

## Zoltan Biro's Testimony conducted in Belgrade on 04.14.1997

Zoltan Biro, a jurist from Vojvodina, survived the Holocaust by escaping the concentration camps and joining the partisans in 1944. He was captured and put in the Hungarian working battalions, then moved to Vojvodina and the mining Borska, from where he escaped and joined the partisans. He was a left oriented student of the Law School, and after the war he became a member of the Supreme Court of Serbia and the Supreme Court of Yugoslavia. Now, we will hear his life story and about the period of the Holocaust that he survived. This interview was led by Jasa Almuli, a journalist from Belgrade.

A: My name is Zoltan Biro, and I am a retired judge of the Supreme Court of Yugoslavia. I am 85 years old.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Budapest. However, my father was in the service in Slavonija, but since adequate medical protection did not exist there, my mother moved to Budapest where her grandmother lived in order to deliver a child under the better medical conditions. So, I was born in Budapest, but I never lived there. I am come from a Hungarian Jewish family, where my grandfather was a teacher and my father was a mechanical engineer. My father was employed by the Railroad Company where he served on all different kinds of jobs. During World War I he was a chief of the heaters in Vinkovci, later he worked in Mostar, and he was a chief of the towing service in Subotica railroad station. This is about my parents.

Q: Where did you spend your childhood?

A: Until I was six we lived in Vinkovci. My father was transferred to Subotica where I attended elementary and secondary school. Since my father was transferred to Mostar I graduated from the High School in Mostar. My grandfather's name was Joseph Biro, which meant that my family roots derived from the Czech Republic, but my father took the Hungarian name.

Q: Was your family assimilated?

A: Yes, we were an assimilated family. My grandfather was a Hungarian patriot, who thought that the Habsburgs were unlawfully removed from power. My father was not a nationalist. When he was eighteen, he had to make the decision whether he wanted to remain in Hungary or live in Yugoslavia. He chose Yugoslavia, mainly because the status of the Jews was endangered with the rise of the counterrevolution atmosphere in Hungary. Jews were prohibited to attend the universities in Hungary. In Mostar I was a member of numerous youth organizations. During the first year of college I went to Zagreb to take the state exam. There I lived with Tibor Setelj, and that was the best period of my life. I escaped the disciplined life that I lived within my family. However, my father got transferred to the Belgrade railroad station, so I had to go back to Belgrade. I had to take some of the exams at Belgrade's University in order to be transferred.

Q: When did you start the law school in Belgrade?

A: I started in 1930.

Q: What was the political atmosphere like in Belgrade?

A: I joined the left progressive movement with the help of Brano Jevremovic, who was a public prosecutor after World War II. I became a member of the SKOJ in 1932, and that was published in the Palace of the Duchess Ljubica, on the occasion of the announcement of a list of the progressive students from the University of Belgrade.

Q: When you said SKOJ, you mean the Council of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia. Was that a legal or illegal organization?

A: That was an illegal organization. Its members were prosecuted before the special court created by the state.

Q: You were in the secret cell?

A: Correct. Among the Jews were Enrih Kos, a writer, and Sergej Dimitrijevic, a well-known scientist from Leskovac, as well as two men from Sandjak.

Q: Who were they?

A: One was Vojin Kurtovic, and the other name I can't recall.

Q: Was that the only cell?

A: No, each school had its representative which created the University Council of SKOJ. I do not know whether this body was connected to the Communist Party or if it operated independently.

Q: What were the tasks?

A: Mostly we were covering the Marxist ideas during these meetings, as well as dealing with the national problems, rural problems, etc. We organized a broader anti-fascist group that gained a majority of the votes among the students at the time of the rise of Hitler and his collaborators.

Q: Were you led by the Communist Youth?

A: More correctly we were led by the anti-fascists.

Q: Did you represent any of the students' interests?

A: Some of the issues like scholarships, cafeterias, meals, and etc. Among us there were many Muslims living in the dorms in Dalmatinska Street. Among them were Hasan Brkic, Osman Karabegovic, and others.

Q: Were you arrested at that time.

A: Yes, I was. After the act we undertook against the German diplomatic mission in Belgrade, when we broke the windows on their building, we were arrested. Among us there were eight or nine people who became later World War II heroes.

Q: How long did you serve in Glavnjaca for?

A: I was in Glavnjaca for 15 days, captured and kept by the political police. We were sentenced to a year in jail and permanent expulsion from Belgrade. Glavanja was a

horrible prison. It was a basement with no windows, no ventilation, and in the cells designed for ten people, they enclosed some fifty of us.

Q: When did you leave for Mostar?

A: Actually, we remained in Belgrade. The public opinion was very strong against our imprisonment, so the Prime Minister, Minister of Internal Affairs, and the President of the University of Belgrade influenced this decision, so we were released. For seven days we remained in hospital, because the conditions in the jail were very bad, creating the conditions for many diseases.

Q: So, the sentence was canceled.

A: Correct. We spent a month in the jail. After that I was waiting for my release. Several days later, a police clerk came to me, brought me out, and told me to go home. I took a taxi and went home.

Q: When did you graduate from the law school?

A: I graduated in 1934, on time, even though I was employed for three years by doctor Adolph Weismann.

Q: What did you do after you graduated?

A: I was working an unpaid internship for the local court, since that was the prerequisite to take the BAR exam. After that I had to do up to five years of the practice in order to start working as a lawyer.

Q: What else could you tell us about the pre-war period?

A: While employed in the local court, I worked for the organization called Red Help, which had as its purpose to collect the material help for the members of the Communist Party.

Q: Who else was a member of this organization?

A: There were Vojka Demajo, and the rest of the people's names I can not recall.

Q: How long did you belong to that organization?

A: We had meetings at different times on Tomasa Turisa Street in Belgrade. Later, we changed the name of the organization from Red Help into People's Help. I received an offer to go to Odjake, which was a large village in Backa, and take the place of the assistant to the lawyer. I accepted, but that area was settled mainly by a German minority, so I lost the connection with the Communist Party. Here I received a passport and the invitation to go to Paris and participate in the exhibition, which could be impossible if I stayed in Belgrade.

Q: Was that in 1936?

A: Correct.

Q: How long have you stayed in Odjaci for?

A: I remained there the entire year.

Q: Afterwards, I found assistant positions with a couple of different lawyers back in Belgrade. I never received more than thousands of dinars of salary, and that was nothing at that time in Belgrade. So, my father had to support me, and it was really hard.

Q: Were you active in the association of the lawyers.

A: Well, at that time I was active in the association of the assistants. Next to me were the main leaders Mukmanovic Tempo, Djuro Strugar, Mirko Aukovic. We had meetings and lectures every Sunday. In Odjaci I worked in different spheres of law. So, I was well trained in many less-known branches of the law. So I have lectured the taxation law, etc.

Q: Who was the president of this association?

A: It was some man from Montenegro.

Q: Where were you when the war started?

A: In 1940, I was in the reserves in Prokuplje, after that I was transferred to Pec in 1941. The war caught me here. We saw Germans coming to Pec and we tried to escape, but they surrounded the city, so we were captured and taken to the prison. I had a lot of friends in Pec who tried to help me get out of the prison. Once, a lady helped me leave the prison, dressed in the civilian clothes. For a few days I was hiding in different houses in Pec until I found the permit to leave and go back to Belgrade. From there I walked and traveled by bus and train all the way to Cacak, where I stayed at my friend's Stojcevic's house for a couple of days. Here I learned that the Germans had started capturing Jews in Belgrade. I decided not to go there. With the assistance of my friend Rade Kusic, I went to Subotica. On the way there I came to the Hungarian occupational zone, where I was stopped again. When asked to show my permit, I did so, but it had expired, and since I did not have a birth certificate, they figured that I was a Jew on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. I was lucky that the policeman who captured me spotted his old friend coming, who had just been released from the Hungarian prison, so while he was greeting him I escaped this difficult situation. I joined a group, which had already been carded, and along with them I crossed the river Sava on a raft. Here I met some honest Hungarian people. One of them understood my trouble and offered to carry my suitcases in order for me to stay unrecognizable. Once we reached Subotica and I met my parents and uncles, I offered him some money, but he did not want to take it.

Q: Could you explain the way you experienced the Hungarian occupation?

A: I learned from my parents that the Hungarians entered this region without any resistance. Since they were very drunk, they did not count the casualties. They would install a tank in the middle of the square and bomb any of the suspicious houses, without any concerns whether they were Jewish, Serbian, or Hungarian houses. They used to kill more than 400 people, and some of them were Hungarians, too. Psychiatrist Nikola Wolf's mother found the apartment for us. It was an abandoned Serb apartment, because that family ran back to Serbia. The Jews were full of fear after the Hungarian army came to this region. Many of the influential people lost their jobs, many lawyers lost their clients, and most of the Jews were very silent and scared. There was a large Jewish community in Subotica with its two synagogues.

Q: Who was in the majority?

A: The Orthodox Jews were the majority, and there were 1,200 of them.

Q: Did the Hungarians intervene in the synagogues?

A: No, they did not, even though most of the people joined the Liberation Front.

Actually, the Rabbi's son was killed.

Q: Why did they kill him?

A: He was involved in the burning of the wheat fields.

Q: He was in SKOJ?

A: I do not think that he was in SKOJ.

Q: What was his name?

A: His last name was Gersan, but I cannot recall his first name. His tombstone is in the Subotica's graveyard. I think there were seven or eight Jewish youths killed that time, since they were actively involved in the Liberation movement.

Q: How would you explain such involvement of the Jewish youth. Were they leftist before the war?

A: Well, they were not communists, but they were left oriented. They were organized in a group called Hat Sumer Hatcaj, which was a left-oriented group.

Q: So, they were leftist!

A: Correct, leftist. However, they never actually joined the movement, but they participated in the actions against the Hungarians. Also, they brought as the chief of the commission a Serb whose last name was Kovacevic, and who participated in arresting the communist youth in 1921 or 1922. He was very-anti communist, so the Hungarians made sure to find someone who could capture all of the Communist Party members.

Q: What other measures against the Jews were undertaken at that period of time?

Did they prohibit the Jews from working or to wear their symbols?

A: No, no. It wasn't like that. It was a livable situation. Who had enough money, they could live. There was not any restrictions or ghettos at that time.

Q: Craftsmen and merchants were able to work?

A: Yes, they were. In the larger stores there were some restrictions, but not significant ones.

Q: What did you do?

A: For several months I was working at the law firm while the firm had its permit to work, but once their permit got revoked they had to close and I left. Later my uncle found me a job at his friend's brush store, so I have worked there for eight months.

Q: Did you make brushes?

A: Well, I made them. I was working mostly assisting kind of jobs, so I was washing hair from the cows' tails. I have worked there for eight months. I have to admit that all of the time I was working at this store, I have never been insulted. The employees were mostly Hungarian, and all of them new that I was a Jew, but no one ever insulted me, or told me anything bad. They new that I was a Jew and that I was a lawyer, but they were polite.

Q: When did they mobilize you?

A: In 1942 I received the drafting notice to report to Sombor for the working battalions. That was instead of joining the army. We were grouped through different units, and we belonged to Hodnozavaras County that was near Segedin.

Q: Could you explain why Jews could not join the regular army?

A: On one hand the Hungarians thought that the Jews are not worth being in the Hungarian military, while on the other hand they did think that Jews might collaborate with the Communists. Here, in Sombor we were practicing to work hard and to live under the inhuman conditions. We were doing worthless kinds of jobs.



Q: Since the Jews were not allowed to join the army, they were selected in the working battalions. Did these battalions serve military purposes?

A: Yes, they did. The working battalions were a part of the military, and my battalion was under the Hungarian Air Force. Most of my work that I did during the time of my service, I worked on the construction of the airport. First we were working on the construction of the airport on the border between Romania and Hungary. That winter was very severe and the soil was too hard to work on, so we were transferred to Kuz where we worked on cleaning the snow, and later we were finally taken to Sombor to participate in the construction of their airport. I forgot to mention that there were some people from Bacva in our units. We were lucky that some of us were stationed in one German house whose owner was very decent. In the beginning we were put in the barn to live there, but after while, the owner let us moved inside the storage, which had a hardwood floor and which was very clean. He gave us warm blankets and piles of straw, he allowed us listen the radio London, and during the Christmas he used to brink us some delicious cakes. We were in the group of ten people. Some other groups were mistreated.

Q: Who did mistreat them?

A: Mostly their masters. The owners of the houses these other people stayed at. Germans.

Q: Was that in Kuz?

A: No, that was in Setivan

Q: So, you were lucky to be in the house where the owner was decent man!

A: Yes, that family was very nice. He would call me a doctor.

Q: To you!

A: Yes. The owner told me that he was an unhappy man. He thought if either side in the war wins it will be his loss. If the Germans won he would have to report why he wasn't in Kulturnburg, but if the Communists won he would be prosecuted just because he was a German. I checked after the war, and he was right. Not a single German remained alive in

this town after World War II. Once the Russians entered the Romania, most of the 500,000 Germans fled. Whoever remained, these people were killed.

Q: So, you were stationed throughout the various households. But who was your commander?

A: The Hungarian officers were our commanders. Most of the time we were just cleaning the snow.

Q: How did they treat you?

A: Each one was different. Some of them were extremely fascistic, while some of them were all right. Some of them were taking bribes from the richer Jews. They would pay our commander and he would let them go home for the weekend. But his tactic was to always include some of the poor Jews so the bribery would not be so obvious. So, he knew that I was poor, and that I was a refugee so he included me on the list with the people who were allowed to go home on the weekends. So, he used my status to clean his dirty operations.

Q: Some of the workers were taken from Sombor to Hungary, and after that to Ukraine. Were they on the front there?

A: I think they were on the front. I am not sure, but I believe that they were cleaning the mines, so many of them died.

Q: Your uncle did not return?

A: No, he didn't.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Ladislav Mendeson Kasalo.

Q: For how long did you stay in that German town?

A: In Romania there wasn't a German town, that was in Backa while I was there. Over there we were building the airport which exists even today. Our status there was not that

bad. Some of us were allowed to go home. We were allowed to have visitors, as well as to receive parcels with food from our families. We managed to live a decent life while we were in Hungary. The Romanians were very primitive. We were stationed in the basement of one very dirty house. It was very primitive.

Q: When were you transferred?

A: This is how I was transferred to Bor. The Hungarians made a deal with the German engineer Meihauzen to sent around 6,000 workers to the Bor mines. Originally, the Chetniks were supposed to provide these people, but they did not recruit people, so this job came to the Hungarians to deal with. So one large contingent of Jews from Eastern Europe came to Apatin. They were mostly uneducated people, with a few intellectuals among them. They did not speak any Hungarian, only Yiddish.

Q: Later, the Ustashas came too?

A: They did come to Apatin. A German medical commission was selecting people for work based on their physical fitness. Since the number of physically fit people was missing, the Germans selected some of the people from my group. That was the way that me and 15 others from my group ended up in Bor.

Q: Could you explain what Bor was?

A: Bor was the German working base next to Trepca. Bor was actually the copper mine. The Germans opened the top of the hill, so they got the open mine. Right after they built a railroad from Bor to Dubravice. Dubravice was a port on the river Danube, close to Pozarevac. They were building the power station in the Kostolac, so they were planning in the long run.

Q: How many Jews from Hungary and Vojvodina were there?

A: There were around 3,000 Jews from Hungary and Vojvodina. There were several prisons in the area and each of them had five to six hundreds of Jews.

Q: Where did you work?

A: I was at Feralberg. We worked for the organization Top and Vienna's company "Relagebeg".

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

A: We worked on different of jobs. I was lucky that I was very skillful, so I worked with the miners, and that helped me escape later on. I learned the technique of installing dynamite and many other technical things that helped me later in my life. However, I worked so hard and it was such exhausting work.

Q: What kind of food did you have?

A: Food was very bad. Around 200-250 of us were accommodated in only one barn, that was filled with the mud.

Q: Who was your commander?

A: Most of our commanders were Hungarians, but our field supervisors were Germans. The Germans treated us much better than the Hungarians. The Hungarians had some very severe ways of punishing prisoners that had remained since the Austro-Hungarian period. On the contrary, the Germans kept us unpunished because they wanted healthy workers, rather than exhausted and for work worthless people. But the food was miserable. However, compared to others I was in a better position. They did not take our clothes. I had several shirts, suits and some other things that I could sell for money. For example, I sold my watch for 7,000 dinars. They allowed correspondence, so we were allowed to send the postcards to our families once a month.

Q: Were you receiving the packages?

A: I received the packages illegally. Some of my friends from Belgrade who were also organized to some work groups helped me receive some of the parcels. They also try to sneak some tobacco. We had enough paper to roll the cigarettes, but we did not have enough tobacco. So my parents used these canals to send me some tobacco along with the other things. The behavior of the Hungarian guards was different from person to person. Some of them had a very sadistic nature, while some of them were more reserved. As

time went on, more people became softer and more human. Also, there were some of the soldiers who directly protected us. The worst were the common Hungarian soldiers. They used to beat, strangle, and slaughter the prisoners. I was afraid that the guard might figure out that I was assisting the Jews, and in that case they would send me to Russia to the Eastern Front.

Q: You food same as the military?

A: Correct. It was even worse than in former Yugoslavia.

Q: Were there prisoners who tried to escape?

A: Prisoners who tried to escape and were caught, they were brought before the Hungarian military court in Bor. They would be brought in front the firing squad. The rest of the prisoners were observing, so they could get the idea what could happen to them in the case that they try to escape. However, no one tried to escaped from our prison. The reason for that was that there was a Chetniks brigade stationed nearby our prison.

Q: Who were the Chetniks?

A: Chetniks were the followers of Draza Mihajlovic, who was for the return of the Serbian king. Honestly, they played a double role. On one hand, they played the role of the German friends, and on the other, they were their enemies. I can provide the facts for this argument.

Q: Why were they in the civil war with the partisans organized by the Communist Party?

A: They were fighting the communists and they were in the open war with them. So that was the partnership they had with the Germans. The Chetniks from the surrounding areas were allowed by Germans to use our prison's doctors, because their military unit did not have any physicians. So the doctors from our camp were in close contact with the Chetniks.

Q: Did the Chetniks' commander collaborate with the German ones?

A: Yes, they did. The German commander of our camp sent the doctors to heal the Chetniks and their families.

Q: Was the German commander in charge of the entire camp or just the working squad?

A: He was the commander of the working camp, and he was not a military person, he was a civilian.

Q: So you witnessed the cooperation between German commander and the Chetniks' officers?

A: The Chetniks' commander Pirotic was openly inviting doctors to join the Chetniks. One day he planned the kidnapping of the doctors from the camp. He came with the well-equipped Chetnik soldiers, confiscated the rifles from the Hungarian guards, took their uniform, left them only in their underwear, and kidnapped the doctors. Actually, most of the doctors voluntarily joined the Chetniks. One of these Chetniks offered me to go with them, but I was interested in joining the Chetniks forces. Two brothers Perl, then Israel Milo, and some others joined the Chetniks.

Q: Were the Chetniks in the neighboring villages?

A: I do not know exactly where they were, but they were somewhere around.

Q: Did they survive?

A: Yes, they lived there and survived.

Q: Was there a anti-fascist organization?

A: I made a contact with the illegal organization and ten of us constantly maintained that contact. We were building four bunkers on the four corners in the place called Brestovacka Banja. Over the workers who worked for some company in that region we started receiving the bulletins that were published in London and Moscow. Unfortunately, we were transferred to a different location, losing our connection with the pro-communist forces. We were transferred to the different prison where we were supposed to work on the local power plant.

Q: You were talking about the creation of the communist organization. But among these 3,000 Jews were there anyone who tried to initiate some anti-fascist organization.

A: I believe that some initiatives existed. Our problem was that we were very disunited and we were held apart throughout different prisons.

Q: It means that in your unit was not any of the organizations!

A: It was some kind of organization, but it's ties were very fragile. Very soon I lost any of the contact with such organization, I got scared since I lost my connection, so I decided to escape.

Q: So that is the reason why you decided to run.

A: Correct. I decided to run. I became very scared. Especially since the extermination in the working camps increased and the mistreatment of the Jews increased. We used the situation when the Red Army and the partisans came to Bor. That was the area close to our prison, so we used the confusion that was created by the constant battles and escaped. Seven of us hid in some nearby forest and waited there for the appropriate moment to continue our escape.

Q: Who were these seven people who escaped?

A: They were all Jews. Some were from Subotica, and some were Segedin.

Q: How long did you stay in the forest for?

A: I believe it took us about 14 days while we were hiding and searching for the way. I knew the storage where the black-market merchant was storing its products. We broke into it and stole some margarine and some other things that helped feed ourselves. Then we went to the farm where we started working for the local farmers only for food. We had a delicious milk every day and some other products that gave us strength. These farmers were known as the Vlachs, not Romanians, but Vlachs.

Q: These were the inhabitants of the Balkan with the strong Romanian influence.

A: Correct. They were very primitive. In their houses the heat did not have even exhaust pipe from their furnaces into the chimneys. So their houses were full of smoke.

Q: You said that you were searching around for 15 days!

A: We were lucky that we met one local man who escaped the neighboring village in front of the Germans and who was very familiar with the terrain. Actually, this man was the one who took us to the partisans. However, these 15 days were very hard. We were hiding all the time in front of the different armies. So many different armies were in that region. Russians, Germans, Chetniks, and partisans, they were all in that region. So that was the way we joined the partisans. One day we received the command to go to Belgrade. Since that was a long walk to Belgrade and I was not in shape because of the time spent in the prison, I had a problem following these people in their march. So all the time I was losing them and again finding them. Two or three days prior to our arrival, Belgrade was liberated.

Q: Was that in October 1944?

A: We came to Belgrade on October 22, 1944.

Q: Which division were you?

A: As I mentioned, that was 23<sup>rd</sup> division , 7<sup>th</sup> Serbian brigade. I got the approval to enter Belgrade. As soon as I arrived in Belgrade, I went to the Attorney Association where I met my old colleague Apostolovic, who was there when I passed the attorney exam, and who helped me get my license right away and without any trouble. So on the October 23<sup>rd</sup> I was a licensed attorney.

Q: What was Belgrade like on that day?

A: Well, it was totally demolished. Everything was burned, and the common man had a hard time getting around.

Q: Do you remember when you escaped the prison?

A: It was near our prison.



Q: Do you remember the date?

A: It was the beginning of September.

Q: What happened with the people who remained in the prison?

A: Some of them got killed. No one remained in the prison, except the bakers and doctors.

Q: Were they taken anywhere?

A: No, they left them there, and they were freed.

Q: What happened with the others?

A: Some of them escaped to Hungary. I remembered that they took a walk over Belgrade and River Tisa to Hungary. Some of them are still alive and live in Budapest.

Q: Who took them away from the prison?

A: They were escorted by the Hungarians.

Q: How many were taken from the Bor prison?

A: They were taken in two groups. The first group was attacked close to Crvenka. They had many casualties. Afterwards, they reached the Germans, most of whom surrendered.

Q: So the fact that you escaped saved your life!

A: Correct. The other group was taken to the prison where they were liberated at the end of 1944 by the partisans. Mostly, they joined the partisans, crossed to Romania, and through Temisoara they came home.

Q: So you did not have any connections with the Chetniks?

A: No, I did not have any connection with the Chetniks. Well, to be honest I was invited by Chetniks to join them since I was the only educated army officer before the war.

However, I did not respond to such invitation. Most of these Chetniks, after they lost the battle with partisans, they ran away to their homes or just stayed and joined to the partisans. That was how doctor Semze remained in the partisans, passed the medical exam after the war, and remained the specialized military doctor in the Yugoslav Army.

Q: A Doctor was with Chetniks before?

A: Yes, he was. Just like doctor Sefer from Kanjza who joined the partisans. Later, he told some joke about the president, so he was brought before the military court. I want to mention one more thing that I forgot. Some of the German soldiers who were delivering mail used to steal the mail mostly for the Jews. I gave as my mailing address the name of the local influential Serb, so most of my mail was not stolen.

Q: Let's go back. Your only experience with the Chetniks was when they kidnapped some of the doctors from the prison. Did you know any other Chetniks' commanders?

A: I heard of some Jovanovic Pizon, who used to operate in the region between Romania and Serbia and who used to kill all of the escapers. But this is what I heard and not what I saw. Most of the youth who did not know where to go would join him.

Q: In 1946 you received all of the necessary jurists permissions. What was your career like?

A: People in my military unit recognized that I was so exhausted with the years spent in the jail. They want to use me in some different way. Once they learned that I was an attorney, and especially when they heard that I spoke the Hungarian language, they sent me to Subotica to work for the military court. I remembered that I walked again for almost four days. It is strange once you see that today people cross these distances just in couple of hours with the cars.

Q: When were you a member of the military court?

A: First I started as a clerk, after that I moved to the position of the secretary. I spent some time on this position, after which they transferred me to the military court in Novi Sad. Here, I was a military prosecutor. A friend of mine from Belgrade heard that I was

in military, and since he was influential he managed to get me transferred to Belgrade into the Ministry of the Internal Affairs. Here I was from 1945 until 1950.

Q: That was the Ministry of Internal Affairs!

A: Correct. I was a chief of the sector. I worked in the department for the citizenship and civil affairs. Soon after I was transferred to the Construction sector, where my new duties were to organize three factories and to supervise its construction.

Q: Which were those buildings?

A: Those were in Sremska Mitrovica, in Pozarevac, and in Nis.

Q: Did you organize these factories?

A: Yes, I organized them.

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

A: On this job sight I completely lost my nerves. I had so many problems about the job sight in Nis, because the terrain that the factory was built on was not appropriate. However, we successfully ended this war, so I was recommended to the next job, which was deputy of the Minister of the Finance. I was in the department for taxation. After this ministry was closed, I became the public defense attorney. From there I was moved to the federal level. But here I could not agree with the ways of work of some people. I had some different views on the problems of the decentralization of the state's railroad company. However, I was told that I was not there to think, but just to implement laws that I was suggested.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was beginning of 1950's. However, I moved to the Department of Justice. Here, I moved my friend from the University Krstic, who was later the one who helped me be elected for the Yugoslav Supreme Court. From here I was progressing very fast. I was writing books and press releases on different legislation. Well, very soon, my work was

recognized by the general council of the Communist Party, which was one of the highest compliments and honors at that time.

Q: When did you do that?

A: I can not recall. Like 1956 or '57.

Q: How long did you work in the court for?

A: For twenty years. After that I retired. They wanted me to go to some other parts and work, but I had enough of my service and I had enough years of work to be retired. So I wrote couple of more reports on different legislation and retired after that.

Q: Even though you retired you still remained active?

A: I worked in arbitrage commission. Also, I was a member of the Presidency. I was there two times for three years.

Q: You are still active!

A: Correct I am still active. At least once a month I have a solid case to work on.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I got married on September 1, 1945. I married Eva Rozinberg, who just came back from the prison and stayed in my apartment in Subotica. At that time I slept in my office allowing Eva and her mother stay and live in my apartment.

Q: Was she a Jewish woman from Subotica?

A: Correct. She was from Subotica and her family was once very wealthy, but ended up very poor. My mother-in-law in the last years of her life was literally hungry. I remember their family used to own a factory.

Q: Well, did you have children with your wife Eva?

A: Yes, I do have two children. One of my daughters is Jelena, who graduated with a degree in mathematics, and Judith, who finished pharmaceutical school, and currently works for the pharmacy in the Jewish Community.

Q: What did Eva do?

A: Eva was educated in Switzerland, so she spoke several languages. She spoke French, English, German, Serbian, and Hungarian. She started working for the information agency. Very soon she was elected for one of the main persons in the agency. Very soon she was promoted to the chief of the information agency. In the beginning she had some problems with the bookkeeping, so I had one of the people I met in the prison help her with that.

Q: That was a part of the photo agency TANJUG?

A: Correct. Later they incorporated in one agency and became TANJUG. After 30 years of work, she retired. Five years later she died.

Q: Did you stay active in the Jewish community afterwards?

A: Yes, I was twice reelected to the council of the Jewish community. Third time I refused to be elected.

Q: Was that in Belgrade?

A: Yes, in Belgrade.

Q: So, you were a member of the council.

A: Yes, I was a member for two terms for which I received couple of awards. My wife was one of the organizers of the Jewish Museum, and I have couple of awards in her name too.

Q: This is the interview for the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. I am interested how did your family handled a dissolution of Yugoslavia and the tragedy of the war?

A: Well, it was very hard for us. We lived in Yugoslavia freely, without being exposed to any kind of discrimination.

Q: If you would compare the crimes committed in World War II with the crimes committed in this current war, what would you measure as the worse?

A: I could not compare these two. I believe that World War II was the worst. The volume of crimes was larger in World War II.

Q: However, nothing can be compared with the World War II?

A: Correct. These death camps, Jasenovac, it was the worst. My parents were taken to Aushwitz in 1944.

Q: How do you live right now?

A: Predominately, I live by myself.

Q: Your wife died.

A: Yes, she died. I have a friend who I meet from time to time so I am not that lonely. My daughter that lives in Belgrade calls me every day, and very often spends some time with me. On Sunday I eat at her house and she prepares food for Monday and Tuesday. I cook one day in week, and during the rest of the week I go to the restaurant. At least the food is not problem for me.

Q: How do you handle these sanctions?

A: I handle them as the rest of the people. We all do have problems, but that is the way it is. I have hope for our youth.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?

A: No, I think I said all I wanted.