

# Avram Aleksander Mosaic

Aleksander Fredi Mosaic

Belgrade

Serbia

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For my own reasons I will begin presenting myself from an unusual perspective. I have my own name, family name which appears in all my documents but I also have a nickname, Fredi, by which I am known to all my friends. You probably sensed that I pronounced that in the German manner, the Viennese pronunciation, that is because my mother was Viennese and my father a Belgradian. My mother was Ashkenazi and my father Sephardi. He was even a fifth generation Belgrade Sephard. When I was born I was given the name Avram. Later, during WWII, I was forced to change that name to Aleksandar. I will tell you about why I did that during the second half of our conversation when we come to WWII, Holocaust, the period of the partisans, and the like. Thus, I am originally Avram Mosaic, professionally I am called that today, I have a passport with that name and an identity card with Aleksandar Mosaic. I am a chemical engineer, I have a diploma from 1947. As I mentioned already my parents are of a mixed marriage from the Jewish perspective—my father was Sephardi and my mother Ashkenazi. Since they married on January 5, 1913 when WWI broke out my parents situation was very difficult as mother was an Austrian and father a Serb. Based on the fact that Austria attacked Serbia that family, that is that marriage, was a very uncomfortable situation from the standpoint of state security of the Kingdom of Serbia, from the standpoint of social relations which existed at that moment, so that my parents escaped to Sofia via Nis. From Sofia I do not the exact path they followed, whether it was through Romania or Austria or Greece or Italy but they ended up in Switzerland as my mother had highly risky pregnancy. They lived in Switzerland during WWI so that I was born in Zurich on May 21, 1919. Even though in all my documents it is written that I was born in Zurich I never was Swiss and I only saw Zurich for the first time when I was sixty years old. During one of my travels I went to see my birthplace.

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## Growing up

My parents returned to Belgrade, via Vienna, immediately after WWI. My grandfather and grandmother's families still lived in Vienna at that time. I had two maternal uncles there Hannes and Fritz and aunts Emma and Edith and we spent some time in Vienna. Hannes inherited grandfather's shop for men's ready-made clothing and Fritz was a partner at Penichek and Rainer fur trading. My first visual memory is of the Viennese train station. It is difficult for me to say whether I was two or three at the time, but I remember the scene from the east train station in Vienna, where the trains leave for Budapest and Belgrade, where I saw a train being assembled on

the other track and I was astounded how those wagons travel without a locomotive, namely locomotives pushed the wagons. The wagons only had a motorman who at the right moment stopped them. I think that I could not have had less than three years. Immediately after that comes our arrival in Belgrade. At the Belgrade train station there were no cars rather carriages. Upon our arrival in Belgrade we got into a carriage, we climbed up the steep Balkan Street and went to my grandmother Mosaic's apartment.

Grandfather Mosaic had already died from Parkinson's disease, I don't remember him and grandmother still lived on Knez Mihailova Street, across from the so-called Grand Passage. This building, built in the urban baroque style, still stands today. Halfway between Kneginje Ljubice and Obilicev Venac. We lived there a very brief time and I am amazed at myself that I still remember this even today. Grandmother Bukas was well educated; she spoke German language and was a typical Sephardim. She spoke judeo espagnol and I visited her often for a lunch as she cooked my favorite dishes *mirinjenu* (made of eggplant) and *pastel* (meat pie).

We moved later to 31, 33 or 35 Strahinica Bana a house that still exists today. We entered our apartment on the third floor and I remember very well the balcony where I was allowed to play. That street is my first "homeland", essentially where I began my childhood. For those who does not know Belgrade I will tell you that Strahinica Bana is in Dorcol. In the part of Dorcol above Dusanova Street. The buildings were modern at that time, built at the turn of the century. A lot of Jews lived on that street. Most were Sephardic Jews, because there was a large concentration of Sephardic Jews in the area of Dorcol. Sephardic Jews were darker colored, they dressed differently, spoke judeo espagnol. Sephardic women wore darker clothing with pearls. There were Ashkenazik Jews in several houses, but their numbers were significantly fewer. Afterwards I learned that Ashkenazik Jews were mainly concentrated near the Savska Padina and in all other parts of Belgrade up to Smederevska Derma and Cubura. These were the outer areas of Belgrade, after these areas there were vineyards and in the twenties this was the periphery. Ashkenazi Jews were scattered all the way to there, while the Sephardic Jews were truly concentrated in Dorcol. I do not believe that when speaking in Serbian one must define what Dorcol is. On one occasion three or four years ago I wrote a book in German called "Jews of Belgrade" for an intellectual circle in Berlin and there I described more clearly what Dorcol was. In Dorcol was a Synagogue Bet Israel, Kal Nuevo (New Synagogue) in Cara Urosa street, which was robbed and destroyed at beginning of the war. Kal Vieju (Old Synagogue) was demolished in 1946 as it was completely destroyed during the war. My childhood therefore begins on Strahinica Bana Street which I want to describe to you. It was a street of Jews from the middle class in good apartments, nice houses, the street was treelined and with asphalt in the center or checkered track, on the sides there was still macadam road and the outer part of the sidewalk was treelined, these trees still stand today, however the street no longer resembles what it once was. It was a peaceful street on which we later, when I was already in the lower grades of the gymnasium, today these are the higher grades of elementary school, played football without fear of cars. Today this is not at all possible.

My father was a merchant and had a unique store with dental material which was called »Dental Depo«. Today those types of stores are called the same in German and French. Father ran that store and had excellent contact with all dentists in Serbia, and when I say Serbia I mean Vojvodina, Sumadija and Pomoravlja, in brief father was the one who supplied dentists in eastern parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After living on Strahinica Bana, if my memory does not fail me, we moved

to Balkanska Street. That building no longer exists, it was hit by a bomb in 1941 or 1944, I do not know if it was hit by a German bomb or an Allies bomb. The building was in the immediate vicinity to the »Luxor« movie theater, which today is called »20 oktobar«. It was at the corner of Pajsijeva and Balkanska streets. Pajsijeva Street remains very clear in my memory because it was steep. I used to sled down Pajsijeva Street. That was the period before elementary school.

My grandmother, I cannot say exactly when she left her apartment on Knez Mihailova Street, since she was already a widow, a young widow since my grandfather died in 1920 or 1921 from Parkinson's, moved to Marsala Pirsuska Street. Grandmother moved and joined my paternal aunt Neli Nehama, nee Mosaic, she married Josif Demajo, family. This family had two sons and a daughter, who were older than me. And as was customary among close relatives I admired them and they were examples for me. I was young and they were already merchants or students at the Commercial Academy and in their twenties. Grandmother lived with my aunt and uncle, in that house they spoke Ladino or Jewish Spanish. We differentiate between Ladino and Jewish Spanish in that Jewish Spanish is a literary language and Ladino is a type of spoken language, a bit of a dialect. I understand Ladino to be the lower level of language of educated Sephardic Jews. So, at home my grandmother and uncle spoke Ladino and Jewish Spanish which enriched my childhood. Because I listened to Ladino throughout my childhood and it remained in my ear, today I can understand Spanish, be it Jewish Spanish, Catalina, Mexican, even though I cannot speak it. I can always get by in spoken Spanish. Having listened to one romance language in my childhood helped me a great deal later, when I went to gymnasium and had to learn French, based on which I later learned Italian. So that my knowledge of romance languages and my love of romance languages begins from my pure Sephardic surroundings. At home my parents did not speak Ladino even though my father spoke Ladino, rather they spoke Serbian and German because my mother was from Vienna and did not know Ladino. My father completed his commercial middle school education in Germany. If I am not mistaken, many years have passed, it was a commercial academy in Mahtbrajt, I do not know what part of Germany that is. Certainly during father's schooling in Germany he mastered German and spoke it without any kind of foreign accent. I have to say that the Mosaic family paid a lot of attention to education of children. My grandfather Mosaic was an industrialist, he had a hat factory which among other places sold in Vienna and that is how Grandfather Mosaic of Belgrade came to know Grandfather Nojvelt in Vienna. This relationship between my grandfathers resulted in my parents marriage. In my parents family German and Serbian were spoken. My mother tried very hard, she was a good bride, she was a very good young wife and she understood it to be her obligation to learn Serbian and she learned it. The truth is she sometimes made mistakes with the cases but today with the greatest amount of love and admiration I excuse her because she never claimed to know perfect Serbian but she spoke it. During my childhood I already learned German as well. The fact that I grew up bilingual later had a great impact on my upbringing, schooling and interests. I grew up bilingual, actually knowing two and a half languages, I spoke Serbian and German and understood Ladino. When I came to middle school, I must remind you that in those days school lasted four years, and after that one went to the lower gymnasium and then to the higher. When I came to the lower middle school already in the second grade I began to learn French as part of the curriculum and it was very easy for me. I am certain that the ease with which I learned French was a consequence of my two and half language upbringing. By the way, let it be said, I already mentioned middle school, it was called »Realka« and this no longer exists today, today this type of school is the mathematics gymnasium,

so that I did not learn Latin nor Greek only modern languages. Upon graduating I already spoke fluent French. In the fifth grade then and the first grade today, I began to learn German, which was a breeze for me. I would like to draw attention to one thing, the knowledge of language which a child brings from home is very limited. The vocabulary from home life is limited and does not surpass 1000 words. My mother was a very well educated woman and she knew that she needed to develop German language for me parallel to Serbian. I subscribed to a German or Austrian magazine, which I received regularly and enjoyed reading, because it was very good. When I graduated from the gymnasium I spoke three languages fluently, with a vast vocabulary, with full knowledge of grammar and syntax. At the university I used only Serbian textbooks, but later in the higher years there were no Serbian textbook so I used German and French textbooks parallel and in the end I graduated with a knowledge of technical terms in three languages. We will leave my early childhood to graduation. We will continue with that in the second half.

Now it is interesting the life of a Jewish family with both Ashkenazik and Sephardic components. My mother socialized well and got along with the Mosaic family, I want to tell you that my two aunts also knew German, so they accepted my mother very well. My aunts who my grandmother lived with were Nehama or Neli and the elder one was Sarina or Sara, her married name was Alkalaj. Both aunts spoke German well and my uncle, my aunts younger brother, also did. They all knew German and they accepted my mother nicely. My mother, perhaps out of sentimental reasons, remains a very clear memory for me. When she came from Vienna she had an affinity towards the Belgrade Ashkenazik circles, she socialized with her friend with the same name, Elza Flajser, the wife of the famous Belgrade glass and porcelain merchant Benjamin Flajser who had a shop on Terazija and was the court supplier. We socialized with the Flajzers, and the two ladies had the same name like my daughter Elza. From my father's side I had very close contact with the Sephardic milieu which was in this area. My grandmother lived on Tadeusa Kosciuszka with the Demajo family. Jewish families such as: Gabaj, Tajtacak, my uncle Mosaic, Karaoglanovic lived on the whole row of apartments and houses on Jevremova Street, and on Cara Uroša Street. Today, since unfortunately that Jewish milieu disappeared during the Holocaust it will be interesting for me to tell you that the Sephardi Jews after the plague in Belgrade I think in XVII century moved from Savska Padina to Dunavska Padina and from then on Dorcol was the Jewish center. At the same it was always a multi-ethnic milieu where a mix of people lived and there were always excellent relations between the Jews and the Serbs, Cincars, Albanians and Turks as long as they lived in Belgrade. Because of this mixture in Dorcol all those who lived there learned great national tolerance; an attribute unique to Dorcol. To a great extent this spread to today's Belgrade which ends at Cubura and Smederevska Derm. Due to Dorcol, which represents the old center, Belgrade today is nationally a very liberal city. This was especially true before WWII and not to say WWI which I do not remember.

I remember best the period between the two world wars. We played in Dorcol among ourselves and we did not care at all who was of which religion or nationality, in general we knew each other by nicknames. In the school where I studied in close proximity to the Sabor church there were a lot of Jewish students. Around 30 students were in the grade, and if someone was called Adanja, and someone Mosaic or Bararon they were Jews, but as was said earlier we knew each other by nicknames and no one paid attention who was of which religion and we did all this playing in Kalemegdan. There were also harmless children's fights between the students of Realka and the

First Male Gymnasium, but there were no injuries. That was how territory was possessed and they were child's play that is played in every neighborhood in every city and in retrospect it is very cute. I knew all the kids from my generation in Dorcol. Now I will tell you something about Dorcol, when Jews in the XVII century moved to Dorcol from Savamala, that is the Sava mahala, this is a Serbian and also Sephardic verbal contraction, it is then mala with a long »a« , they moved northward from Dusanova Street that is between Dusanova Street and the banks of the Dunav. Today this remains Jewish Street, once it was Mojsijev Street. It is between Tadeusa Koscuska and Dubrovacka Streets. We have a picture in the Jewish Historical Museum of how it looked in the XIX century. However, after the Turks left in the second half of the XIX century an economic boom came to Serbia and to the Jewish communities. Those families that were poor moved into the middle class, they moved to the west from Jaliya via Dusanova Street to the area called Zerek, slope from Uzun Mirkova Street to Dusanova. Today there are still Jewish residents on Strahinica Bana, Jovanova, Jevremova streets to Uzun Mirkova and Vasina streets. When I was a kid all the Mosics already lived in this part of town, therefore all the Mosics fell into the middle class. My grandfather was an industrialist and had a hat factory. That hat factory was on Banatska Street, today it is Mike Aalasa. That building no longer exists, and the Mosaic's economic standing was good. Due to this I can tell you that they were elegantly dressed in European clothing, without any trace of the Turks, oriental clothing, which existed until the period before my childhood especially among older women. My aunts, all dressed in the European style. Also the houses were arranged in those circles if I can say on par with what I saw at my aunts and uncles in Vienna, it was that level. Concerning pure Jewish life, we went to the synagogue on Cara Urosa Street. This was the Sephardic synagogue Bet Israel, which was built before WWI. It is well known that King Petar I placed the corner stone, on the occasion of dedicating the synagogue he was present, and relations between Serbs and Jews were excellent. Since my father was a Sephard we were members of the Sephardic community and went to that synagogue. As a student I had to go to religion classes during which we learned tefila, praying customs and Biblical history. Friday night for every Erev Shabbat I had to be in synagogue. I also had to be in synagogue, independent of my parents desire, for each holiday. It is true that sometimes we skipped these religious services like we ran away from classes in the gymnasium. Yes I was an excellent student but I was also a little bit of a hoodlum. We felt very at home in synagogue, we knew the gabai who took care of Synagogue, cantor, rabbi, chief rabbi. We also knew to read Hebrew from the prayerbook, which we called tefila. However we did not learn the language, exactly what those prayers mean, but we did know the meaning of certain blessings. We learned these blessings because they are much shorter. When we had to read prayers or psalms from 10 to twelve lines from the book were read them but we did not know what we were reading. I had a Bar Micva when I was 13 years old. I do not have a lot to tell about this, I had a Bar Micva in the same way that other boys had one. We were prepared for this in Jewish school. Today I still remember that one Saturday at the end of the morning service, I had to give a speech in which I had to show that I knew something about Judaism. I remember that I spoke about Maimonides and while preparing this presentation I acquired a special respect for a man who is a humanist and philosopher. It was very interesting for me; studying his life was easier for me than studying his teachings because I was too young to understand his philosophy. It was very interesting to me because it showed me life of the Sephardi Jew before the expulsion from Spain. This awakened in me a special affinity for this Roman-Jewish culture.



My mother occasionally went to the Ashkenazik synagogue, not because she was of Ashkenazik religious determination, rather simply because that is where her friends were. Mother was also a member of a Jewish women's society, which I no longer know. It is barely felt that my mother and father were from two different, Ashkenazik and Sephardic cultures. For example my mother taught me to say the Sema Israel before going to sleep. She did not teach me to say it in the Ashkenazik manner, rather she adopted the Sephardic manner. She wanted to entirely fit into the Mosaic family therefore I did not say Sema Jisroel rather Sema Israel. We did not observe kashrut at home, because it was very hard to do this at home however there were families that did observe it. Pork we practically did not eat, simply it was fatty and we did not question this. My mother did not say kosher, rather kasher. And with that one can see her desire to enter the Sephardic milieu.

At grandmother and grandfather's in Vienna it was a different style, here one could notice the difference between the cultures of Vienna and Belgrade. Yes both cities are on the Danube, but Vienna was a city of the Tsar, much richer and more orderly. Belgrade, before WWII, was much more orderly than it is today, this terrible condition is an entirely other theme of urbanism and social problems. I happily went with mother to Vienna where my uncles and aunts pampered me, because except for me there was only one other grandchild, so that the entire Nojvelt family really pampered me. Till 1935 when uncle Fritz got a son I was the only child and for that reason everyone fondled me. I got to know Vienna as a pre-schooler and especially as a student. I got along very well there due to my knowledge of German. Vienna was very interesting to me: it had a zoo, lovely parks, the Prater amusement park. The life of my ancestors and relatives in Vienna I have the impression that the lives of my ancestors and relatives in Vienna were less full of Judaism than the Mosaic's in Belgrade. They were rich merchants. My grandfather, my uncle inherited it, had a men's fashion shop, clothing, in the middle of the main commerce street in Vienna, Kertnerstrasse, which is comparable to Knez Mihailova Street in Belgrade. My uncle was richer, I think, than my father, and his standard of living was a half of degree higher than my parents. I remember my uncle's apartment which was very richly furnished, uncle had a car before we did, so that from this perspective maybe I was spoiled with a high standard of living. As a young boy I went with my grandfather and grandmother every summer on vacation. Summer vacation I spent two months with grandfather and grandmother around Vienna in the Alps in nice orderly places and that is how I acquired my affinity for nice and orderly surroundings. Later, this carried over to my life, but I will talk about that when I discuss my professional career, how that additional upbringing from Vienna influenced my career.

There were many prominent people in the Mosaic family. Some of them are not called Mosaic. In the extended family there was the very respectable Aron Alkalaj, who was the general secretary of a mortgage bank, an exceptionally well educated man and very prominent in economic circles in Belgrade. Another friend of ours, I do not know to what extent we were related, among Sephardis many are relatives, I did not know who was related to whom but I knew them through the friendly relations between my parents and these families. One was Avram Levic, the head of the ministry of finance. He was the one who was entrusted to carry Miroslav's Gospel during the withdrawal through Albania. I know that there is some controversy concerning whether it was him or someone else, but in any case his name is associated with the withdrawal through Albania and the saving of the Miroslav Gospel. I will give an example of the type of circle my parents socialized in. One of the famous and respected Jews of Belgrade was Solomon Alkalaj, doctor president of the Sephardic

Jewish community who was married to the sister of an aunt of my aunt, that is to say a distant relative. Solomon Davidovic, urologist, when he operated on me to remove a birthmark he was a docent at the medical faculty. When I was 13 I had caecum (appendix) and I remember that he operated on me in an emergency operation at the »Zivkovic« sanatorium. In my happy memories I remember a grocery store on Kralja Petra Street, who had a grocery store on Rajiceva Street. In the period of my childhood it was a street that stretched all the way to the French embassy. In that row of shops, there were the Koen brothers, there were more Jewish than Serbian grocery stores and many horse drawn carriages passed by there which brought and took merchandise around Belgrade or to the train station, that is how things worked then. There were no trucks. Then along Kralja Petra Street, store next to store was owned by Adanjas, Bararons, Almozlinovs, pharmacy, all of which were well stocked stores and respected people. These people's children were my school friends, in the elementary school and secondary school. Since I mentioned school I cannot skip our religious studies lessons. I must tell you that for some unknown reason I did not go to the religious lessons, somehow elementary school passed and I did not get grades from religion classes, I do not know how this happened. When I entered the Realka secondary school, this could no longer go on and I had to go to the religious studies lessons in the first and second grade. Ashkenazi religious lessons were held in the newly constructed synagogue on Kosmajaska Street. That is the sole remaining synagogue today. The headquarters of the Ashkenazi community and the rabbinate were located in that building. I did not go to that building even though I did socialize with Ashkenazik Jews. I went to Jewish school in the Sephardic community on Kralja Petra Street, in the Jewish communal religious school which took care of the synagogue and school and religious lessons, which was obligatory. The school was where the Jewish Historical Museum is today, on the first floor of the building, the Jewish community building at. When I went to Jewish school we had classes two afternoons a week. We had two professors: one was professor Solomon Kalderon, who was educated to be a professor of history and worked at the First Male Gymnasium, before that he was a professor in Sapac. He taught us Biblical history. That is the part of the Torah which describes the Jews, Israel and Judea. We liked those classes very much because he was an excellent professor, not only a first class historian but a good lecturer too. I went to the classes very willingly. The other teacher was according to academic levels a step higher, Dr. Juda Levi, I think he was a doctor of philosophy or theology or both and he was educated as a rabbi. He was an exceptionally well educated and a good man but he was not a good teacher. He was supposed to teach us about the customs in the synagogue that which is called tefila. We mastered certain texts from the tefila, but we could not learn Hebrew language which was part of the educational program for his subject as it was too difficult for us. Was it because he was not a gifted linguist, was it because we only had a few classes, I do not know, but it is a fact that I did not learn Hebrew and today I still do not know it. That is how we passed the religious lessons. I can tell you that when I finished middle school I knew more about Biblical history than I did about the religious services and more than I knew Hebrew. Learning Biblical history I think instilled in me the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, because through learning the Biblical Jewish history one comes to understand Jewish ethics. Dr. Levi did not even talk to us about that, it was not his duty. And professor Kaledron, whether it was his job or not I do not know, but I learned that with him. Many years later I came to understand that which would be called philosophy of Judaism, when I tried to understand the essence of Jewish monotheism. But that is a theme which falls into my memory of my later years. Jewish school was the only mixed school because earlier schools were divided between male and female. I have to say that this had its nice side as well. There first loves were born. These were

very innocent and naïve, but then we already entered puberty and girls interested us, and we interested them, but there were different forms of interest.

Speaking about that Jewish youth world and life I must deal with two more forms of socializing. Dances, tango, waltz and others, were organized in the big hall of the Jewish community. Ashkenazi girls came to these dances, as well as boys, but the girls were of interest to us because they were different from us. And you know how it always is, I think that it is a good side of life, that which is a little bit different is more interesting. And those Ashkenazi girls were very interesting to us. We danced with them very eagerly, and we happily socialized with them and after that there were walks in Kalemegdan. It was different, maybe it was great courage, but it is better that I say this as the opinion of one of many boys. Jews in every country take on some of the characteristics of the nation in whose milieu they live and that is how it was with us in Belgrade where there were 80% Sephards and 20% Ashkenazi since the end of XIX century till 1941, approximately speaking, commenting on the difference of origins of Jews. Spanish Jews came from Spain and brought with them certain Mediterranean characteristics both physical and cultural. They were swarthy, temperamental, they had strongly developed lyric poetry and poetry. They had their wonderful Spanish love songs as poems which expressed their joy, love and sorrow and this was that cultural tradition. As a young boy, I could differentiate Sephardic from Ashkenazik mentality which was more utilitarian. They were very hardworking, systematic in their facial features German influence was visible. This means that Ashkenazi Jews experienced that German influence just like we experienced a Mediterranean influence. This was blond hair, blue eyes and a bit different behavior and this was interesting to us. And I think that we were interesting to them. The other type of socializing was associated with Zionism. Zionism had its own focus and center in Zagreb. It is understood that it was came to Belgrade where it was also strong. Zionist youth socialized entirely independent of whether they belonged to this or that community, there was no type of division in fact there was ideological resistance to any type of division. In the Zionist Ken, headquarters of the Zionist youth, there was a special atmosphere. In Zionist Ken were premises of Hashomer Hacair and other Zionistic organizations as Tehelet la van and Betar. I was not part of the Zionist movement, because I was too engaged with other things. At that time I was studying music, French and I was very busy. Zionism interested me as such. However, we have to take something else into consideration. Since Belgrade was nationally very liberal, in Belgrade there was no anti-Semitism. Tolerance and national liberalism are the best catalyst for assimilation. I think that the Belgrade Jews were closer and more strongly assimilated than Jews from the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the day, who for centuries and decades were oppressed socially and religiously and whose caution towards the surroundings were far greater. All of which made them better Zionist than we were. This explains why Zagreb and Novi Sad had stronger Zionist organizations than Belgrade. The Zionist of Belgrade had as a façade scouting organization, whose headquarters were in the Ken on Solunska Street, if I am not mistaken. Jasa Amuli, my playmate and schoolmate with whom I lived in the same street till 1941, can tell you much more about this.

In the upper grades of the gymnasium I had my first encounter with anti-Semitism imported in Serbia. And this was connected to the growth of Nazism in Germany. The Nazis infiltrated and bought out the politicians of the day: Dimitrije Ljotic with his group Zbor, the Cicvaric brothers with the weekly paper »Balkan«, who first published the Serbian translation of the »Protocols of the Elders of Zion«. When I encountered that I was astonished, because before that I did not have any



contact with anti-Semitism. The appearance of the »Protocols of the Elders of Zion« was an intellectual shock for me. I thought of it as idiotic, as something incomprehensible and not serious. At that time I did not have enough political education to understand the history surrounding the »Protocols of the Elders of Zion« and to understand the purpose of this publishing. This was the beginning of my encounter with anti-Semitism. This was a very personal encounter with anti-Semitism. During the second year of my studies I fell in love with a colleague, Radica, who was in the first year, and it lasted one academic year. During the summer one of our docents won her heart, he later married her. Later I learned that her future husband, a functionary in Ljotic's Zbor, blamed her because she had a boyfriend in her youth that was a Jew. When I learned this I was upset, because this was incomprehensible for me. My entire youth to the beginning of the war I never had a conflict with anti-Semitism. I never saw this girl again, she went with her husband to America.

### During the war

At the beginning of the war I was a student in my VIII semester. The war began in September 1939 and I enrolled in the chemical engineering department of the chemical engineering faculty in September 1937, that means that at the beginning of 1941 I enrolled in the eighth semester. We were very good students and we felt the war growing near and we hurried to graduate before war broke out. It did not succeed. In April 1941, I had passed exams, colloquiums and lab work I would have graduated in March, at the latest June 1942, if there had not been war. When war broke out I was a loyal citizen of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, even though I had not served in the army because I was exempt. On April 6, I went to the military district to register as was the obligation. At the military district they told me I was to go to Sarajevo where there would be a battalion of educated students. My friend, Mose Koen, who unfortunately was killed later, and I made it to Umka, embarked on a freight train and that is how we arrived in Sarajevo. In Sarajevo I met up with another two or three of my fellow students of chemical engineering, Jews. One or two days we spent in Sarajevo gathering, thinking and finally we went back to the barracks to sign in. At night an officer was on duty who gave us a room to sleep in and the next morning to change clothes. In other words we took off our civilian clothes and became soldiers. That night around midnight a reserve corporal or first sergeant came into our room. His last name was Altarac, but unfortunately I do not remember his first name. I am very grateful to him. That night Altarac was the non-commissioned officer on duty. He asked us where we students were from. It was obvious that he recognized us as one Sephard to another Sephard. He told us: tomorrow in the morning before the shifts change while it is still dark get out of here while you still have your civilian clothes. No one will stop you. With this army you will end up either in captivity or in a concentration camp. Disappear however you know how. It is best for you to head south towards the sea. Thank him.

How we succeeded to reach Herceg Novi, is a long story which I will not discuss here, but we made it. I spent some time in Boka Kotor and then in Dubrovnik. When the Ustache took over the civilian government in Dubrovnik I heard again through a friend that in the morning the Ustache were going to take control and I went back to Boka Kotor by bus, and then by boat from Boka Kotor to Split where I lived from June 1941 to October. In October the Italian police confined me to Korcula, and I spent two years there. During the second year of my confinement on Korcula I made contact through an organization that existed then which had several of our young Jewish refugees, connected to the background organization of the NOB (The People's Liberation Battle). I got

connected with them in November 1942, so that I have war service. In September '43 I entered a combat unit of the NOV (People Liberation Army), in the 26th division, on Pelješac in coast artillery, that is in the marines, and that is how I, a young man from Dorcol, became a marine. I survived the end of the war on Vis, in a marine workshop where I was stationed because I was a student of chemical engineering so they expected that I would do the work of a technician, which I did myself and I can tell you that due to mechanical part of my education which I had at the chemical engineering faculty I got by very well at the marine workshop and I learned a lot of mechanics. I waited for October 1944 when Split and Belgrade were liberated on Vis, I returned with the marines to Split and then to Trogir, where I worked in a shipyard. I met my wife again who I met for the first in 1941. Our acquaintance developed into love and we married in May 1945, 5 or 4 days before armistice. My wife was a student of agronomy three years in Zagreb and then in Belgrade. When WWII began she showed a great sympathy towards Jewish refugees and she risked her life bringing 100 Napoleon coins from Belgrade to Split to a Jewish family Rais from Sisak.

My war ended in Split where I was stationed after Trogir in a marine workshop, from there to the Split shipyard which again served as a good part of my education, because I learned a lot at the shipyard.

Mama suffered a great deal. She tried to escape and hid herself in Obrenovac, then in Loznica and then she was captured on May 9, 1942 and she was killed in Banjica. We were wrong in our estimation that women will not be in such a danger as man. My mother suffered terribly. This is one tragic story among many others from the Holocaust. My father succeeded with fals papers through southern Serbia, Kursumlija and Albania to reach Dalmatia and I do not where exactly but he boarded a boat. We saw one another again on Korcula. We met, he knew that I was on Korcula. For some time we wrote to one another it went through Zemun so that father knew that I was on Korcula and he simply one day disembarked. Someone ran to me and told me your father is on the coast. That is how I was with my father until fall of Italy. Then they transferred my father, along with the other refugees, not only the Jewish refugees but also the Dalmatians, to southern Italy and to Esat, and the rest of Italy. Father survived and mother perished. The rest of the members of the Mosaic family were also killed. The death of each one is a story unto itself.

### **After the war**

In Split I married in May 1945. It was a civil wedding as it was a mixed marriage. Quickly, after that I asked for a transfer to a river flotilla. Instead of that I was demobilized, because it was already the time of the armistice. I came to Belgrade. At the beginning I did not have anything, not even a place to stay. I moved into a one room apartment of my parents, we slept on the floor. I got the idea into my head to finish my degree, in contrast to many of my friends, to mention Jasa Almuli who started a political career, and became a journalist. I wanted to be an engineer. I returned to the chemical engineering faculty, walking in the hallways on the first floor I met a famous professor of mathematics Radivoja Kšanin. Before this he only saw me twice in his life once during the first year in a seminar and the second time in July 1938, when I passed the test. We passed by one another and I said hello. Then I hear a voice behind me: Stop Mosaic! How did you survive the war? How are your parents? What happened to Karijo, Benvenisti, Singer? My legs froze. After seven years he correctly asked about the Jews from my generation. I was speechless. That kind of memory and friendship towards Jews I will never forget. I happily and frequently retell this

anecdote. Professor Kasanin I remember also as a scientist and an exceptional professor, but his humanity I will never forget. I graduated in 1947 and I have to thank the army for this, because I was returned to the army as a chemical engineer and I worked in a military laboratory on the analysis of explosives. My thesis concerned the method of analysis of smokeless powder. This was purely practical work because our army had confiscated a large amount of smokeless powder, this was a trophy and it had to be classified which is what I worked on. I was demobilized in '48 because I was not a member of the party, and in '48 after the Infobiro resolution it was very important to the army to have trustworthy people. I was not trustworthy because I was not a member of the party. I was happily demobilized, and I did not know how easily members of the party ended up on Goli Otok easier than those outside the party. We who were outside the party were marked as pro-Western. Then I went to work in a soda factory in Lukavac as the head of the laboratory. The man who had this job prior to me was also a Jew but I no longer know his name he went to Israel and his position was vacated. I worked there for three years and I started to worry how I would send my children to school since Lukovac did not have a school. Andre was born in '46 in Belgrade and Elza in '48 also in Belgrade but in Zemun. It was of great concern to me that my children not have a worse education than I had. At that time my brother-in-law from Split called to say that the Zagreb newspaper »Vjesnik« published information concerning a concourse for a job with an oil refinery in Sisak. I applied and won the position. We moved to Sisak in 1952. I spent 12 years there from '52 to '64. These were good years, nice years. I am a Belgradian, from Dorcol, a Jew and I climbed from an assistant head of a laboratory, which was like an apprentice, to the technical director of a refinery, which is not a small thing. In '64 we returned to Belgrade. While I was in Sisak I became a member of the Zagreb Jewish community and while I was in Lukovac I was a member of the Tuzla Jewish community. There were no Jewish activities there nor did I have time for any. In Zagreb I also was not active in the Jewish community, but I was a member. In Sisak there were two or three other Jewish families and the wife of a doctor was a representative of the Zagreb Jewish community in Sisak. When I returned to Belgrade I enrolled as a member of the Belgrade Jewish community.

When the 67 war broke out they also broke off diplomatic relations with Israel. Nota bene I must say that in Sisak in '56 I was accepted to the party, because without this I could not become a technical director. Since it was estimated that I was the person for that job I had to become a member. In Pacevo I again held a high position, because we built a refinery and I was one of the few refinery experts, I received that position and the apartment in which we are sitting. Consequently, I rejected to give a contribution to the unfortunate Arabs and blood for Egyptians. I knew exactly what was happening in the Middle East as my father was in Israel. This then caused me to leave the party and I saw that my place is in the Jewish community. My father left for Israel with first or second Aliya in 1949, with his second wife.

I told Kadelburg, who was a President of Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia at that time, this and that thing happened to me, and Kadelburg happily tells me that we need such people. And that is how I started to collaborate first with the Jewish Historical Museum. Then Kadelburg brought me into the Executive Board of the Federation and I can tell you that I hope I was useful, because I had knowledge which I gathered during the time of confinement on Korcula. I only dabbled in Judaism. The Holocaust brought me to be more occupied by Judaism. Of course I brought that to the Federation as well as my knowledge of languages. In Paris I very easily spoke French, in London, Washington and New York I spoke English and when it was necessary in Vienna I

spoke German. It was significant to the Federation that they have someone who could do this so easily. This was true until 1994 when a argument broke out between me and the late Aleksandar Demajo and Cadik Danon, because Brane Popovic as president of the Jewish community and his ex-wife Tamara frontally argued against the warriors and we had a tempestuous meeting of the board of the Jewish community where I threatened to leave the community, because you who were born after the war cannot tell me some things. Then for some time I was truly passive because I was deeply upset and then I got over that and again began to collaborate, now without any title and without money I work. I`m President of The Memorial Committee of Jewish Community Belgrade and member of editing for book We survived, edited by Jewish Historical Museum.

I am too old to work. I think we have finished for today. At the end I would like to say that I am very interested in the Kladov transport. This was the tragedy of Austrian Jews who were caught in 1939 actually 1940 in Kladov in the ice and who were the victims of a game of the British Foreign Service. They were transferred to Sabac, and there they were killed, and the women died in the »Sajmiste« camp. The story about the Kladov transport remains a bit in the shadow, but this year we will erect a memorial plaque in Kladov. I hear that Zeni Lebl received an award from the Federation of Jewish communities for her history of the Kladov transport. It is of great interest to me to see her work, because I think I know a lot about the Kladov transport.

With a great admiring I`m related to the Jewish ethics. As I become more mature professionally and socially it was more and more clear to me that founs of the Jewish ethics are in unique understanding of abstract monotheism.