Matilda Kalef Cerge (above, right) was interviewed for Centropa by Rachel Chanin in 2005. In 2013 Stefan Sablic directed Nebojsa Ljubisic and Seka Sablic to read the parts of Matilda Kalef Cerge and her sister Breda for an eighteen-minute multimedia film. Stefan also scored the soundtrack and Wolfgang Els produced the film, which was chosen as an official selection in five international film festivals and was underwritten by The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

**The Kalefs of 5 Gospodar Jovanova**

"My great uncle Jakov was one of the first Jews to be taken away and shot. His sons David and Mija Kalef were picked up to clean up the destruction from the bombing. One night they didn’t come home. Their mother, Lenka went looking for them and they took her away too.

"After the war we went back to Gospodar Jovanova. None of our family in Serbia had survived. There were eight apartments in our building and all of our property was nationalized. They gave us the maid’s room and the hallway. The others kept the rest of the house including the toilet. For fifty years, my mother had to go to the yard to use the communal toilet in a huge house she once owned. When the democratic government came in the 1990s, we got it back, room by room. My mother was ninety, and when we said the house was hers again, she tried to take an axe to the walls they had put up! She lived to see her house returned."

The Kalefs were resilient. They worked hard to rebuild their lives after the war. They remained strong and devoted to maintaining their family traditions and preserving their heritage.

**The Kalefs of 4 Skenderbegova Street**

"Avram and Vukica with Stella Darsi (nee Kalef), Josko Kalef, Regina Ekenaz (nee Kalef).

Aunt Elica (not pictured) got married, had a baby and they were transported from Belgrade. Since she knew she was going to die she threw her baby, Avram, out the train window. We never knew what happened to the baby. This photo of a baby was taken in Belgrade in 1933. His name is Elvis and he is also named Avram. Elvis was forced into a camp with his mother Eliza where they were both murdered. Josko was shot. Regina survived because she married a Bulgarian Jew and moved to Sofia."
In 1927, a twenty-year-old Catholic Slovene, Antonija Ograjensek, was visiting relatives in Belgrade. That’s where she met Avram Kalef, a Sephardic Jew. Antonija found him funny and charming and she didn’t care about his being confined to a wheelchair. Avram was drawn to Antonija’s warmth and he didn’t care that she wasn’t Jewish. Hence the wedding picture above.

Antonija converted to Judaism and became Dona Bat Kalef. Matilda, who our interviewer, Rachel Chanin, spoke with over the course of several weeks, was born in 1929. Her younger sister Breda was born in 1930.

Their grandmother Matilda was one of four siblings, all of whom had families. Dona Bat Kalef kept a family album with pictures of everyone, until April, 1941 when the Germans invaded Yugoslavia. Dona took her daughters on the run, and found a Catholic priest to hide them. Just before she fled, she took her family album and shoved it under the eaves of the attic. When she returned in October, 1944, the album was still there. Almost no one in those pictures survived.

“My father was confined to a wheelchair. We were told it was the first wheelchair in Serbia. Grandmother took him to famous doctors in Vienna, but it didn’t help. Still, my father wanted to go everywhere; he wanted to do everything and he never wanted to be left out.”

“We went to the Jewish kindergarten, then public school, and we were very often in our Jewish community center, which was just around the corner. We attended a gymnasium for a short time, too, and I raced home to tell my father about my day. He loved hearing it. But my school days came to an end when the Germans came.”

“My mother had gone to a hospital to have me, got scared, and came home. I was born premature by two months and I was told they rubbed me in goose fat, wrapped me in cotton and grandmother put me near the stove. That’s how it was before there were incubators. My sister was born in a hospital in 1931. My sister and I fought all the time, like so many children do. My sister really did want to take the stage, which, in fact, she did after war.”

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“Our store on Visnjiceva Street was full of materials: from heavy textiles to chintz. Two tailors, two salesmen and my mother and grandmother worked there. We had two or three sewing machines and there were goods by the yard and ready-made clothing.”

“In our home, we had a cleaning woman and a Roma woman came to do the laundry. Grandmother supervised lunch for everyone. There were often eleven mouths to feed.”

“My father was confined to a wheelchair. We were told it was the first wheelchair in Serbia. Grandmother took him to famous doctors in Vienna, but it didn’t help. Still, my father wanted to go everywhere; he wanted to do everything and he never wanted to be left out.”

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