THE SLOVENIAN RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

Edited by

Irena Šumi and **Oto Luthar**

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FOREWORD

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Hitler's horrific idea about the superiority of the "German race" and his ambition to have the Aryans rule the world and thus establish a new world order began to take shape in 1933 with his appointment as chancellor of the Third Reich. Semites and especially Jews were viewed as defiling the purity of the "German race" and were considered harmful to all of humanity. For this reason, Europe was to be rid of all Jews and rendered *judenrein* or *judenfrei,* i.e., "cleansed of Jews." This thesis grew into a political ideology and became the basis of Hitler's program.

With the appointment as chancellor, it became clear that Hitler would turn his ideas into reality. In 1935, these ideas were codified into the Nuremberg Laws. These laws were then gradually introduced in other countries allied with Germany. The first law stated: "Only a person of Aryan blood can become a citizen of the Third Reich." This alone stripped the Jews of any lawful status; they became a second-rate population deprived of citizenship. This was the beginning of the "final solution of the Jewish question."

Restrictions and persecution then began in earnest. Anti-Jewish laws were passed everywhere. Jews were ousted from civil service. Jewish shops were forced to put

up signs reading *jüdische Geschäfte* (Jewish business). Aryan men were strictly prohibited from marrying Jewish women. Jews were no longer permitted to employ Aryans. Entrances to public facilities, theatres, cinemas, and other public institutions bore signs that read "No dogs and Jews allowed." Jews were required to wear, on top of their garments, the "Jewish badge" with the inscription *Jude* (Jew). Books by Jewish authors were publicly burned. Jews were forced to scrub the streets with toothbrushes. Orthodox Jewish men had their beards publicly cut off. Jews were only permitted to buy food at the market after 11 a.m. when all the stalls had already been emptied out. The list goes on.

Most European Jews saw all this as a clear sign that they were not welcome and they had best leave. Until September 1939, and to some extent until early 1941, it was still possible to leave Germany, and then Austria and Czechoslovakia legally, but the majority of Jews were initially reluctant to leave their homes of many generations. Those that eventually decided to leave on the eve of the war had nowhere left to go as all the countries gradually closed their borders to refugees.

Local Jewish organizations liaised with other Jewish and humanitarian organizations around the world and

begun more or less illegal transports of Jews, mostly children, out of Europe, especially to British Palestine where they were received mainly by the kibbutzim that had already been set up. One such organization in Germany, *Aliyat Hanoar* (Youth Immigration), led by Recha Freier, also established links with Jewish organizations in the then Yugoslavia, and organized border crossings for about 55,000 Jews that managed to escape to Palestine. Only small groups of refugees crossed the border at official checkpoints. In early 1941 when the decree on prohibiting the Jews from leaving the Third Reich was finally passed, the Yugoslav border was sealed under pressure from Germany. Any breach of this decree was met with severe punishment, in Yugoslavia as well.

In the Yugoslav territory, a total of at least 60,000 Jews lost their lives, comprising 80 per cent of the pre-war Jewish population. Many among the remaining Jews opted to join the resistance movement. No less than 4,572 – that is, 6 per cent total – joined the partisans. In the entirety of Central and Eastern Europe, Yugoslav partisans were the only resistance movement that accepted Jews into their ranks, as the Polish, Belarus and Ukrainian partisans adamantly did not. In certain cases entire groups of Jews joined the partisans, like the entire Belgrade section of the Jewish youth movement *Shoamer*

Atzair. Among those who joined the partisans, 3,254 survived the war. That is to say, every fifth or sixth Yugoslav Jew who survived the Shoah was an active member of the National Liberation movement. There are ten Heroes of the Nation and 149 recipients of the 1941 Resistance Memorial among Yugoslav Jews.

At least some Jewish survivors owe their lives to inordinately brave and compassionate men and women who put their own lives in severe danger to save individual Jewish people from certain death. This book is dedicated to those brave Slovenian men and women, not all of whom lived in the present territory of Slovenia at the time of WWII but were of Slovenian ancestry. The first part of the book describes the brave acts of those individuals whose sacrifices have already been awarded the honourable title of the Righteous Among Nations by Yad Vashem. The second part of the book chronicles the selfless acts of those who may eventually be awarded this prestigious honour, even if posthumously.

I am pleased that with this volume, Slovenia is finally on the map of the many European countries that bore the courageous men and women who did not yield to the deadly and criminal ideologies of the warmongers, but preserved their humanity even with the possibility of losing their own lives.

INTRODUCTION

Irena Šumi, Oto Luthar

This book brings to light the collected testimonies regarding the people of Slovenian ancestry during WWII and the Holocaust who were among those courageous throughout Europe who resisted the violent and genocidal practices of the occupying forces and their quisling local authorities in the best possible manner: by risking their own lives to save individual Jews, people who were stripped of their political and human rights under Fascism and Nazism and destined for total annihilation. The racist pseudo-science of eugenics and the Nazi political program recognised Jews as the primary threat to both the racial purity of Europeans and to the European present, future and history. The Roma, Slavs, the handicapped, and homosexuals were other victims on this list, but Jews were subject to systematic and total annihilation by the Third Reich. The historical episode called the Holocaust (*Shoah* in Hebrew), the extermination of six million European Jews by cold weapons, shootings, and mass killings in the gas chambers of the concentration camps, remains the most horrendous mass violent crime of our modern era and recent history, and one of the most cruel and systematic genocides based on one of the most dehumanising ideologies that humanity remembers.

The Holocaust happened within the continuity of armed mass violence in twentieth century Europe that an increasing number of historians view as holistic, beginning with WWI, which forever changed the protocols of war between political entities and introduced mass destruction of lives and property, to the short interwar period of prospering extremist ideologies and the onset of the decay of the European colonial system, to WWII in which the growing class inequality was interpreted as differences between pseudo-biologically understood "peoples" and brought the second episode of mass destruction of lives and infrastructure. It expanded from 36 million victims in WWI, to at least 60 million victims in WWII, with all the collateral processes. Following WWI, one of such processes was the Spanish flu epidemic that killed additional 100 million people planet-wide, while the prolonged civil wars and mass revenge after WWII, according to historian Keith Lowe (*Savage continent*, 2013) took at least 35 to 40 million additional human lives.

There were places where people collectively refused to partake in, or allow the extermination of the Jews, notably in Denmark and Finland. In other places, the state authorities defied the plan. In Bulgaria for instance,

Tsar Boris III refused to deport the country's 50,000 Jews, but sadly, only after the Bulgarian occupying forces carried out the genocide of Macedonian Jews. At least in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, the Holocaust took place in the countries where people firmly believed in the biologised "ethnic" construct of painful social and class differences, and where Jews were, for decades prior to the war, the collective victim of aggressive race- and class-based antisemitic ideology.

To stand up against these ideologies of biologized "ethnicity" and antisemitism therefore required a heroic disposition in individuals who did not allow themselves to have their basic humanity destroyed by such ideologies, even as the latter were backed by formidable political and religious power and sweepingly popular beliefs. The men and women presented in the first part of the book have already been recognised as Righteous Among Nations for their brave humanitarian acts during WWII, a title bestowed by the Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research, Education, Documentation and Commemoration. Their stories were written by Miriam Steiner Aviezer, a long-term collaborator of the Yad Vashem, and the key instigator of recognising the Righteous in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia.

It is no coincidence that the majority of these stories were published previously in the books on the Righteous from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia. As the reader will notice, most of these people lived and worked outside Slovenia during the war. Out of nine Slovenian women and men proclaimed Righteous Among Nations, only one, Uroš Žun, then commander of the border police in Maribor, performed his act of rescue on Slovenian soil. All others were scattered throughout Yugoslavia, except France Punčuh who initially worked as an adjunct and then external diplomatic employee of the Yugoslav embassy in Warsaw, Poland, and who married, lived, and died there.

One may be inclined to conclude from the above that the Slovenian rescuers of the Jews were courageous and enterprising individuals who made their lives and careers far away from their places of birth. But such an impression lacks objectiveness. In Slovenia, detailed research into the past and fates of the Slovenian Jews begun some fifteen years ago. It is an on-going effort and much more time will have to pass before we can say with any degree of certainty that a well-rounded picture of all the relevant processes and events was obtained. The lives of these Slovenian Righteous thus mainly testify to the circumstances and life opportunities in pre-war Yugoslavia,

therefore to the historic reality of the Yugoslav state, and to the fact that research results were earlier, and more abundant in those ex-Yugoslav environments where the Jewish population has been much more numerous than in Slovenia. This book we intend as an addition to these previous research results.

To this end, we have included in the second part of the book, the stories of individuals who are yet to be recognised for their brave deeds and given their proper place in the historic memory. Many among them proved their courage and humanitarianism in Slovenia to Slovenian Jews. We included their stories in order to avoid the impression that Slovenia did not have brave people during the war who valued their human ethics higher than their own lives in a time of general terror, occupation, and war. Quite on the contrary, there are many more stories than we were able to include in this book and many are still under historic investigation.

In addition to the six stories we present in Part two, research is underway concerning a Catholic priest Berden from Martjanci in Prekmurje whose story was narrated by Mrs. Erika Fürst from Murska Sobota, this town's last Holocaust survivor and recipient of the national Golden Order for Services in 2012 for her

contribution to Holocaust research and teaching. Boris Hajdinjak is conducting the research. Father Berden saved the lives of Ana Hirschl, the maternal aunt of Mrs. Fürst, and her daughter Piroška (married as Kornfein) by providing them with false papers and employment as a seamstress and nanny respectively in the service of the local nobility. A story from Ljubljana speaks of another Catholic priest who is said to have saved many Jews by providing them with false papers. These and other stories will be included in future editions of this book. Several individuals presented in Part two are also posthumous candidates for the title of Righteous Among Nations. All of them, however, deserve our grateful memory, as one of the authors aptly put it. Because of people like them, the destructive Nazi machine failed in the end. Because we know that there are many more stories to be told, we decided to supplement the book with the criteria of Yad Vashem for the title of Righteous Among Nations in the hopes that the brave men and women presented here are joined by more in the future.

However, Yad Vashem criteria are highly selective in that they recognise only those acts of rescuing Jews that were carried out for entirely altruistic motives and that entailed extreme mortal danger for the rescuer. In Part

Two, we present two stories about highly organized rescue venues that were part of some kind of illegal resistance organization and were therefore highly programmatic. Both these stories, about organized rescuing of Hungarian Jews over the occupation border, and rescuing of the Jews from Croatia to Slovenia, that is, from the Fascist Croatian state to the Italian occupied territory over the Kolpa river, call for further research.

An attentive reader will notice that of the nine Righteous of Slovenian background, only two were awarded this title during the Yugoslav socialism. All others were recognized, most of them posthumously, only after 1991, with all remaining titles awarded from 1998 to 2004. These facts testify to the ambivalence of the ex-Yugoslav authorities towards the surviving Jews. With the end of WWII, ethnicization of class enemies did not cease at all, nor did the monster of antisemitism die with the new century. As we write this, it is again rearing its ugly head all over Europe. People who were rescuing Jews during the war were often subject to political persecution after the war, or suspected of anti-socialism, as the stories of the Righteous Martina Levec Marković and Uroš Žun illustrate. That being so, we are all the more convinced that investigations into the stories of the people who risked their lives to save

Jews from Nazi persecution are incomplete, as many of the stories we present here were supressed and silenced for decades.

The entire team who worked on the book owes special gratitude to Miriam Steiner Aviezer whose instigation was decisive, and who also contributed the majority of chapters on the Slovenian Righteous. We would also like to thank all other co-authors, especially Boris Hajdinjak and Marjan Toš who contributed several key details and a wealth of archival materials to the articles in Part I. Our gratitude goes also to all the informants who gave the authors the details, and the photos: Erika Fürst, Vera Pintarič, Tanya Puncuh, and Miriam Steiner Aviezer; and Juraj Breskvar, the historian Milivoj Dretar, Boris Cigüt, Cvetko Vendramin and Tomaž Zajc, the Leskovec pri Krškem Elementary School and the Municipality of Murska Sobota. A warm thanks is also due to Alenka Koren whose help in finding information was indispensable, and the book designer Tanja Radež for her excellent work.

Finally, let us say that the book contributes substantially to the clarification of circumstances surrounding the Holocaust in the Slovenian and Yugoslav territories, especially from the point of view of those who were its col-

lective witness, and from among whom there emerged several individuals and groups with exceptional courage to withstand evil. The book is edited and arranged in such a manner as to be accessible to the broadest circle of readers, especially to the young. To all readers, we wish both sobering and inspiring reading.

PART ONE
THE SLOVENIAN RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

UROŠ ŽUN
SIXTEEN WORLDS SAVED

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Uroš Žun

Uroš Žun was a lawyer by education, born on 6 March 1903 in Radovljica, Slovenia, at Mesto No. 41 (nowadays Linhart's Square 14), to Valentin and Olga Žun, née Jug. He spent his first five years of life in Radovljica. Because of his father's work, the family moved a great deal. They lived in Vienna between 1910 – 1914. In October 1918, they moved to Ljubljana where Valentin died. The very talented young Uroš continued his schooling although the family was not well off. He obtained a degree in law and was employed in the state administration. Between 1938 and 1941 he served as a border official near Maribor. This town between Vienna and Trieste was an important point for Jewish refugees who entered Yugoslavia fleeing from the Nazi terror.

On the eve of the war, before the April 1941 German attack on Belgrade, Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia were fleeing through Yugoslavia to reach other countries, notably British Palestine. A decree was sent from Belgrade to all border outposts, especially those on the border with Austria, that any border official who allowed refugees, and Jews in particular, to cross the border would face harsh punishment. When the decree reached Žun, there was already a letter on his desk announcing the arrival of sixteen Jewish girls requesting any kind of assistance. The girls were already on their way. Before he even had a chance to decide, he heard quiet female voices in the hall, and suddenly a group of smiling girls was standing in front of him. For a moment he hesitated. He always acted in full compliance with the rules and knew that were he to

disobey the orders he would face punishment, probable demotion, or worse. Should he risk his career and put his safety and the safety of his family on the line, or should he help the frightened girls who had managed to escape from Austria?

Žun was well informed about everything that was happening in Austria through daily contacts with his fellow officers there. He also knew he could save these girls' lives simply by putting a stamp on their border passes. This was the most difficult moment of his life. He clearly held in his hands two sets of destinies. The destinies of the girls whose lives he could most likely save, and his own destiny and that of his family. He could send the girls back, but then they would surely be thrown in jail. This his conscience would not allow.

He stamped their border passes and allowed them to cross the border. The girls sensed that he had breached his orders, but were not aware of the gravity of the punishment he was facing. They hugged him in gratitude and left the border outpost. There they stopped, not knowing where to turn. The paid men that escorted them were long gone. When Žun realized the situation, he decided to drive them to Maribor himself. He took them to a hotel whose owner was a local Jewish industrialist named Marko Rosner. The hotel accommodated them free of charge and connected them with the Jewish community in Zagreb. The people in the community promised to send someone to transfer the

girls to Zagreb. Žun grew fond of the girls and visited them every day. His wife would bring them dairy products and fruits and vegetables. In observance of their kosher diet, the girls did not eat meat and kosher meals were nowhere to be found in Maribor. The girls anxiously awaited Žun's visit every day, growing attached to him as a surrogate father they could trust. When the representative from the Jewish community in Zagreb arrived, they said goodbye to their rescuer with heavy hearts and tears in their eyes.

Knowing that he faced severe punishment, Uroš Žun, his wife and their son fled to Zagreb where they went into hiding. It is a good thing that they did so as the Germans issued an arrest warrant for him immediately upon their arrival in Maribor. They even plastered houses with posters, promising a reward of 10,000 marks to anyone that would betray him. Although many Maribor residents knew Žun had saved the girls, and some even knew his whereabouts, no one came forward.

Žun and his family thus became refugees themselves and began moving from one city to another to escape arrest. First they spent some time in Zagreb where Žun hid under the name of an Ustasha who had been killed by the partisans, using a forged identity card. But the family could not stay in one place for long. From Zagreb they moved to Bosnia where they remained in hiding under dire conditions until the end of the war. Uroš Žun never returned to Maribor. He moved to Trieste where his knowledge of at

least eight languages earned him a job with a newspaper as a proof-reader. Later, he moved to Ljubljana where he undertook teaching at the Economic and Technical high schools. He was well loved by his pupils. Uroš Žun died on 4 May 1977.

His post-war life in Ljubljana drew attention of the then secret police, UDBA. He was suspected of collaboration with the British and American intelligence services. His first wife, Branka Štimec, recalls that during their joint living in Maribor, many officials were visiting him who were known to be of intelligence services, but Žun always declined any collaboration. She and her husband were interrogated repeatedly. In one instance, Žun was taken to the police station for questioning, after which he contemplated suicide. The family was harassed until Žun's wife Branka managed to persuade the agents of her husband's past, detailing to them his time as customs commissioner in Maribor prior to the war.

What happened to the girls? Once in Zagreb, they were taken under the wing of the Jewish community jointly with a group of Jewish children from Germany and Austria who reached the city taking other routes. Some of these children were the siblings of the girls. Having formed a strong bond with them, Žun continued visiting the girls during his stay in Zagreb. Their destiny remained uncertain until the arrival of Josip Indig, a Jewish activist and educator, who made it his goal to rescue a group of fifty children. They

were to leave Zagreb without delay because the occupation authorities had already begun rounding up and deporting Jews from the city.

It was decided that they should reach the area that had been occupied by Italy. The first stop was Ljubljana, where they were received by Ljubljana's Bishop Rožman who offered for them to stay in an abandoned mansion at Lesno Brdo. Local farmers supplied them with food generously. In the meantime, Indig provided the group with forged border passes and the entire group made its way to Split. There they were joined by some fifty children from all over Yugoslavia whose parents had already been sent away. It was again time to raise large sums of money, pull some strings, and take a number of steps. Finally, Indig and the group, now numbering about one hundred Jewish children, reached Italy, the small town of Nonantola near Modena. After Italy's capitulation in 1934 when the Germans arrived in the area, Indig managed to transfer "his" children safely to Switzerland.

In 1945, the sixteen girls who had been rescued by Žun reached British Palestine, today Israel. Their names are: Tila Ofenberger Nagler, Gizela Wiesner, Fany Zwik Zanft, Paula Munves Teitelbaum, Lili Neumann Levin, Ruth Mashiah Drinker, Irit Rosenberg, Bety Sochschevsky Endzweig, Sonja Harary Boros, Lola Feilchenfeld Schindelheim, Gerda Ben Baruch Tuchner, Mausi, Frida Stern Endzweig, Hilde Miron Steinhard, Berta Reich, and Eva

Froehlich Reich. They never forgot the Slovenian border official who, in those difficult and fateful moments, showed such compassion and courage, even as he knowingly jeopardized the safety of his own family, to save their lives.

The girls started new lives in Israel, most of them in various kibbutzim. Some set out for America. They were not in continuous contact but, when some of them learned about the possibility of proposing recommendations for the Righteous, they banded together and submitted their statements to Yad Vashem. In 1986, Uroš Žun was proclaimed Righteous Among Nations. The recognition, alas, came posthumously. The award and medal were presented to his son Igor.

At Yad Vashem, the name of Uroš Žun is engraved on the stone Wall of the Righteous. The ceremony was attended by the majority of the former girls who were now grandmothers with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The memorial medal awarded to the Righteous bears the inscription: "He who saves one life, saves the whole world." Thus Uroš Žun saved not only sixteen girls but sixteen worlds and generations.

ANDREJ TUMPEJ
RAHELA BECOMES BREDA

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Andrej Tumpej

On 25 March 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite Pact with the Axis Powers. This sparked mass protests, the best-known of which took place in Belgrade on 27 March with its famous slogans *Bolje rat nego pakt* (War rather than pact) and *Bolje grob nego rob* (In the grave rather than a slave). The protests contributed substantially to the overthrow of the government. Hitler's response was to attack Yugoslavia. Orders were issued to postpone the planned attack on Russia known as Operation Barbarossa for four weeks in order to subdue Yugoslavia. Many historians maintain that these "four invaluable weeks" thwarted Germany's plans to attack Russia, which may be seen as Yugoslavia's direct contribution to Germany's ultimate defeat. The government and military command capitulated and King Peter II fled to London.

After the capitulation of the Yugoslav government, the Axis Powers began dismembering Yugoslavia. The Germans assumed indirect administration of Serbia proper, direct military administration of Banat, and annexed Slovenian Styria and Upper Carniola to the Reich. In all their occupied Yugoslav territories, the Germans set up a special administration to solve the "Jewish question" to the point of final annihilation. It started with an inventory and confiscation of their property, then shooting men and later women and children, some of whom were murdered in special gas vans. Jews frantically sought ways to escape death and

deportation. Only a few people summoned enough courage to help them. Any form of assistance to the Jews was prohibited. Huge signboards displayed a warning that severe punishment awaited any citizen who offered them shelter. One of the few to help the Jews despite these odds was Andrej Tumpej.

Tumpej was born on 29 November 1886 in Lovrenc na Dravskem Polju. He finished elementary school in his hometown, and secondary school in Maribor (1899 – 1900) and Graz (1905 – 1907). He proceeded to study theology with the Lazarists in Graz (1907 – 1911) and entered the priesthood. Soon afterwards he was nominated Professor of religious instruction at the Catholic Gymnasium in Istanbul that was headed by the French Lazarists. He served as a catechism teacher from 1912 – 1914, first in Istanbul and then as parish priest in Bitola and Belgrade. He was charmed by Istanbul and it made him ponder the schism among Christians. He familiarized himself with both Islamic and Christian Orthodox traditions. He became an ardent ecumenist. Shortly before WWI, he returned to Slovenia, to Ljubljana, where he headed a dormitory, and brought up young men to become Lazarist missionaries. During the war, he contributed to the process of building the independent Slovenian Lazarist order, and helped in the organizing of the Mission Joint Venture, founded in 1916, and the Mission Association that published the *Misijonski koledar* (Mission Calendar) , which he edited, between 1923 and

1926 and the newspaper *Katoliški misijoni* (Catholic Missions). He also helped found the Missionary school at Groblje near Domžale. However, he longed to go back to the Balkans, to work on the reunion of all Christians.

Tumpej was thus only too glad to accept the office of parish priest in Bitola in 1926. He did a lot of travelling and invested all his powers in establishing cooperation between Catholics and the Orthodox. He would travel by foot in Macedonia and Kosova. He reached many very remote places and preached the Gospels. Because of his extensive evangelisation and travels, he was nicknamed "the Old Balkanian."

In 1929, he was appointed parish priest in the Parish of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Belgrade. He lived and worked in Čukarica until 1945, and helped substantially with the building of the church consecrated to the two saints. He had their statues brought from the Lazarists in the parish of Sv. Jožef nad Celjem and installed in the new church. He was known and respected for his readiness to console people who suffered economic and social hardships, and famed for his strength of character and strong will.

When the Germans marched into Belgrade, they immediately started to enforce anti-Jewish laws, forcing hundreds to try to flee the country. Some fled to Albania, others to Dalmatia and the hills, but most remained in Belgrade, trying to find another escape route. Antonija

Kalef, a Slovenian by birth who was married to a wealthy Jewish merchant in Belgrade, was suddenly left alone with two daughters aged nine and twelve. Her daughter Rahela recounts:

> *My mother, my sister, and I literally found ourselves on the street. This was when I realized what it means to have such a brave and noble mother. My father was in the hospital and was later taken to the concentration camp with other patients, straight to the gas chamber. We were starving, especially our mother. If we got a little bit of bread, my sister took one bite and then I took one, and there was often none left for our mother. We knew that we would only survive if we learned to cope with hunger and cold, and if we changed our names.*

Antonija Kalef and her daughters Matilda and Rahela turned to the parish priest Tumpej for help. Without a moment's hesitation, he invited them into the church, generously provided them with food, and kept them in the parish for several days in order to gain time and arrange for forged passports. He knew that he was putting his career, and even his life at risk, but he could not deny them help. His conscience would not allow it. He knew that he was breaking the law. Posters were put up everywhere threatening severe penalties, even death, warning the population that it was forbidden to offer shelter and help to Jews.

Tumpej gathered all his courage and began working on the forged documents. He decided to use the papers of a distant relative from Slovenia named Ograjenšek. When he brought them the falsified identity cards, he said to his charges:

From now on, your name is no longer Kalef but Ograjenšek. You, Mrs. Kalef, will keep your Slovenian name Antonija, but the daughters must change their names. Matilda will henceforth be called Lidija and Rahela will become Breda.

Then he turned to Rahela:

From now on, you are no longer Rahela and your family name is no longer Kalef because, remember this well, child, you will become a completely different person. Your name will be Breda Ograjenšek. In no way may you make a mistake or tell anyone that you are in fact not Breda Ograjenšek. Only in this way will you be able to save your life.

With the new documents, all three led a relatively peaceful life in Belgrade. They moved to another neighbourhood because Dorčul, where they previously lived, was turned into a kind of ghetto where police raids took place every day. Once the danger became imminent, especially in October and November 1941 when the deportations to Sajmište (known as *Judenlager Zemlin*)

began, they turned to Tumpej and found both shelter and comfort in his parish.

Tumpej not only saved the Kalefs but, in a similar way, helped two other Jewish girls, sisters whom he also provided with forged identity cards that gave them the protection of Serbian nationality. The two girls applied for employment in Germany. At the police station at the train depot where special permits were issued for persons applying for work in Germany, they were required to present their documents. They were afraid their real identities would be revealed, but everything went smoothly. However, once on the train, someone recognized them and reported them to the police. The police interrogated them to find out who had given them the forged identity cards. At first they refused to talk, but in a moment of weakness, after being subjected to horrific and extremely brutal torture especially devised for women, they revealed the name of the man who had provided them with the forged documents. They hoped this would win them their freedom, but it did not. The girls were shot and the parish priest Tumpej was arrested and interrogated to provide the names of others he had supplied with fake documents. Despite horrific torture, Tumpej did not reveal anything regarding his assistance to the Kalef family. Ultimately, he was released because of lack of evidence, but he never fully recovered from the excruciating ordeal in prison. After the war, Tumpej held office in Smederevo between 1948 – 1963. Following the

catastrophic earthquake in Skopje, he went there and stayed until 1971, and then returned to Belgrade where he died on 5 March 1973.

The bravery and humanity of the parish priest Tumpej set an example to many. The Kalef family remained in amiable contact with their rescuer, and Rahela Kalef retained the name Breda for life, as a token of gratitude. She became the acclaimed mezzosoprano prima donna of the Belgrade Opera. In the many interviews she gave during her illustrious career as an opera star, never once did she forget to recount the story of the courageous, humanitarian, warm heart of her rescuer, Andrej Tumpej.

At her initiative, Andrej Tumpej was proclaimed Righteous Among Nations in 2001. Mrs. Kalef had not known that the title could also be awarded posthumously, or "the good Father" and "Old Balkanian" would certainly have been recognised while still alive.

ZORA PIČULIN
VARUŠKA IZ LJUBLJANE

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Zora Pičulin

After Yugoslavia's capitulation in 1941, Macedonia and the southern Serbian town of Pirot were annexed by Bulgaria. The people received the occupying forces with songs and flowers. Bulgarian citizenship was granted to everyone except Jews who were stripped of citizenship and all civil rights. They were placed outside the law. The Bulgarian occupation forces established a special department for the "Jewish question" headed by Aleksander Belev. He sent a message to the Bulgarian government that the Germans were willing to cooperate in bringing about the "solution" to the Jewish question. They carried out a census of Jews and their property, then confiscated all assets and forced the Jews to invest their money into Bulgarian banks.

Jews had to carry special identity cards on their persons at all times, were prohibited from holding public offices or serving in the Bulgarian army, and had to pay a monthly special tax of 30 levs. They were not allowed to marry non-Jews or live with them in extramarital arrangements. Mixed marriages were likewise not recognised. They were prohibited from hiring non-Jewish employees, and from living in the cities or certain parts of a city. They also could not adopt non-Jewish children even if one of the child's parents was a Jew.

Furthermore, the Commission on Jewish questions of the Bulgarian government issued an ordinance on 4 September 1942 according to which the Jews were

required to label their homes with a visible inscription: "Jewish house." Likewise, their businesses were to be labelled as "Jewish business." On 23 September, the Commission also decreed that all Jews were to wear a yellow Star of David on the left top of their garments. To purchase this symbol, every Jew had to pay 20 levs. Jews were also prohibited to enter public buildings and businesses. These measures were carried out with outmost zeal, punishing the trespassers severely.

Despite these measures, the Macedonian Jews were joining the resistance movement led by the Communist party en masse. Around 800 Jews joined the resistance whereby they self-organised into groups of workers, women and girls, merchants, students, intellectuals, etc. Entire families joined and worked for the resistance. Many Jewish families were hiding the partisans, their collaborators, and wounded fighters. Many Jews excelled with their bravery in the resistance groups. As early as 1942, the occupying forces took hostage a large group of Jews, sentenced and executed them by hanging. The partisan detachment called Pelister was thus destroyed soon after its formation. Among them was a Jewish fighter, Pepo Pesko who was captured and tortured to death. Around 600 Macedonian Jews were fighters in the partisan forces.

In early March of 1943, the Bulgarian occupying forces in Macedonia prepared the plan of deportation of Jews to Treblinka. Jews were to be rounded up in each city and tak-

en to areas in the vicinity of the train stations to facilitate the coordination of transports. Everything was meticulously planned and swiftly carried out. By 11 March 1943, all Macedonian Jews from Bitola, Štip, and other towns had been transferred to the Monopol tobacco factory in Skopje. Security was tightened to prevent any attempt to escape to Albania or to the partisans. A total of 7,762 Jews were held in five four-storey buildings without bathroom facilities, running water, or food.

On 22 March 1943, the Bulgarian freight cars arrived. Each had room for forty persons or eight horses, but the Bulgarian soldiers crammed eighty persons with their luggage into every single one of them. Each car only had two small windows in the upper corner. The passengers were given food, salty dried fish, but no water. Many died during transport.

The Bulgarian soldiers handed the deportees over to the Germans. Out of the total of 7,762, at least 7,144 were sent to Treblinka and straight to the gas chambers in three transports. The Germans organised the first mass transport on 22 March 1943, with 1,600 Jews from Bitola and 2,338 from Skopje. The second transport departed for Treblinka on 25 March, carrying Jews from Bitola, Skopje and Štip. The third transport departed on 29 March, carrying the rest of the people from Skopje and Bitola, the majority of them young people and children, and Jews from Kosovo. The last transport reached Treblinka on 5 April

with 2,404 people. Many died during transport. The rest were murdered on arrival. Only 166 of the Jews who found themselves in these three transports lived to see the end of the war.

While the Bulgarian occupying forces transferred all Macedonian Jews to the Germans in March 1943, the 8,500 Bulgarian Jews were spared. The plan to give them over to the Germans met with strong opposition on the part of Bulgarian politicians, church dignitaries, intellectuals, and many citizens. They were successful in their protests, as Tsar Boris revoked the ordinance on the arrests. The Bulgarian Jewish community was saved from total annihilation, but the ancient, highly cultured Sephardic Jewish community in Macedonia was gone. Only 10 per cent of Macedonian Jews survived the Holocaust, among them Šaul Gatenjo.

Zora Pičulin was born on 1 January 1911 in Solkan in Slovenia. As a professional nanny from Ljubljana, she was invited to Skopje by the wealthy Gatenjo family to take care of their little son Šaul, born in 1941. On the evening of 9 March 1943 when the curfew law took effect, rumours began to spread in the city of Bulgarian plans to gradually deport all Jews to internment camps. The first in line were the wealthy and successful Jews who sought to escape the country. Escape proved to be virtually impossible as all the borders were well guarded and the Bulgarians were very expeditious in executing the measures towards the destruction of all Jews.

The Gatenjo family resided in the wealthy part of the city and it was a matter of certainty that they would be among the first to get arrested. It was precisely at that time that two-year-old Šaul fell ill. He had a sore throat and an ear infection. He was in the hospital, in the care of his nanny Zora Pičulin, as his parents were arrested and sent away, led to believe that it would merely be a hearing for an investigation, and that they would be permitted to return to their home in short order. That, however, did not happen. They were taken to the Monopol camp, and from there to their death in Treblinka with the other Macedonian Jews.

When Zora learned about these events, she knew she had to save her charge because Jewish children were not spared either. Surely it would not go unnoticed that the child of the Gatenjo family was missing on the list of the arrested. Before long, he would have been located in the hospital. Zora realized that she had to move swiftly. Šaul was still ill and incessantly crying with an earache. She began to devise a plan to smuggle the child out of the hospital. His clothes were in the small cloakroom where the patients' garments were kept. She asked the nurses to bring her the baby's clothes, saying that there was something she needed in the pockets. The nurses allowed her to go into the room alone. She took the baby's clothes, hid them under her coat and returned to the sickroom. Šaul was running a high fever, but she wrapped him up tightly and smuggled him out of the hospital in the dark of the night.

Šaul was crying constantly and she whispered to him: *Ne plači, dušo moja, sve će biti u redu. Zagrli me pa će te manje boleti.* (Don't cry, my darling, everything will be all right. Hug me tightly and the pain will subside). Šaul indeed put his arms around her and immediately fell asleep.

Zora had no idea where to go. She saw that the Bulgarians were everywhere, searching through every backyard, every apartment, and even coffee shops. She knew she should not go back to the Gatenjo family's house which was surely under guard. She did not carry much money and her clothes were not suitable for setting out on a journey. Little Šaul was in his pajamas, but she was wary of waking him up to change his clothes. Suddenly she saw the cemetery, the only place where no one would be looking for them. The gate was ajar. She entered. She found a small chapel where she placed the child on top of a chest, and they both fell asleep.

In the morning, she heard footsteps; two men were talking outside near the chapel, and she could hear them clearly:

"All Jews have been taken away. Everyone. To the last one."

"How did they know who was Jewish?"

"They had lists. They must have taken them to some concentration camp."

"Yes, to Poland perhaps. Apparently, they have concentration camps with gas chambers there."

Zora was horrified by what she heard and decided to flee as far from Skopje as possible. She went to a neighbouring village. There she bought some milk and corn bread for the child. The housewife who sold her the food noticed that the child was wrapped up, and asked why. Zora told her about the ear infection. The woman gave her an ointment she had prepared herself. It worked like a miracle medicine to soothe Šaul and in the end even cured him completely. They moved from one settlement to another, further and further away from Skopje where everyone knew the Gatenjo family, just as everybody also knew the family had hired a professional nanny and midwife from Slovenia to take care of their only son.

Having wandered for days with only this goal in mind, Zora and the baby came to a town in the hills called Letnice. At the local Catholic monastery, a rarity in that area, they were taken in without hesitation. Zora told them truthfully that she was a nanny in care of a Jewish child whom she had managed to snatch from the hospital, and that she was looking for a way to survive. She asked the nuns for shelter and offered to work as a maid. They accepted and so she and Šaul stayed with them until the end of the war in December 1944. Since there were some other Jewish children in hiding in the monastery, little Šaul had company, but most importantly, his nanny was there as well, following his every step and giving him motherly affection.

After the war, Zora Pičulin and the boy returned to Skopje in the hopes that someone in the family had survived, but they found no one. By then the tragic fate of the Macedonian Jews, little Šaul's parents included, was generally known. The boy was of course too young to understand any of this. The only thing that mattered to him was that his nanny was with him. He had already begun to call her mama. Zora resolved to adopt the boy and return with him to Ljubljana. She went to the Jewish community to complete all the formalities. There she was received very kindly and explained that hers was a very humane gesture, however, they first needed to establish whether the child had any surviving relatives. She was told that they would have to wait a while because people were returning from all over the place and perhaps a relative might come forward, and relatives have priority in the care of orphaned children.

Indeed, after waiting for a long time, relatives appeared. It was the Biti family who wished to adopt the boy. That did not go smoothly. Little Šaul who was five then refused to be separated from his "mama." He clung to her and would not let anyone else close. Mrs. Biti invited Zora Pičulin to stay with them. She accepted the invitation because she too could not separate herself from the child.

In 1948, when the state of Israel was created, nearly all surviving Jews left their old homelands and moved to the newly established Jewish state. Jews from all over the world

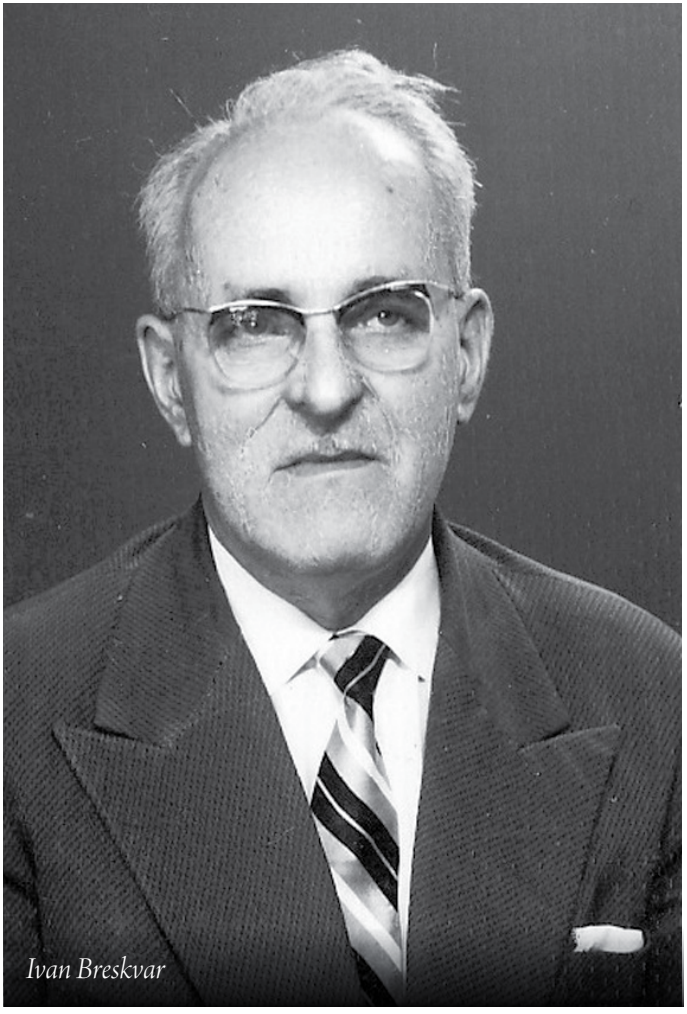
were pouring in to live in safety and freedom. Transports were organized from Yugoslavia, and the Biti family also applied. They offered Zora Pičulin the opportunity to go to Israel with them, but she could not accept their kind offer. She found it very difficult to let Šaul go; but, as she said, everyone should live with their own people. Zora returned to Ljubljana, and Šaul went to Israel with his new family.

Šaul grew up and started his own family in Israel where he works as a math teacher at a high school in Jerusalem. He came to visit Zora in Ljubljana every year of his adult life. He last visited her two years before her death. She died on 2 June 1998 and was interred in the Ljubljana cemetery Žale.

Zora Pičulin was recognized as Righteous in 1975, the year when the solemn festivity took place at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. Zora visited Israel at the occasion at invitation from Šaul and the Biti family. Šaul was constantly at her side, holding her hand and enjoying every single moment with his "mama." At the Yad Vashem memorial site, he helped her plant a tree. Among the 22,000 trees planted in the memory of the Righteous from all over the world, there is thus a tree with the inscription: *Zora Pičulin, Slovenia*.

IVAN BRESKVAR
RESCUE ON A BICYCLE

Miriam Steiner Aviezer



Ivan Breskvar

On 10 April 1941, German troops marched into Zagreb. The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was established, although military command remained with the Germans who had their diplomatic representation and a Gestapo office in Zagreb. Direct control over Jews, however, was taken over by the Ustasha. In his desire to demonstrate his affiliation with the Germans, the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić, in agreement with the Gestapo, immediately introduced anti-Jewish measures as stipulated by the Nuremberg Laws.

Among the Jewish survivors from the territory of the NDH were those Jews who managed to escape to the territories annexed by Italy, those who had been given border passes (those that were converted to Christianity were given the passes by the Croatian cardinal), those who joined the partisans, and those who were rescued by courageous people. Among those courageous people was the Slovenian Ivan Breskvar.

Upon invitation of the local silk factory management, Ivan Breskvar, a textile engineer from Ljubljana, arrived to Varaždin as business advisor in 1931. He liked the city, was received warmly and respectfully, people were kind, the salary was good, so he decided to make Varaždin his permanent home. He married a local girl; by the time the war started, they already had three children. He became the director of the factory's department of silk braiding where he made friends with his colleague Milan Blass, a Jew from Slovenia, who was an expert in silk dying.

With the onset of the war in 1941, Varaždin became part of the NDH. Here, too, all anti-Jewish laws were enforced, including the confiscation of Jewish property, the Jewish quota in schools, and the wearing of the Jewish symbol. In 1942, the execution of the Final Solution plan began across Croatia. The Jews were deported to various concentration camps under Ustasha administration. Milan Blass was temporarily protected from deportation by the special status of an indispensable in the factory of his employment. But the Ustasha list included his relatives, his aunt Zdenka Hary with her husband Teodor and their baby born in 1942, and his sister Renata Rosner's family with a four year old who lived in Mali Bukovec near Ludbreg. The desperate mothers knew what awaited them and were frantic to save their children. Luckily, the district representative of Ludbreg managed to persuade the Ustasha to spare children under five years of age.

The Ustasha conceded, but under the condition that the children be taken by their close relatives. When Blass learned about this, he rushed to the assembly point and stated that Zdenka Hary and Renata Rosner were his sisters so the children, the five-month-old Vedran and the four-year old Artur were given to him in custody. Artur would not separate from his mother, so it took effort to persuade him to go with his uncle. The mothers held their children tightly, covering them with kisses as they knew very well that they were saying goodbye to them for life. In those difficult moments, there was hardly time for tears.

They had to act fast, before the Ustasha could change their mind. Milan Blass took the children and returned to Varaždin. Renata Rosner and Zdenka Hary were taken to Stara Gradiška, never to return.

A bachelor, Milan Blass knew little about caring for such children this young. He could manage with Artur who was already old enough to understand what he was being told (when Milan was at work, Artur was left in the care of his housekeeper), but handling the baby was a challenge. Milan turned to his aunt, Zora Schonwald, for help. She found a woman who provided day care for children at her home and who took little Vedran in. However, once she learned that the baby was Jewish, she declined further risk to herself. Blass again sought help from his aunt. She had a maid, Cilika Kumrić, in her employ. Mrs. Schonwald had a reputation in the community for treating her domestic help well. She would even find husbands for some of them, and the girls, too, enjoyed working for her. Cilika loved her employer. Once she heard the children were in danger, she offered to help without hesitation:

"I could ask my parents to take the children in. They live in the village of Cerje Nebojse."

"That would be a splendid solution."

Everyone agreed. Cilika immediately asked her parents to take in children, relatives of her employer. The parents, very grateful to Mrs. Schonwald for treating their daughter with such generosity, agreed. In the meantime, new laws

were issued, prohibiting offering day care for Jewish children, and any form of assistance to Jews. Because Artur and Vedran were registered with Blass, it was critical to move them to Cerje Nebojse without delay. The remaining problem was how to take them to such a remote village to which no transportation was available.

Breskvar noticed that something was worrying his friend Blass. He knew that the children were with him, that he had saved them in the nick of time from deportation, and that their mothers had been taken away. When they were alone, he said:

"Something is bothering you. How can I help?"

"I have a huge problem and I have no idea how to solve it," Blass started explaining. "The children are in danger."

"Yes," said Breskvar, "I saw posters announcing the prohibition on helping Jews. Children as well, then?"

"Children as well."

"Do you have any suggestion as to what I can do?"

"I have the opportunity to send them to a village, to the parents of my aunt's maid, but I don't know how to go about it. I have to do something fast. They're in danger."

"To what village?"

"Cerje Nebojse."

"I know that place," Breskvar said. "Granted, it's quite far away and difficult to get to."

Breskvar thought for a few minutes and finally came up with an idea.

"I can help. I can take each one there by bicycle."

"This is an excellent idea," smiled Blass, reassured. "One can only get there by bicycle. But are you aware of the danger you're putting yourself in? Vedran is so small and weak, and he's constantly crying."

"Does he sleep at night?"

"That he does."

"Well then, we'll travel by night," Breskvar said resolutely and jumped from the chair. He was quite agitated in the face of the task, which was not an easy one, and it was also dangerous because it required riding at night without lights.

"I'll be extremely grateful if you do this, but think it through. You know that you're putting yourself and your family at risk?"

"I'm aware of that, but there are two children here who must be saved and I'm willing to take the risk."

Breskvar immediately set to work. He prepared the bicycle well, took a backpack, made two holes in it for the little legs and two for the little arms, and headed over to Milan's apartment. They waited for little Vedran to fall asleep, then carefully placed him in the backpack, and Breskvar set off. He rode slowly and carefully through the night. Vedran, resting against his back, slept the entire time and only woke up once they reached the village. The Kumrić family was expecting them. Mrs. Iva Kumrić took the child in her arms and fed him fresh milk and soaked bread. Vedran ate it all and clearly felt comfortable. They

dressed him in farm clothes and cut his fair curly hair to make him look just like the other children that filled the house. After a quick rest and meal, Breskvar headed back to Varaždin to prepare for another journey, this time with Artur, the following night. This was an easier task because he could put Artur in the seat behind him. And, they were already old friends because Artur had often visited his family's house to play with their children.

Both Artur and Vedran did well with the Kumrić family, not in the least because there were so many other children of their age there. Among them was two-year-old Micika with whom they became especially close. Everyone in the village knew that the Kumrić family was hiding two Jewish children. Every time the Germans or the Ustasha patrolled the area they had to hide them in a different house. Their relative Ivka Vlahović who lived in the nearby village of Stažnjevec came to their aid as well. Vedran and Artur stayed with the Kumrić family in Cerje Nebojse for three years. Uncle Milan often came to visit them and sometimes stayed with them for days.

After the war, the children were returned to Milan Blass who had married in the meantime, so his wife took care of both of them. In 1948, Zora Schonwald's daughter, Blanka Banjai, officially adopted Vedran and moved with him to Israel. Vedran Hary, today known as Jair Palgi, lives in the kibbutz of Nir David in northern Galilee, in the Beit She'an Valley. He is professor at the University of Haifa and has a large family.

Artur stayed with his uncle Milan and his wife. He graduated from the university and became a mechanical engineer. He married Sonja, the daughter of his rescuer Ivan Breskvar, and lives with his family in Varaždin. Milan Blass, a renowned philatelist and polyglot, worked as a tourist guide for a long time. He died in 2003. Ivan Breskvar died in Varaždin on 7 May 1986.

Ivan Breskvar, Iva Kumrić and Tomo Kumrić were declared Righteous among Nations in 1998.

LJUBICA AND IVAN ŽUPANČIČ AND OLGA RAJŠEK NEUMANN
YOUNG DAN

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Olga Rajšek Neumann

Dan was nine years old when he was left all alone. His father, a prominent lawyer in Nova Gradiška, fell into German captivity in 1941. His mother, Štefa Stockhamer, was left alone with two children and decided to move to Pakrac to live with her father Julius Neuman, a medical doctor of many years of practice and considerable reputation. Štefa hoped she would be safe with him. She also hoped her father would cure her daughter who had been suffering from polio since birth. However, all his efforts to save his granddaughter were in vain. Everyone mourned her, especially Dan who loved his sister dearly and spent many happy moments with her. No one could ever have imagined that this was only the beginning of the tragedy that was to come.

At the end of 1941, the Ustasha assembled all the Jews of Pakrac and transferred them to the camp at Stara Gradiška. Among them were Dan, his mother Štefa and his grandmother Draga. From there they were taken to the women's and children's concentration camp at Djakovo near Osijek. The living conditions were inhumane. There were no bathroom facilities and practically no running water, which caused a typhoid epidemic. Hungry and deprived of water, the healthy inmates shared their bunks with the sick and the dead. Štefa contracted typhoid fever, but was more concerned for Dan's destiny. She kept wondering how she could save him.

Help came from a woman through whom Dr. Neuman, still a free man given that he was of good use to the authorities, was able to send a little food and medicine to his wife, daughter, and grandson. At the entrance to the camp, they took half of what she was carrying, but she still managed to bring a little something inside. It was agreed that this woman would take Dan out of the concentration camp, a task anything but simple. Dan would not be separated from his mother. He clutched her, crying and begging her not to send him away. His mother was crying too, holding and kissing him:

"Go, my son, my only son, go, I'll come after you."

He resisted, but she explained to him that they could not both leave at the same time, and she assured him she would follow. She too had to summon all her strength to let him go. Dan left with the stranger. His mother's tearful gaze followed him all the way. He experienced a sudden premonition this was the last time he would ever see her. His premonition proved true. Štefa Stockhamer and Dan's grandmother, Draga Neuman, were transferred to Jasenovac where they were murdered. Dan was taken in by his grandfather, but a few months later, Dr. Neuman was sent to Jasenovac as well. He was killed on 31 August 1942, without ever knowing that his wife and daughter had been killed there before him.

In his grandfather's house, Dan was left with no one but the maid who took good care of him. Despite her care, he

grew more dispirited every day, worrying about his mother and grandfather. When Aunt Hana, sister to Dan's father who was still free, learned that he was all alone in Pakrac in the care of the maid, she came for him. She lived in Banja Luka and was married to Samuel Bijelić, a medical doctor whose original name was Weiss. After her husband's death, Hana took both her own son and Dan to Dan's paternal grandfather Josip Stockhamer, an eighty-four-year-old veterinarian who also lived in Banja Luka. During a night raid at the end of 1942, the Ustasha arrested Aunt Hana, her son, Dan, and grandfather Josip, but later released Josip due to his age, and Dan because he was a minor. When they were set free, Dan and his blind grandfather had nowhere to go. They could not return to their apartment which had been looted and sealed. They sat on a bench in the park to consider their options. Some acquaintances saw them, but shied away, knowing Stockhamer was a Jew, and any assistance to Jews was prohibited.

"Where will we go, grandpa?" asked Dan.

"I only have one old acquaintance who I'm certain will take us in."

That acquaintance was Ivan Župančič, a Slovenian railroad worker, who lived with his wife Ljubica in a small house on a blind alley by the railroad tracks. They were both over sixty and childless. They first met Stockhamer when they sought his professional help in treating their sick dog. That visit was the beginning of their lasting friendship.

Ivan and Ljubica welcomed the exhausted homeless man and child and immediately invited them into their home. They were just preparing dinner, so Ljubica set two more plates on the table. Dan and his grandfather were hungry and did not need to be told twice. The Župančič couple wanted to hear the whole story and Stockhamer told them about everything they had been through. He finished, saying:

"And now I have no idea where to go."

"You can stay with us," the wife said spontaneously and looked at her husband. He nodded.

"Thank you for your kind offer," Stockhamer said, "but I need to warn you that you're putting yourselves in danger. If word gets around that you've given shelter to two Jews, you could lose your jobs and face punishment."

"We know that," Mr. Župančič said. "We saw the posters in the streets, but we can't abandon our friends in need."

"You're welcome to stay with us," added Mrs. Župančič.

They settled into the warmly welcoming, modest home of their Slovenian friends. However, in 1942, not long after their arrival, Dan's grandfather died. Thus Dan lost one more person to whom he had grown very attached. At his grandfather's funeral he broke down in tears and would not be consoled.

"I've never seen a child as sad as Dan," said Mrs. Župančič.

Ljubica Župančič decided to put aside her duties and devote all her attention to Dan. It was clear to her that the boy was in a fragile state of mind. He would not speak and always sat by himself, silent and sad. She was no psychologist, but had keen intuition. She constantly kept him company. Together they did the chores around the house, the kitchen, and the barn. She read to him, walked with him, and waited patiently for the moment when he would speak once again. She knew that the boy was going through a profound psychological crisis and that she would have to wait for him to "open up."

In the meantime, Dan's father, who was in captivity together with his brother-in-law Zlatko Neuman, learned that Dan was alone with the Župančič family, and that he was in good hands. He still thought it would be in Dan's best interest to be in the care of his remaining family. The only relative not to have been taken away was Olga Rajšek who lived in Zagreb and was engaged to the brother of Dan's mother. Mrs. Župančič took Dan to her and the boy had to say goodbye to yet another loved one.

"I'll come visit every month," Ljubica promised.

She kept her word and was able to visit the boy several times a month, as she had a free rail pass being the wife of a railroad employee. Olga Rajšek introduced Dan to his neighbours and friends as her uncle's child. Unfortunately, one of her neighbours, a former resident of Nova Gradiška, was the wife of the Ustasha agent who had arranged to set

the boy free before, and she was determined to do something about it. She reported Dan to the authorities and Dan was again sent to prison, from where people were being deported to concentration camps. Olga then turned to a well-connected friend of hers by the name of Vidaković, who helped her set Dan free again. One friend suggested Dan be baptized. Olga took the advice, only this time she did not take Dan home with her, but to the Home for Destitute Children where children of partisans and orphans were housed. She visited him several times a week to bring him extra food and treats. However, it was Ljubica's visits that made Dan happiest. She would take him for walks and to the confectioner's shop, and he most enjoyed talking with her.

When Olga's neighbour, the wife of the Ustasha agent who had reported Dan, moved away, Olga again brought Dan home at Derenčinova street no. 34 where he stayed until the end of the war. His father came back from captivity together with Dan's uncle, the prominent architect Zlatko Neuman, who married Olga Rajšek. Dan settled with his father in Banja Luka, graduated from high school, and then studied medicine in Zagreb. He received his PhD in 1958. In 1966, he moved to Chicago with his wife Lea, also a Holocaust survivor. He got two children, Ruth and Dan, and works as a physician. He maintained contacts with Ljubica and Ivan Župančič and visited them every year until their deaths.

Ljubica and Ivan Župančič, as well as Olga Rajšek Neuman, were proclaimed Righteous among Nations in 2002.

VERA AND LUDVIK VALENTINČIČ
THE STORY OF SUZANA

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Vera and Ludvik Valentinčič

The young couple Vera (1920 – 2007) and Ludvik Valentinčič (1917 – 1944) lived in Zagreb on Žerjavićeva Street. Close by, on Marulić Square, Vera's parents Ante and Adela Grünbaum resided. Ante Grünbaum was a publisher who, amidst the war, made books of authors such as Rabindranath Tagore. Valentinčič, born in Slovenia in Podbrdo in Baška grapa, came to Zagreb before the war to study veterinarian medicine. The entire family were loyal citizens, responsible and honest, who never came on the wrong side of the law. The young couple and Vera's parents were very close and were visiting each other daily. In those political circumstances, Vera's parents, given their Jewish-sounding family name, made sure to obtain documentation that confirmed they were not of Jewish, but of Sudeten German, extraction.

Vera and Ludvik befriended Mr. Hermann Pohoryles who, following the 1938 Anschluss, came to Zagreb seeking refuge. He and his wife Wilhelmina, called Vilma, stayed for a time in a special shelter for refugees. In 1941, they were joined by the daughter of Mrs. Phoryles from her first marriage, seven-year-old Suzana Knoll who arrived illegally from Vienna to Croatia and was thus saved in the nick of time. Her grandmother who stayed behind in Vienna perished in the Holocaust.

Once the NDH started its persecution of the Jews, Hermann and Vilma had to part with their daughter. For a fee, they found refuge for her in a family in Zagreb, but

Suzana could not stay there long. Her life was in danger, so the parents were forced to seek family after family to take her in temporarily. Hermann and Vilma managed to obtain false documents for themselves with the family name Pokorn in order to conceal their Jewishness, but could not get them for Suzana as well. The family lived in a permanent fear that the child will be found and deported.

Vera and Ludvik Valentinčič, and the Pohoryles family were friends, but also had business ties before the war. Hermann and Vilma knew very well their friends were opposed to the Ustasha rule, and dismayed at their treatment of Jews and Serbs. They also knew that Vera and Ludvik were in contact with the illegal resistance in Zagreb. Thus in summer of 1944, Hermann Pohoryles addressed Vera and Ludvik with the problem of their daughter Suzana and told them the entire sordid story. They were at the end of their rope; there was nowhere they could send Suzana to safety.

"I came to ask a big favour of you," Mr. Pohoryles told Vera and Ludvik on a visit to their house.

"You are aware that my family and I are refugees. (…) We managed to solve my wife's and my own situation somehow. We obtained papers with the name of Pokorn, so we have the freedom of movement. But Suzana, our daughter, 10 years of age, that is to say, my stepdaughter, my wife's child from her first marriage, has no papers. She is in constant danger."

Pohoryles asked the Valentinčičs to inquire about a family who would be prepared to take the child in based on their information. Vera and Ludvik did not give their answer on the spot, but promised to do their best. They felt an urgent desire to help the child, but were equally afraid to draw suspicion of the authorities as they were pre-war members of the leftist association of pacifist students (*Kulturno udruženje studenata pacifista*, KUSP, established in 1936 and forbidden in 1940), and were rumoured to support the partisan movement. They sought Vera's parents' advice. The parents were adamant their daughter and son-in-law should not get involved as they knew only too well the fate that befell any person who was concealing a Jew.

Vera and Ludvik nevertheless decided to take little Suzana in. Much later, they said that they were led by the urge to "diminish the sea of suffering, if only by one drop." Since they were married for only eight months at that point, they could not present the child as their own; therefore they said she was a daughter of their relatives from Ozalj who came to live with them in order to attend school in Zagreb. Such relatives did not exist, but Hermann Pohoryles meanwhile managed to secure false "Arian" papers for his daughter in the name of Sofija Ribarić. Under this name, she was enrolled into a school on Gundulićeva Street which was run by nuns. Suzana was safe and happy at last, and was able to visit her parents regularly. All went well until December 1944.

Ludvik Valentinčič was arrested by the Ustasha on 12 December 1944, as he was alleged to supply the partisans with weapons. On 30 December, he was hanged together with 49 other hostages at Krušljevo Selo in Croatian Zagorje, an act of revenge for an ambush killing of an SS officer by the partisans in the same spot. Soon afterwards, on 12 January 1945, Vera was arrested as well and placed in the prison on Petrinjska Street in Zagreb where she underwent torture, but was then released. While in prison, Vera was worried sick about little Suzana. As soon as she was released, she hurried to her home on Žerjavićeva Street, but found her flat occupied by unknown people. She went to her parents and to her surprise, found Suzana there. The child came to them from school once Vera was arrested and she found the flat empty. Vera's parents conquered their fears and took the child in.

Sylvia Suzana Knoll and her parents, Hermann and Vilma Pohoryles, returned to Vienna after the war. Since 1948, the plaque on the building of the veterinary station in Ljubljana mentions the name of Ludvik Valentinčič among the casualties of war among Slovenian veterinarians. Vera Valentinčič subsequently married again and took the name Obereiter. After the war, she worked as a teacher of English language. She died in 2007 in Zagreb, 86 years old.

When Vera and her late husband Ludvik were proclaimed Righteous among Nations in 2004 in Zagreb, she told the *Novi list* newspaper:

In those times I did not know whether what my husband and I were doing was brave. We simply had to do it, the infinite evil had to be opposed to with at least one good deed.

RUDI ROTER
HOW THE PEOPLE OF POTOMJE SAVED THE KOEN FAMILY

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Rudi Roter

Rudimir Rudolf Roter was nicknamed "master Rudi" in Dubrovnik. He was born in Potomje in 1897 and was Slovenian on his father's side. His father was a carpenter born in Škrilj near Ajdovščina in Slovenia. He moved from place to place in search of work and finally arrived in the then Austrian Dubrovnik district where he settled and married a local girl, Ana Basić. His original family name was Rovter, but he changed it into Roter before his marriage.

The family had very little land so they depended on the father's craft. Rudi was the only son, after him, four daughters were born. When Rudi was fourteen, the family lost his father. As Rudi was well trained by him in carpentry, he took the family's subsistence into his hands and completed his apprenticeship in carpentry in Rijeka, then returned home and helped his mother support the family. But he was thirsty for education. He had no money to study regularly, so he enrolled into a night school in Split that prepared its students for high school examinations. Thus he completed the gymnasium program and enrolled in the Faculty of Letters in Zagreb. Upon completing his university studies, he went to Sarajevo and became a journalist. There he befriended Josip Engel, a lawyer and public servant:

> *Rudi Roter was a dedicated democrat and pacifist both of which he professed in his journalism. He was in high regard as a journalist and collaborated with several newspapers, but mostly worked for the Jugoslovanski list.*

He was especially concerned about the antisemitic policies: he argued against them constantly and advocated the necessity of cultural diversity and coexistence. He was close friends with many Jewish intellectuals: the engineer Oskar Grof, the linguist Dr. Vita Kajon, and the journalist Teodor Pinto. But his closest friend was Abo Koen.

Roter met his journalist colleague Abraham Abo Koen (1896 – 1944) in Sarajevo where both worked as correspondents for the Belgrade daily *Politika*. Roter also got married in Sarajevo, to a Slovenian from Ljubljana, Davorinka Merkun. His friendship with Koen deepened in 1941 when the German army occupied Sarajevo and the antisemitic laws were proclaimed. The deportations to concentration camps began. Roter immediately went to visit his friend Koen.

"You must not remain here. I heard that the first to be deported are all wealthy Jews and intellectuals. Abo, you will certainly be among them, as you never concealed your antifascist views in your writings. Your family must leave Sarajevo immediately."

"But where can we go?" replied Koen.

"You will go to my home in Dalmatia which is under Italian occupation, there the Jews are safe."

Koen accepted his friend's offer. Thus Roter brought Abo, his wife Loti and his little daughter Mira to his native village Potomje. It is a tiny village on Pelješac that was then

inhabited by 350 people. They were all members of the illegal resistance and maintained close ties to the recently established National Liberation Front. The occupying forces knew about that and kept close surveillance over the village. The arrival of the Koen family could not have gone unnoticed.

Stipe Antijević, Roter's village neighbour, later testified:

Rudi Roter was the pride of all us villagers, we all loved him and respected him. When he brought his friend Koen and his family, we were immediately clear that we have to conceal them as they were in danger, and to be honest, also because their arrival endangered us all. We held a meeting of the village council to determine how to help Rudi save his friends. First, everyone vowed to stand by him and do everything so his friends are not harmed, and that in hiding the Jewish family, all villagers will be active.

Roter had to leave his home immediately because of the danger to him, but he left assured that the Koen family was in good hands. The villagers organised in such a manner that each house took turns in hosting the Koens for a few days. First they stayed with Kate Peruša, then with Frani Radović, then with Stipe Antijević, then with Nevenka Pojanić, then with the Fabijanović family, and then with Ante Kirigjija, who later recounted:

During the time the Koen family stayed with us, I was meeting with Roter regularly, with this interesting and intelligent man; we took long walks and talked. I remember

him as a frail man who limped a little (as a consequence of polio in his childhood) and was insatiably curious.

Kata Fabijanović added:

We respected Rudi Roter immensely as he was an educated man and a renowned journalist. When he brought us his Jewish friends, we all understood that they came to be saved from persecution, and we all understood it was up to us to help out, especially after Roter had to flee. We all helped, my family as well. The Koens stayed with us for a while. I was often babysitting little Mira and befriended Madam Loti. Her husband Abo instructed the children in German language and helped with their schoolwork, he wanted to repay us. When things got very dangerous, the Koens had to flee from Potomje, and some of us also had to go hiding.

Soon the Koen family had to flee further, to Trpanj. First they stayed with the Roter relatives, then with the family of the cooper Matej Ivanišević, whose son Dr. Stjepan Ivaniševič (1939) is professor of law at the University of Zagreb and was Croatian Minister of Justice in 2000-01. In the process of naming Rudi Roter Righteous among Nations, Dr. Ivanišević contributed his eyewitness testimony. Subsequently, the Koens were taken to the liberated territory where they joined the partisans.

Abo Koen fought in the Pelješac partisan detachment, and then joined the Department of information at

ZAVNOH (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja,* State Antifascist Council of National Liberation). He was killed in June 1944 in Frkošiće during a Chetnik attack on the hospital where he was in treatment. – Kata Fabijanović wrote in her testimony for the Yad Vashem:

> *Madam Loti and her daughter returned to Potomje and Trpanj after the war to thank us for all we have done for them. It was a very moving encounter, after all those years of immense suffering. Sadly, Mr Abo, whom we all respected and loved so much, was no longer.*

After the war, Rudi Roter continued his work as a journalist and an ardent proponent of the unification of all Yugoslav cultures and peoples. It is impossible to imagine Radio Dubrovnik without him, and the newspaper *Dubrovački vijesnik*, or the famed Dubrovnik Summer Games. He died suddenly, on 23 October 1959. He was survived by his wife Dara and daughters Zrinka and Jasenka. Rudi Roter was proclaimed Righteous among Nations in 2004 at the instigation of the villagers of Potomlje represented by Stipe Antičević who, in his account, wrote:

> *Our distinguished fellow villager, Rudi Rotar, was neither a communist nor a partisan, but maintained that it was his human duty to protect his colleague and his family from horrendous persecution. His fellow villagers helped out by protecting, hiding and defending Rudi's friends.*

MARTINA LEVEC MARKOVIĆ
RESCUER OF JEWISH RESISTANCE FIGHTERS

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

Martina Levec Marković

Although the town of Zemun is a mere stone's throw away from Belgrade, with only a long bridge separating the two cities, Belgrade was under German occupation administration during the war, while Zemun was under Ustasha control as part of the NDH. Due to the international airport situated in the immediate vicinity, there was also a heavy presence of German military forces in the city of Zemun.

The persecution of the Jews began in 1941 and further intensified in 1942 when deportations of the Zemun Jews to the concentration camps at Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška began. There were posters everywhere warning the population that any citizen who hid, or helped Jews faced severe punishment. The hunt for Jews who evaded deportation was relentless; anyone who was tracked down was shot on the spot.

Josip and Benjamin Beherano and Danilo Fogel managed to escape deportation. They were members of the resistance movement, i.e. the underground, about to join the partisans. The Germans knew about them and searched for them everywhere. Finally, the three men obtained a list of addresses from the partisans where they could turn for help. On the list was a Slovenian, Martina Levec, born on 22 August 1920 in Šentjernej in Slovenian Dolenjsko, who studied architecture in Zemun and lived there with her parents and two brothers. Benjamin Beherano was her high school classmate. One of Martina's brothers was in captivity

in Germany and the other was at home. Martina's parents were out of town at the time.

On 26 July in 1942, the Beherano brothers and Fogel received notice that mass arrests of Jews were being prepared in Zemun to deport them to concentration camps. On the night of 20 August 1942, as the mass deportations of Jews were happening, Josip Beherano came to Martina's house in secret. Following the agreed whistle code, the door opened. He walked in without making a sound. A hand motioned him upstairs and he climbed to the attic. There he found his brother Benjamin and Danilo Fogel.

At the same time, four German officers were stationed in the Levec house by the order of the Gestapo. Three of them lived in the external wing and kept their own household. The fourth one, old Major Zajc, lived in Martina's apartment, next to her room. He was head over heels in love with the beautiful twenty-two-year-old Slovenian.

Martina shunned his advances, but was nevertheless friendly enough to discreetly manipulate him into believing she was not entirely disinterested. She knew he might be of good use to them. As the officers left the house in the morning, the members of the resistance could go to the bathroom to freshen up, and Martina prepared some food. She would regularly inform them of various developments and contacts with the partisans, but their departure to join

the partisans was postponed as it was simply too dangerous for them to leave the safe hiding place.

One day Major Zajc returned to the apartment unexpectedly. Danilo was just on the ladder fixing a light bulb, while Josip and Benjamin were in the bathroom giving each other haircuts. They heard Martina calling out in German:

"Oh, good afternoon, Major Zajc! What brings you home in the middle of the day?"

Instead of answering, the Major pointed towards the ladder and asked sternly:

"Who's that?"

"The electrician. He's fixing the light bulb. Some minor repairs are needed around the apartment."

The Major looked at the electrician with suspicion and headed for the bathroom. The door was locked.

"Who's inside?" he asked rather harshly.

"The electrician's assistant," Martina said. But when she saw the suspicious look in his eyes, she walked up to him with a seductive smile, led him to his room and closed the door behind them. The old major understood this gesture as her acceptance of his courtship. When Danilo heard the door to the major's room lock, he climbed down the ladder and whispered to his comrades in the bathroom, "Quick!"

The Beherano brothers came out and scrambled up to the attic. Danilo got back on the ladder. He was thinking how he could save Martina from the grip of the lecher behind the locked door. He called out, "Miss Levec! I'm done. You can come and see."

Martina opened the door, gave her friend a grateful glance and led him to the kitchen, explaining to the bewildered and disappointed major, "Some repairs are also needed in the kitchen."

"Where are Josip and Benjamin?" she asked Danilo in a hushed voice.

"In the attic."

The members of the resistance stayed at Martina's house for over a month. Zemun is a small town and was rife with informants, one of which alerted the Gestapo that Martina collaborated with the partisans and perhaps hid refugees in her apartment. One afternoon, the Ustasha and Gestapo pounded on her door. Martina saw them and rushed to Major Zajc, "I'm frightened. Would you mind answering the door?"

The major opened the door. Standing tall and looking at the men squarely, he said, "Hier wohnt deutsche Mannschaft." (German personnel lives here.)

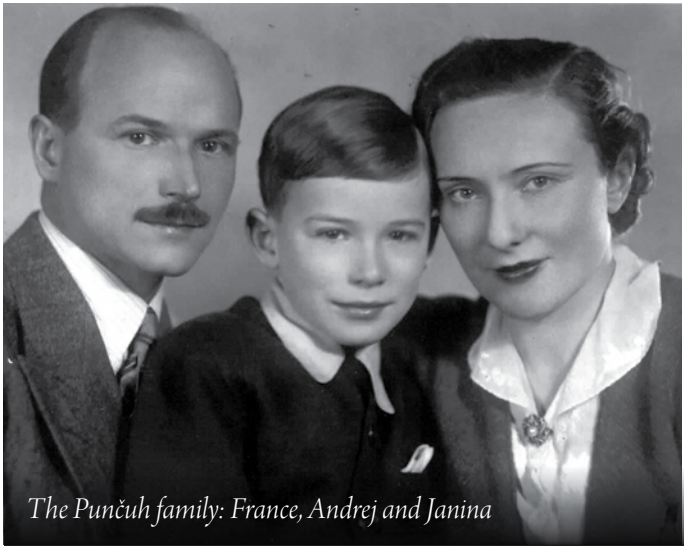
The soldiers apologized and left. But Martina realized that she would have to dispel any suspicion and rid herself

of informants. She became much friendlier with the major and even began appearing with him in public. Although such behaviour damaged her reputation, it was the only way for her to save her Jewish friends who remained in the house until 15 November 1942. The first to go after a month of hiding in the Levec attic was Benjamin Beherano who survived the war by living in Belgrade with false papers. Josip Beherano and Danilo Fogel followed suit and joined the Srem partisans. According to Martina's daughter Verica Marković (in personal communication with Marjan Toš, 18 December 2014), Martina herself joined the partisans early in 1943 and partook in the liberation of Novi Sad.

After the war, Martina supported herself as a journalist, then as foreign languages teacher, and then as a flight attendant with the Yugoslav airlines JAT. In the new regime, she was suspected of anti-revolutionary views and subjected to scrutiny. In 1968 she joined her husband, a forest engineer Marković and their daughter in Morocco where the family spent a decade. Martina Levec Marković died on 5 June 2001 in Zemun. At the initiative of the Beherano brothers and Danilo Fogel, she was declared Righteous among Nations in 2000.

FRANCE PUNČUH
RESCUER OF JEWS IN WARSAW

Boris Hajdinjak



The Punčuh family: France, Andrej and Janina

When WWII erupted on 1 September 1939, Poland was the European country with the largest Jewish population, and its capital, Warsaw, the European city with most Jews. There were around 360,000, nearly a third of the entire city's population. Gradually, their human and civil rights were denied them and they were stripped of their possessions. The largest European Jewish ghetto was established on 16 November 1940 as a precursor to the final destruction. No less than 450,000 Jews from Warsaw and the neighbouring cities and regions were confined there, and more than 100,000 people died in the Warsaw ghetto due to hunger and epidemics. Between 22 July and 12 September 1942, the time of the most massive deportations (the so-called *Großaktion Warschau*), around 10,000 people were murdered in the ghetto, around 250,000 were deported to Treblinka and murdered there, and around 11,500 people were transported to forced labour camps. During the liquidation of the ghetto, between 19 April and 16 May 1943, the most well-known and best researched uprising of the Jews against the Nazi erupted there.

However, Warsaw was also the city where during the war, no less than 28,000 Jews were in hiding, with the help of non-Jews. Incredibly, around 11,500, or 40 per cent, survived the war. That is why Poland is the country with the most Righteous among Nations. At least 6,454 have been honoured with this title to date, comprising one fourth of all ever proclaimed. One needs to recall that starting

with 15 October 1942, the penalty for hiding Jews was death for both the Jews and their rescuers. In addition to the occupying forces and the collaboration, both the hidden and their rescuers were constantly endangered, and blackmailed, by fellow Poles.

Until recently, it was practically unknown in Slovenia that France Punčuh, born 1902 in Doljni Logatec in Slovenia to Antonija, née Žgur and Leopold, played a prominent role in all these events. Punčuh graduated from high school in Ljubljana in 1922, then served the army in the Maribor Petty officers school of engineering where he obtained the rank of sub-lieutenant of engineers in the reserve. He then went to Warsaw to study. He enrolled in 1923 in the then school of commerce, today a Faculty of Szkoła Główna Handlowa. He graduated in 1927 and obtained employment the next year at the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Embassy in Warsaw as a worker on a daily wage. In 1931, Punčuh was among the candidates to be permanently employed at the Embassy. He passed all required examinations and acquired excellent references and demonstrated the knowledge of several languages, in addition to Slovenian and Serbo-Croat, also Polish, German and French. Nevertheless he was not selected. He continued to work for the Embassy on an honorary basis, until he opened his own business in 1935, a licensed retail shop for German manufacturers of typewriters. As he was in high regard at the Embassy, he continued to work there too, without formal diplomatic status. On 29 December 1937,

the Yugoslav Foreign Office named him honorary vice-consul in Warsaw. Meanwhile, in 1931, he married a Polish Jew, Janina Glocer (1905 – 1997). Soon, their son Andrej (1933 - 2011) was born.

After the Nazi occupation of Poland, Punčuh had to protect his wife and son who were both, according to regulations of the occupying authorities of 1 December 1939, "real" Jews, not a "Jewess married to an Arian" and "half-Jew" or "mixed-blood of first degree" respectively, as the racial designations went in certain other Nazi occupied territories. How Punčuh managed to save his wife and son remains uncertain for now, but his status as a diplomat may have helped.

His endeavours were not limited to his family members. Before the end of 1939, when the census of Jewish properties was completed, Punčuh helped out several Jews by taking over their possessions which would have otherwise be confiscated. He helped out the family Königstein, Ignacy and Janina/Nina b. Kaftal, later Wrześniewska, (1909 – after 1978), and their son Marian (1934), who owned the fountain pen factory Kawuska. Punčuh managed to hide them within the "Arian" part of Warsaw. They survived the war. He also helped the Meszorer family by taking over their possessions. They were Albert (1905 – 1963) and his wife Helena/Lena b. Kaftal, (1907 – 1993), and their children Józef called Lutek (later Josef Meshorer, 1932 – 2013), and Ludwika called Wisia (1938 – 2008). By virtue

of asset transfers, he managed to save more Jews from the ghetto and furnish them with false papers so they could hide in the "Arian" parts of Warsaw. He continued to help Jewish refugees up until the Warsaw ghetto uprising on 1 August 1944. His role can be discerned from the writings of Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920 – 2013), the ghetto survivor and later renowned German literary critic:

> *In order for a Jew to survive in the "Arian" part of Warsaw, three conditions needed be met. First: one needed money and valuables in order to procure false personal documents, not to mention to appease diverse blackmailers. Second: one had to alter one's looks and behaviour so that the Poles would not suspect one of being a Jew. Third: one had to have non-Jewish friends and acquaintances outside the ghetto that were willing to help. A Jew who wanted to escape to the "Arian" part of the town but only met two of these conditions, had questionable chances; if he met only one condition, his chances were minimal.*

In the Kawuska factory, Punčuh employed Genowefa Olczak (1913 – 2008) in 1942, thus helping out the four members of the Rozenman family that Olczak kept in hiding, Pawel (1889 – 1944) and Regina b. Zakrzewska (1898 – 1944) Rozenman and their children Ryszard/Richard (1924 – 1943) and Bianka, later married as Kraszewska, (1928). For her help to the families Rozenman, Rosenzweig and Zakrzewski, Genowefa Olczak was proclaimed Righteous among Nations in 1981. The only

member of the Rozenman family who survived, Bianka, hid in Punčuh's apartment, and then in his villa, in 1943.

Throughout the existence of the Warsaw ghetto, Punčuh supplied many Jews with food. Of special importance was his support to the Jewish hospital Czyste (nowadays Szpital Wolski image Dr. Anny Gostyńskiej) where his wife's relative, Sabina Glocerowa b. Gurfinkiel (1902 – after 1962) worked as a nurse. When it became clear, after 22 June 1942, that the ghetto would be destroyed, Punčuh used bribes to enable many Jews to flee the ghetto. Thus he was able to save his father-in-law, Teofil Glocer (1863 – 1947), his mother-in-law, Marta b. Szczecińska (1877 – 1945), his sister-in-law Eweline Lawendel, later Evelyn Lavendel, b. Glocer (1900 – 1974) and her daughter Wanda, later married as Falkiewicz and subsequently Bincer (1930 – 2008), and at least six other people. In several cases he hid the refugees in his apartment in the building at No. 10 Bagatela Street which was located in the immediate vicinity of the seat of the German police. He would hide them in a storage room that he had furnished with a double wall. Or he would accommodate them in his villa at No. 8 Potulickich Street in Konstancin. His son Andrej recalled:

> *From the years 1940-41 up until the Warsaw uprising in 1944 we always had guests in the house who would stay for a few days until a hiding place was found for them. I was never told their names or where they were going. That was safer in case we were arrested. Because of his businesses, my father had adequate financial means to help the refugees with money, and also to pay out the blackmailers.*

In at least one case, France Punčuh collaborated in rescuing two Jewish women from the German prison. These were Helena/Anna Wolman (later Wiśniewska, 1902 – 1972) and her daughter Alicja/Liliana (1931 – after 1982?) who were, with the help of Stefan Badowski (1909 – 1989), in hiding since 1939 and evading persecution with false papers. However, on 25 September 1943, after they were evidently betrayed, the German police burst into their apartment and took them to prison. With money obtained from Punčuh and Henryk Kozłowski, Badowski managed to bribe the commander of the prison and free Helena and Alicja after three and a half days of detention. Since they could not return to their old flat, and a new one took time to procure, Alicja spent some time in Punčuh's flat. Badowski received the title of Righteous among Nations in 1984 for saving Helena and Alicja, Helena's sister Irena Kerth (later Badowska), and Ewa Kornacki.

On 9 September 1944, during the ghetto uprising, France Punčuh was killed by a stray bullet in front of the building at No. 4 Sienkiewicz Street. He was interred in Warsaw, but was exhumed in 1971 according to his widow Janina's request and reburied in Slovenia, in Gornji Logatec cemetery. Janina Punčuh and her son Andrej survived the war and moved to Sweden, and subsequently to London and New York. Janina died in 1997 in New York, and Andrej in 2011 in London. Andrej's daughter Tanya, granddaughter to France Punčuh, lives in Italy.

On 15 August 2004, Yad Vashem proclaimed France Punčuh Serbian Righteous among Nations. Since 2013, he is correctly referred to as a Slovenian. His son Andrej accepted the honour in his father's name in 2005. Present at the ceremony were also Wanda Bincer and Josef Meshorer, two of the people who survived WWII due to Punčuh's help. In 2014, the Slovenian Ministry of foreign affairs commemorated the brave deeds of France Punčuh with a special publication, and by placing a plaque on his parents' house in Logatec.

PART TWO
OTHER STORIES OF THE COURAGEOUS

ANDREJ VENDRAMIN
THE UNKNOWN RIGHTEOUS FROM SOLKAN

Renato Podbersič

Andrej Vendramin

The list of Righteous among Nations from among Slovenians includes nine people at the moment, with a few additional ones still in the process. Among the latter is Andrej Vendramin (1891–1978), a teacher from Solkan in Goriško.

Josip Itai Indig (1917–1998), Jew from Croatia, played a central role in the story of rescuing Jewish refugees, most of them children. As a young man, he became a dedicated Zionist. Before the war, he helped numerous Jews who were fleeing from the Third Reich. Their migrations towards safety led them from many places in Germany towards Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to Istanbul and further on to Palestine.

In the spring of 1941, Josip Indig found himself in Zagreb, in the then NDH, with a group of around 40 orphaned children from Germany. Following the first deportations and having learned that Jews stood better chances of survival in the Italian occupation zones, Indig took the children to the then Ljubljana district. Once there, the representatives of the Italian Jewish organisation DELASEM (*Delegazione per l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei*, Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants) helped him find a temporary refuge. With the financial means he had at his disposal, Indig leased an old mansion, Lesno Brdo near Vrhnika, where the refugees stayed until the next spring. Among them were the 16 young girls who the Slovenian Righteous Uroš Žun saved earlier in the same

year. Indig received substantial help from Evgen Bolaffio, a Ljubljana wine merchant originally from Gorizia and a representative of the DELASEM.

By the spring of 1942, war was nearing the peaceful Lesno Brdo. The partisan resistance was ever more determined and Italian patrols were getting more frequent. For Indig's charges, the situation was increasingly dangerous. He decided to move them to Italy, a decision backed also by the DELASEM. They were able to lease an imposing country mansion called Villa Emma in Nonantola near Modena which was empty at the time but much in need of repair. This rescue operation remains one of the most notable successes of the DELASEM.

By spring 1943, it was decided that an additional 33 children were to be brought to Villa Emma, most of them orphans from Yugoslavia who were to arrive from Split. They arrived to Nonantola on the evening of 14 April, with two chaperones. Villa Emma now accommodated more than 70 children.

Their life was largely undisturbed until the capitulation of Italy on 8 September 1943 which caused panic in Nonantola. Indig and his charges anticipated the imminent arrival of the Germans. In their predicament, they turned to their physician, Giuseppe Moreali (1895–1980), a stark antifascist who felt warmly for the refugee children. Moreali conferred with his friend, the Catholic priest Don Arrigo

Beccari (1909–2005), a professor and one of the leaders of the theological seminary and the parish priest at St. Pietro in Nonantola. They resolved to help the children.

A rescue operation was quickly devised and set in motion. Two other local clerics joined in, Don Pelati and Don Tardini. The majority of children were hidden in the building of the seminary which was practically empty due to school vacations. Don Beccari vouched for them, and the rector of the seminary, Ottaviano Pelati, did not oppose the plan. Contrary to time-honoured tradition, the seminary building accommodated a few girls as well. When the German army came to Nonantola on 9 September, about 30 of the youngest refugees were already hidden in the seminary building. Indig was with them, coordinating the operation. Other children were in hiding with sympathetic local families. A local county employee, Bruno Lazzari, was likewise taken into the loop, supplying the official forms for the children to base false identity papers on. In place of the official seal, the forgers used the county stamp of Larino in the Campobasso region of southern Italy.

Meanwhile, the transfer of the young refugees to Switzerland was underway. The group was broken up into smaller units and sent toward the Swiss border in a few days intervals. In early 1944, they were, with the aid of Union of Swiss Zionists, settled in a place called Bex-les-bains in the Rhone valley where they awaited the end of the war. Once the war ended, many migrated to various

places throughout the globe, but the majority went to Palestine, led by Joseph Indig.

More than a hundred native villagers in Nonantola partook in the entire operation of hiding and rescuing the children. Because of their illegal actions, Don Beccari and Don Tardini were arrested in mid-September 1944 and taken to the prison in Bologna. Despite harsh treatment they never disclosed the rescuing of the Jewish children. Don Baccari was sentenced to death, but liberation came before the punishment could be carried out. Both were awarded the title of Righteous among Nations in 1964 for their selfless actions on behalf of the children.

Up until recently, however, the role of a close friend of both priests in the rescuing of the children in Nonantola, the Slovenian Andrej Vendramin, remained all but unknown. He was born on 17 May 1891 in Štmaver, a tiny village on the rim of Brda that was once part of the Solkan hinterland. As a young man, Vendramin demonstrated talent so the parents sent him to school. He graduated from high school in Gorizia just before WWI broke out, on 9 July 1914. He was not drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army, but went to teach in the schools in the hinterlands of the Isonzo front in Šmarje, Spodnja Branica and Srednji Lokovec. He passed the state exam as teacher in November 1916 in front of the Gorizia commission in Ljubljana. After the war, he taught in primary schools in the Gorizia region, in Grgar and Gorenje Polje, and was, like many other

teachers, transferred to the Italian mainland under Fascist rule. By decree No. 12277 dated 28 August 1929, Andrea Vendramin, insegnante elementare (*Andrej Vendramin, primary school teacher*) was ordered to assume his post on 1 September 1929 in Nonantola near Modena. He was further mandated to report in short order to the Schoolmaster of didactics in Nonantola, region Emilia Romagna, to receive further instructions. Accompanying him to Nonantola was his family, his wife and three children, Cvetko/Florijan, Stanislav, and Marija. Their lives in Nonantola were uneventful until WWII broke out.

In 1941, following suspicions and denunciations on the part of the Fascist authorities, Vendramin was relocated for one year to a smaller town, Prignano sul Secchio on the rim of the Apennines, 60 kilometres south of Nonantola. He lived there alone, the family would pay him visits occasionally. It would seem that he was suspect because he did not allow his daughter Marija to take membership in the fascist youth organisation *Piccole Italiane*. He was permitted to return to his family in Nonantola in 1942, chiefly because of the interventions of the townspeople who held him and his teaching in high regard.

Andrej's eldest son, Cvetko, born 1927 in Solkan, still holds vivid memories of the events during the war, at a time when he was a pupil enrolled in the School of Geometry in Modena. The Vendramins were neighbours to the physician, Moreali, whom Cvetko recalls as an adamant

antifascist. On a spring day in 1943, the Vendramins were asked to help out with the communication with the Split children who arrived in mid-April 1943. A relatively peaceful period ensued that ended abruptly after the Italian capitulation and the German occupation. Nonantola became the seat of the local German command led by a senior officer who Cvetko thinks was a Wehrmacht Major. This officer befriended Andrej Vendramin for two reasons: because Vendramin spoke German, and because of the German's family story that involved relatives who fought on the Isonzo front. From then on, the Vendramins were protected by the influence of this officer, even though they were among the families who had Jewish children in hiding, and helped forge the documents for them. The way the children were hid was indeed daring; they were on the highest floor of the seminary building, while the local German command was stationed on the ground floor.

Cvetko Vendramin retains vivid memories of the entire rescue operation. Seven decades after the fact he can still recall the names of some of the Jewish children. He says the family listened to the forbidden Radio London every day. As a pupil studying geometry, Cvetko marked the position of armies on a map daily, tracing the German retreats. He would often bring these maps to Villa Emma,

> *I can say that the villa was my second home. With many of the refugees, I could speak effortlessly, me in Slovenian, they in Serbian-Croat. They are all Slavic languages after all!*

The Vendramins returned to Solkan after the war in 1945, living in a leased flat. The Primorsko region was free of fascist pressure, but the Gorizia area was then in Zone A under the Allied forces jurisdiction. Andrej Vendramin immediately resumed teaching in the Podgora school near Gorizia, and moved to Solkan in 1946 where he remained until he retired in 1960. He died on 30 May 1978 in Solkan, and is buried there.

Cvetko Vendramin visited Nonantola only one time after the war, in 2001, accompanied by his son Simon who is at present the parish priest of Dolenja Trebuša in the Koper bishopry. In 2001, the county of Nonantola presented a photographic exhibition on the events in Villa Emma. In attendance were many surviving townspeople who had helped the refugee children during the war. Cvetko was particularly moved by the reunion with the elderly Don Beccari. He was given many books that chronicle the events of Villa Emma children who he himself helped shape as a young boy. Many have dedications that confirm his testimony.

CIRIL KOTNIK
DIPLOMAT AND PHILANTHROPIST

Ivo Jevnikar

Ciril Kotnik

After the immensely sad 16 October, I have, together with His Excellency Almansi, composed a memorandum that I was to hand personally to the Pope; I had it in my pocket on the morning of 28 October to take it to Vatican, with Dr. Ciril Kotnik from the Yugoslav Embassy at the Holy See. True to the appointment, I was at 72 Salaria St. at exactly 8:30. During the prolonged course of our friendly contacts, Dr. Kotnik and I agreed that due to our respective positions, we will at all times deny knowing each other. Whenever Dr. Kotnik would come to the DELASEM headquarters, he was incognito for the people assembled there, whereas in more closed circles, he was referred to as Dr. Rossi. Despite the risks, I was often at his house. I never met a concierge or saw people in the concierge booth. But on that morning, there were many people in front of the stairs that I did not know. Keeping up our agreement, I was not going to tell who I am going to, as there could have been a policeman or a spy among the crowd. When asked where I was going by an unknown concierge, I replied: "To flat No. 10", while Dr. Kotnik lives in No. 7. The concierge let me pass. Lucky for me, in No. 10 there lives a tavern owner who is seldom if ever at home. I climbed the stairs seemingly nonchalantly, but I was worried because of the unusual presence of so many people, and plagued by a vague, elusive premonition. I rang the bell of No. 7. The door got opened fast, by a Gestapo petty officer and a soldier. One of them took a revolver to my head, the other to my back. I froze. It would have been pointless to react or try to run. They got me into the flat,

shoving and shouting at me. What they were saying I cannot tell as I do not understand German. At any rate, they were quite rude, and I heard: "Jew, Jew."

With these words, Settimio Sorani, the leading representative of the Italian Jewish charity organisation DELASEM in Rome, described, in 1946, his earlier arrest at the home of the then Slovenian employee of the Yugoslav Royal Embassy at the Holy See, Ciril Kotnik. He soon learned that Kotnik had been arrested and already taken away. What he witnessed was a savage "house search." Among the documents lying everywhere, the Gestapo threw the papers they found in Sorani's pocket when patting him down. The superficiality of their search, and the false name agreement he had with Kotnik saved him, as he was, after torturous hearings at the notorious police station in Tasso street, released on 6 November. These were the most bitter days in the history of Roman Jews.

With the fascist racial laws that Mussolini proclaimed on 18 September 1938 in Trieste, Italy started to persecute the Jews, but did not murder them. For Jewish refugees from other countries, concentration camps were established, but Italy encouraged them to emigrate, therefore the establishment of the DELASEM was permitted as early as 1940 in order to help the refugees move out of the country. Among the founders of the organization was also the president of the Association of Jewish communities in Italy, Dante Almansi, who Sorani mentions in his diary entry

above. All this changed radically after the German occupation began on 8 September 1943. Mussolini's marionette Italian social republic started, as did the German occupying forces, to round up and lock up both the domestic and refugee Jews. Himmler himself stressed that the "final solution of the Jewish question" pertains to Italy as well.

On 26 September 1943, the Roman Gestapo commander Kappler demanded the Roman Jews to hand over 50 kilograms of gold within 36 hours in exchange for salvation. The Jews complied. Despite that, in the great anti-Jewish raid at the break of dawn of 16 October, the Nazis arrested 1,259 people: 363 men, 689 women and 207 children. After checking, 237 members of mixed families were released. On Monday afternoon, 18 October, a train of livestock wagons took the rest towards Auschwitz, arriving there on the evening of 22 October. The very next day, 820 of those deemed "unfit to work" were murdered in the gas chambers and cremated. Fifteen men and one woman survived the war. Therefore, when Sorani and Kotnik discussed going to the Pope with a written proposal of intervention with the German command in order to free the prisoners, or at least the women and children, the fate of the Roman Jews had already been sealed.

But while Sorani was ultimately released, Kotnik was not. According to available data, he was first taken to Tasso Street, and then on 18 December to the Regina Coeli prison

from where they would take him back to Tasso for hearings. He was beaten and tortured and inflicted with psychological suffering. They put his wife in prison for a month. She would be listening to his moaning from the adjacent cell, while he was kept in the dark as to her condition. Also, he knew nothing of the fate of his daughters and his mother-in-law who were hiding with the Slovenian School sisters in Colli Street, and in other locations. He was told he would be put to death. Kotnik endured eleven brutal hearing sessions which direly affected his health. Once he was released, his elder daughter Ivanka barely recognised him. He died on 29 June 1948 in Rome, barely 52 years of age, after a severe illness. The doctors in attendance noted consequences of torture as the cause of death.

The story of how he managed to survive the imprisonment comes in many variants, some of them mentioning bribing of the Germans. His superior at the Embassy, the chargé d'affaires Nikola Moscatello, a Catholic priest from Hvar, invested himself in the rescue. He contacted the Vatican State Secretary, Cardinal Maglione, who promised the Pope's intervention. After the liberation of Rome on 4 June 1944, Pope Pius XII had the entire Kotnik family in private audience in his Vatican library, and conveyed his gratitude to Kotnik for all the humanitarian work. For his aid to Italian resistance members and the officers in detention, Kotnik received expressions of gratitude from the Prime Minister, Marshall Badoglio. The Roman Jewish community invited Kotnik

as the guest of honour to their liberation celebration in the central Roman synagogue.

Not many documents are preserved that would testify to the help which Kotnik extended to the Jews. It was part of his diverse activities before, during, and after the war. That he accomplished important deeds of help is evident by the fact that the Association of Italian Jewish communities honoured 23 Catholics with golden medals with the inscription "From Italian Jews, with gratitude" at the decennial celebration of the liberation in Milan on 17 April 1955. Seven from among the honoured were already deceased by the time, among them Ciril Kotnik. The medal presentation, accepted by the widow Maria Tomassetti Kotnik, states:

> *He was an employee of the Yugoslav Embassy in the Vatican and struggled tirelessly to help the Jews of any nationality, and was saving them. He intervened with the authorities, and the German command. Doing so, he was at all times risking his life. The Nazis arrested him and sentenced him to death. He was saved by the intervention of the Church authorities. He died in Rome after the liberation of the consequences of torture in prison.*

Although Sorani referred to Kotnik as "doctor" and many sources state that he was a consul or an ambassador, it bears saying that Kotnik did not have high formal education, and that he did not achieve posts of distinction in the Yugoslav diplomatic service. It is therefore so much

more honourable that he would accomplish so many humanitarian deeds.

Ciril (Čiro, as his friends called him) Kotnik came from a large family from Dobrje near Ravne na Koroškem. He was the seventh child of railroad clerk Franc Kotnik and Marija b. Unterberger, on 20 December 1895 in Vižmarje near Ljubljana. He graduated from business academy and fought as a volunteer in both Balkan wars and in WWI. He was injured and decorated and subsequently honourably discharged from the army, whereupon he was employed at the Serbian Embassy in Rome in the summer of 1917. He stayed in Rome until his death. In 1922 he married Maria b. Tomassetti from Aquila. To all his three daughters (one died as an infant) the Kotniks gave Slovenian names.

At the Serbian, and subsequently Yugoslav diplomatic mission in Italy, Kotnik was first employed as a daily wage worker, then after a few years promoted to archivist, then again as honorary clerk with meagre pay. He did succeed, however, to evade relocations, as all the ambassadors thought him an indispensable co-worker and an expert in Italian matters.

After the Italian occupation of parts of the Yugoslav territory, and the eviction of the Yugoslav diplomats from Italy, Kotnik and his family remained in Rome. He was under house arrest for a time, but was then transferred to the Yugoslav embassy at the Holy See which was at that time led by Moscatello. There Kotnik was able to showcase

his abilities and his warm heart. He helped the interned from the occupied Yugoslavia. He helped save the officers who escaped the camps, providing them with documents, quarters, and financial support. He made a pact with the National Liberation Committee in Rome who protected the Yugoslav citizens in return for information that the partisans would find useful. He also helped numerous Britons, Americans, and French who were in hiding all over Italy. And he helped the Jews.

Part of these activities were his formal duties, but Kotnik did even more on his own initiative. As his younger daughter Darinka recalls, their apartment was always packed with people, even entire families, who shared the family's food and shelter. Sometimes people would come to conduct secretive discussions with her father in Slovenian or French so bystanders would not understand. Kotnik's wife also helped in these endeavours, often accompanying the strangers to safe locations.

Recently, the Croat historian Stipe Kljaić was able to determine that at the Yugoslav embassy, Kotnik was in charge of humanitarian questions. He would hand out money to Yugoslav refugees and prisoners, many Jews among them as well. Upon request of the British ambassador he handed out help also to British subjects. The Royal Government in London once ordered the embassy in the Vatican to help out four hundred Yugoslav Jews the NDH intended to deport to Poland. Jointly with

Moscatello, Kotnik was also in charge of a group of Yugoslav Jews who they were able, due to diplomatic immunity, to accommodate in the building of the embassy.

Kotnik did not join the Liberation front. His loyalties remained with the Royal government in London, and he stayed in touch with other loyalists in Rome and the homeland. He was therefore under surveillance of the OZNA, the post-WWII Yugoslav secret police. One of the OZNA documents states:

> *At significant risk to himself, [Kotnik] organised the support for the interned in September 1943 (...) By the end October 1943, the Germans arrested him, but he betrayed nothing at the hearings, even though he was beaten. He was sentenced to death. At that moment, the Pope intervened on his behalf, the intervention was successful, and Kotnik was free again by the end of December. (...) Kotnik was the central figure, politically as well as privately, of all the reactionary formations of the Yugoslav nationalities. He wanted to be informed on everything. (...)*

When Miha Krek, the ex-Yugoslav representative in the Allied Advisory Commission for Italy arrived in Rome, he had Kotnik brought to the offices of the Yugoslav delegation, and then assigned him to the consulate. According to the Tito-Šubašić Agreement, he ether lost or abandoned his

job. His family experienced poverty, but despite all that and his failing health, Kotnik continued to help numerous new refugees from Yugoslavia.

Ciril Kotnik was forgotten for a long time. Recently, historical publications stirred new interest in his life and career. In 2014, Kotnik was posthumously awarded two recognitions. On the occasion of a state visit of the Slovenian President of the Republic in Rome on 8 May, President Borut Pahor and the Mayor of Rome, Ignazio Marino, uncovered a memorial plaque in Italian and Slovenian in honour of Ciril Kotnik. The Roman municipality and the Slovenian embassy in Rome had it mounted on the façade of the house in Salaria Street 72 where Kotnik lived. Slovenian ambassador Iztok Mirošič coordinated the effort over a number of years. Additionally, on the Day of Slovenian diplomacy on 22 May, Kotnik and France Punčuh who worked in Warsaw during the war and helped to save many Jews at the cost of his life, were remembered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ljubljana. Their portraits now adorn the main conference room at the Ministry and a brochure was published on their lives and work in Slovenian and English.

ELIZABETA SAVICA ROŽANC HORVATH
MAŽI'S OTHER MOM

Irena Šumi

Elizabeta Savica Rožanc Horvath

Elizabeta Savica Rožanc was born on 4 May 1920 in Ljubljana. Her father was Miha Rožanc, a railway clerk, but also a pianist and composer. Her mother Ema was a homemaker. Savica had an elderly sister, Majda. Savica was just finishing the Ljubljana Lyceum of Business, pondering what faculty to enrol in – her parents encouraged her to study law, while she herself was more inclined to study medicine – when the war came to Yugoslavia with the German attack on Belgrade in April 1941. She managed to pass the comprehensive exam, but could not think of further studies because the war changed everything. There was also no excess of money at home; Savica had to think about earning money.

She obtained employment with the Zajc family in Ljubljana as the nanny for their only son Tomaž, called Maži, born on 2 May 1939. The child's mother was Regina Zajc b. Steinberg (1910 – 1981), prior to the war employed as the chief secretary to the Ljubljana construction magnate Adolf Leo Dukić, and daughter to the Jewish co-owner and manager of the Glue factory in Zelena Jama in Ljubljana, Viljem/Wilhelm Steinberg (1879 – 1944). Tomaž's father Ladislav Zajc (1901 – 1990) was a bank clerk. The Steinberg family which had converted to Christianity in the year 1921 originated from Graz in Austria; Tomaž's maternal grandmother, Lili Steinberg b. Offner (1889 – 1944), was born in Poland.

Once the Slovenian territory was divided up between the three occupying forces, Ljubljana came under Italian rule until the capitulation of Italy in 1943 when the Germans took over. The Slovenian Jews were under pressure of the Yugoslav antisemitic laws passed in 1940. However, the Italian occupying authorities did not show much zeal, or consistency, in persecuting the Jews. In the first instance, they merely wished to concentrate and confine the Jews who did not hold citizenship of the occupied territories, and the refugees in the Italian mainland who fled the Ustasha and German rule. By the end of 1941, the Italians ordered transportation of all prominent and wealthy Jews from the Slovenian occupied territories to Italy, presumably to the concentration camp Ferramonte di Tarsia. They also included those who held Yugoslav citizenship or had residential rights in the Ljubljana region, among them the family of Viljem Steinberg. The true purpose was to grab hold of their assets. The intended deportees turned to the municipality of Ljubljana and managed to reverse the decision. Some were still deported, among them the Ljubljana Jewish families Lorant, Alles-Percy and Moskovič, the latter because of their collaboration with the partisans.

The ensuing German occupation was of course radical and proceeded to destroy the Jewish population of Ljubljana without delay. In the Steinberg family, the first to be arrested were the grandparents. Viljem and Lili were arrested late in 1943 and then deported, Viljem to Dachau on 25 November, and Lili to Ravensbrück on 28 January

1944. They did not survive the Holocaust. For the Zajc family and the family of Tomaž's aunt Lidija who was married to Ludvik Filipec, the arrests happened on 12 September 1944. Tomaž's mother Regina was deported to Begunje on 14 October 1944.

It was a coincidence that Tomaž's nanny spent the night in the Zajc apartment at 8 Resljeva Street in Ljubljana the night of the arrest. Normally, she only spent her days there. At dawn, there was banging on the door. Savica grabbed hold of the child, ran to the kitchen balcony and climbed, with Tomaž in her arms, onto the balcony of the neighbouring apartment where a family of close acquaintances of the Zajc family lived. They took her and the child in.

Once the house quieted down and Regina and her husband were taken away, Savica and little Tomaž went by foot towards Tivoli Park, still in the half-light of early morning. Savica's parents lived on the ground floor of Tivoli Castle as municipal tenants. Miha and Ema Rožanc did not hesitate. They devised a plan to present Tomaž to their neighbours and acquaintances as Savica's illegitimate child who had been previously concealed. At that point, Savica was 23. Tomaž Zajc thinks their close neighbours and other tenants in the castle could not have believed the story as they never saw Savica pregnant, but they kept their silence to protect the child who was now called Tomaž Rožanc. Tomaž recalls that the entire building was fond of him, and

that a neighbour playfully gave him the duty to oversee their chickens, bestowing upon Tomaž the honorary title of "chicken shepherd." The Rožanc family, and the neighbours, were of course aware that concealing a Jewish child was dangerous and punishable by law. Savica, for her part, not only ignored the danger, but also exposed herself to considerable social stigma as an alleged unwed mother.

Tomaž Zajc has no recollection of the night journey from his home to Tivoli Park, but remembers well his life in the Rožanc family, and the love he was given by his adoptive grandparents, Miha and Ema. He remembers well the neighbour's chickens he was supervising, and the winter coat Savica made for him out of a military blanket she managed to procure that sported shiny golden military uniform buttons. But he remembers especially clearly what was perhaps the happiest day of his life. On 17 June 1945, he sat at the kitchen window and looked outside. Suddenly, he spotted a woman coming up the path towards the castle, emaciated and frail. Once she reached the yew tree that today still grows a few meters from the castle's edge, recognition hit him and he ran outside. The woman was his mother Regina who kept calling out his childhood name, "Maži! Maži!"

Ladislav Zajc returned from Dachau a few weeks earlier, as did Tomaž's Aunt Lidija and Uncle Ludvik. The apartment in Resljeva Street had been taken by an officer of the secret police, so the Zajc family moved into the

apartment of Regina's parents at 8 Gajeva Street (now Štefanova Street) in the development complex that Adolf Dukić built and also largely owned before the war. After three years, they had to give the apartment up because a member of the new communist elite, Boris Kardelj, brother to Edvard Kardelj, the renowned Slovenian revolutionary and theorist of Yugoslav self-managing socialism, desired it. The Zajc family was relocated to Slomškova Street, to a single room where they shared the bathroom facilities with the tenants of the entire floor. As years passed, Regina and Ladislav saved enough money to be able to buy a new apartment on Langusova Street. Regina returned from the concentration camp in very poor health, never quite recuperated, and died of intestinal cancer in 1981.

Savica Rožanc kept looking after little Tomaž after the war. His parents thought of her as their adoptive daughter. They kept close contacts with Savica all their lives, even after she had, at a ball in Bled, encountered her future husband from Vojvodina, Izstvan/Pišta Horvath. Upon marriage, Savica moved to her husband's native Zrenjanin in Serbia. Tomaž, by then a teenager, visited her there twice. Tragedy struck Savica and Pišta when they lost their firstborn child, Evica, at the age of three to pneumonia. After that, Pišta did not want to live in Yugoslavia any more. In 1958, he and Savica moved to the United States. For many years, they lived near Chicago, at 847 CL 34 Lake Zurich, Illinois, with their son Ferenc/Ferko. Later on, Savica and Pišta separated, and Savica went to live with her

adult son and his family in Atlanta. When Ferko retired, they all returned to their first American home near Chicago. Savica died there on 12 June 2009, nearly 90 years of age.

Professor Tomaž Zajc completed his university studies in geography in Ljubljana, specialised in tourism, and was employed for many years in leading positions in various Slovenian tourism enterprises. He was named Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism and Economy in two mandates between 1997 and 2000. He is especially proud that he was also a close friend and confidant of the late legendary Olympic champion Leon Štukelj whom he holds in highest regard. He lives in Ljubljana with wife Gordana with whom he has two adult sons, and is grandfather to a girl and a boy. With Elizabeta Savica Horvath he maintained close ties by letters, telephone, and visits until her death. He went to America to see her three times, in 1993, 1996, and 2008. Savica never returned to her old country. Tomaž regards Savica's son Ferko as family and keeps in close contact with him and his family. About Savica, he says simply, "She was my other mom."

LUDVIK CIGÜT, AND THE FAMILIES ŽILAVEC AND FARTELJ SAVING EMERIK HIRSCHL

Boris Hajdinjak

Ludvik Cigüt

On the morning of 26 April, 1944, Ludvik Cigüt (1916 - 1974), as was his habit, rode his bike the five kilometres from Martjanci to Murska Sobota where he worked as a journeyman with a tailor, Kuštor. He certainly could not have expected that the war, by then three years in duration, would change his everyday life entirely and on a very personal basis. Not that the war did not already deeply affect the people of Prekmurje. There was the magyarization of all public institutions, there were troubles with supply chains, and there was the drafting of men into the Hungarian army. Since 1942, the local Hungarians were mobilized to the army, the Slovenians both to the army and to work details, and the Jews only to the latter. The news of the dead and missing locals in far away places on the Eastern front were ever more frequent.

Ever since the autumn of 1943, people in Prekmurje understood well that the war was not happening just on the front. The American and British bomber planes that flew over Prekmurje towards their targets in Austria and Germany testified to that. But what Cigüt observed on that morning was not what war was supposed to be; he saw the gendarmes lead Jews – children, the elderly, women and men – to the Murska Sobota synagogue. Cigüt was not the only one to observe the unusual event; many onlookers wached in silence, some were were loudly voicing their approval. We will never know what went through Cigüt's mind as he was watching this, but we do know what he did. He turned around and biked back to Martjanci to his friend, Emerik/Mirko Hirschl (1908 - 1985), to tell him what was

going on in Murska Sobota. Because of his ill health, Hirschl was one of the few Jews of his age who were not yet drafted to work in the units of the Hungarian army.

The scene that Cigüt witnessed in Murska Sobota may have been unusual for Prekmurje, but not at all for Europe at large. As of mid-1941, the "final solution of the Jewish question" was underway in the territories controlled by Nazi Germany. Hungary became part of these territories with the German occupation on 19 March 1944. The main reason for the occupation was to prevent Hungary from exiting the alliance with Germany, although the "final solution" that left around 5 million Jews dead in Europe by the spring 1944 also loomed large. Hungary was, with three-quarters of a million Jewish inhabitants, the only country hitherto unaffected by the "final solution" in Nazi Europe, and thus a "mistake" that the Germans undertook to correct in short order. On 12 March 1944, they established the *Sondereinsatzkommando Ungarn* (Special response unit for Hungary). Under the personal supervision of Adolf Eichmann (1906 - 1962), the operation concentrated the majority of genocide "specialists" in order to carry out the destruction of Hungarian Jews in what has since been known as *Ungarnaktion* (Action Hungary), the largest single operation of destruction of the Jews in Nazi history. The key factor was the cooperation of the new Hungarian government which issued 107 laws to strip the Jews of their civil rights. Most noticeably, the law from 5 April 1944 required all Jews older than 5 years of age to wear a large, 10 by 10 centimetres, yellow Star of David sewn on the left

side of the upper garment. This was observed in Prekmurje as well, but neither Cigüt nor others in Prekmurje, Jews and non-Jews alike, could imagine what the next step would be.

When the next step happened, it was a much more radical one. In a very short period between 16 April and 3 July 1944, the Hungarian authorities placed more than 455,000 Hungarian Jews under arrest, confiscated their property, and placed them in ghettos. This phase of *Ungarnaktion* spared only those who were exempt by law: those in Budapest, those in working units of the army, and those who managed to hide, with the help of non-Jews who summoned the courage despite the severe punishments that were threatened and evade the deportations. The latter were by far the fewest. Not many people in Hungary were willing to risk their freedom, much less their life, for a Jew. On 19 April 1944, the fateful decision was made about the Prekmurje Jews, as the area was bordering on the territories where the Yugoslav partisans were very active, thus making Prekmurje potentially "hostile." The Jews had to be deported so that they would not escape to the partisans. On the evening of 25 April 1944, the southernmost cities of the "hostile territory" saw a series of meetings between the civil authorities and the gendarmes. Detailed plans for the mass arrest of Jews were finalized. Although many non-Jews were privy to the plan, it would seem nobody saw fit to warn the Jews. When the arrests began on 26 April 1944 at five o'clock in the morning, a vast majority of the Prekmurje Jews were in their homes.

In the villages surrounding Murska Sobota, the raids and arrests begun slightly later in the morning, so Emerik Hirschl was warned just in time by his friend Cigüt to avoid the arrest. Emerik tried to persuade his two unwed sisters, Jolanka (1910 - 1944) and Renata (1914 - 1944/45) who lived with him to come along, but they declined. Once they were brought to the Murska Sobota synagogue to join the rest of the captives there, their mother, Regina Hirschl b. Heimer (1877 – 1944), inquired, "Ge je Imre?" (Where is Emerik?), and was told of his escape. The exchange was witnessed by Erika Fürst (1931), Regina's granddaughter. The family took the news of Emerik's escape as a small relief. At least one family member stood the chance to remain in freedom. Five of Regina's nine children were arrested that day, and ten members of the extended family. Her son Ladislav (1902 - 1941) had already died as a Yugoslav prisoner of war in Germany; her daughter Marija Löwenstein (1906 - 1942/43), who lived near Varaždin, was deported to Auschwitz already in either 1942 or 1943; and her daughter Helena Sonnenwald (1904 - 1944) who lived in Čakovec was arrested there practically at the same time as her mother in Murska Sobota.

On the next day, 27 April 1944, the Hungarian gendarmes transported their prisoners from Murska Sobota and Lendava to Čakovec. Jointly with the prisoners from Medžimurje, they were handed over to the SS. All, 2,675 people in total, were transported by train to Nagykanizsa the next day, on 28 April. Once they arrived, 800 "Jewish workers between 16 and 50 years of age" were selected and

sent to "work in Germany" the same day, with around 1,000 of the prisoners who were already in Nagykanisza's internment camp who had been arrested in Budapest in the police raids for their political views following 19 March 1944. In Budapest, these deportees were joined by some 1,000 additional people arrested in police raids. The transport departed from Budapest on the evening of 28 April as one of the first of a total of 147 *Ungarnaktion* transports. By 22 July 1944 a total of 430,000 Jews from the then Hungarian territories were sent to Auschwitz. The remaining Prekmurje Jews were detained in Nagykanisza from 28 April on. Around 1,800 people unable to work remained there. These were mostly children with their mothers and elderly people, as many younger men were put into working details of the Hungarian army and the majority of those deemed capable to work of both sexes had already been taken away with the first transport.

On 18 May 1944, the second transport from Nagykanizsa carried around 1,750 people and arrived in Auschwitz on 21 May. This is perhaps the single most horrid date in the history of Auschwitz. Six transports from Hungary arrived, bringing in more than 17,000 Jews of whom about 13,000 were murdered immediately after the selection. During the entire *Ungarnaktion*, about 75 per cent of all transportees, that is to say, 320,000 Hungarian Jews, were murded in the gas chambers upon arrival, their bodies cremated. Those who survived the initial selection, however, were not intended to survive. The purpose of the work camps was not merely slave work, but starving the inmates to death.

Out of the ten aforementioned family members of Emerik Hirschl who were arrested in Murska Sobota on 26 April, only three survived. Given that out of all the Prekmurje Jews who were in Auschwitz, only 23 women and 3 men survived, Emerik's chances of survival would have been slim.

On the same day he managed to evade arrest, Emerik went to see his acquaintance, the local merchant Aleksander Žilavec (1901 - 1975), in Andrejci after sunset. He told his story and asked for shelter. Emerik turned to Žilavec probably because of their close business ties before the war and because he trusted him, although hiding away a Jewish refugee was nothing akin to a business deal. The details of their discussion remain unknown, but they both undoubtedly understood the risks involved, and also that hiding Emerik would be a long-term operation. Žilavec hid Emerik in a barn on his estate that stands to this day. Emerik could only emerge from hiding during the night.

Žilavec was helped by his wife Agnes b. Celec (1906 - 1954) and son Koloman (1925 - 1980) in caring for the refugee; unknowingly, their seven-year-old daughter Marija/Mariška, later married Gergorec (1937), was also helping. She was not told about Emerik, but nevertheless spotted him. She recalls how well aware she was, despite her young age, that she was to tell no one about him. The family communicated with Emerik by a series of calls allegedly directed at their dog Bodri to let him know when they were bringing him food, or whenever there was danger.

Irena Kukojca, b. Kalamar (1925) from Andrejci who knew Hirschl well as she was his employee in Martjanci for two years, recalls that it was common knowledge that Emerik was not deported and was in hiding somewhere. The neighbours of the Žilavec family did not know about the refugee, but one of them met him during one of Emerik's night walks and told a third person who betrayed Emerik to the gendarmes. The locals know this person's identity, but as there are living relatives, I will refrain from naming the person here.

The gendarmes came on 19 August 1944. Emerik ran, but was caught in the nearby vineyard. During the hearing in Murska Sobota, he would not admit he was hiding with the Žilavec family the entire time, but insisted that he hid in a different house each day. Irena Kukojca recalls that Emerik was taken to Andrejci two days after the arrest. He was weak and covered in blood due to beatings and lost consciousness twice. The gendarmes would not allow the locals to give him water. He struggled to save the Žilavec family, but he did not succeed as the gendarmes found traces of his prolonged stay in their barn. Thus Aleksander Žilavec, too, who was not at home when Emerik was taken in, was arrested, and beaten during hearings.

Hirschl and Žilavec were taken from Murska Sobota to Szombathely after a few days, and from there through Győr to Budapest. From Budapest, Žilavec was allegedly taken back to Szombathely where he was imprisoned until the liberation on 2 April 1945. Emerik's fate, however, was

different. He was first sent to the Mosonmagyaróvár concentration camp, then to Sárvár near Szombathely, and finally to the Kistarcsa camp near Budapest. After 16 October 1944 when the extremist antisemitic Arrow Cross party took power, Hirschl was sent to Austria on one of the so-called death marches. On the way, somewhere along the Danube, he managed to escape, taking advantage of the guards' momentary distraction. He was far from saved, a fugitive without papers in a land where he knew nobody, and he risked being killed on the spot as a Jew. Although very weak, he summoned extraordinary willpower and walked 200 kilometers in ten days. By early November, he was back in Prekmurje.

There the circumstances had changed. The Red army was approaching and reached the Danube on 21 October 1944 near a place called Baja, 250 kilometres away from Prekmurje. The hopes that the suffering would end soon were stifled by measures carried out by the occupying forces. It was during this time that the victims were most numerous, beginning with a battle with the partisans on 17 October in Murska Sobota. In its wake, the Hungarians imprisoned more than 90 people and turned them over to the Germans who deported them to concentration camps. All the rest of the Prekmurje Jews were arrested as well. Because of the increasing numbers of deserters, the gendarmes were combing the area more often than ever.

It was lethal to have a Jew in hiding at that time. Of the three Jews married to non-Jews that were in hiding with

their relatives to escape the October arrests, only one survived the war. Aleksander Balkányi (1902 - 1945) and Josip Mayer (1904 - 1945), both from Lendava, were captured and killed. Šarika Zamlić b. Weiss from Serdica alone survived. Emerik Hirschl was thus inordinately lucky to have found people who were willing to hide him once again. These were the Fartelj family in Tešanovci, the brothers Franc (1903 - 1976) and Jožef (1897 - 1966), their mother Julija (1875 – after 1945) and Jožef's wife Marija b. Slavic (1901 - 1977). The only family member who did not directly partake in saving Emerik was Jožef's son Štefan (1922 - 1958) who was in the Hungarian army. The Farteljs also knew Emerik through business before the war. Emerik was again hid in a barn – that one is no longer standing – and was communicated to through commands to the family dog Bukši. The Fartelj farm was situated at the village's edge, but was not isolated. Thus the neighbours knew soon enough there was someone in hiding there, but nobody betrayed the fugitive. When the Red Army came to Prekmurje in early April 1945, Emerik was still safely in hiding with the Farteljs.

After the war, the ties between Hirschl and his rescuers were formalized through familial bonds. When Emerik married Neža Petek (1911 - 2005) and converted to Catholicism, his baptismal godfather was Aleksander Žilavec. His wife in turn was the confirmation godmother to Žilavec's daughter Mariška. Hirschl kept in close contact with both families of his rescuers and partook in their family events, and was considered as one of the family.

Koloman and Mariška Žilavec lived with the Hirschls while in school in Murska Sobota. When Koloman died in 1980, Hirschl left the hospital where he was being treated for pneumonia to attend the funeral, saying it was his duty. The Hirschl children maintain close contacts with both the Žilavec and Fartelj families.

The nine rescuers of Emerik/Mirko Hirschl, whose name was later Slovenicized as Hiršl, a common practice among the few Holocaust survivors in Prekmurje, are now themselves rescued from oblivion. Hopefully, they will be the first from Prekmurje, the Slovenian region that suffered the most numerous Holocaust victims, to be awarded the title of Righteous Among Nations for their bravery and selflessness.

Mirko and Neža Hirschl, first and second left,
at the wedding of Koloman Žilavec and Gabriela Banfi,
November 1948. Agnes Žilavec standing first and second to the right

Mirko Hirschl, standing between the bride and the groom,
at the wedding of Štefan Fartelj and Jolanka Kardoš, cca. 1948.
To his right, standing, are Marija, Franc and Jožef Fartelj

JULIJ KONTLER
A FAMILY STORY UNTOLD

Jasna Kontler - Salamon

Julij Kontler

The year 2014 marked the 70th anniversary of the German occupation of Hungary, and the subsequent "final solution" carried out among Hungarian Jews. The very last day of 2014 was also the septuagennial anniversary of the death of Slovenian teacher Jurij Kontler in the German concentration camp Flossenbürg. According to his son's testimony, he was deported and killed because of his involvement in the saving of the Budapest Jews.

In early 1944, around 750,000 Jews still lived in Hungary, the majority of them in Budapest. The Hungarian authorities introduced antisemitic laws early on, but declined to carry out the extermination. The invasion of the Allies, and freedom, seemed imminent in early 1944, until March, when Hungary was occupied by the Germans in the so-called *Operation Margarethe*. Immediately upon arrival, on 19 March, the deportations of Jews began in the Hungarian countryside. During the following months, nearly half a million people were murdered, including the Prekmurje Jews. In Budapest, a ghetto was set up in November of 1944.

These events fatally affected the Kontler family. Both Julij and his wife Marija grew up in an area where a strong Jewish community lived prior to the war. Julij was born in 1892 in Lendava, and Marija b. Komlosy in 1898 in St. Martin. Both finished the Hungarian teachers' academy and had many Jewish schoolmates. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of her graduation, Marija Kontler told

me, her eldest granddaughter, that less than a half of her surviving class was in attendance as the others were Jewish, and all had been murdered during the war.

After WWI, Julij and Marija decided to live and work in Yugoslavia, despite the fact that their entire education was in Hungarian. They taught school for a number of years in Prekmurje, then in Prihova, and were later transferred to Koprivnik in Kočevje to teach among the Volksdeutscher population. Just before WWII, they lived in Maribor, in the Studenci suburb, as Julij got the position of principal at the local primary school. They had four sons, Zlatko, born in 1921, Kazimir, born in 1923, Nikolaj in 1925, and Ladislav in 1930. They were all very gifted academically and the parents were very proud of them. Their father Julij was also a man of many talents: a teacher, a publicist, a collector of folk tales, and a gifted amateur painter. The teachers' academy was certainly not the education he would have ended with were he able to chose, as he was striving all his life for a broader knowledge. In his only preserved biographical note, he described himself as "an eagle whose wings were clipped." He was the first school principal in Yugoslavia who established a charity kitchen that served the poor children a cup of milk and bread.

Poverty was not the only thing Julij disliked. Studenci at that time was a typical proletarian suburb where there lived numerous Germans, many who sympathized with the Nazis. Swastikas began to appear in Kontler's school.

Kontler's reaction was adamant; he introduced lessons in civil education where the evils of Nazism were explained to the children. The swastikas were gone, but soon after, Germany occupied Yugoslavia and with it, the Slovenian Štajerska region. Julij and his family had to run. Hungary was their only option.

The family found temporary shelter in the Serbian village of Bolman in Baranja that is now in Croatia. Only Julij and Marija lived there. Zlatko was working in Budapest, Kazimir studied there, Nikolaj was attending the teachers' academy, the youngest son was still in secondary school. Julij never bothered to hide his anti-Nazi views and openly listened to Radio London, telling the people in the village that the end of the war was near. However, once the Germans occupied Hungary, things in Bolman went awry as well. Schools were closed and a torrent of arrests began.

Some people in Bolman remember Julij and his family well to this day, among them Anka (born 1930) and Radovan Stojanović (born 1927). Julij was Anka's teacher. When I visited Bolman in 2010, she told me how highly respected Julij was in the village. She also recalls his arrest that happened around the beginning of the 1944/45 school year. "We were much taken by surprise when he got arrested. There were rumours that our teacher was arrested because of his son who was sending Jews to Bolman," said Anka. She had also heard that a partisan, Mirko Bošković Puškin, was taking the Jews across the Drava river by boat during

the night. Allegedly, Bošković himself was later recounting these events, but did not disclose where the Jews were from. He died several years ago. Therefore, the only testimony that remains is that of Julij's son Zlatko who was in Budapest at the time in question, but was in close contact with his family, especially his brother Kazimir. In 1944, during the massive arrests and deportations of the Jews, Zlatko was 23, and was working in the Philips factory in Budapest. He got arrested as well at the time that his father and brother were taken in, but was saved from imprisonment because they could not do without him at the factory.

Having talked to my Uncle Zlatko, I told him what my Grandmother Marija told me, that Julij was imprisoned together with his son Kazimir because he was transporting medicinal supplies to the partisans. Uncle Zlatko took me by surprise, saying: "No, they were transporting Hungarian Jewish physicians," and explained, "I could name at least forty people whose names I found at home on a list." He went on to tell me that other people from Bolman were involved in these rescue operations: an Orthodox priest who was later shot by the Germans; a woman named Ankica who was in charge of the local dairy; and another school teacher. Uncle Zlatko also told me how the rescue operations were conducted. Kazimir gathered the Jews, all of them medical doctors as per the partisans' demand, who were then put on trains, the German military fast line Berlin-Athens, from Budapest to Beli Manastir. They would hide in the toilets and other utility compartments during the

journey. The train was scheduled to stop briefly in Beli Manastir where the stowaways disembarked with the help of bribed conductors. Julij was awaiting them and took them on foot on a four-kilometer walk to the school building in Bolman. They were assembled in a classroom and were then taken to the Drava river during the night, sometimes the same night they arrived, sometimes in a couple of days. Julij escorted them to the riverbank where a boat was ready. Across the river, the partisans were waiting. "They all pledged to work in the partisan units as medical doctors. The majority then left for Bari in Italy, and from there, to America," said Uncle Zlatko. He also told me that in Pečuh after the war, certain newspapers wrote about these rescue operations, mentioning Julij and Kazimir as well. But then, the operations ceased:

> *On the border along the Drava river some Jews were awaiting their boat one night. A lady was wailing saying she cannot take it any more. The Hungarian gendarmes overheard a female voice and started shooting in the air, scaring about 20 people from a cornfield where they were waiting for transport.*

The investigations began and Julij got arrested. The Stojanovićs and Julij's youngest son, the recently deceased Ladislav, assumed he had been betrayed by a villager to the Arrow Cross. Ladislav was only 13 at the time, but did remember that there were people in hiding in the school building, and that his father was arrested by the Hungarian

Nazis. Julij was court marshalled and sentenced to the concentration camp. On his train journey through Slovakia, he managed to throw a letter out of the train car, a detail the family had learned about, but the letter was never retrieved. In Fossenbürg, Julij Kontler was murdered and cremated within three months. His death certificate states that Julij Kontler, school teacher, prisoner number 36243, died on 31 December 1944.

It may seem unusual that those members of my family who knew about Julij's cooperation in saving the Jews, kept their silence for so long. Uncle Zlatko probably assumed we all knew the story. But my Grandmother Marija and my Uncle Kazimir kept their silence on purpose. Whenever asked, Marija told everyone he was sent to the concentration camp because of his collaboration with the partisans, and that he was providing them with medical supplies. In a 1946 official form, she wrote that her husband was "interned because of his cooperation with the partisan details in Baranja." She never said or wrote a word about just how he had cooperated with them, although she of course had to know. Perhaps her silence is due to the fact that in post-war Yugoslavia, anti-Jewish sentiment persisted for years.

Apparently, Kazimir also would not have wanted his father's work to be exposed, although he was most likely the instigator of the rescue operations. He too was sentenced to the concentration camp and was sent to Dachau where he survived the war. He then served as a translator in the

Nuremberg trials, and departed for the United States with the American military. He died in the U.S. in 2008. Although he was much burdened with his father's death and felt responsible for it, he never spoke about the reasons for their arrest. Unfortunately, he did not leave any documents that would shed some light on the fateful events in his and his father's life.

Luck permitting, there may still come to light additional proof that will make possible the candidacy of Julij Kontler for the title of a Righteous Among Nations, perhaps in the post-war newspapers in Pečuh. But in any case, he does deserve our grateful memory.

TESTIMONIES OF **CIRIL PLUT** SAVING THE JEWS ACROSS THE KOLPA RIVER

Oto Luthar

Ciril Plut

Given the number of Jewish individuals and families who were saved from Croatia to the so-called Province of Ljubljana up until the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, thus escaping death in the Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac, the history of WWII in Slovenia and Croatia must be expanded by the narrative of a handful of people who testified about, and partook in, the bravery of the people in Bela Krajina. They preserved for us the names of men and women in the region who were involved in rescue operations over the border river Kolpa, and many of whom undoubtedly deserve the title of Righteous among Nations. As the majority of them have passed on, and as there are too few known details on individual rescue operations, it remains improbable that any one of these rescuers would ever make it to the famed list of the Yad Vashem; also, except in rare cases, the names of the rescued people have been forgotten. For now, a short report on these events for the purposes of this publication is all the information we have.

The person who collected the most information about the rescue operations across the river was Ciril Plut who took part in some of them. At fifteen, he escorted the first Jewish families to Ljubljana. Later, he was an activist in the Bela Krajina partisan brigade. Obviously modest by nature, his published accounts of saving Jews that we present here largely downplay his role in the resistance movement. He is similarly reticent in his account of his own share in the rescue operations, but he is all the more precise when

enumerating and describing the individual actions. Doing so, he is not drawing any lines between those whom he himself witnessed and those he was told about by local informants whose accounts are mostly first-hand. Plut published his reconstruction of events between 1997 and 1999 in the main Bela Krajina and Dolenjsko daily *Dolenjski list,* under its rubric "Notes on recent history of our area". His material comprises four exceptionally informative contributions.

Plut informs us that on the Croat side, crossing the border was mainly coordinated by Dr. Štrajcer, a physician from the village of Ribnik. With the help of many locals he got the refugees from Zagreb, Karlovac, and other places in the NDH territory to the border villages of Pravotina, Mala Paka, and Velika Paka. From there, the locals, notably one Janko Milavec, took them to the Slovenian side by boat. Some of the fugitives found their first refuge in the village of Krasinec, in the home of Karlina Jakovčič and her relative, perhaps a cousin, Bara whose family name Plut did not know. According to his data, at least 40 Jews were saved this way. Karlina and Bara then escorted the Jews to the railway station in the village of Klošter near Grad where they boarded the train to Ljubljana. In one case, the women were helped by Tone Pezdirc, then 20 years of age, the son of the then mayor of the village Gradec, who took 20 people in one go to the railway station in Dobravce.

Several times, Ciril Plut also took fugitives stationed with the Jakovčič family to the railway station, and escorted them by train to Ljubljana. He was well suited to the task because as the son of a retired railway employee, he had free railway tickets. In Ljubljana, at the historical *Nebotičnik* (Skyscraper) building, "always a different person" took the fugitives over, while Plut returned home the same day. The refugee families often met other Jewish fugitives who embarked on the train at the Metlika or Dobravica stations. Plut recalls that they often knew each other, which made him think that Dr. Štrajcer and his family and neighbours were involved. One of the doctor's relatives known to Plut in this regard was Ive Štrajcer from Velika Paka who would take the refugees across the river by boat, then escorted them to the village of Griblje, and delivered them to the home of the farmer Alojz Brinc. The latter then took them to the Mlakar tavern in Metlika. Finally, they bordered the train to Ljubljana. This was confirmed by Tone Pezdirc, the son of the Gradec mayor himself,

> *Plenty of things happened to me in my life. I was also saving the Jews over the Kolpa in all sorts of situations. I saw frightened and suspicious people who went into the unknown, grateful for anything we could do for them. […] Over the river, I took them by three or sometimes more, I did several trips during the night, in pitch darkness, sometimes over the engorged river, and it was really dangerous. I took no payment, only once one of them gave me some change. But that did not matter. Most of them were poor people*

stripped of everything that were trying to save their bare skins, running in panic from the Ustasha, the Germans, and the Croat homeguards.

About a month after Ciril Plut published his first article in *Dolenjski list*, a journalist by the name of Ladislav Lesar wrote about Tone Pezdirc, estimating that he alone saved "around 20 people." He then observed that on the topic of saving the Jews,

... it would be interesting [...] to make a short movie. With their larger boats used to transport fine sand extracted from the river bottom, the brave people saved many a life. [...] I described only a short section of the Slovenian-Croat border. But the border went on through Vinica and Gorski Kotar, and from Metlika to Kostanjevica. I am sure many Jewish refugees crossed to the then Italian side in those areas. It would be interesting to obtain a testimony from one of the survivor Jews.

One of the escape routes led also through Križevska Vas. As there was no bridge or ferry there either, the refugees crossed the river at its shallowest, under the dam that controlled the water flow in front of the mill. Once they crossed the river, the fugitives remained for a few days in the village, and then proceeded to Ljubljana. Plut was told about it by a local, Ivan Avguštin, who, similar to Franc Kočevar from Bereča Vas, once helped the fugitives. He met a group of four younger people, Aron, David, Sara and

Golda, in May 1942, behind the family's barn where they hid because Sara sprained a leg. Sara was seen to by Franc's mother Neža Kočevar, a renowned local midwife, while the others spent around two weeks in the nearby forest. Once Sara could walk again, Franc took all four to the partisans in Brezova Reber. Less then two years later, Franc met Aron and Sara at a partisan cultural event where they both performed as members of a culture group of a Croat partisan detail. On that occasion, Aron told Franc that Golda and David also joined the Croat partisans.

Less lucky were three Jewish refugees who sought safety in the Mrtvice village in late 1941. The two women and a man of early middle age were accommodated by the Pešeč family. Two years after their escape from NDH, they were captured by the Slovenian homeguards and the Croat Ustasha. They forced the father of the Pešeč family to take them to Drniči, a Croat village, with all their belongings. There the three fugitives disappeared, while Jože Pešič was, to everybody's surprise, released in a few days to return home.

In Metlika, Leopold Grabrijan and his wife, who was originally from Zagreb, are known to have helped many Jews. Because Mrs. Grabrijan was known as an enterprising, well-groomed and well-dressed woman, Plut initially thought she was Jewish herself, and therefore helped her relatives and friends from Zagreb. In his next article, Plut corrected his mistake. Ela Grabrijan was not Jewish,

although many in Metlika probably thought so. She and her husband decided to help the Jews because their business partners in Croatia and their Jewish acquaintances asked them to. Thus, many fugitives that crossed the border in or near Metlika sought their first refuge with the Grabrijans who would then escort them to the train for Ljubljana. Ela Gabrijan, their daughter who was at that time around 10 years old, recalls that her parents helped save at least 20 people, and remembers some of them by name: a merchant couple Šenbron, Pavel Bek, and the Pisker family.

Among the local farmer families, Plut also mentions the Matkovič family from Dobravice, the Šteforins from Božakovo, the Žunič family from Krivoglavice, and the Vrničars from the village of Čurile near Metlika. The Jewish refugees who they helped save were crossing the Kolpa river at its shallow point near the Croat villages Brihovo and Mišnice, or at the confluence of the rivers Lahinja and Kolpa near the villages Primostek, Otok, Bubnjarci, and Dolnji Zalog. One of Plut's collocutors recalls that the fugitives travelled only during the night, that they needed 14 days or more to travel from Zagreb to the border, and that they carried rucksacks and valises. The people in Bela Krajina took them in only once they were across the river. Then they were sent to different farms, and from there, to railway stations. The saved people were given warm refuge and food, mostly bread and local brandy.

The people of Bela Krajina, in collaboration with the

villagers on the Croat side of the Kolpa river, saved around 120 Jews in the years 1941 and 1942, from among "more than a thousand who fled across this border." Many also made it to safety in places where they could cross the river by bridges, most often at the border sections between Samobor and Metlika, and in Gorski Kotar where the border was, because of the presence of the partisans, not very well guarded. There are very few testimonies about all that in Slovenia. Perhaps more light will be shed from the fragments in the resistance archives. Like Golda, Sara, Aron and David, some Jewish refugees decided to join the partisans on either side of the border.

THE HOLOCAUST IN SLOVENIA A BRIEF HISTORY

Marjan Toš, Irena Šumi

Before the April 1941 attack of the Axis powers on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the majority of Slovenian Jews in the present territory of Slovenia lived in Prekmurje, in Murska Sobota and Lendava and their vicinity. According to incomplete official census data, there were, in the Kingdom of SHS in 1921, 64,159 Jews, of them 860 in the present Slovenian territory. In 1931, the Yugoslav census bureau counted a total of 820 Jews in Dravska Banovina, the majority in Murska Sobota (269) and Lendava (207). There were 95 Jews in Ljubljana, 81 in Maribor, 32 in Ptuj, and 30 in Celje.

It needs be stressed that these numbers differ considerably from one source to another. While the last pre-WWII official census reported 820 Jews, that is, people who self-declared as members of the Jewish faith, in Dravska Banovina, the Union of Jewish communities of Yugoslavia noted 760 in 1938. Another source of data of the Union notes a total of 845 people in the Murska Sobota and Lendava communities in 1940, 711 and 134 respectively. It is therefore reasonable to say that at the very least, 800 Jews lived in the pre-war Yugoslav Slovenia in the 1930s. Although the Jews comprised a negligible percentage of the total population in Dravska Banovina, many among them were prominent in business and industry. In the then newly-

constructed Maribor industrial park, Jews were notable in textiles, leather, and food production. In Prekmurje, they were similarly at the forefront of the local businesses and industries and in printing.

Both Prekmurje Jewish communities, however, experienced waning numbers in their membership since WWI. The region, as well as the Slovenian part of Steiermark, Štajersko, were cut-off economic, commercial, and communications hinterlands to Austria and Hungary once the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established. An additional reason for the increasing emigration was the rising antisemitism.

Religious affiliation was for a long time in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia a mandatory datum in the census, and with it, membership in organized religious communities. The Štajersko and Prekmurje Jews were first annexed to the Zagreb Jewish community, and in 1929, to the Israelite religious community in Murska Sobota. The Maribor Jews settled in the city much later than the Jews in Prekmurje, as they came at the invitation of the Yugoslav government in its effort to reindustrialize Maribor after its amputation from the old Austro-Hungarian empire, and to revitalize its economic industries. They were first attached to the Graz Jewish

community and continued to go there for major religious holidays, but in the years before WWII, the Rabbi from Murska Sobota came to Maribor weekly to instruct the children. But a vast majority of Slovenian Jews were thoroughly secular. A minor influx of the more observant were brides who came to Prekmurje from Hungary. Many Slovenian Jews were also distinctly socially engaged and refused any religious or ethnic affiliations for reasons of their worldview. In that situation, and because of the steadily rising antisemitism, many converted to Christianity in the 1920s and 1930s, or declared themselves atheists, and many Slovenicized their family names.

After the attack of 6 April 1941, Slovenia was partitioned between the Italian and German authorities; the latter occupied Prekmurje, too, but handed it over to the Hungarians on 16 April. Yugoslavia passed a set of antisemitic legislation already in 1940, primarily on the insistence Dr. Anton Korošec, a Catholic priest, the leader of the Slovenian People's Party, and a cabinet minister in several Yugoslav governments. One of the laws introduced the *numerus clausus* policy for Jewish students in the universities, highs schools, secondary schools and teachers' academies, as the number of Jewish students and pupils had to be in proportion to Jewish

residents in the city of every such school. In Murska Sobota, quite a few Jewish students could not enter secondary education as a result. Another law prohibited the Jews from establishing wholesale food processing businesses. The existent ones could be terminated, or placed under the authority of commissioners who then led the business. This ordinance affected a number of Jews in Slovenia. Obtaining Yugoslav citizenship likewise became impossible to resident Jews of foreign citizenship who were mainly employed as engineers and technicians in the industries. An overwhelming majority of Slovenian Jews, however, were Yugoslav citizens.

Following the occupation, the systematic persecution of the Jews first began in the territories under the Germans, in Lower Štajerska and Gorenjska where the arrests and deportations begun at once. Many saved themselves in the nick of time just before the war broke out, for example the Falter family, the very affluent landowners and manufacturers from Jurklošter. Many waited until the eleventh hour and escaped, if they still could afford it financially and logistically, among them Marko Rosner, the Maribor textile industrialist, with his family. Before their escape, Rosner still managed to intervene in the fate of the sixteen girls the Righteous Uroš Žun saved from arrest at the border. Marko Rosner

was an enlightened capitalist and the founding donor or the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Art. Immediately after the occupation, all industrial and commercial businesses belonging to Jews were confiscated, "Aryanized," a dispossession policy that was the overture to physical extermination. Before the war, Korošec pressed for the "Aryanization" of Jewish assets, but the war took care of it for him.

The fates of the Maribor Rosner family members, who all survived the war, and the members of the Maribor families Singer and Kohnstein, are well researched. The Singers and Kohnsteins had the majority of their possessions confiscated and in early September 1941 were evicted from Lower Štajerska. They escaped to the then Hungarian Medžimurje where their relative Emil Kohnstein had lived since 1935. The Ustasha killed Nikola, the son of Eugen Singer, in the Jadovno concentration camp in Lika in July or August 1941. The second son, Viljem, who had lived in Prague since 1937, was taken to Terezin in November of the same year. The rest of the Singers and Kohnsteins survived until the April 1944 arrests in Prekmurje when the mass extermination of the Jews begun throughout the Hungarian territories. They were detained in the Nagykanizsa ghetto and taken to Auschwitz probably on

21 or 22 May 1944. Upon arrival, the notorious selections were made. Those destined to be murdered at once were ordered to the left. At the time, massive transports arrived in Auschwitz and 75 per cent of all newly arrived were murdered instantly. Arnošt, Olga, and Rudolf Kohnstein, and Marija, Erna and Milan Singer were murdered with them, their bodies cremated on the same day. The Kohnstein twins, Milica and Gizela, endured the horrendous Mengele's "medical" testing in Auschwitz. They survived the war, but Milica died in Budapest in 1946 from the consequences of the torture. In memory of these victims of the Holocaust in Slovenia, *stolpersteine* (stumbling block memorials) were made in Maribor in 2012.

The Italian occupying forces took the best part of Dolenjska, Notranjska, and Ljubljana. In Italy, Jews underwent shrinking civil rights and economic life beginning in 1938, but the measures against them were limited on the occupied territories. The Ljubljana Jews were allowed to organize and conduct a limited dialogue with the authorities, especially through the DELASEM, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The role of intermediary was given to Evgen Bolaffio, a wine merchant. Deportations, however, did happen. Well-known is the fate of the Ljubljana family

Alles-Percy who were deported to Italy. The family father died en route, while his wife and chronically ill daughter survived the war, were dispossessed upon return home, and lived in poverty until the 1960s, and barely surviving. In the years of 1941 and 1942 however, the Italian occupation zone was a safe haven of sorts for Jewish refugees. By the end of 1941, more than 400 were in Ljubljana from the German occupation zone and Germany and Austria. An increasing number of people also fled the Ustasha regime in Croatia. Thus, by the end of April 1941, 55 Austrian and German Jewish refugees came to Ljubljana from the refugee centre in Leskovec at Krško; by May, there were 108. They fled the German occupation territories together with a wave of Slovenians.

After Italy's capitulation, the circumstances in the Ljubljana region changed drastically. The Germans took over the northern and central parts of Italy, and its former occupation zones. Radical persecution of the Jews in the Ljubljana, Trieste, and Gorizia regions began. 764 people from Trieste and 45 from Gorizia were killed. Between late 1943 and September 1944, 32 Jews were arrested and deported with the aid of the Homeguard police in 1944.

When the Germans occupied Hungary on 19 March 1944 and Adolf Eichmann personally took care of the destruction of nearly a million Jews in the Hungarian territories by means of his infamous clock-wise sweep, the Prekmurje Jews were among the first deportees. Before that, Jews were victims of antisemitic policies but were not deported. The first wave of arrests started on 26 April in Prekmurje. Another wave ensued in May, and the final ones in October and November of 1944. In April, the Hungarian gendarmes arrested 387 Jews from Murska Sobota and took them through Čakovec to the temporary ghetto in Nagykanizsa and finally to Auschwitz–Birkenau. While the arrests were carried out by the Hungarian gendarmes, many among them Slovenians, the Germans supervised the looting of Jewish property. Many local members of *Kulturbund*, the pro-German organisation, partook in the looting. The deportees were handed over to the SS in Čakovec. The collaboration of Slovenians in these events remains obscure and will likely never be properly assessed as stories of the looting are told in the area, but the perpetrators are rarely if ever identified.

The sheer efficiency of the mass deportations in the penultimate year of WWII places Slovenia among those European countries where the Holocaust was most

radically carried out. No less than 86.6 per cent of Slovenian Jews were murdered. Gone were both Prekmurje Jewish communities and the community in Gorizia region. To date, 558 victims of the Holocaust in Slovenia were identified, 392 from Prekmurje alone, of among whom 481 were murdered in the concentration camps, mostly in Auschwitz. 69 were children. In the year 1944, the greatest number of all Slovenian Jews were murdered.

As the author Keith Lowe states in his recent book titled *Savage Continent* (2013), the end of WWII did not bring about the end of ethnicization of social conflicts. In the decade after the war, the entirety of Europe was in a state of anomic, dispersed power. The re-bordering processes were still underway and the material and human rebuilding of a continent, razed to the ground, barely started. In these circumstances, atrocities were committed which sought to end the local, religious, and civil animosities that were born during the war, by mass extrajudicial murders of the defeated and their collaborators, and the mass raping of millions of women. In many places, people strived for a final victory of precisely those pseudo-biological ideologies of ethnic difference that started the war in the first place. Massive ethnic cleansing of national territories ensued that saw in

all Germans, Italians, and Hungarians the faces of the aggressor. In Slovenia, the coastal region was cleansed of Italians, the mainland of Volksdeutscher, and of course, of the surviving Jews as well. In post-war European communist countries, the dispossession of the class enemy was entirely enmeshed with the notion of the ethnicized Other. The Yugoslav communist authorities declared the surviving Jews ethnic aliens, "persons of German ethnicity," in order to strip them of Yugoslav citizenship, to press them to decide for emigration, and accused them, absurdly, of collaboration with the aggressor and members of *Kulturbund* in order to strip them of their property. The majority of all survivors in Slovenia and Yugoslavia decided to emigrate, mostly to Israel when it was established in 1948. Upon embarking on the ships, they were forced to sign documents to the effect that they were giving up, for themselves and all their offspring, Yugoslav citizenship, and all property on Yugoslav soil. In short, after the war the surviving Slovenian Jews were systematically stripped of their private and industrial property. In the case of the Maribor industrialists, the shameful political court-martialling tried and sentenced them *in absentia* for high treason, because they managed to escape the Holocaust, and for collaboration, because their property was "Aryanized". The surviving Jews were now class and ethnic enemy at

once and had no effective means to defend themselves from these accusations. Those declared "ethnic Germans" had to prove in writing they were no such thing.

The Western world underwent a process of awareness building about the Holocaust and the historic responsibility for the carnage of WWII, mainly after the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel. The protocols of public memory were set once the survivors were able, for the first time in history, to testify about the horrors of the Holocaust. Not so in the newly established European communism countries. In Yugoslavia and Slovenia, the ideological consolidation of history insisted on a double war trauma, one pertaining to the outside aggression, and the other, to the struggle to overturn the capitalist exploitation by means of the revolution that took place within the liberation struggle. This was the story that legitimized the regime. The ways in which the Slovenian Jews were pushed out of the protocol of national memory was complex, dependent on the rest of the revolutionary narration, and thorough. This part of the memory was uprooted rather than merely suppressed or silenced. As the Jews were victims to both ethnic and class cleansing, the narration prevailed in which the Holocaust never happened on Slovenian soil, and that it was immaterial to Slovenian national history as the story pertained to

foreigners, non-Slovenians. As the survivors had to emigrate en masse, the knowledge of Slovenian Jews was as equally marginalized as the history of mass extrajudicial murders of the collaborationists after the war. Destroyed, eliminated, and deliberately left to decay were all the material remnants of Jewish culture.

The Gordian knot of these interdependent ideologies, coupled with historic revisionism and the negation of Holocaust post-1991, is all but unravelled. Slovenian independence in 1991 brought no conscious, pragmatic catharsis. However, the growing knowledge of the Holocaust in Slovenia, and the ever more detailed memory of Slovenian Jewry, victims of the Holocaust and the post-WWII ethnic and class cleansing, can no longer be stymied, much less ignored.

The Murska Sobota synagogue was levelled in 1954

Monument at the Jewish cemetery in Murska Sobota

Monument to the Holocaust victims at the Murska Sobota railway station

Stolpersteins for the Singer and Kohnstein families in Maribor

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YAD VASHEM CRITERIA FOR THE TITLE OF RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

Miriam Steiner Aviezer

The honour of the title of Righteous among nations (Chasidei Umot haOlam) consists of a medal and a written justification. A person has to meet the following criteria in order to be proclaimed Righteous:

- that he/she is not Jewish
- that he/she offered help and risked their own life doing so, exposing themselves to persecution on the basis of the so-called racial laws
- that he/she was not remunerated in any way for saving Jewish person(s) that was agreed to prior to the act as a condition

- that he/she acted in full awareness of the fact that a Jewish person is being saved that is threatened by eviction, concentration camp, or danger due to antisemitic laws
- that he/she acted on their own initiative and was personally involved in, and responsible for the act of rescue
- that he/she did not act in the line of duty (e.g. following orders within a resistance movement or partisan units)
- that he/she was not a member of hostile political parties and did not partake in active persecution of the Jews and in looting of their assets
- solely admissible are the statements of witnesses that can testify of the rescue personally and were at the time of the event older than 12 years of age (exceptionally, older than 8 years of age)

The process of recognition of a Righteous among nations is conducted upon the instigation of the person rescued, or the witnesses that can testify about the deed. Testimonies must be verified by the notary, or the local Jewish community, and are recommended to be have supplementary documentation, e.g. the testimony of the rescuer, or other relevant documents.

The decision to award the title is adopted by a special committee of the Yad Vashem comprised of historians,

law professionals, ex diplomats, literary figures and other important personalities of the public life in Israel. There are regional committees in Tel Aviv and Haifa, and the high commission that convenes twice a year and is presided over by a judge of the Israeli Supreme court.

The title of Righteous among nations Naslov Pravičnega gives the person so decorated the right to a special memorial plaque in the Park of the Righteous in Yad Vashem. In the beginning, each Righteous also planted a tree next to the plaque, but due to lack of space, the trees are now planted in a special park.

The medals are handed to the newly proclaimed Righteous in two ways:

- during a commemoration in Yad Vashem in the Hall of Remembrance (Ohel Yizkor). In attendance are usually the rescued person with family, the rescuer (if still alive and well), the ambassador of the rescuer's country, and invited guests. Such commemoration is reported on in the public media;
- at the Israeli embassy in the rescuer's country, usually within the festivities for Israeli Independence Day, in mid-April. If there is no Israeli diplomatic mission in the rescuer's country, the commemoration takes place in the local Jewish community.

THE SLOVENIAN RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

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To stand up against Nazi ideas of biologized "ethnicity" and antisemitism required a heroic disposition in individuals who did not allow themselves to have their basic humanity destroyed by such ideologies, even as the latter were backed by formidable political and religious power and sweepingly popular beliefs. The men and women presented in the first part of the book have already been recognised as **Righteous Among Nations** for their brave humanitarian acts during WWII, a title bestowed by the Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research, Education, Documentation and Commemoration. Part Two brings the stories about people who were also saving Jews that were not recognised as Righteous yet, but some among them are candidates.

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