

**Rahela ALBAHARI PERIŠIĆ**

**IT WAS A HARD, BUT HONORABLE STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM**

*She was born on 14 February 1922 in Sanski Most, to father David and mother Luna. She had a brother Moric and sisters Judita and Flora.*

*In Drvar, where we were the only Jewish family, we lived from my father's shop selling mixed goods.*

*She attended secondary school in Prijedor and in Banja Luka. She was a member of Hashomer Hatzair.*

*During the war she fought in the Partisans in the Tenth Krajina Brigade.*

*She completed a higher pedagogical school and taught history.*

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In Prijedor, a small Bosnian town, in 1939, during a history class in the seventh grade of the gymnasium, Professor Mišković opened the grade book and called out:

“Rahela Albahari, come out.”

Confused, I thought: why should I come out, when we always answered from our seats? I stood up.

“Tell us, Rahela, what do you know about Emperor Dušan the Mighty.”

I was pleased with the question, because I had mastered that lesson very well. I spoke about Dušan as a great Serbian ruler who expanded the state, describing its extent... and most importantly, that with the adoption of Dušan's Code, a strong feudal state was formed.

I finished convinced that I had answered well.

The professor walked through the classroom and asked:

“What do you think of Rahela's answer?”

The students, as always, raised some insignificant details. The professor replied:

“No, that is not it.”

The students were confused, and silence fell over the room.

“Let me tell you what is not good in Rahela’s answer. You see, she does not speak about Emperor Dušan with feeling, because Rahela was not born of a Serbian mother. She was not nourished with Serbian milk, so she cannot feel the full greatness of our great Emperor Dušan.”

In the classroom, a few students who were Ljotić supporters (followers of the fascist Dimitrije Ljotić) laughed, while a larger part of the students shouted:

“Shame on you, professor!”

I do not know how I reached my desk. Trembling, I began to cry.

That was my first humiliation and insult as a Jew.

When I was a little girl playing with children, if someone got angry with me, they would say:

“Little Jewess, you killed Jesus for us!”

Back then, still small, I did not take it so hard, but now it was different. I understood what awaited us Jews.

The class ended and I was still crying.

My school friends approached me—Sveto Popović, Joco Stefanović, Esad Cerić, Bogoljub Radovanović and others—comforting me:

“Don’t cry, hold your head up. That fascist enjoys humiliating you in front of the students. Don’t give him that satisfaction.”

They were young communists, members of SKOJ, who wanted to tell me that not everyone thought like that fascist, to encourage and support me.

From then on I spent time with the SKOJ members, who gladly accepted me into their ranks. I understood why the professor had brought me before the class: he wanted everyone to see my humiliation, my pain and tears.

For a time I attended school in Banja Luka. I was a member of the progressive organization Hashomer Hatzair and regularly visited the “ken,” where we discussed various social issues: social justice, humane relations among people, opposition to racial discrimination, and similar topics. The ideas of young communists were therefore not foreign to me.

Soon the minister Korošec introduced the “Numerus clausus” law, which determined how many Jews could attend school. At a teachers’ council meeting there was a heated discussion about students who could not continue their education. Professors Burović, Kosovka, Vešović argued that older students should continue, while younger ones could go into vocational schools. The director Grba and Professor Mišković were against it, but the majority accepted the proposal.

Thus several of us Jewish students in the upper grades remained in the school. I remember Beba Kabiljo, Braco Kabiljo, Ruben Atijas and others.

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In March 1941, after large demonstrations throughout Yugoslavia against the pact with the Axis powers, Yugoslavia was attacked. All schools were closed, and I returned to Drvar, where my parents lived. My father had a shop selling mixed goods. We were the only Jewish family in that small Bosnian town.

Yugoslavia capitulated and was occupied by Germans, Italians, Hungarians and Bulgarians. The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was formed, a fascist state zealous in enforcing German fascist laws, including the persecution and destruction of Jews.

Drvar was within the NDH. Before the Ustaša entered Drvar, the German army passed through the town. We secretly watched the German units. On a motorcycle, two blond young soldiers stopped in front of our shop and pointed at the sign:

“David Albahari, mixed goods shop.”

Not long after, those same two young men entered, gave the fascist salute and said:

“Hinaus mit Juden” (“Out with the Jews”).

We all froze in fear...

They asked about the shop, and my father answered. They asked how he spoke German so well. He explained that Bosnia had been under Austro-Hungarian rule and that he had served in their army. They took what they wanted and “gallantly” paid with their worthless marks.

But that humiliation and genocidal greeting “out with the Jews” was not the last.

With the arrival of the Ustaša troops we were subjected to even worse humiliation and abuse. My father’s shop was immediately confiscated, and we children were sent to forced labor. We cleaned Ustaša premises—my sister Flora, younger sister Judita, little brother Moric and I.

When we cleaned toilets full of filth, Ustaša would come laughing:

“Look, look, little Jewesses, fine ladies, how well they work.”

The Ustaša government arrested prominent Serbs, killed them and threw them into nearby karst pits. The people rose in alarm; adult men fled into the forest.

My parents—father David, mother Luna, sister Judita and little brother Moric—were driven into a transit camp in Bosanski Petrovac, intended for all Jews of the Bihać district. Women, children, men, the elderly and the sick were placed in an unfinished building, with the goal of sending them to Jasenovac.

My sister Flora was then with relatives in Derventa, and I was with my aunt Sarina in Ključ, so we did not go to camp with our parents.

The Ustaša soldiers learned I was in Ključ and came to arrest me. My aunt Sarina was married to a Muslim, Sadik Medić. She bravely asked the Ustaša to return later while she packed me something. She immediately went outside and waited for someone traveling to Bravsko, where the railway station was. A hadžija, an older Muslim man, appeared; she paid him well, and I, crouched among baskets, set off.

Later, the Ustaša came back. My aunt, pretending concern, said I had disappeared. They could do nothing to the Medić family because my uncle was the mayor of Ključ, but they alerted all stations and the railway post at Bravsko to arrest me if seen.

I arrived in Bravsko and approached the ticket counter when I heard loud laughter from the clerk:

“Have you heard? The little Jewess escaped the Ustaša—now they’ve informed us.”

I quickly withdrew and went toward the freight wagons, hid among bales, thinking: from Bravsko the train goes to Sanski Most or Drvar. I thought: from Bravsko the train goes to Sanski Most or Drvar. If it goes to Sanski Most, I have relatives there and can hide for a while; if it goes to Drvar, I have friends there who will help me.

At night we arrived in Drvar. As the wagons were opened for unloading, I jumped out. I made a mistake and walked through town. Near the Ustaša post I heard:

“Halt, who goes there?”

Confused, I answered: “Rahela.”

The guard laughed:

“We’re just waiting for you.”

The Ustaša in Drvar were our neighbors, school acquaintances. I asked to spend the night at my friend Mila Beoković’s house, promising to report the next day. One Ustaša escorted me there. That night Mila and I agreed I must flee. I crossed the Unac River, hid in bushes, and waited for the connection she arranged.

The plan was for me to be transferred to the village of Ataševac, to relatives of Pane Kecman, my father’s friend.

In the village they hid me during the day in a hollow, and came for me at night. I slept outside the house in the hayloft. It was terrifying to spend an entire day alone in the forest, frightened by every sound and every voice that might be heard. Because I loved drawing, so that time would pass faster and to drive away fear, I made small mosaics from various leaves and pebbles.

Since I did not appear, the Ustaša came to Mila's house to look for me. Mila acted surprised, saying that I had left at dawn and that she was astonished I had not reported myself. The Ustaša began searching the surrounding villages and asking about me. The family sheltering me became afraid and begged me to leave, because they would suffer for hiding a Jewess.

The situation in Drvar was very difficult; everyone was terrified, and my friends could no longer help me. I did not want to keep running and bringing trouble to anyone. I decided to surrender so that the Ustaša would send me to the camp where my parents were.

I entered the post and they immediately began interrogating me. While they questioned me, I heard one Ustaša say to another: "You go now." Then I heard a scream and understood that they were raping a young Slovenian woman whose parents the Germans had expelled from Slovenia.

Into the room entered Gusti Šom, a Croat, my friend from SKOJ. I was afraid—now he would betray me and they would kill me when they learned that I too was a SKOJ member. I looked at him with disgust, the way one looks at traitors.

They led me upstairs into a room. I opened the window and decided that I would throw myself out if they tried to rape me. Hours passed like years. I thought about what I should have done instead of surrendering. I was terrified.

Late in the afternoon I heard a woman's voice calling:

"Rahela, Rahela."

I answered and knocked on the door. I heard her say:

"You see she is here, and you told me she wasn't."

The door opened and I saw beautiful Dragica, Pane Kecman's daughter. Gusti had alerted my comrades, and they decided it was best to engage Marija, a Croat woman, Pane Kecman's wife. She knew the camp commander well and begged them to release me, guaranteeing for me. They let me go, and I hid at the Kecmans' home.

The Ustaša continued persecuting and killing Serbs; most Serbian men fled into the forest.

On 27 July 1941 the uprising began and Drvar was liberated. Great help to the insurgents was provided by that same Gusti, whom I had thought a traitor. He presented himself to the Ustaša as their supporter. On the eve of the uprising he learned the password, and the Ustaša were caught asleep, so there were not many casualties.

As soon as I heard gunfire and saw the insurgents, I ran out and joined the fighters.

Mila and I went to the hospital, since in school we had learned first aid. We helped with the care of the wounded. The chief doctor was Salamon Levi, and he immediately took me as an assistant during surgical procedures.

I remember—once a fighter’s leg was torn apart by a dum-dum bullet and had to be amputated. I held the leg, and it still moved as if alive. That frightened me terribly, but where could I show that I was a coward?

Gusti looked for me and found me in the hospital. He hugged me and said:

“Rahela, I will never forget the look you gave me in the Ustaša camp. I was afraid that if something happened to you, you would never learn the real truth.”

I embraced him warmly and said:

“I am happy, Gusti, that I was wrong in my judgment. I truly thought you were a traitor.”

The main position against enemy forces was at Oštrelj, in the Grmeč mountain. Oštrelj rises above the Petrovačko field, and at the end of that field, near Bosanski Petrovac, there was a camp where Jews were held. I was at Oštrelj working in the infirmary of the Drvar–Petrovac detachment.

Often I watched the camp through binoculars and felt sorrow that we could not help them. Our fighters tried several times to reach the camp, but they failed. I grieved for all my loved ones, but the hardest thought was of my little brother, whom we all loved dearly, and what horrors he was enduring in the camp.

The uprising spread throughout the entire Krajina, and the Ustaša waited for the first opportunity to transport the prisoners to Jasenovac.

And one day they loaded all the prisoners onto trucks and set off toward Bravsko, to transport them further by train to Jasenovac. They did not get beyond Prijedor, because the Partisans tore up the rails and mined the tracks. The Jewish transport of freight wagons was halted on the railway indefinitely.

My father was very brave and sensible. He decided to escape. He told his family:

“I will go first, as if to the toilet, and afterward you come one by one.”

Since many people were asking to step out, the guard did not notice that my family did not return. My father led them to the narrow-gauge line that goes toward Sanski Most.

They boarded a wagon and without difficulty reached Sanski Most. They hid with Aunt Mazalta Atijas, who was in deep mourning because the Ustaša had killed her two sons, Puba and Lola.

On 2 August 1941, on the Serbian holiday of Ilindan, the Ustaša killed around 7,000 Serbs and nine Jews from Sanski Most and surrounding villages. Even today the exact number is unknown - estimates range from 5,000 to 7,000. For days the Sana River flowed red with blood, because the victims were buried right along the riverbank.

Because of the Ustaša massacres, Italians arrived in Sanski Most. Now my parents could move more freely, and my father immediately organized transport back to Drvar through friends. After three months of liberated Drvar, the city fell under Italian rule.

Several of us SKOJ members (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) remained in town to inform the Partisans about enemy movements, to collect medical supplies, and to carry out many other duties.

One night someone knocked on the window and shouted: "Who is in the house?" Mila and I were frightened, and when he shouted again, "Open up," I recognized my father's voice. We ran outside. How much joy when I saw my dearest ones - my beautiful mother, my thin father, my sister Judita, and the one most precious to all of us, my brother, who was only ten years old then!

The Italians did not disturb us, but carabinieri often came to check whether everyone was present. We were hungry. My father's shop had been taken and he had no work, but thanks to good people we somehow survived.

In February 1942 there was a great winter. Snow fell so heavily that it was barely possible to move through town. One morning Bosa Bosnić, our liaison with the Partisans, arrived wrapped up. She brought a message that all SKOJ members must leave the town, because one platoon commander had surrendered to the Italians.

I found myself in a difficult situation. If I left, the Italians would carry out terrible reprisals against my family. If I stayed, I would surely be arrested, perhaps even shot as a communist.

My father noticed that I was upset. Worried, he called me into the room and asked what was happening. I told him everything, and without hesitation he said:

"Go, my daughter, and do not worry about us."

The next morning, after Mila informed the other SKOJ members, we left. At my father's recommendation I left the house without saying goodbye to anyone. He feared that someone under pressure might reveal where I had gone.

Dressed in ski outfits, Mila and I reached the exit guard post in February 1942, when a carabinieri came out and shouted:

"Signorine, dove andate?" ("Misses, where are you going?")

We said we were going to the village to obtain some food. They offered us money to buy them grappa (rakija), and we could hardly wait to get away from the guard post, so we answered:

“We will buy it, and you will give us the money when we return.”

We could barely move, sinking into deep snow, and somehow reached the Bosnić family. After a short rest, we had to go as far as possible from Drvar. We set out with Kosta (who was killed in the war and proclaimed a National Hero) to the remote mountain village of Gruborski Naslon, where the Partisan headquarters was located.

The first days with the Partisans were very difficult for us. We slept in village houses, where hygienic conditions were at the lowest level—no water, no electricity, no toilets, full of fleas, and sometimes lice. But we were satisfied because we were free, and for me especially, as a Jewess, there was no longer humiliation and abuse.

Sometimes villagers would go down into town and bring us news about the situation in Drvar. In that way I learned that my family was alive and well, and that after my departure the Italians had done nothing to them.

Thanks to my father’s composure and courage, everything passed without reprisals. That morning when we left, my father went to Mila Beoković’s father and proposed what they should do.

The next morning they went to the colonel (the commander) and, worried, said that they had sent the girls to the village to look for food and that we had not returned. Seeing how frightened Mila’s father was, my father whispered to him: “You be quiet, I will speak.”

My father spoke Ladino fairly well, and during the First World War on the Piave front he had learned a good deal of Italian, so he could communicate well with the commander. With great politeness he asked the colonel to search for us in the surrounding villages, because he feared that the Partisans might have captured us.

Sheltering with my parents were Mimo Atijas, son of Mazalta from Sanski Most, where my family had hidden in 1941, and Jozef Kabiljo from Prijedor. They collaborated with the Partisans, and the Italians arrested them and sent them to the camp on Rab island. Both survived the war.

In the summer of 1942 the Germans, with Ustaša assistance, attacked Kozara, the liberated territory from Prijedor toward Banja Luka. The Partisans fought bravely, but the stronger occupying forces managed to break the encirclement of Kozara fighters. Nevertheless, the main brigades heroically fought their way through to the liberated territory.

All of Kozara was burned. Many fighters and civilians were killed. Those who remained—mostly women, small children and the elderly—the Ustaša took to the camps at Gradiška and Jasenovac. A number of younger women were taken to Požega to work on farms.

Among them was Luna Levi with her one-year-old son Saša. His father, a merchant from Prijedor, had been killed by the Ustaša in 1941. They were housed in poor barracks and worked

in the fields all day, returning late, exhausted and worried as they looked at their sick and weakened children.

Hygienic conditions were very bad, and many children fell ill. Saša developed severe diarrhea, and Luna was concerned how to save her child. She made contact with a railway worker connected to the Red Cross. She handed the child over to him and, with great pain, separated from her only son.

In Zagreb there was an illegal organization led by a good elderly woman named Tatjana. She cooperated with the Red Cross and placed children who had been left without parents into good families as adoptions. She kept a secret list of these children and families so that later, if parents appeared, it would be known where the children were.

Saša was adopted by the Domačinović family—an architect—and Vinka, an actress. They knew nothing about the boy's origin. They suspected he was Jewish because he was circumcised. Once Saša became ill and they took him to a doctor. When the doctor examined him and saw that the boy was circumcised, he looked at the parents with a smile, made no comment, and finished the examination. Even then there were good people.

After the war, Luna found her child through the Red Cross. She experienced a joyful and sorrowful reunion with Saša, who came to her and looked at her warmly. The sorrow was that, on the advice of a social worker, she was not allowed to tell him immediately that she was his mother. Time and repeated contact were needed so that it would be easier for him when he learned the truth.

When she would come, Saša would run up and shout:

“Aunt Luna has come!”

She would hug him, kiss him, hold him close, with pain in her heart because she still could not say: Saša, my son, I am your mother.

That day finally came. Strangely, when he learned, he looked at both mothers—mother Vinka and mother Luna—sat in Luna's lap and gazed for a long time.

Luna had lost all members of her family. She first had to settle somewhere, find work, and only then bring Saša. After finishing elementary school, he came to Sarajevo to live with mother Luna. But it was also very difficult for Saša to adjust to the new environment. He was torn between mother Luna and mother Vinka. He often went to Zagreb and was always warmly received by the Domačinović family.

Saša graduated from the Faculty of Architecture and lives in Israel with his wife Laura, his son Benjamin, and his daughter Lora. Luna died sometime around 1986.

I remember the winter of 1943. In Bosanska Krajina winters are long and snowy. I was crossing the Grmeč mountain pass with the Tenth Krajina Brigade. A major German offensive was underway from Banija toward Krajina.

The people fled over the mountains to escape, because everyone was being killed indiscriminately: women, children, the elderly, the sick—no distinction was made between fighters and civilians.

In a small hollow we came upon a family sitting around an extinguished fire. We approached and saw frozen people, children. The hardest thing for me was to see the small children sitting in their parents' laps, with lifeless little eyes, as if seeking help.

The enemy passed through Drvar and left the town burned and devastated. My brigade entered Drvar, and we were all shaken as we saw the burned and destroyed houses, and the people descending from the hills back into their town.

I passed by our house and saw, in front of the door of our former shop, a boy sitting bent over, his face not visible. I approached and saw—it was my little brother Moric.

“What are you doing here, my dear brother?”

“I'm waiting for Mama and Papa,” he answered.

I saw his swollen face, his frostbitten feet. I quickly took him to the Vođević family and we gave him first aid. Through military channels I informed my parents, who had also fled. They soon arrived and cared for him.

Now my brother told me what had happened.

We knew that Germans, Ustaša and Chetniks were advancing toward Drvar. The people fled into the forests, and the fighters with the wounded moved toward Šator Mountain. Everyone from Drvar fled toward nearby mountain villages.

Mama and Papa fled. Slavko Rodić (a surveyor from Drvar, a National Hero), commander of a unit, took Moric with him, wanting to protect him from the enemy attack.

Fierce battles were fought, but the wounded made fighting difficult. Youth carried the wounded, and often, because of ice and winter, they would slip with the wounded down cliffs into ravines.

Moric told me:

“A great confusion arose. I remained in one house, while the others scattered. The Germans came and were surprised to see such a small boy among the fighters...”

“...I had a camera under my jacket with photographs of fighters and battles. I knew some German, and in the units there were also Volksdeutsche from Vojvodina who spoke Serbian. I

asked to go to the toilet. In the village there were no toilets, so people went into the field or forest. I went a little farther and threw away the camera.

The Germans asked my name; I said Marinko. They asked where my parents were and where I was from. I made the mistake of saying I was from Drvar. The Germans handed me over to the Chetniks to return me to Drvar.

When I arrived in Drvar, the Grahovo Chetniks handed me to the Germans. The commander immediately liked me because I resembled his son. He showed his picture—he was the same age as me. I worked in the kitchen.

When the Drvar Chetniks came, they recognized me and said: ‘What Marinko? That is the Jew’s son, and all of his family are with the Partisans.’

The commander said I was under his protection and that no one was allowed even to touch me. Protected like that, I stayed with them until the Germans withdrew from Drvar.

When I saw them packing and preparing to leave, I went into the basement and hid behind a cast-iron stove. I heard them calling: ‘Marinko, Marinko, wo bist du?’

When everything became quiet, I came out of the building and, barely able to walk, made my way to our house. I waited for Mama and Papa. I was very happy when I saw you with the Partisans.”

In May 1944 an airborne assault was carried out on Drvar, where the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army was located, led by Tito. Gliders and paratroopers landed in Drvar and in the surrounding fields. All of them carried Tito’s picture with the order: capture Tito alive or dead!

Bloody battles were fought. German soldiers and paratroopers machine-gunned everything in their path. The Partisans defended the Supreme Headquarters and drove the Germans back to the town cemetery, surrounding them.

During their retreat toward the cemetery, the Germans forced mostly women and children in front of them as a human shield, intending to prevent Partisan attacks.

My parents fled to the village of Bastasi, three kilometers from Drvar. Here is how my mother described the assault:

“...In the Seventh Offensive, during the Drvar assault, my Davo and I were in a trench with several others from Bastasi. We heard the speech of the paratroopers—they were only a few meters from our trench. We expected that at any moment they would come and kill us.

We were saved by a puddle of water nearby. They did not want to step into the water. They went in another direction and did not find our trench.

When we saw there were no more paratroopers nearby, we fled toward the village of Kamenica. Bombs were falling around us, shooting everywhere.

At one moment I looked up and, high on the rock, I saw a spring flower, nasturtium. I picked it and promised myself: if I remain alive, I will grow that beautiful flower. That flower was something beautiful in that terrible situation, something like a sign of life..."

(Jewish Review, no. 5–6, Belgrade, May–June 1981)

In the spring of 1943 I became seriously ill and was withdrawn from the brigade to work in the liberated territory. We called it liberated because we had authority there and there were no enemy troops, though the enemy often raided and killed activists and officials of various organizations.

When I arrived in the field, it was necessary to form people's liberation committees, youth and women's organizations. The goal was for organized authority to function in the liberated territory. Schools and literacy courses were established, cultural life developed, fields were cultivated to feed fighters and civilians.

Most men were at the front, so these tasks were largely carried out by young women, women and the elderly. I was in the leadership of Party, youth and women's organizations.

We often traveled alone, on foot, from village to village. We avoided roads because the enemy would suddenly raid villages. There were so-called "troikas" (small groups of Germans or Chetniks) who hid in the forest and attacked villages.

In 1943 my friend Mileva Rodić and I were walking across Petrovačko field toward neighboring villages. We walked slowly, without speaking, holding hands, in pitch darkness. Suddenly we saw something shining and fading near the ground. We thought it was the enemy smoking. We stopped, breathless, and quickly lay down in the grass.

Then, from the direction of Petrovac, where the Germans had a garrison, a searchlight turned on. It swept across the field and we saw that there was no one ahead of us. It warned us that we were very close to the Germans and that by sheer luck we had avoided stumbling into their nest. The flickering had been from a small July firefly.

Frightened and exhausted, we reached the village.

Walking on, I came to a mill on a stream and entered to rest. The miller suddenly pulled me by the arm, signaled me to be silent, and hid me behind sacks of grain. I heard voices, people entering the mill, and the words:

"Has our grain been milled?"

They were Chetniks from neighboring villages. They loaded the flour and left. The miller said:

“I saw them coming down the hill, and that is why I hid you so quickly.”

Those were moments when I could have been caught and killed.

The villages I visited were Partisan villages. Everyone loved me, especially the children. When they saw me entering a village, they would run out to meet me with our greeting:

“Death to fascism!”

The villagers found my name hard to pronounce, so they called me Radmila, which was my Partisan name. I wore peasant folk clothing and did not differ from local girls.

Before the liberation of Travnik, SKOJ members from the town knew that in the SKOJ Committee there was a young woman. During the liberation of the town in autumn 1944, they rushed through the town to find clothing for me.

When we met, they gave me completely urban clothes: beautiful underwear, which made me happiest, because since 1941 I had not had anything like that; a sweater, cloth, and other items. And what joy when I held a bar of toilet soap in my hand—something that for us Partisan women had been only a concept.

In the spring of 1943 I walked from Drvar to villages near Bihać, along the valley of the Una River. It was a wonderful spring day. Everything was in bloom. The earth smelled fresh, giving the first signs of awakening.

Along the Una stretched the most beautiful carpet of greenery and blossoming wildflowers. Near the end of the path, closer to a ditch, I saw a beautiful cluster of potato flowers. I stopped, looked, and wondered: who planted potatoes along the road?

A peasant approached and said:

“I see you are looking at these potatoes. This is a monument to a boy,” and he began to tell the story.

In February 1943, when the enemy attacked our region, the people fled in all directions. A mother from Banija with several small children, exhausted and frozen, came to our village. She entered the first abandoned house at night to shelter from the cold and ice. On the floor there were many scattered potatoes. The householders had fled in haste and spilled them while escaping.

In the morning the mother took a handful of potatoes, as many as she could carry, and stuffed one or two into each child’s pockets, believing she would find somewhere safer where she could give the children at least one proper meal.

They set out, and one boy, exhausted, fell and died on the road.

The villagers who had fled would creep back at night to check the situation, and when the enemy withdrew, they returned to the village. They found the frozen boy. They buried him quickly right where he had died, because they feared another enemy raid.

In the spring, when the snow melted, from the potatoes in the boy's pocket grew that beautiful cluster of potato flowers.

A similar case happened in the village of Cvjetnići near Drvar. I was in the house of a kind old president of the AFŽ (Women's Antifascist Front), Milica Pilipović. Snow kept falling and blocking the village road. Many refugees from Banija struggled through deep snowdrifts.

Milica's daughter-in-law suddenly ran into the house carrying something wrapped in rags, shouting excitedly:

“Look what I found at the fountain!”

She unwrapped the rags—and there was an infant, only a few months old. It was barely breathing, turning blue.

The owner quickly slaughtered a sheep and placed the little girl into the bloody sheepskin to warm her. Since they had no pacifier, they took a clean soft cloth, dipped it in milk, and the child began to suck.

With great patience and love they raised the little girl, whom they named Nađenka Nežnanović—“Foundling Unknown.”

After the war they learned through the Red Cross that her mother was from a village in Banija and had perished with her children somewhere in the ravines of Bosnia.

Often children were lost, wandering through villages naked, hungry and terrified.

When I was with my brigade in the winter of 1943 near Grahovo, I gathered eleven small children and sheltered them in the brigade hospital, although it was a great burden for the unit. At the first opportunity, when the wounded were being sent to Lika, I sent my little ones to a children's home.

In March 1945 I was in the surrounding villages of Travnik and Jajce. I was informed by the command of Travnik to go out to the railway station, because my sister Judita would arrive by the narrow-gauge train (the Partisan “ćiro”). I was happy at the prospect of seeing my sister, whom I had not seen for almost two years.

I came to the station in Donji Vakuf. I waited impatiently for the train. I heard the whistle of the “ćiro,” the train stopped, and I quickly boarded. I saw my beautiful sister Judita in a military uniform. She had become older, more mature, a true soldier.

Beside her sat a boy of about four years old—frightened, thin, covered in scabs from scabies. I looked at his beautiful little black eyes, sunken into their sockets because he was so thin that only those lovely but sad eyes stood out on his face. I kissed him, but he pulled away from me.

My sister told me his story.

Our uncle Jako and aunt Rena were killed in the village of Hrvaćani near Prnjavor by Chetniks and Circassians who were part of the German forces. The boy's father, Šalom Mito, was killed in 1942 by Chetniks as a fighter in the National Liberation Struggle. His mother Matilda was taken to the Jasenovac camp when she went to Banja Luka seeking medicine for her sick son Moric.

When his grandmother Rena was murdered, little Morickan was sleeping upstairs. Hearing her screams, he came down and saw his grandmother covered in blood. He screamed and called for her.

A neighbor heard him, ran in, and saw what had happened. She took Morickan and brought him to her home. She hid him and at the first opportunity went to Prnjavor and handed him to the mother of the Jewish pharmacist Finkelštajn. The pharmacist himself had already gone to the Partisans.

Not much time passed before another shock came. The town of Prnjavor often changed hands between the Partisans and the enemy. During one raid by Germans and Circassians, they killed the pharmacist's elderly mother and burned the house.

A young man heard the child's cries from the burning house. Through the window (the house was one-story) he jumped in, grabbed the child, and threw him out into the grass.

When Judita asked Morickan what happened at the pharmacist grandmother's, he answered:

“There was a big fire, and an apprentice jumped in and threw me into the grass.”

For him the young man was an “apprentice,” because in his grandfather's shop apprentices were that age.

The AFŽ organization hid little Moric in various houses, in basements. From all these shocks, Moric became mute. Whoever approached him, he would struggle and cry.

Judita's unit liberated Prnjavor and heard about the death of our relatives and about the only surviving little Moric. She found him, and because she was in a uniform, he began to cry, scream, and struggle. She offered him candies. He stretched out his little hand and greedily began to eat. It took much patience and time for him to understand that this “aunt soldier” wanted only good for him.

As soon as the unit moved to another position, they took little Moric with them. The military tailor sewed him a small scarf and a Partisan cap, and so he became the youngest Partisan of the National Liberation Army.

They had to march a great deal, moving from battle to battle, so they placed the little Partisan in a basket hung from a saddle. Thanks to the brigade commander, who showed great love toward the child even though he was a great burden for the unit, he gave Judita an escort of soldiers to take Morickan to Sanski Most, where our parents were.

Little Moric had only just become attached to Aunt Judita and the fighters, when once again he arrived in an unfamiliar environment. The love and care of new acquaintances—grandmother Luna and grandfather David—quickly freed little Moric from fear.

Once, while playing with children, someone shouted:

“Jew, you killed Jesus!”

Poor child, he knew nothing of any Jesus, but he knew only that the Ustaša were killers. He answered:

“It wasn’t me, it was the Ustaša who killed him.”

He grew up with my parents, was educated, and knew no other parents, only grandmother Luna and grandfather David.

Moric today has his own family: his wife Vida, his son Šalom Mito, and his daughter Matilda. We all called him Morickan because in the family there was already one Moric—our brother. He lives in Belgrade.

My entire family participated in the National Liberation Struggle. My father worked for a time in the Supply Department of the Supreme Headquarters. My mother held courses in villages on hygiene, cooking, and raising children, and all the women gladly accepted her advice.

My oldest sister Flora was in the National Liberation Committee of Drvar and the Women’s Antifascist Front. My younger sister Judita was in the surgical team of the Supreme Headquarters and survived the bloodiest battles on the Sutjeska in 1943.

My brother Moric, although still a child, was a courier in the Fifth Corps and a photographer in the propaganda department.

I was a fighter in the Tenth Krajina Brigade and worked as a political field organizer. I am a holder of the 1941 Commemorative Medal and of a Charter for Lifetime Achievement of general significance for the development of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although we were all in great danger, we survived. It was the only Jewish family in Bosnia and Herzegovina that fought in the National Liberation Struggle and whose every member survived.

My parents returned to Sarajevo, and our home in Mali Alifakovac became a warm refuge for all of us, and especially for relatives returning from camps and exile. Many found no one of their own family left, and my parents offered them comfort and hope for a better tomorrow.

My father died in 1973 and my mother in 1983.

After the war we all continued our education. Judita graduated in agronomy, Moric in forestry, pilot school, becoming a reserve air force major, little Morickan at electro-technical school.

I completed the Higher Pedagogical Academy and taught history.

I often remembered my history teacher Mišković and tried to be better than him, because he truly was inhumane. I defended Roma students if anyone tried to insult them with derogatory words, and they were very grateful.

I obtained scholarships for a student Razija and a student Ramadan. Razija finished teacher training school, and Ramadan finished music school.

My brother, and we three sisters married and founded our own families...

Flora married Duško Simić, an officer of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and a writer; their sons are Vladimir and Danilo.

Rahela married Ilija Perišić, an officer of the Yugoslav People's Army, a lieutenant-general of the air force; their sons are Simo, Predrag and Miljenko.

Judita married Veljko Krivokuća, head of the sales network of TAM; their daughter is Tatjana.

Moric's wife is Rahela Maestro; their son is David.

A large number of members of our family, on both my father's and my mother's side—about seventy-two people—perished in camps, were killed by the Ustaša or by Chetniks.

We remember them with pain. We remember, but we will never forget the crimes committed against our family and the six million Jews murdered in the Second World War, especially today, when fascism and antisemitism have risen again.