

LEAH MAYER  
RG-50.154.0019 (recorded in Sarasota 1988)

Leah Mayer was born approximately 1921 and lived in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Her father was a silk merchant who owned 2 stores with his cousin. She describes a good life until the Germans came in April 1941. She said there was no antisemitism and even the King of Yugoslavia would participate in High Holy Day ceremonies. At first the Yugoslavs didn't believe the Germans would come to their country, but after they did there were many restrictions. Jews had to wear the yellow star and give up their money. Her father's stores were taken away.

Leah states that the Croatian Ustaša were worse than the Nazis and did their work against the Jews for them. They started rounding up Jewish men and then younger men and sent them to the salt mines where many died. Other men fled to the mountains. They didn't know until later on if the men were hiding or killed. Leah also describes the animosity between the Croats and the Serbs which had been going on for centuries.

With her mother and brother, Leah managed to get to the Italian held part of the country. At first his father stayed in Zagreb because he had an elderly father, but he came after his father died. The family lived peacefully for a while in the Italian occupied area of Croatia.

In November 1942 Leah and her family were rounded up by the carabinieri's and taken to the nearby camp of Souchok where there were about 200,000 other Jews. Then they were moved to a nearby island where they lived with no problems until the armistice between the Italians and Germans in September 1943. They family went to Italy where they were able to get false identity papers.

Leah worked in Italy with the German panzer division and was able to pass information to the Partisans. She was arrested, but the Germans didn't find anything damaging on her. The day after the arrest she moved to Switzerland until the end of the war. She states that the Italians were good to the Jews. At the end of the war her parents were in Bari. She worked for the Joint in Milan helping people emigrate, which she finally did in 1949.