. She is buried in Belgrade, in the Topcider cemetery, where my husband is [also] buried. We have a family plot there.

My older granddaughter, Leana, went to the Jewish community for a while. And for some time I took the younger one [Sara]. They have drifted away from this and I don't know why. Leana studies acting and the younger one, Sara, is still in high school and very busy. She would like to do Israeli dance and I tell her to go.

But she says, 'Grandma I really can't.' We live far away; she goes to school, comes home, has extra courses in German and goes to music school. She is so overextended, she really doesn't have time. Maybe when she begins university she will have more time. I also try and convince her to join the choir because she has a nice voice.

I never sang in the Jewish choir, but I did sing in some state choir. But I only sang for a few years because I was very busy. I don't remember what it was called.

✖ I retired 23 years ago. I have a garden, a cat named Kica; I also used to have a dog. I have to take care of the garden and the house. Mostly I take care of all these things on my own. In the winter I need to keep the fire going in the tiled stove.

I have to get all the things I need on my own. I cannot expect anything from my children, who are very busy and have their own life. I pay the bills, go shopping and take care of the house. I had some friends, but unfortunately five of them died within a very short time. I read a lot of fiction. I follow everything.

I have a subscription at the library and take all the books that they have. Whatever [they have] I grab. I spend a lot of time reading. I especially like to read in the morning when I wake up. I hate to get out of bed, so I stay in and read a while before getting up and start taking care of the things that need to be taken care of.

I can't read at night because it keeps me awake. I concentrate so much on the book [that I can't fall asleep]. That's why I prefer to read in the morning and in the afternoon when I lay down to rest a little. I watch very little television, just a few films. I like programs about history and animals. Once a day I listen to the news to have some idea of what is going on. But I have had enough of all this politics and other stuff.

Fridays I go to the Jewish community. We exercise, socialize and talk a little. Recently we agreed that every week each person will tell a little story from his life. We didn't only survive; we are still living. Everyone must tell a detail from his life, something nice that he has in his memory. There you go, a little this, a little that.

This last war in Yugoslavia [the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999] was very difficult for me. I live on a hill fifty meters from where they were launching anti-aircraft defenses. When they bombed, it shook a lot over here. Our house is also very close to a military facility and then Rakovica [military airport], and the gas reserves in Banovo Brdo. It was a lot of banging. The whole time we were at home.

Had Yugoslavia not broken up, we would have had a divine life. If we had been smart. The politicians did all sorts of things to us. It is unforgivable. Now little by little we will remain a minority in Serbia.

When the State of Israel was established I was so happy. I don't remember how I heard about it or if there was any celebration in the community. I was happy that, thank G-d, we finally had one corner on the globe where a person could feel safe and where he could come if there was a pogrom.

When there is a census I declare myself a Jew.

I get restitution money from the Claims Fund [Conference].

I didn't go to Topovske Supe a few weeks ago when [Vojislav] Kostunica [the Premier of Serbia] dedicated a new monument to the Jews that were executed at that spot. I get very upset [at those commemorations] and I don't go to them anymore.

When the Berlin Wall fell, I was satisfied that this had finally happened. Maybe it isn't alright for a person to feel like this. The nation as a nation didn't participate in many things and is not guilty, but I never managed to like Germans.

Andrej Tumpej was declared a righteous Gentile [in 2001] and received a certificate from Yad Vashem [14](#). His nephew received it for him and my sister was present at the ceremony in Ljubljana when the Israeli ambassador gave his nephew this document since the priest had died. He died of natural causes. This was a few years ago. I cannot remember the exact date. He had helped everyone.

My mother didn't learn how to make anything [food] from my grandmother. So she wasn't able to pass down those things to us. And the situation at first was very bad; we almost didn't have anything to eat for four years.

Today, I am having guests and will make pita [salty pie made with sheets of flaky dough]. First you make the filling: a kilo of greens such as spinach, Swiss chard, etc. cut into tiny, tiny pieces, white cheese and kajmak [Serbian cream] and eggs.

Mix it all together really well. Then you take two sheets of flaky dough and sprinkle them with the water and margarine/oil and then cover it with filling, two more sheets sprinkled with carbonated water and oil and then add the filling. Repeat until the tray is full. Then I pour some sour cream and carbonated water on top.

Cook it in a pre-heated oven for twenty minutes at 200 degrees Celsius. At the end you might need to cover it with aluminum foil so it doesn't burn. When I take it out I sprinkle it with some more carbonated water and cover it with a clean cloth.

- **Glossary**

## **1 Dorcol**

Turkish for 'four ways.' This area, several blocks square, to the southeast of Kalemegdan, became known as Jevrejska mala, the Jewish quarter. (Source: 'Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community' Harriet Pass Freidenreich)

## **2 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**

The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495).

The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

## **3 King Petar II (1934-1970)**

born in 1923 to King Alexander I and Queen Marie. He became King on 9th October 1934 upon his father's abdication. He was deposed on 29th November 1945 and died in exile in 1970.

## **4 Vojvodina**

Northern part of Serbia with Novi Sad (Ujvidek, Neusatz) as its capital. Ethnically it is the most mixed part of the country with significant Hungarian, Croatian, Romanian, Slovakian population as well as Roma and Ruthenian minorities (and also a large German population before and during World War II, which was expelled after the war).

An integral part of Hungary, the area of present day Voivodina was attached to the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (Yugoslavia after 1929) at the Trianon Peace Conference in 1920. Along with Kosovo it used to be an autonomous province within Serbia between 1974 and 1990, under the Yugoslavian Constitution.

## **5 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people.

After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box'. In Poland the JNF was active in two periods, 1919-1939 and 1945-1950. In preparing its colonization campaign, Keren Kayemet le-Israel collaborated with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

## **6 Banat**

Geographical area confined by the Maros River in the North, the Tisza River in the West, the Danube in the South and the Carpathian Mountains in the East. Until the end of World War I the area was an integral part of Hungary.

It was an ethnically mixed area with a large German, Serbian, Romanian, Slovakian, Ruthenian and Croatian population. As a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty Banat was split up between Romania and Yugoslavia. Today Serbian Banat is part of Voivodina.

## **7 Aleksandar I (1888-1934)**

King of Yugoslavia from the Karadjordjevic dynasty between 1921-1934. In 1929 Aleksandar dismissed the parliament, abolished the constitution and the parties, and became absolute ruler. Although he announced the end of the dictatorship in 1931 and proclaimed a new constitution, he kept the power in his own hands.

His authoritarian and centralizing policy brought him the hatred of the separatists, especially the Croatian Ustasha and the Macedonian IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). He was assassinated by the Ustasha Movement on an official state visit to Marseille in 1934.

## **8 6th April 1941**

Yugoslavia was invaded on all sides by the Germans and their allies. After less than two weeks, on 17th April 1941, the Yugoslav armed forces surrendered and the state ceased to exist. On this day Belgrade suffered a severe bombing destroying much of the city.

## **9 Nedic, Milan (1878-1946)**

Serbian soldier and politician, who was a major collaborator during WWII. Born in Groska, Serbia, he participated and led many battles and was an accomplished military man; this led to his appointment in 1939 to Minister of Army and Navy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. However, he was removed from this post in 1940 because of his strong alignment with Hitler.

Once the Germans occupied Yugoslavia, the Wehrmacht commander entrusted Nedic with the administration of German-occupied Serbia. He managed to squelch resistance and it was with his



help that Serbia was considered 'judenfrei' in 1942.

In October 1944 his government was disbanded and he escaped to Austria but was captured by British forces in 1946. He was incarcerated in Belgrade but supposedly committed suicide by jumping out of a window while the guards weren't looking.

### **10 Ljotic, Dimitrije (1891-1945)**

leader of the Yugoslav National Movement which also used the name Zbor (Rally). Ljotic professed a strong Serb nationalist ideology and advocated a centralized, corporate state similar to Mussolini's Italy. Zbor was the most enthusiastic and active collaborationist organization in Serbia during the years of Nazi occupation. His organization had its own youth movement which was known as the White Eagle.

### **11 Volksdeutscher (ethnic German)**

Early 18th century German colonists from southern German states (Baden-Wurthenberg, Bavaria) who settled, on the encouragement of the Habsburg emperor, in the sparsely populated parts of the Habsburg Empire - especially in southern Hungary.

Thanks to their advanced agricultural technologies and hard work they became some of the wealthiest peasants in Hungary. Most of them lived (and partly still live) in Tolna and Baranya counties in present-day Hungary, Baranja in Croatia, Voivodina in present-day Serbia and the Banat in Romania. After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, following World War I, many of them came under Yugoslav and Romanian rule on the territories disannexed from Hungary on the basis of the Trianon Peace Treaty.

### **12 KPJ (Yugoslav Communist Party)**

It was first established in 1919, after the new state of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians came into existence after World War I. Many communists were killed and imprisoned in the purges during the royal dictatorship, introduced by King Aleksandar I in 1929 (the so-called 6th January Dictatorship, 1929-34), and the Central Committee of the KPJ went into exile in Vienna in 1930. The KPJ set up the first partisan units in November 1943 and organized resistance throughout World War II. The communist Federal Republic Yugoslavia, with Tito as its head, was proclaimed in November 1945. Yugoslavia became a communist dictatorship with a one party system and with the oppression of all political opposition.

### **13 Yom Kippur War**

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from October 6 (the day of Yom Kippur) to October 24, 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria.

The War began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day War six years

earlier.

The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict.

This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords which came soon after led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

#### **14 Yad Vashem**

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.