

Jakov Demajo, Sofija's Father



Photo of my father, Jakov Demajo. Taken in Belgrade (1890s).

My father and mother met in Belgrade when she came to visit and live with her brother. They met and got married. My father was a widower. He had three children. The eldest sister was Sol Suncica, then brother Samuilo Sima, and sister Sarina Jelena. My mother viewed herself as their birth mother and took care of them. Then my brother, Tuvi Dikica, was born. We did not know until we were older that we had two different mothers. I was named after their mother Sofija, and my mother handed over my upbringing to my elder sister, and she raised me [Sofija's mother was ill and knew that she would likely die].

My mother maintained religious traditions in our home. On Friday evenings, she would lay down a special tablecloth, plates, and napkins. It was Father's ritual to place a small present under each child's plate on Friday nights. The table was set, first duck eggs were cooked in onion skin, and then Father would cut an egg into four parts and divide it among us children as an appetizer. He would have a small glass of rakija [brandy], because he did not drink a lot. In general, our Jews were not alcoholics. Rather, every day, or on holidays, they would have a small glass of rakija, wine, or spritzer. Then Mother would prepare pastel with meat. It was all covered with a special cloth and when father came home from the synagogue she would pick it up and give us an egg and, eventually, some other small thing. Naturally, the food was kosher. There is no big difference between Jewish and Serbian Orthodox food; peas, potato puree, and meat, etc. are regularly eaten. Pastel was a must on Shabbat evening, Friday night. Everything I am talking about was for Shabbat evening, this is how it was for Friday night dinners. The next day, Father went to synagogue. I remember very well that, on Yom Kippur, Mother gave us a quince with cloves punched into it. This

was so that we could fast and not eat until the sun set, but I do not remember if we were allowed to drink water. Then we ate again - kosher, naturally. For Pesach, my mother had a big trunk with metal handles. In there was where she kept pots, cutlery, plates, and other dishes which were used only for holidays, when she would take out those kosher plates. For Purim, we dressed up as jesters, as men. Costume parties were organized for children and adults in the Jewish community.