

DESTRUCTION



The Kohns of 27 Gospodar Jovanova

“After the Germans came, my mother told Lenka Koen’s son Isak, ‘Go join the Partisans! I will go with you to the woods and you can save yourself.’ Mother helped Isak get to the forest, but imagine, he came back! They caught him. My great Uncle Josip was taken away almost immediately. Then they came for everyone else in the family. No one survived.”



The Kalefs of 5 Gospodar Jovanova

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



The Kalefs of 4 Skenderbegova Street

“Avram and Vukica with Stella Darsi (nee Kalef), Josko Kalef, Regina Eskenazi (nee Kalef).”

Aunt Elica (not pictured) got married, had a baby and they were transported from Belgrade. Since she knew she was going to die she threw her baby, Avram, out the train window. We never knew what happened to the baby.

This photo of a baby was taken in Belgrade in 1937; he’s Josko and Rasela Kalef’s son, who was also named Avram. Little Avram was forced into a camp with his mother Rasela where they were both murdered. Josko was shot. Regina survived because she married a Bulgarian Jew and moved to Sofia.”



The Kalefs of 3 Gospodar Jovanova

“Father was crippled. He sent us away but his mother would not leave him. They were transferred to the Jewish hospital. We were already living on false papers and mother tried to bring us to see them in March, 1942. But the street was blocked off. No one could get near and they were throwing people into a truck. We could just see the feet climbing up. My father couldn’t walk. They either threw him in with his wheelchair or maybe without it. Those were the gas trucks, we found out later.”

RESCUE



“In Banovo Brdo mother asked a Catholic priest, Andrej Tumpej, to take us in. He gave us false documents and we lived next to the church with nuns. He even made it possible for us to go to school, but the school director obviously understood since we had no transfer papers. Father Tumpej was a man in the true sense of the word and my sister and I saw to it that he received a Righteous Gentile award. After the war, Breda, whose real name was Rahel, said she could not change her name back because, “Father Tumpej didn’t just give me a name, he gave me a life.” And when I got married, I told my fiancé the only person I would allow to marry us was Father Tumpej.”

“During the war, my sister and I sang in the church choir, and Father Tumpej kept telling Breda, “You have an exceptional voice. You should be a singer!” She took his advice. Breda Kalef became one of the most famous opera singers in Yugoslavia.”



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



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

Centropa is a non-profit Jewish historical institute with offices in Vienna, Hamburg, Budapest and Washington, DC. Between 2000 and 2009 we interviewed 1,200 elderly Jews living in fifteen European countries. We never used video in those interviews; instead, we digitized 22,000 of their old family pictures and asked our respondents to tell us stories about the entire century, just as they lived it.

We began our educational programs in 2005 and we now work in nearly five hundred schools in nineteen countries. Our twin goals are to preserve Jewish memory and to bring history to life. We are committed to telling stories and sharing stories. Feel free to be in touch.

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THE KALEFS OF BELGRADE



THE KALEFS OF BELGRADE



In 1927, a twenty-year-old Catholic Slovene, Antonija Ograjensek, was visiting relatives in Belgrade. That's where she met Avram Kalef, a Sephardic Jew. Antonija found him funny and charming and she didn't care about his being confined to a wheelchair. Avram was drawn to Atonija's warmth and he didn't care that she wasn't Jewish. Hence the wedding picture above.

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

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

THE FOUR KALEF SIBLINGS



GOSPODAR JOVANOVA 3

"Matilda married Nisim Kalef and they lived at Gospodar Jovanova 3. They had three sons but Nisim and two sons died. Matilda's surviving son Avram had enormous health problems. Aside from diabetes, he suffered from a muscular degenerative disease."



GOSPODAR JOVANOVA 5

"Jakov Kalef married Lenka Almozlino, and with his sister Matilda, ran the family store. He was a leader in the Jewish community and sometimes sang as cantor in the synagogue. He and Lenka had two sons, Mile and David."

THE KALEF FAMILY STORE



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

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



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

THE FOUR KALEF SIBLINGS



GOSPODAR JOVANOVA 27

"Lenka Kalef married Josip Koen. Their children were Isak, Marko, Maci, Elica (Rahela) and they lived a few streets away."



VISOKOG STEVANA STREET 4

"Avram and Vukica had three children. Josko married Rasela and had a child Avram. Regina married a Bulgarian Jewish man and moved to Sofia."



BREDA AND MATILDA KALEF



"I was born in 1929 at home. My mother had gone to a hospital to have me, got scared, and came home. I was born premature by two months and I was told they rubbed me in goose fat wrapped me in cotton and Grandmother put me near the stove. That's how it was before there were incubators. My sister was born in a hospital in 1931. My sister and I fought all the time, like so many children do. My sister really did want to take the stage, which, in fact, she did after war."

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