Josef Baruhovic With His Sister Rahela During The War At Their Maternal Aunt's House In Mostar

My sister Seli and I playing in the garden of our Aunt Erna in Mostar during the war. The photo was taken in 1942.

A month or two before the war began, my mother, sister and I moved from Zagreb to Sarajevo.

My father was in the army and my mother wanted to be with her family. At the beginning we stayed with my mother's sister, Esperanza, in the center of Sarajevo.

From her apartment, near the large Cathedral, about 10 meters up the hill, I could see the Ustashe destroying and looting what was perhaps the most beautiful synagogue in the Balkans.

Esperanza was taken to the Jasenovac or Gradiska concentration camp where she was killed.

Once the Ustashe took over and the threat of danger increased, we left this apartment and moved in with another one of my mother's sisters who lived a bit further out of town.

Very soon sanctions against the Jews began. At first, a curfew was enforced for Jews (from 7 or 8pm) and we had to wear yellow badges in the shape of the letter Z (Zido = Jew).

Commissars were entrusted to control Jewish property, basically to ensure that the Jews did not try to sell their property.

One day my mother's sister, aunt Erna, sent her Catholic Croatian servant from Mostar to Sarajevo to bring me to Mostar where she and her husband lived.

We travelled by train and since I was so small no one asked any questions. A week later my aunt sent a taxi from Mostar to Sarajevo to pick up my mother and sister and bring them to Mostar.

Of course, she had to pay for these interventions. My aunt and uncle did a great mitzvah during the war.

They saved and helped many Jews, and at one point there must have been twenty of us living with them. That is how we came to Mostar, which was a relatively liveable town under Italian control.

The Italians were entirely different from the Ustashe and their treatment of the Jews was much better and more humane. We had freedom to move around and we did not have to wear the yellow Z.