

# Albert Eskenazi

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Belgrade

Serbia

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## My family background

I do not remember my paternal grandparents. My grandmother died three months before I was born, and my grandfather a few years earlier. My grandfather was Abraham Eskenazi and I am named Abraham, after him. Later we changed that to Albert. This is what they called me at home; however, in my first certificate from the Jewish elementary school in Zagreb, my name was "Abraham Eskenazi." When I was in the first grade of the gymnasium, when my Serbian language teacher, who liked me very much, called on other students to answer a question and they did not know, he would then say: "Let's go, Abraham, child of God." Otherwise, no one ever called me "Abraham." When I came back to Yugoslavia from Israel I had a problem with the authorities, so I officially changed my name from Abraham to Albert. I entered a request with all the details, because in my birth certificate it said Abraham Eskenazi. They told me that Albert and Abraham are not the same. But, I told them that I am now called Albert, and not Abraham. They allowed me to continue using the name Albert, but Abraham remained written in the registry.

My paternal grandfather was a lawyer in Bjeljina. He lived there. He was Sephardi. He observed the traditions. He was not Orthodox, but like the rest of the Jews from his generation, he observed the holidays, went to temple and socialized with others. It was not a ghetto, but all the Jews, especially from smaller places, socialized in the communities or at the holiday parties for Purim, Hanukah. At that time, there were about 150 Jews in Bjeljina. The Jewish community organized cultural activities and people gathered there, not only on holidays but during the rest of the year, when there was a lecture or a guest. They were very close. All the Jews were from the middle class; maybe there was a group who were poorer, maybe 20 percent, most likely those who were tradesmen. But Jewish solidarity was well-known, and our fellow citizens looked upon this with envy. Rich Jews helped the poorer ones, and it was not just with alms but with substantial help for their children - clothing and shoes. During the holidays, the children would get all they needed from the richer members of the community. I do not remember if there was anti-Semitism there, as I do not remember it in the whole of Bosnia.

My grandfather was buried in Bjeljina. His daughter went there after the war went to visit his grave, but she could not find it. The Jewish cemetery had been dug up.

My grandfather had three daughters: Vikica, Perl and Heda. All of them were born in Bjeljina. His first two sons, Michael - known as Mikica - and Jakov - known as Jakica - were born nearby in Brcko. Since there were no descendants there to maintain and visit the graves, the graves were dug up and new gravesites were made from them. After my grandfather's death, my grandmother moved to Slavonski Brod. I do not know how she managed; most likely, she received her husband's pension. As far as I know she was a housewife. She was not employed and she lived there until her death in February 1929. I was born in June of that year but she had died three months earlier.

I remember my maternal grandparents. My grandfather was a rabbi for the whole area of northern Bosnia. My grandfather was born in Bosnia but I cannot remember where. Together with his brother, Nisim Kabiljo, he went on pilgrimage to Palestine around 1890 and there two things happened. My grandfather met my grandmother, who was born in Palestine, they married and had their first four children: three sons and one daughter. My grandfather went back to Bosnia, and had another seven children. His brother remained in Israel where he made a big family. He was no longer known as Kabiljo, but rather Haviiljo, which became a famous name in Jerusalem. In the center of the city there is a Haviiljo Family Square. They were producers of candy, halvah and sweets. Theirs was the first big factory and it operated for a long, long time. When I came to Israel I went to the factory. The halvah produced by Shmuel Haviiljo was well known and they were famous for it. After his death, the city of Jerusalem decided to name a small square in the center of town Haviiljo Family Square. I have seen this street sign. Their grandchildren still live in Israel. They were real Israelis. One, Shlomo Haviiljo, was a colonel in the Israeli army; another was Avram Haviiljo, he worked as a diplomat; a third, Mose Haviiljo, worked in the factory. Shmuel Haviiljo hired several Yugoslavs who came to Israel as part of the first aliya because his father, Nisim Haviiljo, was of Yugoslavian descent.

## Growing up

I was born in Slavonski Brod. My parents lived in Bosanski Brod, but there was no maternity hospital, so they moved to my grandmother's and lived there. Then my sister was born 16 months later, on October 20, 1930. Today, when I want to joke with Bosnians, I tell them that I am not a Bosnian. A large bridge spanning the Sava River separates me from Bosnia. You are on one side, and I am on the other in Slavonia, a Slavonian. Life and circumstances made it so that I do not even remember my birth place, as I was not even 2 years old when we moved to Zagreb. I saw Slavonski Brod when I was 35. I went to Slavonski Brod with my mother and she showed me where she used to walk with me in my carriage, and where we lived. I do not remember what our house looked like, but I know that the street was called Trenk. Trenk Street exists today, named after the Croatian baron, Trenk.

Because of the war, when we fled Zagreb in 1942, for Mostar, I had to go through Slavonski Brod and Sarajevo. We spent a whole night at the station waiting for the train in Slavonski Brod. I spent the whole night at the station and did not manage to see my birth place.

My parents met in Derventa. My maternal grandfather had a manufacturing workshop there where he sold all sorts of things. The two saleswomen in the store were his two daughters: my mother and her sister. I do not remember what brought my father to Derventa or how long he remained there. He fell in love with my mother and she with him and, according to custom, they received their parents' blessings and married in Dobož on August 10, 1925. I do not why they married in Dobož. I was born four years later. Their first child died during birth. My father worked for a Jew as a traveling salesman supplying materials and scraps of material. They sold everything in bundles, which his boss obtained in Zagreb, where he had a big warehouse. My mother was a housewife and never worked.

I started school in Zagreb when I was 6. I went to the Jewish school, which at the time was well known and experimental. All the Jewish children went to this school. It was called the Jewish Elementary School. The school had four grades, then there were four grades of lower gymnasium and four upper grades. It was lovely, as school children we went to temple on Fridays two at a time in the morning. The temple was close to the school. The school was in the Jewish community building. Today the Jewish community is still in the same place. In the Jewish elementary school we had religious studies and Hebrew lessons, in the third and fourth year. The teachers were named Martin Mozes and Greta Vajs. I started to learn my first letters and words in Hebrew in the school. I did not know that I would live so many years in Israel and that I would teach and translate Hebrew one day, but that is when I started.

My mother's father was a rabbi and his two sons also learned to be rabbis, although they never worked as such. One was named Samuel and the other Moric Kabiljo. They knew everything that a rabbi needed to know. In addition to being a rabbi, my grandfather was a shochet, and he circumcised newborn male babies. He circumcised all his male grandchildren born before 1941, including me.

I do not know why, but my maternal grandmother and grandfather moved from Sarajevo to Zagreb in 1939. They probably made this move because they had a daughter, my mother, there who could take care of them because they were quite old and sick. Their other children who had made something of themselves also helped them. The second-eldest son, Jozef Kabiljo, had a big information bureau in the center of Belgrade. David Kabiljo, the eldest son, was a successful merchant in Prijedor. Moric was a merchant in Derventa. The others worked in someone else's firms. Two of them worked for Jozef.

I remember when they moved to Zagreb. I went with my mother and father to their place. They changed apartments twice. Whenever I went to visit them, my grandfather sat on the couch and prayed. He had big and small prayerbooks, and whenever I went there he was praying. He spent several hours a day praying or reading, but his reading was like his praying. He knew a lot of things by heart. He had an enormous amount of books. My grandmother took ill and died at the end of January. It was a nice funeral with all her eight sons and two daughters there. Their eldest daughter died from diabetes problems in Belgrade, before her mother.

All of my grandmother's eight sons married Jewish women, even Sephardi women. I do not think there was an Ashkenazi woman among them. All three daughters also married Jews: My mother married Eskenazi, another Kraus, and the third Altarac. At the time it was possible for everyone to find their own mate and our elders and parents wanted their children to marry Jews, which after

World War II was impossible. All were dead, disappeared.

Our entire childhood in Zagreb was fully involved in Jewish activities. My sister and I went to the Jewish school, and were active in all events. We had religious studies and Hebrew language lessons. When we entered the gymnasium, religious studies was part of the curriculum. There were two of us Jews and one Evangelist; we went out during these classes and played football. But we went to Bible once a week with our rabbi, Samuel Romano. Every half-year, we needed to get a stamped certificate stating that we had been to religious classes, and our grade was entered into the certificate.

We were a poor family. We lived in an apartment that did not have its own bathroom; we used the bathroom in the hall. We were the only ones who used it, but it was not in our apartment. We lived very modestly, and my sister and I received help from rich Jews who had shoe, coat and clothing stores around Zagreb. When there was a holiday, we would go to their stores and receive a coat, shoes. They took care of the poor children. There was a time when we could not even pay the rent. The rent was 200 dinars monthly, and my uncle, who lived in Belgrade and who was rich compared to us, sent 200 dinars every month to pay our rent. What my father made was enough to feed us.

## During the war

World War II arrived. The Germans came to Croatia. They created and installed their own authorities, and with them came the Ustashe. Laws against the Jews were enacted. First they had to register, then that they had to hand over, their stores and property. Everyone who lived in a better apartment was evicted and slowly they were taken to camps. Once my grandfather was widowed he spent one month with one daughter and another month with one son, etc. He had two remaining daughters: one in Zagreb and one in Nova Gradiska. In November 1941 he went to stay with his daughter in Nova Gradiska because she still had not been deported. They said that those that lived in smaller towns might be saved. However, one day the Ustashe came and took my aunt Mirjam; Merjama, my mother's sister; her husband, Bernard Kraus; their children, Zlata and Jelena; and her elderly father. Zlata was older than me and Jelena was my age. They were all taken to the Stara Gradiska camp. From there, the women and children were taken to Djakovo. None of them returned.

My grandfather did not conduct services in Zagreb because he was already too old. He went to temple. There were two temples in Zagreb, one Sephardi and one Ashkenazi, which was enormous and was destroyed by the Ustashe in 1941. My grandfather demanded that all of his children - and this was not hard because they all listened to him and respected him - observe the Jewish tradition, practices, go to temple on the holidays, if not every Saturday and Friday evening. All of his children had to teach their children about Judaism from a young age, which we continued later in the Jewish school. I remember when my mother taught my sister and I the basic Jewish prayers. We still had not started school at that time. She would take us in her lap and recite Shema Israel, and we would repeat it a few times. After a few days we knew the Shema Israel. My mother - and even more so her brothers, two of whom had studied to be rabbis - observed the holidays at home. The two of them surely observed kashrut. From the earliest childhood, we received lessons in Judaism and knowledge about our roots. When we began the Jewish elementary school we received even more.

In Zagreb, Belgrade and other places, there was a Jewish youth society called Hashomer Hatzair - "Ken," which in Hebrew means "nest." There were social events; we had clubs for youth, students and children. Some of them were in the community's building, but most were in a special space. Ken and Hashomer Hatzair had a space in the center of Zagreb on Ilici Street on the second floor. There was a third Jewish group, B'nai Akiva. My sister and I went to B'nai Akiva for some time because we got the nicest cakes there, but I went to Ken before that. I hear that even today the children come to the club only to get Coca-Cola, cakes and snacks. That is almost equally as attractive as that which they learn in the clubs. I remember that we went because of the cakes, which were made by Jewish women who brought them to the club. This club was at the Kresimirov Square, which still exists today. We also had a very developed sports club called Maccabi. It was originally called the Zidovsko Gombacko Drustvo Makabi (Maccabi Jewish Gymnastics Society). Maccabi had a very strong table tennis section. Maccabi played in the Zagreb football league. We went twice a week for exercise, gymnastics. It was on the same street as the Jewish school. The hall was beautiful and it still exists. It made our day when we went to Maccabi. We had some famous, first-rate athletes in boxing, fencing, gymnastics and football. The table tennis player Herskovic was the best in the country. Leo Polak, the boxer, was first in the Balkans. A few years later, someone said he had been the best Croatian boxer of all time, even though he was a Jew. I met him when we were getting ready to escape in 1941; he came to the community to get his documents. My father introduced me to him: "Leo Polak, the famous boxing champion."

As soon as the war began and the independent state of Croatia was established, the persecution of the Jews began. They expelled us from all schools and faculties of the university. I remember that the director of my gymnasium called my mother and, in a very cultured way, he said that he unfortunately had to inform her that her son could no longer attend school, that he was very sorry, but that the order came from the government, and he asked her to please understand. I remember that he said: "There will come a time when they will be able to go to school again." Clearly, that referred to only those who survived, because 80 percent did not survive. My sister almost finished elementary school, but she could not enroll in the gymnasium.

Our community established a Jewish school so that we did not miss out on our education. This was in Zagreb. The school functioned very well. The professors were all Jews. There was one for Croatian-Serbian language, another for mathematics, handiwork, etc. However, since there were waves of deportations to the camps, every day there was one professor fewer or two students fewer. They would come to people's houses during the night and take them away to the camps.

In school, we celebrated Shabbat. We lit candles and sang songs. We did this until the school lost its sense, once 80 percent of the teachers had been deported, and maybe there was one left. One day Mikija was not there, they had taken him; Lee was not there, they had taken her.

My father was taken to Jasenovac on September 19, 1941. First he was taken to Stara Gradiska and then to Jasenovac. It is hard to know what was worse, to be in Stara Gradiska or Jasenovac - the camps were even connected. We stayed in Zagreb, and no one touched us. They took the Jews in two ways, sometimes the whole family and sometimes just the head of the family. When they took my father, they took only the men. However, two months later, they came after the women and children as well. We were not at home. I remember the details. We heard that the next day they were going to deport all the Jews whose last name began with K. We had relatives named Kon. That



morning my mother went with us to the Kons, who did not live far from us, to tell them what we had heard and to hide. My mother drank coffee with them, then we went back to our apartment where our neighbor told us: "Mrs. Eskenazi, run away; they are looking for you. Hide until this passes." We hid for a few days with relatives, he was a Jew and she was a Catholic and was in some way protected. Afterward, we hid with a Croatian family we knew from when we had lived on Sava Road. Then we hid with a Moslem waiter who knew my father. My father had gone to a café where he worked; his name was Fajko. He hid us with his wife. At some point my mother lost her nerves and patience and said: "No one is going to hide us any longer. We are going home and whatever is the fate of the others will be our fate as well."

In the meantime, my uncle came from Derventa. He had done so much for the economic development of Derventa and the region that he received Aryan rights. It was the rare Jew who was rewarded for his involvement in Croatian causes, culture, architecture. The Aryan rights would protect them, or at least they believed these would protect them. However, my uncle along with his entire family was captured, put on a train and taken to Zagreb. At the Zagreb station, they waited to be sent someplace else. We raced to the station to see them. Then something unexplainable happened - they were sent back to Derventa, and it was clear to my uncle that they must flee before they came for him again. They came to Zagreb. They hid in our apartment while they prepared papers to flee. The destinations were between Mostar and Split, because the Italians were there. Their papers arrived and luckily they arrived in Split. My uncle's Croatian assistant from the store followed them to Split to make sure that they arrived safely. His name was Marko Covic. Indeed, they did arrive safely. They fled further, for Argentina, and my other uncle from Belgrade had successfully made it to Split, so they had money and gold to bring with them.

Before they went to Argentina they sent my mother, sister and I false documents. These said we lived on Brac, and that the children were being treated for an illness in Zagreb, and they were now returning to Brac through Sarajevo and Mostar. The goal was to get us to Mostar. Marko Covic followed us as well, to be sure that we arrived in Mostar. Mostar was the destination for the majority of Bosnian Jews from Sarajevo and western Bosnia. All those who were able to reach Mostar were saved. There were two or three families there from Zagreb.

There was a Jewish community in Mostar, which had its own kitchen, where we received two meals a day. However, because of some agreement with the state of Croatia, the Italian authorities had to hand over Mostar to Croatia. The Italians knew that as soon as the Ustashe enter Mostar, they would come after the Jews first. So, the Italians organized to have us transferred to an island that remained under Italian authority.

We were transferred from Mostar to Jelsa Island, then to the city of Hvar. We had our own kitchen in some deserted hotel on Jelsa. The women organized themselves, and we had a stove and wood from the surrounding forests. We children collected oak-apples. Every seven days the Italian authorities gave us sugar, flour, pasta, parmesan cheese and jelly, according to the number of members in a family. Each adult had to register at the police station every day. After Jelsa, where we were for three or four months, we were transferred to Hvar where we were put up in five hotels, which were empty because there was no tourism. We were in Hotel Slavija, which had a wonderful owner named Tonci Maricic, who gave us everything. He left us alone to organize ourselves and he solved all the problems. The Italians paid for this, but what was important was how he treated us.

After liberation, many people visited him and he came to Sarajevo and Zagreb. This friendship lasted as long as he lived.

Then the Italian occupational authorities decided that all Jews who were on Hvar, Korcula, Lopud and Kuparij should be transferred to Rab. On Rab there was a camp where Slovenes lived before, under terrible conditions. Half of the camp was comprised of brick buildings and the other half of barracks. The camp was surrounded with multi-layered thorns, wires. When we saw this, we realized this was a real camp, with wires. Later we realized this was neither Jasenovac nor Auschwitz. We were organized. We had a big kitchen; we organized cultural life. There were pianists, actors, doctors, lawyers and other experts among us. We children were divided by age. The elder ones worked. As children, we did not feel camp life. We were so small and we were able to go swimming every day. There was one Italian guard for all 100 of us.

My mother was employed in the tailor shop that made uniforms - not new uniforms; they repaired used ones. She worked seven hours in this tailor workshop and the prize was one loaf of bread. My mother worked for that, so that we would have a little more bread, for the growing children. We could withstand all of that - until the Italians capitulated. The Italians were anxious to do this because they were never soldiers like the Germans. This is a nation that has a nice language, nice poetry, a nation that loves to love - but they are not warriors. Yes, their army did damage throughout Dalmatia, and certainly people were killed, but they were humane in their treatment of us, if one can say that. The Italians threw down their weapons, and the partisans came. In the camp itself, there was a partisan organization, which we children did not even know about. The partisans knew that we would be unable to hold the island much longer and, since they had already liberated us, they wanted to transfer us to more secure territory.

## Post-war

We were transferred in groups to liberated territory by large and small boats. First we were sent to Lika and then to Kordun and the last destinations were the Banija in Petrinj, Glin and Topusko. We came to Topusko, where there were many deserted hotels and buildings, and we found accommodation there. Everyone had work. My mother worked as a cook and my sister and I took care of some baths. This was the spa at Topusko; there was a building with pools of warm water from nearby springs. We bathed every day and they called us the cleanest partisans, because partisans tended to have lice and only bathed once in a while. I became a courier, first in the command center in Topusko and then in the Zavnoh, the anti- fascist organization. This was the partisan authority for Croatia.

Zavnoh had its own management, technical and health sections, the partisans' future ministry. I was assigned to the management department, which was responsible for legislation. My boss was Leon Gerskovic, a Jew. He later became the third most-important person dealing with legislation in Yugoslavia: first was Mosa Pijade, then Kardelj and then Leon Gerskovic. When they transferred me to the propaganda section, where the mimeograph machines spun out materials, this started my love of printed things, of printing things. I was in this section of Zavnoh almost until the end of the war. When the Germans capitulated, Zavnoh was moved to Sibenik, liberated territory, as was the rest of Dalmatia. We were in Topusko for some time and then we transferred with some other command to liberated Zadar, for a month. One day the Zadarian whose house we lived in, a

partisan himself, told us that our command was being transferred to Zagreb, which was already liberated on May 8, 1945. We all jumped on the truck. We parted ways at Hrvatski Karlovac, because military men could not transport civilians. We were transferred to a huge empty factory hall where we spent two days and where we awaited a freight train to Zagreb. We missed the train but another truck came with a covered tarpaulin. We jumped on. On the bridge over the Sava there were the guards who we had feared would not let us through. From the other side of the bridge, through which was the entrance to Zagreb, the sentries raised the flag, when they saw partisan hats they said, "Pass through." We got off with our luggage before the Zagreb Cathedral. We went to the first guest house, we asked the owner if we could leave our luggage until we found our relatives, and one told him that there were weapons inside so not to touch anything. The man responded: "Mister comrade, do not worry." It took them a long time to learn to say "comrade" instead of "mister." We found our relatives; it was a happy homecoming from the partisans. We hoped my father survived, but he did not return.

At the age of 16 I became employed in state service in the president's office of the Republic of Croatia, in the printing department, a continuation of the propaganda department from Topusko. The boss was the same, the staff new and then my mother went to the center of Zagreb where Tanjug was in the same building. We found my boss from the partisans who wrote a letter of recommendation for me: "Comrade Albert Eskenazi worked as a courier in the management board of Zavnoh. He is a lucid, reliable and hard-working young man, we believe he would be able to be of use for more important work - signed by the chairman, Nikola Rupcic." His wife, Ruza Rupcic, was my professor of Serbo-Croatian.

My friends from school returned to Zagreb within two or three months, some from Italy, some from Switzerland and some from the partisans. A cafeteria was opened in the Jewish community. The first and second floors, where earlier there had been a school and community offices, were for homeless people.

Because I went to work when I was 16, in the printing department, I was unable to go to the gymnasium on a regular basis. I started going to night school where I was able to pass two grades in one year. Every night I went to classes. I skipped the seventh year because I left for Israel.

I fell in love with the world of newspapers; I started to write for the main syndicated paper in Croatia. I wrote articles on sports and a column called "the voice of work." I started to feel great love toward this calling, and I had lots of material at my disposal as I could access the whole archive. I started to write articles in other Zagreb newspapers. I wrote for "Napred" and "Vjesnik." After two years in the printing department, the editorial office of the Belgrade "Borba" decided to print an edition in Latin characters in Zagreb. By phone and teleprinter, the text was copied in our department. I asked my boss to allow me to be a real reporter and to work in a real newspaper editorial room. From the first day that "Borba" began publishing a Latin edition in March 1948, I was transferred to the editorial room. I was the youngest reporter; I worked on cultural and sports columns.

## **My life in Israel**



On May 15, 1948, Israel was declared a state, and preparations began for aliya. Whoever wanted to could sign up to go, except doctors and engineers, until 1951, when the five-year plan was finished. My sister went on the first aliya in December 1948. Two months earlier, she had married, and she went to Israel with her husband and his parents. I did not want to go, but my uncles in Argentina pressured us - after everything that happened, Jews could once again be declared guilty - and they persuaded my mother. In the meantime, my sister contacted us and told us that our relatives and the old-timers received her nicely. When she left she was already pregnant, and in June she had her first son.

I had work I liked very much and I lived very well; we had a nice small apartment. However, my relatives managed to convince us to leave, and my mother began to yearn for her daughter. We went to Israel in July 1949 - even though my sister wrote that we should not come because, "there you are a gentleman and here you will be just a worker." This did not bother me. I thought I would stay a little, learn about the situation and when I returned I would be a little expert on the Middle East. We traveled six days. In Haifa they sent us to the reception camp "Sent Lux." All of the people my age were immediately mobilized into the army, but since I came by myself I was not taken. From this camp we were transferred to another, closer to Jerusalem, so that we could be closer to my sister and our relatives. We were in these buildings another two or three months, but I still did not have work even though before that I had worked in the larger reception center in Bet Lit, in Netanya. One of our people who came on the same boat as me gave me a job. He was a professional cook and he got me work in a bar in Tel Aviv. I worked as an assistant in the kitchen and as a dishwasher for two months. Then we went to Jerusalem and found an apartment in the old part, a Jewish apartment in an Arab-style house. We had permission to bring all our things with us. Only those who had paintings had to seek special permission. The apartment had three rooms. Then I read in "Hitadut ole Jugoslavia" that a locksmith was looking for an assistant. His name was Laci Balok. I thought I needed to learn some trade. He had a workshop, we made keys, fixed stoves, made frames for doors. I worked almost a year with him and then I was advised to go into the army. I went in October 1950 and I came out in December 1952. After demobilization, I registered in Jerusalem. Again I did not have a trade, so I worked as a collector for a political party, until a friend of mine suggested that I learn a good trade that is valuable everywhere. It was zincography in the best printing house in Jerusalem, with Mihael Pinkovski, a Russian emigrant. We agreed that even though most trades are learned in four years that I would learn everything in two years because I was no longer young enough to be an apprentice. I did this until I left Israel.

In the meantime, I went to visit my relatives in Italy, Zagreb and Belgrade after nine years. In Belgrade, I visited my uncle's brother. We got along very well. Even though he was 15 years older than me, I respected him like a father. We were in the partisans together. I went to visit him for two days. One afternoon, an elderly couple came; they were his good friends Sandor and Ruzica Katan. An hour later, there was someone else at the door - a girl of 20 or 21 came in and moved toward my uncle's brother to kiss him. Being a miscreant, I asked her if she gave everyone kisses. She answered: "No, everyone who gets one from me must earn it." And that is how I met Sarina. I asked right away how the Jewish community was organized. At that time, Albi Vajs, the president of the federation, was giving a lecture. I went to the lecture, then we all went together to the theatre to watch "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." The third day we sat in a nice pastry shop and ate cakes. At that point, I asked her if she wanted to marry me. I was sure she did not. She said she would and we

decided to get married. I had to go back to Israel; she came once she had her papers in order. We were married in Israel.

## My return to Yugoslavia

The whole time I was in Israel, I wanted to return to Yugoslavia. I made a request through the Yugoslav Embassy in Jaffa. A month later, a negative response arrived, stating that I left of my own free will. A condition for going to Israel was that we renounce our Yugoslav citizenship. Later I learned that the government sent all the ambassadors a circular letter not to accept returnees, because many wanted to return because of the hard life in Israel. I wrote a second request, but no one told me to go to Belgrade and find a connection there. My father-in-law was a driver for a general who was third in the hierarchy of the Yugoslav army, Vlado Janic. The general called the assistant minister for interior affairs and that is how we got permission to return.

I received work immediately in BIGZU in the department for zincography; there were not enough people who knew this trade. I remained there for 27 years; for the last 10 years I was a boss. In the meantime, I got an apartment. I had two children. I have five grandchildren. We live in a big house where each has his own apartment. After retiring I wanted to start writing, but my brother-in-law made an appointment with the then-president of the Jewish community, Jasa Almulic, to discuss the position of secretary. As soon as he saw me, he offered me the job. The \$300 salary attracted me and, instead of staying two or three years, I remained for 10 years. After 10 years, I was tired and spent, and wanted someone younger to take my place. In addition, since I have been involved in Hebrew language for more than 50 years, I became a teacher of language and an official translator for Hebrew language, translating in both directions.

Since my return from Israel, 39 years have passed. I feel secure as a Jew. I never felt any anti-Semitism, even though everyone knows I am a Jew. My children also never felt anything in school. Here and there, there were a few situations, but the government very quickly punished those who carried them out. This is not strange since Serbs and Jews suffered together in the past, especially under the Nazis. Many Serbs even hid and saved Jews. This is very dear to me. It makes me proud and soothes me.