

USHMM Archives, RG-50.468*0009

Ljiljana Ivani{evi} was only 5 years old when she was deported to Jasenovac from the Serbian village Veliko Nabdje in Slavonia where she stayed with her two brothers at her maternal aunt. They lived before that in Novi Sad, in the Region of Vojvodina which was occupied by Hungary, but both her parents joined the partisan and before that entrusted the children to the aunt. Her father was killed in action, her mother was seriously wounded but survived and found two of her kids after the liberation. A baby of eight month perished in the Usta{a camp Stara Gradi{ka which was Jasenovac 5.

Ljiljana gave a picture of Stara Gradi{ka as seen through the eyes of a child. She was able to reel back the film of her recollections, and describe the days in the camp as they were lived by a child.

She described herself as a filthy, sick, hungry little animal. When she was alone in the prison she often sought shelter in overturned barrels in the yard where old, sick and exhausted women also sheltered before dying. Four men had the task to collect the dead. One of them used to clean his hands after handling the dirty corpses with a bundle of grass which he carried in his pocket. Once he threw away the bundle of filthy grass, Ljiljana took it and ate it. After this he started bringing grass for her to it.

Ljiljana described the fate of children who were deported to Stara Gradi{ka with their mothers. The Usta{as separated them brutally. Ljiljana was present when columns of women with children were brought to the camp after the joint German and Usta{a offensive against Serbian liberated territory around the mountain Kozara in Bosnia in Summer 1942. Ljiljana has seen babies torn from the breasts of their mothers. Children were put in a special "small camp" within Stara Gradi{ka she believes in former stables. Some of the older were sent to other camps or given to Croatian families to work as servants. Her older brother survived in this way while her baby brother 8 month old was taken somewhere and never reappeared.

Ljiljana was not put into the "little camp" for children., Her aunt smuggled her into the prison for women. When the aunt was sent with younger women to Bosnia to pluck plums and make jam for the Usta{as, a Jewish woman took care of Ljiljana. The woman had two children of her own, they were both taken by the Usta{as never to be seen again. The Jewish woman did everything she could for Ljiljana to survive. She was working in a workshop and during night Ljiljana slept with her in the prison room. One morning Ljiljana awoke alone. The woman was taken away during the night. Ljiljana remembers that she was a thin woman and that she tried to teach the child about herself. If you survive, she said to Ljiljana, know that I am from the town of Zemun, that my name is Bendl and that we lived in the Vrtlarska street (Garden street). You know what vrt is, (what garden is) we lived in the Vrtlarska ulica. She mentioned also something about timber or logs, Ljiljana does not remember well, and supposes that the family had a timber business. She never met anybody from the woman's family after the liberation.

After the Jewish woman was gone, Ljiljana was protected by a Serbian older woman and finally taken out of the camp by a good Croatian. He came to the prison Stara Gradi{ka to claim his daughter which was married to a communist who was a Serb and was pregnant.

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Ljiljana said that pregnant women were first to be killed so that her father did not find her. . Searching through the prison he was galvanized, as he said later, by Ljiljana's eyes. He left the prison but turned back to claim Ljilja obsessed by her eyes which must have implored him. The Usta{as handed her to him. She was 5. The man, Grga Zlatar, an employee and his wife Ana, a teacher, took good care of her, they healed her. Her skin was heavily infected as she did not wash during two years, her forfinger was without skin and was bleeding as the hungry child sucked it all the time. My forfinger sawed my life, Ljiljana said.

In the light of her experience with the Jewish woman Hendl and the murder of Jewish women and children in Stara Gradi{ka, Ljiljana rejected strongly the allegations that the Jews in Jasenovac denounced and provoked the Serbs and participated in the selection of those to be killed, made in the Statement of 13 Serbs released from Jasenovac in 1942.

Ljiljana who is the Secretary of the Belgrade chapter of survivors from Jasenovac said: "Persons who could make such statements are or not human beings or derived some benefit from speaking in such a way, they are sold souls."

She said that survivors from Jasenovac, Gentile and Jews, who live in Belgrade are close to each other as brothers and sisters.

She rebuffed the writing of the president of Croatia Franjo Tudjman that at the most 30,000 to 40,000 people were arbitrarily killed in Jasenovac, saying that only in Stara Gradi{ka (Jasenovac 5) about 60,000 were killed of whom 20,000 children.

"Tudjman's statements are horrible, they are immoral....Jasenovac can not be hidden, Jasenovac was the biggest killing place in a small country."

As for the statement of Jovan Prnjatovi} given in occupied Belgrade in 1942 after his release from Jasenovac, that the Serbs in addition to suffering from the Usta{as in Jasenovac were suffering from the Jews also, Ljiljana declared:

"Prnjatovi} is a person without honor if he could speak in this sway. We were all the same in the camp, Jews, Serbs, Gypsies, Croats and Muslims".