

ELI TAUBER

**WHEN NEIGHBORS  
WERE REAL HUMAN BEINGS**

Revised Edition, 2016

Eli Tauber  
WHEN NEIGHBORS WERE REAL HUMAN BEINGS  
Revised Edition

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# Introduction

In 2004, I started conducting research on the topic of Jews saved during WWII. This was a personal exercise – my own mother, Ester, was snuck out of Sarajevo disguised as a young Muslim girl. Decades after my own mother’s escape I found myself in Israel, after my own family sought refuge from the bombing of our city, Sarajevo. It was during this time period that I met the woman who saved my mother’s life. Decades later she was coming to Israel to be recognized by Yad Vashem. When she called I knew who she was right away. It is safe to say this meeting changed my life.

In 2004 my wife Mirjam and I moved back to Sarajevo. One afternoon I was visiting the Jewish Museum and realized there was nothing written about people who saved Jews during World War II. I spoke with the manager who told me if I collected materials they would make a permanent exhibit. Working with Yad Vashem we finally opened the exhibit in 2008; at the same time Sarajevo hosted a conference about genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and around the world.

I chose the title *Kada Su Komšije Bile Ljudi/When Neighbors Were Real Human Beings* because the acts portrayed in the stories that follow reflect the meaning of the Bosnian neighborhood as it existed for centuries. The word *komšiluk* (pronounced kom-shee-look) originates from the Turkish word *komşuluk* and most closely translates to *neighborhood*. However this translation is inadequate because in Bosnia and Herzegovina *komšiluk* is not limited to a shared space but encompasses sharing one’s *life* - as in one’s worries, hopes, fears, meals, rituals of birth and death, and of course coffee drinking.<sup>1</sup> *Komšiluk* functions as local community and is governed by voluntary decisions of individual persons to participate in it or not.

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<sup>1</sup> The coffee drinking ritual constitutes one of the most important social practices in Bosnia and includes everything from socializing and dating to business transactions.

Information about Jewish neighborhoods in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Jewish history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jewish material and non-material heritage, were indisputably and irretrievably lost in the Holocaust. The cities of Sarajevo, Cazin and Zvornik experienced particular devastation. However despite the risk to their own lives and their families, there are stories of people who took action to help, a large number of whom (in what is today Bosnia and Herzegovina) were Muslim. We also know there were many more people who saved Jews but for whom we don't have information. About 4,000 Jews survived from Bosnia, about 35 percent of the population. They survived because people helped them to survive.

Eli Tauber

Edited by  
Rebecca Nathanson

## A Note

*Excerpted from Stephen Schwartz's article "New Light on Bosnian Jews During World War II," The Huffington Post, April 16, 2016.*

There is more to learn about the Bosnian Jews and their Muslim neighbors during World War II. In 2010, Eli Tauber, a Sarajevan whose mother was Sephardic and father was Ashkenazi, published a book titled *When Neighbors Were Real Human Beings*. Issued by the University of Sarajevo with the authorization of the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, the volume exists in English and Bosnian language editions and describes the actions of "Righteous Among the Nations" - Bosnians who rescued Jews during the war.

Such individuals are memorialized at Yad Vashem. As described by Tauber, they included a number of Bosnian Muslims. His chronicle enumerates 47 Bosnians who saved Jews, of which 25 bear identifiably Muslim names.



# Righteous Among the Nations Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## THE STORY OF HOW ZLATA WAS ADOPTED FOREVER

File 4684

**BEGIC, MAURICETTE**

**BEGIC, MIDHAT**



Mauricette Sullerot met her husband Midhat Begic when he was working as a teacher in Paris. Although from different faith backgrounds (Midhat was Muslim and Mauricette not), the couple married in 1939 and moved to Sarajevo where they had two children. In Sarajevo they lived opposite the Papo family, a Jewish family who had two children the same age as theirs. The two families quickly became good friends and spent a lot of time together.

When the war broke out Midhat was recruited into the Croatian army. Simultaneously he became involved with the clandestine Yugoslavian underground. In early 1942, Leon Papo was taken away to Jasenovac, from which he never returned. With both husbands absent, the Papo and Begic women helped each other. Mrs. Georgina Papo, who had sent her oldest daughter to live with relatives, had Mauricette look after her baby Zlata when she had to go run errands.

On one particular day when Georgina did not return to pick up Zlata, Mauricette went to her apartment and found her unconscious on the floor. Coincidentally Midhat was home at the time and immediately took his neighbor to the hospital. The doctors refused to treat Georgina because she was a Jew but Midhat persevered and only managed to get her hospitalized after his friends intervened. Nevertheless, a few days later she died.

Before Georgina died, Mauricette promised her that she would take care of Zlata if anything should happen. In following her promise, the Begic's picked up Zlata and all of her belongings and took her back to their home where she was treated as one of their own.

In 1944, the Begics joined Tito's Partisans and left their children along with Zlata, with neighbors. After the war they officially adopted Zlata, waiting until she turned fifteen to tell her about her real parents. Zlata went on to adopt the surname Begic-Papo. The Begic family later moved to France with Zlata who went on to marry a Jewish man named Marszak.

On February 27, 1991, Yad Vashem recognized Mauricette Begic and her husband Midhat Begic as Righteous Among the Nations.

## BOGLJUB AND LJUBA'S BRAVERY

File 7968a

**BLAGOJEVIC, LJUBA**  
**STEVANOVIC, BOGOLJUB**



Before the war Aron Hajon, a Jewish salesman, lived with his wife and four children in Zvornik where he managed a department store. In 1939 Hajon and his family moved to Belgrade where he continued in the same line of work.

When the war broke out in April 1941 Hajon's sons, Emil and Izidor, were taken as hostages in response to attacks carried out against the Germans – both boys were executed. Hajon knew that he and the rest of his family would be taken as well, so he began to look for ways to escape from Belgrade. He was aware that many residents of Bosnia had managed to acquire refugee papers after reporting that their original documents had been lost or destroyed. He started to look for Bosnians

who would act as witnesses in order to assist him in obtaining such papers. His daughter Matilda then remembered her old school friend from Zvornik who before the war had moved to Belgrade.

One day in mid-1941, Hajon showed up at the home of Bogoljub Stevanovic, the father of his daughter's friend, and explained his predicament. Stevanovic knew the risk he would be taking if he lied in order to help a Jew obtain documents. Despite this, he went with Hajon to his friend Ljuba Blagojevic, also originally from Zvornik, who agreed to go with them to the war refugee office. There under oath, both men attested that they knew Aca Markovic, Hajon's borrowed alias, as a Bosnian Serb from Zvornik who like them, was a refugee in the city.

As a result of Stevanovic and Blagojevic's testimonies, Hajon received the documents he needed for his wife Sofija and his daughters Juliana and Matilda. Equipped with the papers the family escaped as refugees to Nis, where they spent the rest of their time during the war.

After the war the family remained in Nis. Juliana later married and continued living in Nis and Matilda immigrated to Canada. Both of the men that helped these Jews never received compensation and kept in contact with Hajon and his family.

On February 25, 1998, Yad Vashem recognized Ljuba Blagojevic and Bogoljub Stevanovic as Righteous Among the Nations.

## THE VILLAGE OF SAFETY

File 3955

**BOZIC, MARKO**



Josef Sinkovic-Singer, a wealthy and pious Jew, lived in Osijek, Croatia with his wife Lotti and their daughter Ruzica. When the Germans conquered the area in 1941, the Ustasha took control of the city. The Ustasha was especially concerned with appropriating Jewish property. Since wealthy Jews were due to be the first victims Sinkovic-Singer turned to a Croatian acquaintance and asked him to help him and his family flee the city. In return for a lot

of money, this man took the Jewish family to a Croatian village. However, upon arriving the Sinkovic-Singers discovered that the majority of the residents of this village were anti-Semitic and supporters of the new Croatian regime. The family decided to move on.

Sinkovic-Singer then turned to the anti-Nazi movement that he had been in contact with in the past, and after a few days Marko Bozic, a village farmer, was sent by the movement to help. After walking for a few hours Bozic arrived with the Jewish family to the village of Stojanovici, where Bozic lived with his wife and two children. The village was isolated and hidden in the mountains and had only eight families living there. All were friendly with each other and wanted to help the Sinkovic-Singer family. The refugees were hidden safely in the attic of the Bozic's home. In fact, the village was so isolated that the villagers did not understand who was fighting who or why the Jews were persecuted.

Whilst in hiding there Sinkovic-Singer taught the local children reading and writing while informing the villagers about the war. Lotti, his wife, taught the women new recipes. Ruzica, the daughter, played with the local children and dressed as they all did.

After a while the Germans and their local accomplices began to search more intensely for Partisans. Suddenly the isolated village of Stojanovici was in danger of persecution for harboring Jews. However, all the residents gathered and agreed to carry on hiding the family. Towards the end of the war Sinkovic-Singer fell ill, and died. His remains were buried in the village.

In 1945 Lotti and Ruzica moved to Zavidovici and from there to Sarajevo. Ruzica (later Shoshana Arad) immigrated to Israel with Youth Aliyah and her mother followed shortly afterwards. Even from Israel the mother and daughter maintained contact with the Bozics.

On February 22, 1989, Yad Vashem recognized Marko Bozic as Righteous Among the Nations.

# THE STORY OF ANDJELKA AND HER FAMILY

File 6920

**BRKIC, ANDJELKA**



**BRKIC, BORISLAV**

Andjelka Brkic, from the village of Posusje in Herzegovina, became a widow in 1932. Subsequently, she moved with her two young sons to Sarajevo. After a short time she met Joseph Finci, the only son of a wealthy and respected Jewish family that owned the “Jonekla” steel factory. The two soon fell in love and wanted to get married. Joseph’s parents were not happy that their

son wanted to marry a widowed non-Jewish woman with two children, something that was against the family’s Sephardic tradition, but this did not deter the couple’s engagement.

When the war broke out in April 1941, Joseph enlisted in the army and when the army disbanded he returned to Sarajevo, to his fiancé’s home. A short time later the prohibitions against Jews commenced and Joseph, concerned about his family, decided to relocate them to a safer place. Joseph’s father was adamant that the family would not come into harm because of the business relationship he had with the German Ministry of Trade, so he was in no hurry to flee. By the time he realized that he and his family should run away it was too late. The Finci’s were among the first group of wealthy Jews deported to Jasenovac, from where they never returned.

Joseph was determined to save his sisters Klara and Nela and their families after struggling to equip them with the appropriate docu-

ments. When Klara and her family were arrested, Joseph asked Andjelka to help save his other sister Nela from deportation. Joseph then went into hiding with them in Andjelka's apartment whilst she made contact with a Muslim acquaintance that obtained false papers for him. This process took two weeks to accomplish. At the end of 1942, Nela, her husband Daniel Ovadia and their children- six-year-old Perla and four-year-old Mordechai - as well as Daniel's sister Sida Demayo and her daughter, were ready to escape to Dubrovnik.

The group of Jews made their journey to Dubrovnik dressed in traditional Muslim clothing including head coverings and, for extra safety Andjelka placed the two families on separate carriages on the same train. After passing through checks in an Ustasha controlled area to one in the Italian occupied zone, they arrived in Dubrovnik. Andjelka made this journey with them and with her two children in tow. When the families had arrived safely at their destination she returned with her children to Sarajevo.

Later the situation for Jews deteriorated in Sarajevo as deportations and arrests increased daily. Joseph, who was still hiding in Andjelka's home, found himself in danger. Andjelka and her two children, in particular Borislav, sometimes moved Joseph to an alternative hideout. However, one day, the Ustasha burst into the home after receiving information about a Jew hiding there and arrested Joseph and Andjelka. While Andjelka was in jail, her children were home alone. Borislav, aged fourteen at the time, looked after his sibling. A neighbor sometimes invited them over for a meal. Six weeks later their mother came home but Joseph was sent to Jasenovac and never returned.

After the war Nela and her family returned to Sarajevo. She made contact with the Brkics and remained in touch with them until she died. Later on, Andjelka's children moved to the United States.

Nela's children and grandchildren immigrated to Israel in 1992.

On January 3, 1992, Yad Vashem recognized Andjelka Brkic and her son, Borislav Brkic as Righteous Among the Nations.



## TWO EMPLOYEES WHO SAVED THE BOSS

File: 8948

**SOBER DRAGOJE ROZA**

File: 8948 A

**BESIREVIC ZEKIRA**



This story takes place in Sarajevo, which was under Ustasha management, and under the control of the Gestapo, which issued anti-Jewish orders right after arriving in Bosnia in April 1941.

Gracia Djamonja (from the Kamhi family) was born in year 1921. She completed high school and started working as a teacher in her uncle Mordo Albahari's fashion house. She had befriended two non-Jewish workers who also worked there Roza, a Catholic and Zekira, a Muslim. Meanwhile, conditions of life for Jews in Sarajevo were getting harder and harder every day. From the very first day they wore yellow ribbons, went to mandatory work, and then the deportations started. The Ustasha broke into Jewish homes at night, dragged them to the Jewish community center, from where they sent them to the concentration camps Jasenovac and Djakovo.

One night the Ustasha picked up the Kamhi family. Only Gracia and uncle Mordo managed to avoid the arrest by hiding between two walls in their big apartment. Roza and Zekira heard the raid starting and

ran quickly to the house to see if they could help them. They saw the Ustasha taking away Gracia's mother and cousins. As they got closer, Gracia's mother managed to whisper, "they are upstairs." The two girls waited until the Ustasha went away then ran upstairs to save Gracia and her uncle.

They took them carefully to their house. At the same time, it was announced that the locals could be trustees for Jewish shops and businesses. Zekira has asked to be trustee for the fashion house Albahari. Her request was approved and she got the commission over the shop. Together with Roza, she then transferred Gracia and uncle Albahari to the shop. During the day they were hidden, and in the night they could move freely and eat food the girls brought to them. During the few months spent there uncle Albahari managed to acquire false documents, which would allow them to transfer to Mostar, a city south of Sarajevo that was under Italian control.

Their first attempt at escape failed but after a successful second attempt, they sent false documents to Gracia's mother and ten year-old brother. Later, Gracia and her uncle were transferred together to the camp on the island Rab, in the Italian occupied zone. In 1943, after the capitulation of Italy, and the transfer of Italian territory to the Nazis, both joined the Partisans.

Through the Partisans, Gracia befriended another woman who also escaped from Sarajevo with help of Roza Sober Dragoje. In Gracia's own words,

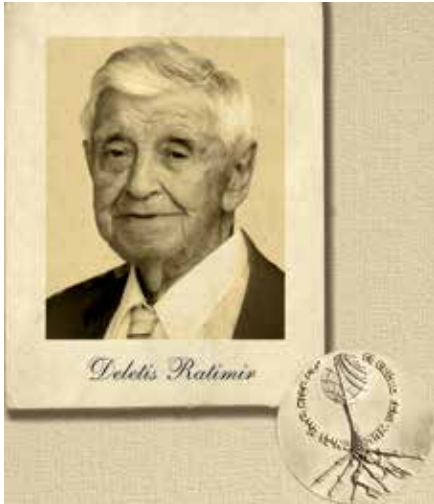
"These two women, Roza Sober Dragoje and Zekira Besirevic have done everything to save us and the members of my family. They brought food to my aunt and grandmother, who stayed in Sarajevo after most of the family left."

On May 28, 2000, Yad Vashem recognized Zekira Besirevic and Sober Dragoje Roza as Righteous Among the Nations.

# THE SCHINDLER OF TUZLA

File 3859

**DELETIS, RATIMIR**



Before WWII, Serbs, Muslims, Croats, and Jews lived alongside each other in Tuzla. When the Germans invaded in 1941, the once friendly population became divided and the Jews found themselves outcast and facing real danger.

Ratimir Deletis, a lawyer who had been a judge in the local court before the war, lived in Tuzla. When the war broke out he was appointed to the state attorney's office and in this capacity realized he could

help save lives.

Among the Jews taken hostage, in retaliation for attacks on Germans, were David Domany and his brother. Domany's wife turned to Deletis for help, who decided to try to have the prisoners released using a formal method. Deletis requested that the law court adjourn. There, using his rhetoric skills and legal brilliance, Deletis managed to persuade the Ustasha to release all 25 hostages.

On January 14, 1942, the Ustasha announced that they were going to send all the Jews from Tuzla and Travnik to concentration camps. Only those Jews who had official exemptions would be able to remain in the cities, and these exemption certificates, which could only be acquired through the mediation of Croats, required relationships with the leadership in Zagreb.

Deletis decided to try rescuing some Jews already incarcerated and

awaiting transport to Jasenovac. Deletis headed to Zagreb in order to talk with Kvaternik, the head of the Ustasha Security Services, in order to persuade him to abolish his plan to deport the Jews from his city. Before making this trip, Deletis turned to one of the leaders of the Ustasha in Tuzla, a highly influential man and the friend of Pavelic, the head of the Ustasha. Deletis managed to persuade this man to accompany him to meet with Kvaternik. When they arrived at Kvaternik's office, the two men introduced themselves as representatives of the people of Tuzla and requested amnesty for the 200 Jews under arrest in the city.

After a long and tough conversation, Kvaternik agreed to release sixteen Jewish families on condition that they convert to either Islam or Christianity.

As Deletis left the meeting, he wondered how he would choose just sixteen families. He decided to free the sixteen largest families, saving 100 Jews. These included Hermina and Ruben Domany, Lina, Ruben and Dina Wiesler, Edi Hirschbein, Elsa Kleinman, Hana Altaraz, and Hana Danon-Saban. He then had to tell the rescued Jews that they had to convert. Fortunately, the Catholic church and the Muslim Imams were exceptionally sympathetic and simply handed the Jews conversion certificates that allowed them to live freely in the city.

Most of these Jews then decided to leave for the Italian occupied zone, a move they made again with the help of Deletis, who obtained travel permits for them.

After the war most of the Jews helped by Deletis moved to Israel.

On May 12, 1989, Yad Vashem recognized Ratimir Deletis as Righteous Among the Nations.

## THE SILK FACTORY'S MECHANIC

File 6497

**EBERHARDT, JOSEF**  
**EBERHARDT, ROZIKA**



In 1941, Leon Kabiljo was the owner of a large wool and silk factory in Sarajevo where he lived with Natalia, his wife, and thirteen-year-old son. Among the many workers employed in the factory was a mechanic of German origin named Josip (Jozo) Eberhardt. He was married to another factory worker, Rozika. Kabiljo helped this couple establish a home, the relationship between them was more than just an employee to his employer and they were good friends.

When the Germans entered Sarajevo in April 1941, Eberhardt was asked to join the German army. As he had never before served in an army and was not in any way affiliated with a Nazi organization, he felt no desire to enlist. Eberhardt then turned to Kabiljo and consulted with him about what to do. They realized that Eberhardt had no other option but to enlist, otherwise he and his family would be pun-

ished. Thus, Eberhardt joined the army and was made a translator for a Gestapo unit based in Sarajevo.

One night in early September of 1941, the Ustasha rounded up Jewish residents from two main streets in the city. Eberhardt went to Kabiljo's home and told him that he and his family should flee immediately because they were going to be arrested. That night, Eberhardt took the Kabiljo family to his own home where they ended up hiding for two months. Eberhardt and Rozika took care of everything and treated their friends with much care.

Eberhardt also made great efforts to obtain false travel permits for them so that Kabiljo, Natalia, and their son Yitzchak as well as Kabiljo's brother could move to Mostar which was in the Italian occupied zone. After the war, the Kabiljo family returned to Sarajevo and in 1948 immigrated to Israel, where they maintained regular contact with the Eberhardts.

On May 17, 1995, Yad Vashem recognized Josef Eberhardt and Rozika Eberhardt as Righteous Among the Nations.

## THE CHILDREN OF HASIJA

File 1931

**FAZLINOVIC, HASIJA**

**FAZLINOVIC, SULEJMAN**

Hasija Fazlinovic lived with her husband Sulejman, a railroad worker, and their children in Sarajevo. Two Jewish families, the Israel Levys and the Altarazs, lived in the same neighborhood as the Fazlinovics and they were good friends.

When the war broke out, many Jews in Sarajevo were sent to concentration camps, the men to Jasenovac and the women and children to Djakovo. Among those incarcerated were the Israel Levy and Altaraz families.

The Jewish community in Osijek, adjacent to Djakovo, turned to the Ustasha and requested that the Jewish children be released and that they would take care of them. The response was positive and some Jewish children from Sarajevo, among them eight-year-old Sida Levy, Albert and Miriam Israel (age eight and five respectively) and five-year-old Lea Altarac were placed under the care of the Jewish community of Osijek.

Hasija Fazlinovic and her husband (who was in Zagreb at the time) soon discovered that the Israel Levy and Altaraz families had been sent to the camps and that their children had been released and were in Osijek and Vinkovci.

Out of fear that these children would be arrested again, they made every effort to take the children to a safer place. Sulejman managed to locate Sida Levy and take her to his home in Zagreb. When his neighbors discovered that he was hiding a Jewish girl, Hasija moved Sida Levy to

her grandmother in Mostar. There Hasija found out the whereabouts of the other Israel Levy and Altaraz children in Osijek.

Around this time in April 1942 concentration camps were filling up with Jews deported from Croatia. The authorities were carrying out ruthless searches for Jews trying to escape, but despite this, Hasija headed back to Osijek. She arrived at the home of a Jewish veterinarian, where the Jewish children stayed, just a few days before all the Jews of that area were deported. She asked the family that was taking care of the children if she could relocate them to the home of their grandparents and other relatives in Mostar. Then with false documents and despite the danger, she made the journey back to Mostar by train, acting as if the children were hers.

When Hasija arrived in Mostar with Albert and Miriam Israel Levy and little Lea Altaraz, Sulejman also helped. Hasija provided food for the children and acted as an intermediary between the children and their mothers, as well as Sida Levy's younger sister, who were detained in Djakovo. She sent food packages as well as shoes for Levy's sister in Djakovo.

After the war the Israel Levy children's aunt took care of them. When the aunt fell ill, Hasija traveled to look after the children.

On November 25, 1980, Yad Vashem recognized Hasija Fazlinovic and her husband, Sulejman Fazlinovic as Righteous Among the Nations.



## ALIZA WAS LIKE THEIR CHILD

File 5274

**GRINER, FRANJO**

**GRINER, LIDIJA**



The Werdisheim family from Leoben, Austria, was among the many Jewish refugee families that arrived in Yugoslavia between 1938 and 1940 with the aim of immigrating to Palestine. After moving from place to place, the family eventually arrived in Caplina, Bosnia where they reunited with relatives already in refugee shelters. Due to bad conditions there (the lack of food and medication) little Alisa became ill and her aunt took her to Mostar, to the Griner family home. The Griners, who spoke German, had expressed their willingness to afford temporary refuge to a Jewish child.

The Griners treated Alisa well and she recovered within a couple of weeks. The Griners then decided to take Alisa back to the family, as had been agreed earlier. They went to Caplina but found no one there. Shortly after, they learned the Germans had taken all of the Jews away.

Even though Lidija and Franjo Griner already had four children, they decided to take Alisa back home with them. It was the end of 1942, when Mostar was in the Italian occupied zone.

The Griners, who made a living from arranging flowers and teaching music, tried to reassure nine-year-old Alisa, who was sad and did not understand why anyone from her family had not come to fetch her. The Griners continued to care for Alisa as if she was their own child. Alisa was not allowed to play outside because it was dangerous if someone recognized her as a Jew. Instead she spent most of her time indoors with the Griner's other children and in the extensive home library.

In September 1943, after Italy surrendered and German soldiers took over the area, a warning against hiding Jews was posted across the region. Nevertheless, the Griner family organized several different hide-outs for Alisa in and around Mostar. Wherever she was hidden someone from the Griner family was with her.

At the end of the war, when it became clear that Alisa's father, mother, twin brother, and grandmother had died, the Griners were prepared to continue raising her. Alisa's older sister, who had moved to Palestine before the war, managed to make contact with the Griner family and asked them to move Alisa to a Jewish orphanage in Belgrade. Alisa's separation from the Griner family was very difficult and Lidija told Alisa that if things did not work out for her, she could always return to their home. In 1948, as a young woman, Alisa immigrated to Israel and kept in contact with the Griner children for many years.

On August 5, 1992, Yad Vashem recognized Franjo and Lidija Griner as Righteous Among the Nations.

## THE STORY OF ZEJNEBA

File 2811

**HARDAGA, MUSTAFA**

**HARDAGA, ZEJNEBA**

**HARDAGA, IZET**

**HARDAGA, BACHRIYA**



Zejneba and Mustafa Hardaga were long-time residents of Sarajevo. Their family was a pious, patriarchal family in which women donned a veil and everyone strictly observed all the religious laws and rites. In the garden of the Hardagas home, a Sarajevo Jew named Joseph Kabilio, started a pipe factory that became the largest of its type in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Similarly, but with their own faith the Kabilio family observed all the Jewish laws and rites.

The two families were excellent neighbors. Each maintained a high level of respect for the other's customs. The women of the Hardaga family never cleaned or dusted their carpets on the Jewish Sabbath so as not to disturb the festive and restive atmosphere reigning in the nearby



synagogue. The Kabilios were careful to avoid engagement in festivities during Ramadan, so as not to make fasting more difficult for the Hardaga family.

Often while sipping coffee Mustafa would tell Joseph: “Your religion is so similar to ours in so many ways: you circumcise your sons as we do ours; you don’t eat pork as we don’t; you too believe in one God; you bury your dead in similar ways to us. Your women cover their heads and used to be able to bathe freely in our hamams when the Christians could not. When you came here 400 years ago after being expelled by the Spanish Inquisition we graciously accepted you.” Joseph concurred.

On April 15, 1941 life changed as the two families as knew it. Sarajevo was bombed. The Germans marched in and immediately entered the Sephardic synagogue, which they began to destroy. They fired shots at the beautiful candelabras; burned Torah scrolls (some of which had been brought from Spain) and then gathered all the sacred books, all the community registers and family chronicles, and old and precious manuscripts and created an enormous fire. The synagogue, the second largest in Europe, was suddenly reduced to nothing.

At about the same time anti-Jewish laws were issued – orders and regulations that all purveyed only one message: outcast the Jews. The ensuing looting of Jewish property, money and homes occurred as Jewish Sarajevans were deported to the concentration camps Kruscica, Lobograd, Djakovo, and Jasenovac.

During the bombing everyone in the city fled to the surrounding forests, only returning once immediate danger subsided. When they returned, Zejneba Hardaga rushed to see what had happened to the Kabilios. She found Joseph with his wife Rifka and their two children, Benjamin and Tova, on the street. Their house had been destroyed. Without hesitation Zejneba brought the Kabilios to her home where her husband and his brother Izet and wife Bachriya welcomed them with outstretched arms.

“Whatever is ours will be yours. We’ll share everything like family – feel as if you are in your own home,” they said. Later Zejneba recalled, “This was the first time that a foreign man had slept in our house, the first time we unveiled ourselves before others. But Joseph was like a brother to us – if not before then, certainly from the day he entered our home.”

However, it was dangerous for the Kabilios to stay long. Across the street from the house was a Gestapo base and notices were posted everywhere stating that anyone hiding or harboring Jews in their home were putting themselves in danger. The notice said that houses would be destroyed and everyone, including children, would be killed.

Joseph Kabilio refused to expose his friends to such danger. Instead he found a way to transfer his family to Mostar (then in the Italian occupied zone) while he hid himself in a hospital. However, someone informed on Joseph and he was caught, imprisoned, and taken into forced labor in Sarajevo.

Early one morning while shoveling snow on a street, Joseph noticed a Muslim woman wearing a veil standing next to his group observing them and weeping. It was Zejneba, and she could not stand watching

their beloved Joseph clean the streets. The only thing she was able, and permitted to do, although it meant compromising herself before the Ustasha authorities, was to bring clothing and food to Joseph and the rest of the group.

Joseph suffered a lot in forced labor. Nevertheless, already sentenced to death, he managed to escape – the only one of ten to succeed in doing so. The only place he could run to was back to the Hardaga's home. This time, he stayed with them for two months, hidden and without once leaving the home. Through the windows Joseph watched Jews being deported or tortured in the Gestapo building opposite before being flung off it from the third floor and onto the street. Before long there appeared to be not a single Jew left in the city.

Restrictions at this time were exceptionally severe and any infraction led to the death penalty. Joseph felt that he could stay with his friends no longer - it was simply too dangerous for those harboring him. With help from the Hardagas, Joseph managed to move to the Italian occupied zone, where he found his family and joined the Partisans.

After the war the Kabilios returned to Sarajevo and again found a temporary home with the Hardagas. A box of jewelry that they had left with their friends for safekeeping had remained in the Hardagas' home and was returned to the Kabilios unopened. This at least gave them something small to start a new life with. The Kabilio family later immigrated to Israel.

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In the wake of the war in Bosnia in 1994, Zejneba Hardaga and her family were invited by the Israeli authorities to come to Israel. There the Kabilio family warmly received them and took measures to ease their stay in Israel. Zejneba was also received by then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. After one year, Zejneba passed away but her daughter, Aida Pecanac, her husband, and their daughter remained in Israel, converted to Judaism, and changed their names. Aida, who changed her name to Sara, is Director of the Archives at Yad Vashem.

On January 29, 1984, Yad Vashem recognized Zejneba and Mustafa Hardaga as well as Bachriya (Zejneba's sister-in-law) and Izet Hardaga as Righteous Among the Nations.



Zejneba and Rifka 1941., walking in Sarajevo. Zejneba hides with her hijab Rifka's yellow ribbon, which during the Nazi Occupation Jews were forced to wear on the outside of their clothing (Zejneba (far right) with her sister-in-law (far left).

# THE COURAGE OF REZAK AND SULEJMAN

File 7442

**HATIBOVIC, REZAK**

**HATIBOVIC, SULEJMAN**



The brothers Rezak and Sulejman Hatibovic lived in Sarajevo and their neighbors on both sides were Jews. When the Germans entered Bosnia in April 1941 anti-Jewish laws were introduced and the situation for the Jews deteriorated. The neighbors on one side, the Atias family, a mother and two young daughters were affected right away. The two daughters were taken to forced labor and one of the daughters, Luncika, fell ill.

At around the same time, notices posted around the city warned residents not to help or hide Jews, a crime that would incur a harsh punishment.

Nevertheless, this did not deter the Hatibovic brothers. They began to supply the Atias family with food, wood for heating, and regular updates about the approach of the German army.



When Luncika fell ill for the second time, the brothers arranged for a Jewish doctor to treat her. The doctor suggested that Luncika be taken immediately to hospital. Since Jews were no longer being accepted for treatment in hospitals the Hatibovic brothers escorted Luncika to the hospital and registered her as their sister, with a Muslim alias. When she was released from the hospital, the brothers brought Luncika back to their home. When the house searches were intensified and the authorities intended to search the Hatibovic brothers' home, the brothers managed to flee with Luncika in the nick of time to a safe place. They also helped Luncika's mother and sister escape. The brothers found a hideout for the Jewish family with an underground member of the anti-Nazi movement.

Before long Luncika fell ill again, this time with typhus. So that she would not infect the people around her she was placed in isolation and Rezak looked after her.

The three Atias women remained in the care of the Hatibovic brothers until the end of the war and they survived thanks to them. During the war the brothers also helped Flora Altaraz, another neighbor, who was living with her mother and sister and was harassed by the police. They eventually arranged a hiding place for them in their apartment and later took them outside the city to a safer shelter.

The Atias and Altaraz families maintained contact with Rezak and Sulejman Hatibovic for many years after the war.

On April 5, 1997, Yad Vashem recognized Rezak Hatibovic and his brother, Sulejman Hatibovic as Righteous Among the Nations.

# THEY SAVED THE SARAJEVO HAGGADAH

File 6323

**KORKUT, DERSIS**

**KORKUT, SERVET**



## Part I

Dervis Korkut graduated from university in Istanbul, where he read theology and philosophy. When he returned to Bosnia Korkut began working in finance and later became a curator at The National Museum in Sarajevo. Korkut was a well-known person in the city and among Jews he was known as a friend with a deep interest in Sephardic culture and folklore. Korkut wrote several articles on the subject and his writings brought to light the important contributions made by Sephardic Jews to Bosnian society.

In the early days of the German occupation in April 1941, the Einsatzstab Rosenberg, the Organization for the Plunder of Cultural and Artistic Treasures of the Jews, arrived in Sarajevo. Their goal was to confiscate the famous Sarajevo Haggadah written in the fourteenth century. When the representatives of this organization turned up at the museum, they confronted Korkut, who told them that some Germans

had already taken the artifact. They were convinced by his story, although the haggadah was actually carefully hidden in Korkut's home.



The Sarajevo Haggadah, the most elaborately decorated codex remaining from Spanish Jewry's Golden Age

## Part II

In 1942, after the majority of Sarajevo Jewry had already been deported to concentration camps, a few members of the Jewish youth movement Ha'Shomer Hazair joined Tito's Partisans. When the leaders realized they were about to be discovered, an order was given for each fighter to flee in a different direction.

Donkica Papo, a Jewish Sarajevan, was a member of the Partisans. During the war she returned to Sarajevo where she hoped to find a member of her family who could shelter her. However, when she found no one there to help her, she turned to a friend who was a curator and worked with her father at The National Museum. The friend was pleased to see Donkica; he brought her into the museum, calmed her down, and told her to sit and wait for him to return. After a few minutes a religious looking Muslim man entered the room and he told the young woman

to follow him. Donkica had no idea if this man was about to turn her in to the Gestapo or rescue her but she followed him and soon arrived at his home. This man was Dervis Korkut.

Korkut then introduced Donkica to his wife Servet, who welcomed her into their home. The Korkuts told Donkica that she would be safe there. They gave her a room on the top floor, dressed her in traditional Muslim clothing, and introduced her as a cousin to the many people who visited their home.

Whilst hidden there Papo managed to make contact with some family members in another city and after five months with the Korkuts, they helped her obtain a travel permit so she could go and join her family. The Korkuts escorted her to the train station, and she arrived safely at her aunt's home.

Sometime later Papo joined the Partisans again. She served as a nurse attached to a fighting unit until the end of the war. After the war Papo (later Mira Bakovic) discovered that the Korkuts had hidden two other Jewish families in their home.

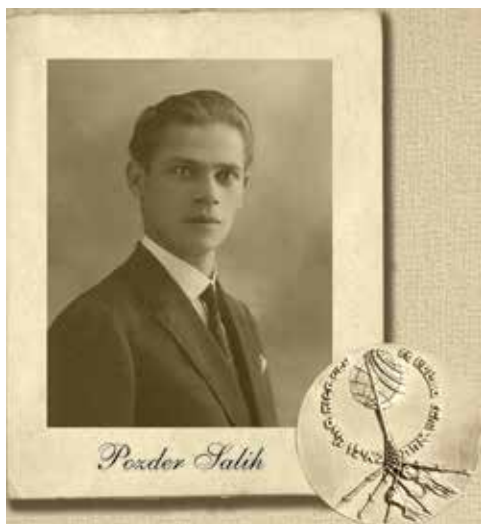
Dervis Korkut returned the haggadah to The National Museum. In 1992, the Korkuts' daughter, who had married a Muslim in Kosovo, left Kosovo for Israel when the war erupted there. She arrived with a group of refugees accommodated by the Israeli government. In Israel she met with Papo's son who warmly received the daughter of the people that had saved his mother and her family.

On December 14, 1994, Yad Vashem recognized Dervis and Servet Korkut, as Righteous Among the Nations.

## UNCLE SALIH

File 7004

**POZDER, SALIH**



Salih Pozder was a Muslim man who lived in Sarajevo where he was a well-known tailor managing an elite fashion house.

In April 1941, after the Germans conquered Yugoslavia they established a Gestapo headquarters in the center of Sarajevo. As a result many Gestapo officers and their wives went to Pozder to have clothes made. At around the same time many anti-Jewish measures were enforced, one of them forbidding

non-Jews to employ Jews.

Pozder, who wanted to save his Jewish worker Bukica-Luna Altaraz from deportation, turned to the Gestapo commander and asked for a special work permit for her stating that without Altaraz he would not be able to complete his orders. With the permit granted, Altaraz was able to remain in Sarajevo, but her family was sent to concentration camps.

In early 1942, Luna Altaraz received a letter from a Jewish family in Donji Miholjac, near Osijek, Croatia, telling her that her seven-year-old niece Rachel Montiljo was with them. She had been with them when the Jewish community in Osijek was granted permission to take all the Jewish children out of the Djakovo camp to be placed among the Jewish families in the area. Altaraz broke down in tears. When Pozder asked her what the problem was she told him about her niece and that

she thought Rachel was in danger and in need of rescue. Pozder decided to do all he could to bring the girl to Sarajevo.

After paying a lot of money for false documents and buying the Muslim garb for a young girl, Pozder traveled to Donji Miholjac to fetch Rachel. Rachel found it very difficult to leave Donji Miholjac, especially because it was adjacent to the concentration camp her mother was being detained.

It took young Rachel a long time to get over the separation from her mother who died shortly after Luna reunited with her niece.

Thereafter Pozder looked after all of Rachel's needs. Pozder's care for Rachel drew Luna closer to him and after the war they married and brought Rachel up together.

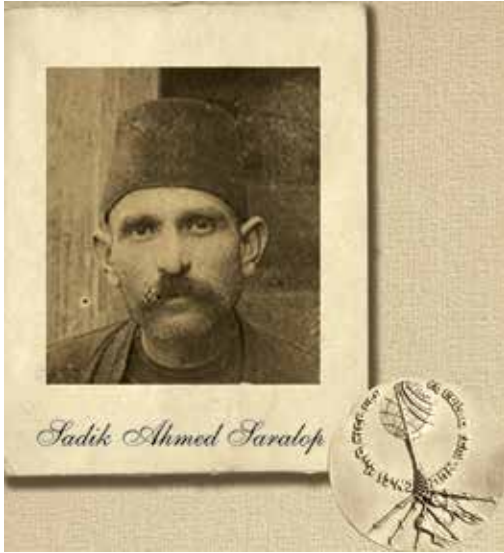
On March 6, 1996, Yad Vashem recognized Salih Pozder as Righteous Among the Nations.



# THE STORY OF AHMED, WHO SAVED HIS JEWISH FRIENDS, AND PAID WITH HIS LIFE

File 2811

**SADIQ-SARALOP, AHMED**



Ahmed Sadiq-Saralop, the father of Zejneba Hardaga, was born in Salonika, Greece. From there he moved to Monastir (today known as Bitola, Macedonia) where he traded with many Jews and even learned to speak Ladin. Sadiq-Saralop wanted to know what the people with whom he traded spoke about amongst themselves. He was a good-natured man and felt most at home in the Jewish quarter of Bitola.

In 1913 Sadiq-Saralop arrived in Sarajevo where he established many friendships with Jews. He traded mostly with Isidor Papo, a thread merchant. They became good friends, although they argued more than once over business.

After a while, Sadiq-Saralop's business wasn't flourishing and he picked up and moved on to Konjic, where he opened a new shop.

Every day at noon Sadiq-Saralop had the custom of sitting at a cafe in the railway station. Sipping coffee slowly and catching up on the world news, he remained well informed about the horrors transpiring in Sarajevo and to the Jewish community. One day in April 1941 while sitting at the cafe he saw his friend Isidor Papo arrive from Dubrovnik

with his wife and two children. Sadiq-Saralop leapt up, rushed towards his friend, and asked in astonishment:

“Where are you going Isidor?”

“Home to Sarajevo, back home,” was the response.

“What home? You don’t have a home anymore – it’s either destroyed or confiscated. All the Jews have already been deported and only a mad-man would return to that hell. You won’t even have the chance to get off the train before they deport you to a concentration camp.”

Isidor Papo simply looked at his Muslim friend without knowing what to do. Sadiq-Saralop was quicker, though. The instant the train’s departing whistle sounded he grabbed the Papo’s suitcases and Isidor’s children and pulled them off the train. Sadiq-Saralop took them directly to his home where they stayed until arrangements could be made for them to acquire documents that would enable them to reach the Italian occupied zone.

For his heroic wartime deeds, Ahmed Sadiq-Saralop paid with his life. Someone informed the Ustasha about the help he provided to the Papo’s. He was arrested and then deported to Jasenovac on the last transport where he was killed for rescuing Jews. All the Papo’s survived the war. One son later moved to Israel and another to America.

On January 29, 1984, Yad Vashem recognized Ahmed Sadiq-Saralop as Righteous Among the Nations.



## ONE FAMILY

File 6117

**SARACEVIC, ELZA**  
**SARACEVIC, FERID**  
**SARACEVIC, SEAD**  
**SARACEVIC, EMIRA**

Elza and Ferid Saracevic lived with their two children, Sead and Emira in Sarajevo. They were friendly with Dr. Leon Peric, a pediatrician that treated their children. Peric was also one of the heads of the local Jewish community and a member of the leadership of the Zionist movement.

When the Germans entered Sarajevo in April 1941, Peric suspected that his life was in danger and he told this to his friend Elza Saracevic. Saracevic consequently invited Peric and his wife Lili to move into his home for a few days, until the danger subsided. When the doctor felt that the situation had calmed down, he and his wife returned home.

A short time later Peric was arrested with a group of local Jewish activists and sent to Jasenovac, where he died. At this time the Saracevics invited Peric's wife Lili to move into their home and despite the risks involved with hiding Jews, Lili stayed there from the fall of 1941 until early 1943.



Elza and Ferid Saracevic were wealthy people that lived in a private house. For Lili's safety the house remained locked at all times. The childhood of the Saracevic children, fifteen-year-old Sead and thirteen-year-old Emira, was also affected; they were not allowed to play with other children or have friends over for two years while Lili was in hiding.

When the Saracevic family felt that the situation was too perilous, the family helped Lili Peric move in early 1943 to Split, which was in the Italian occupied zone. There she joined her brother who was staying there with his wife and daughters, Bianka and Palomba Kabiljo.

Lili's brother and his wife were caught when the Italians surrendered and the Germans entered Split. Both were sent to Jasenovac but Lili managed to evade the deportation, and took it upon herself to help her twelve and fourteen-year-old nieces.

Initially the three of them hid in and around Split but later Lili took the girls to Sarajevo, to the Saracevic family, where they were welcomed. This was at the end of 1943, when searches for hidden Jews occurred day and night and the punishment for hiding Jews was deportation to a concentration camp.

Despite endangering their own lives Elza and Ferid Saracevic continued helping Lili and her nieces without compensation. The Saracevics treated them like family and Sead and Emira, their children, knew to keep their presence a secret.

For their safety the daughters Bianka and Palomba remained in the house at all times until the end of the war. Thanks to Sead and Emira's company, they were able to keep their spirits high despite the trauma, fear, loneliness, and concern for their parents who had been taken to a concentration camp.

After the war, when it became clear that Bianka and Palomba's parents

had perished, Lili immigrated with her two nieces to Israel, from where they maintained contact with the Saracevic family for many years.

On July 13, 1994, Yad Vashem recognized Elza Saracevic, his wife, Ferid Saracevic, and their children, Sead Saracevic and Emira Saracevic as Righteous Among the Nations.

# LITTLE ESTER WAS SAVED FIRST

File 6848

SEBEK-KRAJINA, ZORA



## Part I

Fritz Cahn, born in 1922, a Jewish refugee from Germany, fled to Yugoslavia in 1939. The Jewish community of Zagreb assisted him with his integration into the town of Samobor, Croatia, and he was placed in a shelter for Jewish refugees.

When the Germans entered Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Ustasha deported the ref-

ugees to work camps in Bosnia. When rumors spread that the Jews were being deported to concentration camps, Cahn fled to the Italian occupied zone, to the town of Mostar. There he supported himself by playing a musical instrument in a cafe.

Cahn lived at different addresses in the city and was in perpetual danger because he had no permanent home and was a fugitive.

As winter approached he became desperate and when Zora Krajina, a Croat girl from Mostar, saw him on the street, she took pity on him and invited him to her home for some coffee and cake. Cahn told Krajina that he was a Jewish refugee trying to avoid being hunted down and enslaved in a work camp. Krajina invited him to stay in the home she shared with her mother and brother. For two months Cahn lived there and was treated well.

Krajina's brother, who was a member of the underground anti-Nazi movement, made contact with the Partisans and on Cahn's request, arranged for Cahn to join the Partisans. He fought with the Partisans until the end of the war.

## **Part II**

In October 1941, on the days that many Jews were deported from Sarajevo, a fourteen-year-old girl named Ester Levi happened to be visiting her cousin Berta Papo, who was living in Sarajevo at the time. Although they were Jewish Papo's home was a typical Muslim house, painted green, with a round balcony that looked out onto the street. This apparently was the reason why the Ustasha had overlooked the property, assuming that Muslims were living there. As it seemed obvious that this error would soon be uncovered and that the Ustasha would quickly return, finding a quick solution was imperative. Ester immediately sent a note, written in Ladino, to her sister in Mostar and asked her to come and rescue her. In the meantime, Ester's older sister, Gizela, who also managed to escape the transport, turned up at Papo's house.

After a few days, Zora Krajina, on behalf of Rozika, Ester's sister in Mostar, turned up at Papo's home with documents, Muslim clothing, and a ticket out of the city. When it turned out that two girls were involved, Krajina decided to accompany Ester there first and then return to Sarajevo with a second ticket to take Gizela. Krajina took both girls safely to Mostar. In light of this, she made the journey several more times and saved also Beba Finzi, Berta Papo, and Albi Papo.

Krajina never wanted nor received compensation for these deeds; she was motivated purely by a desire to help her fellow human beings whose lives were in danger.

On October 29, 1995, Yad Vashem recognized Zora Sebek-Krajina as Righteous Among the Nations.



Berta Papo dressed as a Muslim (a photo from forged papers)

בני משפחת הרדאגה

MUSTAFA & ZEJNEBA HARDAGA

IZET & BACHRIYA HARDAGA

AHMED SADIK

BOSNIA

בוסניה

