

Survivor Testimonies

Presented at the
**First International Conference and Exhibit on the
Jasenovac Concentration Camps**

Testimonies from:
Conference Sessions Three and Five
Post-conference interviews
Written testimony submitted to the conference

Session Three:

Ms. Mara Vejnović
Ms. Ljiljana Ivanišević
Mr. Savo Petrović
Mr. George Živković
Mr. Božo Švarz

Session Five:

Mr. Miloš Despot
Mr. Sadik Danon
Mr. Čedomil Huber
Mr. Josip Erlih
Ms. Štefica Serdar Sabolić
Mr. Edo Šajer
Mr. Savo Delibasić

**Kingsborough Community College of the
City University of New York**

Sessions Three and Five: October 30, 1997

Note: Testimonies are included here in the order in which the survivors spoke at the conference. Session Three was chaired by Professor Abraham Edelheit of Kingsborough Community College. The survivors who spoke during Session Three were Ms. Mara Vejnović, Ms. Ljiljana Ivanišević, Mr. Savo Petrović, Mr. George Zivković, and Mr. Božo Švarz.

Session Five was chaired by Dr. Henry Huttenbach. The survivors who spoke during Session Five were Mr. Miloš Despot, Mr. Sadik Danon, Mr. Čedomil Huber, Mr. Josip Erlih, Ms. Štefica Serdar Sabolić, Mr. Edo Šajer, and Mr. Savo Delibasić.

The additional written statements or oral statements given in interviews after the conference are also included following each survivor's conference statement. All survivors' conference statements and all post-conference interviews are available on video tapes.

Prof. Abraham Edelheit (Session Three Chair) of Kingsborough Community College, announces:

I want to welcome you all to the afternoon session of our conference on Jasenovac concentration camp, extermination camp, horror site—whatever you prefer to call it. The place that I would like to start, just very briefly to introduce things is by noting my friend, my colleague, my former boss, Dr. Michael Berenbaum, [Director, Shoah Foundation, Former Director of the U.S. Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC] who noted that, put differently, since unfortunately I did not quite catch the words that he said, but to paraphrase his presentation: There are two forms of history. One is the history of statistics, the history of documents, the history that we, and I am a son of holocaust survivor, may he rest in peace, the history that those of us who did not experience the events can only understand indirectly, vicariously. And then there is the history of those who experienced the events about which we are speaking.

If we are to understand the history of the tragic events that

occurred in what is now former Yugoslavia between 1941 and 1945, I believe, our only way to do so is through the testimony of those who were there. We can debate the statistics at infinitum, ad nauseum. I don't think that one side is ever going to end up convincing the other side. I wonder whether the whole thing is not an exercise in futility.

My father once wrote that if we are ever to understand the history of the holocaust we must begin by understanding that it is not one story. That it is rather the six million stories of those who perished and millions of stories of those who survived. If that is true, and I do believe that it is true, then we are standing and sitting here today in the presence of history.

It is my great honor to introduce the speakers here, today. I will introduce each in tern. I am going to ask them to limit their speeches to approximately 20 minutes so that we can have a question and answer session at the end of hour, toward the end of our session. I know we are running a little late but bear with us.

I would like to introduce now Ms Mara Vejnović who will speak about fate of women and children at Stara Gradiška. I believe she will be speaking in Serbian but there will be English translation on the board.

Thank you, and please welcome Ms. Mara Vejnović.



Ms. Mara Vejnović
Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška Survivor

Ms. Mara Vejnović

Conference testimony

Note: Ms. Vejnović reads her written statement in Serbo-Croatian. Translation of that text into English was projected on the board for the audience.

Today I will speak on the theme of: the Sufferings of Children and Their Mothers in the “Stara Gradiška” Jasenovac Ustasha Concentration Camp. First, I would like to say hello to all the participants at this event, the Chairman, organizers, scientists, historians, and to my colleagues, that is, the concentration camp inmates, survivors—the sufferers. I wish all the success for this conference.

I was born on September 4, 1923, in Žumberak-Doljani-Radatovići, in Croatia. My mother Marija’s maiden name was Dučić. My father’s name was Nikola Smiljanić.

Žumberak is located on the slopes of a high mountain—formerly known as Saint Gera—now known as Trtin’s Peak (Trtinov Vrh), which today marks the border between Slovenia and Croatia.

In the XVI century, my ancestors, former Uskoci—frontier’s men—were transferred to and settled in Žumberak by the Austrian rulers in order to form the Military Frontier, the Vojna Krajina, between Austria and Turkey for protection from the Turks.

Žumberak is famous for its natural beauties, but the region is underdeveloped. The People there are industrious and hardworking.

Under the enormous pressure of the Hasburg government and the Catholic Church, the Žumberak Orthodox Diocese recognized the Pope as the supreme religious ruler in the XVIII century. From that time on, the Orthodox Serbs became Uniates—so called Greko-Catholics. However, they kept their Orthodox Church rites and centuries-long folklore and customs.

My parents were striving for a better life for our family. In 1931, they moved our family to Slavonia, Stari Grabovac, near Novska. The town of Jasenovac is only 12 km from Novska.

With the appearance of fascism and the resulting immediate

peril, my freedom loving family decided to take part in the anti-Fascist struggle. It was with a firm resolve that we participated in all aspects of the struggle against the fascist peril.

The war started. Both Yugoslavia and its army disintegrated. From April 6, 1941 we kept watching in astonishment the passing of the Yugoslav army: carts and starved, cold bitten and depressed soldiers marching towards Belgrade-Serbia. The German occupiers invaded the country. The Ustasha were on the scene. Maček's Civilian Guard collaborated with the Ustasha government. On April 10th, 1941 came the declaration of The Ustasha State—NDH, or The Independent State of Croatia, with Ante Pavelić as the head of state.

The German occupiers and the Ustasha threatened specifically the Serbs, and then the Jews and Gypsies and all the anti-Fascists irrespective of their nationality.

My older brothers joined the Partisans. Nikica who was 23 joined in the fall of 1941 and Đuka was 21 and joined in February of 1942, but was killed in the spring of that year.

The rest of my family together with other well known antifascists continued the antifascist activities underground. However, the antifascists of Novska and the surrounding area were betrayed.

On March 4th, 1942, the Ustasha surrounded our house in Stari Grabovac and arrested us: my parents; my brother Dušan, who was 17 and who was killed while with the Partisans in autumn of 1943; my sister Desanka, who was then 15 and died later in a traffic accident in 1973; and myself. Heavily guarded, Ustasha took us to Novska. My youngest sister stayed at home, crying loudly in the yard near the well. She was only 13.

At the same time many antifascists and their families also were arrested in Novska and in that vicinity.

The following day the Ustasha released my sister Desanka, because she was a minor. My two underage sisters lived alone and took care of the house. They brought food and clean clothes to us at the Novska and Nova Gradiška prisons.

Around March 10, 1942, the Ustasha transferred my parents, my brother Dušan and me from the Novska prison to the Nova Gradiška prison where I stayed until May 30, 1942. On March 13, 1942, I tried to escape with a group of prisoners including my brother Dušan

in order to join the Partisans. But the Ustasha arrested me again.

The Ustasha brought me back to the Nova Gradiška prison where I was savagely beaten and tortured. Then I was transferred to the Stara Gradiška concentration camp where I stayed until February of 1943.

At the same time my parents and my youngest sister, along with many other antifascists and their families from Novska, Paklenica and other nearby places, were taken to the Sisak concentration camp. This was the second arrest for my parents.

The Ustasha then looted all of our possessions and property. They tried to set our house on fire and destroyed our warm home forever. My sister Desanka had joined the Partisans just before that incident.

In the camp I endured all horrors of hell of the concentration camp. I am a witness to the ever-present fear of death, mass killings of prisoners, humiliations, hunger and starvation. I survived typhus fever and several attacks of dysentery. We, the prisoners, felt like slaves. I witnessed many illnesses and deaths of children and adults. The suffering of children and their mothers in Stara Gradiška I had the hardest time to take. That was the most painful thing. I had many nightmares. I would keep asking myself but I could never answer the question of how a human being could become such a criminal, butcher-bloodsucker, vampire and murderer. How could Ustasha kill so many human beings, especially children? Nevertheless, the sights of hell were continuous. They were a reality.

In June and July 1942, by day and by night, new columns of wagons full of people were brought in to the camp. Entire families were arriving, holding white flags. They were prisoners, mostly from Kozara [mountain], but also from Banija, Kordun, Slavonia, Lika, Dalmatia, Srem and Zemun. In those columns were men, women, young people and children. The Ustasha and Germans captured them during offensives and attacks on villages and towns. In silence and in bewilderment, we the prisoners watched for days and for nights the procession of oxen driven wagons loaded with personal belongings. The men and women marched dressed in the national costumes. The men wore black hats and the women wore white scarves. We watched the barefoot and exhausted children come into the camp, followed by the heavily guarded Ustasha with their bayonets pointed.

The camp was filling up quickly and the Fascists were getting crueler and more creative in their methods of annihilating children and adults. These daily exhibitions of mutilated and slaughtered children and adults were horrible.

On one occasion the Ustasha separated male children between the ages of 7 and 15. They dressed them in black uniforms with the Ustasha cap on their heads, with the white letter “U” [symbol of Ustasha] sewed on the cap. For days, columns of these children, starved, pale and exhausted, with their big receded eyes, were marched all over the huge space of the camp. The children had to follow the orders of the Ustasha soldiers who were training them to become, as the Ustasha called it, the Ustasha’s mainstay, or another word “their janissaries”. The children had to sing Ustasha songs. Often when I would watch the children, the children would look back at me too. It seemed to me that the children were ashamed to sing those songs. We watched each other with a mutual understanding. The eyes of those children can be found in the books and publications of Dragoje Lukić, so far the most powerful testament to the children-prisoners of the concentration camp Stara Gradiška -Jasenovac. Those eyes, the symbol of shame and spite, are still the best warning today.

Later I learned that during the night in the barracks, either while half-asleep or even out of spite, the children would sing out loud famous Partisan songs such as: “There goes Mladen leading the Partisans”, “Hey Kozara, you are full of leaves” and so on. This enraged the Ustasha and then they stopped training the children to be the Ustasha’s mainstay. Instead they simply killed them and sent them to other camps—Jastrebarsko and so on.

Whenever the Ustasha snatched children away from their mothers, horrible cries of pain, grief, helplessness and madness were heard throughout the camp. Often groups of Ustasha with bayonets would force the mothers with their children into big circles. At first, they would ask the mothers to separate from their children voluntarily and the children from their mothers. Since they were unable to accomplish this, they would then attack the children and mothers with guns and bayonets, separating them by force into two groups.

The mothers and their children would press closely together and cry loudly while they were pulled apart. Some of the mothers who

could not bear to be separated from their children charged straight into the Ustasha and fell dead on bayonets. The Ustasha then would trample right over their bodies, crushing them with their boots. Then they pull the children to one side and the surviving mothers to the other.

The cries of pain grew ever stronger. The hands of the separated children and their mothers stretched out as long as they could until they were separated in the most sorrowful pain, in their desire to stay together. Their eyes grew wider trying to remember even the smallest detail of their beloved's face. But the distance between the children and their mothers grew ever greater, and in most cases it was final.

This super human grief, uncertainty and ultimate hopelessness was ever harder and more brutal.

At that time, together with groups of young female prisoners, I was given a task to nurse the sick children day and night. The Party leader Ružica Štajner from the Croatian female camp organized the nursing duty. Through this work, I witnessed the mass extermination of children in the camp in the cruelest ways. This included all children from babies to the age of 15. I witnessed the most horrible forms of destruction of thousands and thousands of young children and adolescents.

The Ustasha would isolate large groups of children. They would then strip them naked and would laugh repulsively if any of them were physically handicapped. They would "examine" these children, and then classify them into smaller groups, all to be destroyed—killed.

Masses of children were forced into the huge camp building, filling every room. Fifty or more children were forced into a room, where they could stand only.

Whenever the children were hurled into these rooms they would be visited by three to four nuns dressed in dark brown habits with white headdress. They would enter the building carrying buckets filled with some sort of liquid with which they would then brush the children's lips. Whenever I, or other female prisoners, would ask them what kind of liquid it was they would say that it was a liquid that prevented thirst.

However, an hour or two later the children would be screaming and howling, calling for their mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers,

or the names of their aunts and other relatives. The children would squirm from pain. Their cries grew increasingly more horrified. They would cry:

“Oh mother, I am dying. Oh sister, I am in pain. Oh my dear aunt, I am thirsty.”

They would fall into contortions one over the other, as there was no space. Their arms, legs, bodies and heads were commingled. Their dying bodies were decomposing. Fecal discharge was mixed with these still living disintegrating children's bodies. These poor children had open wounds on their bodies. Then, they would simply die while shrieking and suffering most horrible pain. This lasted for days.

The Ustasha appointed a group of prisoners to visit the rooms, and to place the dead children, or dying children into blankets and to take them to designated places where they would be destroyed. As the days passed there were fewer and fewer children. In the end, only a few of the toughest ones survived barely.

Then the Ustasha played their biggest criminal trick. The few remaining children, who were still alive, were moved to the attic of the camp building. The other rooms below the attic, where children had been killed were turned into children's hospital. These rooms were furnished with cribs and white sheets. The rooms were washed and cleaned and healthy children were placed into beds. These kids were showered with candy. Doctors and nurses on duty wore white uniforms. And then the Ustasha brought in the International Red Cross delegation accompanied by German officers and Ustasha leaders to visit the camp's so called children's hospital.

The Ustasha boasted of the excellent care they provided to the sick children in the camp. However, they never took to take the delegation to the attic where the few remaining sick children were left to rot.

We, the female prisoners on duty, were helping the children by offering consoling words. We would clean them and give them water and tea. But all of that was of a little use, since the Fascists, the Ustasha, controlled the destiny of these children.

Eventually I witnessed when the children were put into gas chambers. This was ghastly. I find it very hard to talk or to write about it even today.

One day in the camp, after my nursing duty, I wondered off a bit

and came upon a prefabricated building with a gas chamber. The chamber was full of naked half-dead children, thrown one top of the other. The Ustasha kept on piling half-dead children's bodies. They kept on bringing more and more children in blankets. As I watched a cold shudder ran through my body. I stood there numbed, looking at the bottom of human life. Around 500 children were thrown into that gas chamber. The Ustasha patrol, headed by a captain, came to inspect the chamber. The commander was a man of short stature, neatly dressed, but an evil individual. There was a several days old infant lying naked on the chamber's threshold. The Ustasha commander, with his clean and shiny boots, stepped on one of the infant's legs, and took the other leg into his hand and then quartered [split] the child. He threw the infant on to the pile, while cursing his "Serbian or communist mother." The Ustasha called all anti-Fascists "Communists." In reality, we anti-Fascists were just fighting for the freedom of our country. Then the Captain gave orders for the room to be closed and the gas to be released. Then he left with a group of other Ustasha.

I was depressed, grieved, embittered and devastated. After regaining some strength I left the place silently asking myself: what did these children do to the Fascists? I also asked myself if that was the end for all of us Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-Fascists.

In the summer of 1942, many women and girls in the women's camp died of food poisoning. The Ustasha had put lye and other poisons in the food. There were other troubles and illnesses in the camp. Women fell dead on the camp's bare, cracked earth that became soaked with the blood and festering of their rotting bodies.

The summer of 1942 was very hot and all day long we burned underneath the hot sun. The female prisoners who were still healthy tried to help the dying ones by giving them small drinks of water, or simply words of consolation.

To die in this manner was like hell itself. The sorrows were endless. They had very high fevers. Their lips were chapped and full of sores. Their last thoughts and their last dying cries were often addressed to their children who were in the Partisans. They spoke softly, with tender, loving and coddling words like my dear duck, or by their names. But at the same time they would encourage them to fight bravely for their freedom.

It was especially difficult to watch women whose children were

just taken away. In addition, it was painful to observe those young women being “prepared” for the transport to Germany for forced labor. They were “examined” naked and their hair was cut off. The Ustasha shaved all hairy parts of their bodies. Then, they had to put on the camp uniforms. Finally, they were transported by freight trains to Germany’s forced labor camps.

While watching all of these horror scenes in the camp I was often stunned and in shock. Whenever I recall those appalling scenes from the concentration camp, I come to conclusion that the truth must be told about all Fascists, irrespective of their kind and sort. The world must know of their crimes in order to get a true and complete picture of these evildoers, monsters and brutes.

All of humanity should be made aware of the crimes of the Ustasha in order to be able to fight for the right to live, and for the freedom of Mankind, and especially for the rights of children.

While I was in those camps I was convinced that I would never get out that hell alive and be free again. I never thought of the ever-present danger of death in such situations, even in the most terrifying ones. I will never forget what we all endured in the concentration camp.

Post-conference interview of Ms. Vejnović at the hotel

I am Mara Vejnović Svirić. I was born in Žumberak. Then I lived in Novska from the time I was seven years old. I have already spoken at the conference, held here in New York, about the beginnings of my involvement with the anti-fascist movement, and about the suffering of children and mothers at the Stara Gradiška concentration camp. Therefore, now I will speak about other important stuff connected to my imprisonment.

On 12th of March 1942, with a group of fellow prisoners, I attempted escape from the Nova Gradiška prison and join the Partisans. The prisoners who organized the escape did so by confiscating guns from prison guards. We were running through the streets of Nova Gradiška toward the slopes of Slunj. I was in a good condition at the time.

I was just about 19 years old. I was always at the front of the group. But, a young woman, who had previously spent a month in

solitary confinement, and was still all bandaged up from the beatings, tried to escape and join the Partisans with us, fell behind. She called me by my name:

“Marija, I can’t go on.”

The comrades who were with me at the head of the group asked me to go back and help the young woman. I was raised in such a way that I could not refuse to go back. I tried to help her. I didn’t succeed, because the Ustasha surrounded us. The group was getting away, but for us it was now impossible to escape.

They [Ustasha] tied us up, and took us back to the Nova Gradiška prison. That was on a Sunday afternoon. The promenade in Gradiška was full of young girls, young men, German and Ustasha soldiers and officers.

They were beating us while we were tied up. When they brought us into the Nova Gradiška prison, they continued the beatings throughout the afternoon. The groups of Ustasha were taking turns and most viscosly tortured us. My comrade’s name was Ljubica. I was caught because of her, when I tried helping her.

Then, the Ustasha separated us. We were beaten individually. They hit separately Ljubica, then me. Ruthlessly, the Ustasha hit us with rifle butts. They banged our heads against the wall, pulled us by our hair, and they called us names.

At the time, in reality, I was still a child. I was raised in a patriarchal family, yet, the Ustasha were telling me that I was joining the Partisans because I was immoral. For me, it was harder to deal with being accused of being immoral, than the beating itself. I could not comprehend that I would ever live through such an experience.

At one in the morning, they stopped beating me. They took me into a solitary cell. From the beating, I was completely black and blue. I fell into a state of delirium. The next day at noon, the prison guard walked in and told me that my cousin from Kovačevac village, who came from a nearby town, near Gradiška, had brought me lunch. That was truly a delicious lunch. However, when I tried to raise my arm to eat, I couldn’t move it. I was so severely beaten.

I remained in that jail for the next month. I was not beaten after that.

My mother and father had also been imprisoned. My brother Dušan had been with me when I had tried to escape. Eventually he

did escape and joined the Partisans.

After a while, in fact, on May 13, 1942, with a group of anti-fascists—mostly women which I knew from Novska and the surrounding towns—I was transferred to the concentration camp Nova Gradiška. Although, my mother remained in the jail, my father was freed and went home that same day.

When we arrived at the Stara Gradiška concentration camp on a truck, the Ustasha Drbanj and Bevanda were waiting. These Ustasha from Stara Gradiška were notorious—well known for the committing the atrocities. They read us our sentences. They didn't specify whether I had been convicted or not, or how long my sentence was. In reality, there was no trial. They informed me that they knew from a document which they were holding, that my brothers were in the Partisans, and that they will be brought to the Stara Gradiška—Jasenovac camp complex in a day or two.

All I could hope for was not to see my brothers imprisoned. It seemed to me that I had already experienced and managed to endure all of these horrors. If I had to see my brothers there, it would have been much harder for me to endure this entire dreadfulness. Perhaps, because I loved them so much and I wished for them to be free.

Later I was transferred from Kula. First, we were placed in the Croatian women's concentration camp. The conditions there were not any better. I was transferred there only because I was an Uniate. That's because the Ustasha considered Uniates as Croats. The people from Žumberak were former Uskoci, Frontier's men, representatives of the Military Frontier—the Vojna Krajina between Turkey and Austro-Hungary. We who came from Žumberak consider ourselves to be Serbs and Orthodox Christians. I practiced the Orthodox faith, rituals and customs.

The conditions were appalling in the Croatian women's camp. There was no space at all. First, I slept in a barracks with lots of women. There was lots overcrowding and many women had to sleep outside on the ground.

During 1942, in June/July, there was a huge Offensive by German, Ustasha and Chetnik units at Kozara Mountain, and in other regions of Croatia: Banija, Kordun, Slavonia, Lika, part of Dalmatia, Srem and Zemun.

I spoke about this in my earlier presentation, just as I also spoke about children in the camps. I just want to say that the living

conditions were extremely bad.

First, death was continuously hanging over our heads, because the Ustasha terrorized the camps constantly. They killed people arbitrarily, according to their moods, without cause or reason.

There were four women Ustasha. Their names were Mara Buždon, Milka Pribadić, Milica Obradović and Nada Luburić. Mara Buždon would shoot the female prisoners indiscriminately, for example, while they would wait for the awful un-salted food. This soup consisted mostly of water and occasional small pieces of potatoes with a few leaves of cabbage mixed with sand. Many, many women were killed in this way. This was their simple method of pacification.

Then there was an epidemic of typhus. Women were dropping dead in the yard. This was disgusting. They were suffering greatly. They would fight high fevers for days. They would be delirious for days, until they finally died. Their bodies literally fell apart.

The summer of 1942 was very hot. The ground was cracking. All the pus from the sores of these poor sick women would pour into the cracks of the ground. We, the prisoners, especially the younger ones, tried to help the sick women. We would give them a glass of warm water, offer them a few nice words.

I was especially touched by the death of Nada Dragosavljević's mother. I had known Nada from the Partisans. Her mother had given me her ring so I could give it to Nada as a last memory of her. Unfortunately, I was never able to give that ring to Nada. Nada was killed. Besides, I had to throw the ring away when the Ustasha were ransacking the camp. I sewed up the ring into a sharenitsa, a type of blanket, which I brought with me from the prison. So, while the woman Ustasha, Milka Pribadić, was searching one hem of one blanket, I secretly pulled the ring out from the other end. Then, I threw it away, because I knew that she would kill me if she found the ring.

I ended up getting typhus myself. Dr. Buki, a Jew from Sarajevo, a very nice man, was taking care of the sick women. We were lying on some kind of wooden beds in some sort of a barracks. I was continuously in a delirium. We, the prisoners, organized our own nurses. The nurses gave us water. They applied water to our lips so we might endure the fever and the pain from the cracked lips better. Dr. Buki was always visiting us. His warm eyes and caring looks

were like a healing power.

I guess, the fact that the younger female prisoners survived typhus had to do with the fact that we were so young, and that we had a great desire to live. The Ustasha were under the impression that we were suffering from prison flu. Had they known that this was typhus, they would have killed us all. We were extremely grateful to Dr. Buki, a Jew from Sarajevo, who was able to receive from the Jewish community some basic medicines like aspirin, or even medicine for heart patients. We will never forget him.

One day I came very near to dying. This incident could have taken me out of the barrack. A group of Ustasha came together with Dr. Buki and the nurses to visit the barracks. At that point, I was able to sit up. I was very weak and very pale. My skin was very white anyway, and I had black hair. The leading Ustasha of the group looked at me and asked Dr. Buki if I were Jewish. Dr. Buki said that I wasn't. The Ustasha asked the same question two or three times and each time Dr. Buki said no. The Ustasha moved on. Had Dr. Buki said that I was Jewish, I would have been taken to death. I would have been killed like most of the young Jewish girls. Dr. Buki saved my life one more time.

After I got out of the barracks and was feeling better, I still could not walk for about a month. I was getting around the concentration camp on all fours. I had lost all of my hair. I had a hard time getting my energy back.

After that, I was relocated and placed with a new group in the so-called Youth room. We called it the Youth room only because we were all younger female prisoners. In the concentration camp, we had a clandestine communist party organization. This organization was managing to take care of ill comrades. It also tried to gather us together to give us guidance to hold up and endure. It encouraged us. It told us that we would survive and that everything will be beautiful again, just as it was we were free. So, the party organization took care of us, even though, we were all facing death constantly, and braving new incidents.

In another incident, the Ustasha were walking along the line at roll call and were picking out every third person. I was lucky that I was not a third. Therefore, I stayed alive one more time.

I do remember a horrible circumstance from that incident. That involved the murder of 30 Jews who were kept apart from the line

up. These Jews were from Novska. I knew them. When they were brought into the concentration camp, we had met at the entrance. We had looked at each other. We had exchanged hellos with eye contact. I had not wanted to say hello to them because I did not want to endanger them since I was already in the concentration camp. And they could not say hello to me because they were afraid. These people were well groomed, well dressed and good-looking. They were carrying heavy bags.

Four days later was this line up, which I just mentioned. As I said, these thirty of them were not part of the line up, but were in a column for the liquidation. Consequently, we saw each other again. Again, we said hello only with eye contact. In just those four days, they had been turned into corpses. They had been poisoned, so now they were barely able to walk. They were barely able to carry their luggage. Therefore, it had taken only four days for the Ustasha to destroy these well-fed and strong people.

So, they were organized into this column. I observed this column of people as they were leaving. I felt terrible for all of those people. The column accounted for 3,500 people, men and women. They went marched toward Gradina. But in the afternoon, they returned in the oxen pulled carts, which had been in the front of the column in the morning. These oxen pulled carts were now filled with their dead bodies. They were also filled with all of the luggage and belongings of the prisoners that had been in that column of 3,500 people.

The Ustasha were now drunk. They were singing. Actually, they were not singing but shouting, as if they were singing. They would party that whole night—obeying a command to party. They were ordered to celebrate the murdering of 3,500 innocent people and anti-fascists.

That incident caused me great pain. I had a hard time trying to heal—and not just that time, but in many other situations where I was witnessing the horrors.

On another occasion, the Ustasha had called us, the female prisoners, into a line-up in front of a building in the concentration camp's courtyard. We were standing against the wall. An Ustasha was sitting at a desk. He was the Ustasha Officer, or Captain, and he was reading our sentences. This was the first time that I heard that I had been sentenced to a year's imprisonment at the concentration

camp for my anti-state involvement. I guess I was supposed to be executed because I was told to stand and face against the wall of that building.

So, I stood for half an hour together with others that had been selected, and I waited to be executed. Suddenly, perhaps, this was a psychological torture, the Ustasha said that we were now dismissed, and that we could go back to our barracks. This experience caused me to lose my fear of death. Everything I survived in the concentration camp was so awful, so pernicious, and so difficult. For example, my good friends, the Tsar brothers, and their sister Jelena were well known Partisans from Novska. I watched their mother die. She was so skinny and weak that she like a ghost was stretching her arms towards a wall. I took care of her until the very end. She would call out her children's names, especially Petar's, who was a Partisan hero, one of the first in Slavonia. Later he became a national hero. She used to call out:

“Pero, my little duck, my dear child. My dear children take care of yourselves. Your mother is dying. You must fight for freedom.”

She was in horrible pain when she died.

Of course, a human being could not endure this easily. All these many deaths affected us prisoners, and affected me personally. It was like this the whole time I was in the camp.

I never held any jobs at the camp. Actually, my job was to take care of sick female prisoners and children. I spoke about that in my earlier testimony at the conference, so I would not repeat myself.

From the camp's building, I used to watch people stroll along Sava River pier. Even though I was convinced that I would never get out of the camp alive, I still longed to be free, which seemed to be an unachievable dream.

However, then something extraordinary happened. As in all wars, the Communist Party and the Partisans organized an exchange of the concentration camp prisoners for captured Ustasha, Domobrani and German Officers.

One day the Ustasha called me. It was around February 1st, 1943, about 10 months after I had been imprisonment in that hell, at the bottom of life. They also called my friend, Buba—Ljubica Jančić, married name Zec, who unfortunately passed away two years ago. She became my older sister when we left the concentration camp.

The Ustasha only told us to get our belongings and to go into the yard. There they searched us. We were worried about where we were going. Our friends were cheering us by saying that we were probably going home. However, the truck that was taking us out of the concentration camp complex had a few Ustasha in it. The commander was Braco the Ustasha. That is just what they called him. Once he wanted to take me into solitary confinement. That meant death. They did not tell us where we were going.

While we were passing by the Ustasha headquarters, there on the balcony stood Majstorović, who was at that time the commander of the camp, and Luburić, who was the former commander of Jasenovac and a high Ustasha official, and approximately 10 other Ustasha. They looked at us. They were talking about something, which we couldn't hear. They were also laughing. Then we left the concentration camp yard. We traveled for quite a while and still didn't know where we were going.

The Ustasha, Braco, who had been so cruel in the camp, now became benign. He told us that he more or less strayed into becoming the Ustasha. He was truly meek. He said, that if we ever met again in life, and could help him in a case should he needed, that we should help him out.

We did not say a word. We didn't know what was going on. We were going in the direction of Okučani. We reached the town of Okučani. We saw that we were not going towards Zagreb. Then they drove us to the Nova Gradiška prison, the same one that I had been in before I was sent to the concentration camp.

There, in front of the prison, they searched us again and threw us into a cell, which was already filled with women. This time, it was not because of an offensive, but because of new arrests of anti-fascists in Gradiška, Novska, Paklenica, Rajići and from other surrounding towns, all near the Jasenovac. Jasenovac is approximately 25 km from Nova Gradiška, and just about 12 km from Novska, where I used to live.

In the cell, I found Vera Šlimar, a young women, whom I knew from Novska. She told me that the day before the Ustasha had arrested her, and that my parents were arrested again, and my youngest sister too. And that all of them had been taken to the concentration camp the Sisak. The Ustasha had tried to burn down our house, but was not known whether it burned down or not.

However, all of our possessions were looted. Thus, our family was broken up, our home, a very warm home, was forever destroyed.

For eight days, the various Ustasha agents, the same Ustasha who used to beat me before I was taken to the Stara Gradiška concentration camp, used to come to look at us through that little window on the door of the cell. They never questioned us. So, eight days later, all of sudden, early in the morning, we heard boot and weapons clanking in the hallway. They opened our cell door. One older gendarme [policeman] said that we should take all of our belongings, which we will need. I took my bundle. I really did not have anything but a few pairs of underwear and a spoon. And then he told me:

“Dear child,—” I looked very young. “What have you done to be experiencing all of this?”

Of course, I did not say a word. I did not even know what would I say.

He said, “Take everything. You will need everything.”

When Buba and I got out into the hallway, on each side of us were German officers with machine guns in their hands. We were walking through rows of soldiers and came to the front of the prison. There, there were many people. There were many Ustasha, Domobrani, even Lugari (forest keepers). A big truck waited for us. They asked us to get on the truck. We got on. There we found a truck full of several types of Fascists.

Again, we realized that we were not going towards Zagreb, nor were we going towards Germany. Again, we did not know where we were going. Buba, who was a great anti-fascist, a literature professor before the war, and an anti-fascist leader in Croatia, suddenly started to sing the Partisan song, “Bileća”. Two other prisoners from the Nova Gradiška prison and I joined her. The young man was from Slavonska Požega and a middle-aged woman, Mila Dombarovski, was from Nova Gradiška. Moreover, what started out as quiet humming, soon turned into loud singing.

Since we thought that we were going to our death, we wanted to die bravely. We agreed that we should not show any fear, and if we must die, then it could not be any other way but bravely. The Ustasha and the other Fascists were confused.

Suddenly, as we were approaching the slopes of Slunj, the Ustasha were talking about the Partisans, who by that time have

been coming into the towns that we were going through. The Partisans would come to celebrate Christmas and Easter, and together they celebrated Catholic and Orthodox Holidays. The Ustasha talked about the Partisan's battles in that area and that the Partisans did not live as badly as they used to in the woods.

Still, we did not know what was going on. Finally, we arrived at the designated place and the truck stopped. The Ustasha and the Fascists became so gentle that they even helped us to get off the truck. There was a small stream there. They took our bundles and they carried them for us. They even wanted to carry us. We did not permit it because we were too proud. Besides, we were very bitter concerning everything we had been through, and because we knew what was awaiting the inmates in the Stara Gradiška concentration camp and the other camps.

We stopped. We crossed the brook. Our feet were completely wet. It was spring, not exactly spring. It was February 8, 1943. There, a group of Ustasha stood and with them was the atrocious Ustasha agent Šikić, who severely had beaten me in the jail and who offended me. This was before I was sent to the concentration camp. The Ustasha told us to wait. We stood and waited.

Unexpectedly, the same Ustasha Šikić, called me to the side and said, "Do you know where you are going?"

I said, "I don't know, I guess to an execution."

He said, "You are being exchanged for some German officers. You are going to the Partisans."

I could not come to my senses because I was so overjoyed. This meant that I had gotten my freedom. Then he proceeded on by saying:

"You know what, you are a young woman. Life in the Partisans is very difficult. Come back. Don't go. Abandon the exchange."

I told him:

"Why would I abandon the exchange. I want the exchange. After all, where would I go if I abandoned the exchange?"

He said, "Home."

Then I asked him, "How could I go home after you arrested my parents and my youngest sister and put them in the concentration camp; and after you plundered all of my possessions; and you burned my house. I have no home to go to."

He said, "We'll give you an office job, or you could work in a

factory, or you could work in Germany.

Without a doubt, I could not accept it. Why he did that, I still do not know. Yet, categorically, I was for an exchange of prisoners, and I told him:

“Let me go. I want to be exchanged.”

So he said, “Good.”

Then he continued and said, “But after the exchange, and when you realize that you simply cannot endure the burden of sleeping under the trees, and in the rain, and when you are in constant danger—escape. Go to the first Ustasha Station in any town in this area and say that the Ustasha Šikić, from the Nova Gradiška command, gave his honorary word that they can not beat you. Tell them they should bring you to him. Or, in case that you might some day be on sentry duty, somewhere up in the mountains with the Partisans, simply escape and do the same thing.”

So, I said, “No, don’t even suppose that I would ever go back to those holes. Alive, never.”

Then, he let go of me. I joined my group and the four of us stood to the side. All excited I said to Buba, “Buba, dear, we are going to the Partisans. We are being exchanged.”

She, also, could not control her joy.

At that point, the Ustasha walked in front of us. We followed them, walking 50m behind, and now carrying our own bundles. Unexpectedly, the Ustasha behind us shouted, “Say hello to my uncle! His name is whatever. He is up there, in the Partisans.”

Another one said, “Say hello to my "koom" [godfather]. His name is whatever. He is up there, in the Partisans.”

And on and on they went.

We were slowly climbing toward a hill where there were white flags. At once, we saw the Partisans with their red stars on their hats. There were six or seven of them. On the two sides were the Ustasha and the Partisans, while we stood back.

The Partisans said, “Death to Fascism!”

The Ustasha said, “For the Homeland and for the our Fuehrer Pavelić we are ready!”

Then the Ustasha Šikić, the commander of the exchange of prisoners and a specialist in torture, who had tried to convince me to go back with him, said, “How long is the cease-fire: half an hour, two hours, three hours?”

The Partisans said, “As you wish. But, if you wish, you can begin the fight immediately. And if not, let it be as agreed and as you suggest.”

Then the Ustasha said, “Let it be as agreed.”

The Partisans called us, and the Ustasha called the German officers. There were two of them. We were told to switch sides. We ran to the other side. The German officers also ran to the side of the Ustasha. We were overjoyed.

Naturally, the Ustasha were ready to head back. They saluted each other again, and the Ustasha shook hands with the Partisans.

This is how we joined the Partisans. There was no end to our happiness. In addition, I must tell you this detail about the Fascists. You could never trust them. Although they were shouting, “Say hello to my Partisan so-and-so,” on our way to the rendezvous they tried to ambush the Partisans. They made some plans, and circled back behind the houses. Ten to fifteen minutes later, they were back with malicious smiles. But, they gave up their ambush plan and returned to their fellow Ustasha, saying:

“Nothing could be done. Behind each rock there is a Partisan.”

But, this is how we joined the Partisans. They welcomed us with a lunch, a hot lunch and with a great hospitality. We were very happy because this was for us a true rebirth. I will never forget that.

Buba Jančić helped me tremendously in those days, although I did not know her previously. She was older than I was. She was a professor of literature before the war. And I became the same after the war. I just was like her younger sister. She took good care of me. In the Partisans, she gave me advice on life, how I should behave, on what kind of a Partisan I should be. I was very grateful to her. We were inseparable friends for the rest of our lives. She died in my flower garden two years ago.

On the other hand, we were in the Partisans together—we were in great pain whenever we would think of the remaining prisoners, or when we would think of all those who were still suffering. Hence, we had to fight.

The same day that I joined the Partisans, I heard that my brother, two years older than I, was killed. He had been with the Partisans since February 1942. That too hurt me a great deal. I worked as a Youth Commander in the Partisans. During the day, I would study, but during the night, I would cry. This went on until the end of the

war. Although, it was not easy, I was very happy in the Partisans because I was free.

This is what I wanted to say.

Luckily, my parents were taken out of the concentration camp. My sister survived by living in hiding in Dobož with our relatives until liberation. My oldest brother survived too. My brother two years younger than me was killed while in service in the Partisans. My sister who was four years younger than me, became a Partisan at the age of 16, and was killed later in an automobile accident.

Life went on. I am very proud of my anti-fascist fight, and of the anti-fascist fight of my people. I am very happy that I participated in it at the very time that the fascists emerged and later during the war with Partisans, and even afterwards in the freed country. That is all. Thank you.



Translator: Dr. Vesna Najfeld

Ms. Ljiljana Ivanisević
Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška Survivor

Ms. Ljiljana Ivanišević

Conference testimony

Note: Ms. Ivanišević's testimony was translated to English by Dr. Vesna Najfeld, herself a child of Jewish survivors of WWII Independent State of Croatia.

I am Ljiljana Ivanišević and I am ex-child-inmate in the concentration camp. Today, I will tell you the story of my life in the camp. I will not tell the story as an adult, but as a child. Today I will be that child again.

I was brought to the camp from the village of Veliko Nabrđe located near Đakovo, in Slavonia. My mother's family lived there, my grandparents. I was at my aunt's house.

On August 11th, 1942, the Ustasha arrived. They rounded up the entire village and took us to the camp. First, they brought us to Đakovo, where they ordered us to get on the freight wagons, wagons for cattle. The wagons were already filled with people. They were so overcrowded. It was just awful. We were choking. It was August, and very hot. There were small children, older people, ill people. There were screams. The train was moving. We did not know where we were going. When the train finally stopped, it was the Jasenovac camp. That was the first stop.

At the Jasenovac station, the Ustasha separated men, 16 and older, and took them further. They ordered us, the children, and women to get back onto the wagons. We were travelling again until we arrived at Okučani. There, we got off again. This is where my Golgotha began. My great Golgotha.

When we arrived in Okučani we were ordered to march the 14 km, to the Stara Gradiška camp. This was a pebble road, and we were barefooted. It was very hot. The Ustasha were forcing us to run. Those who could not keep up the pace were hit and whipped.

I remember a woman who kneeled over a rampart and she let go of her baby. The baby rolled down. I remember that she was dressed all in white. Later, I learned that she was from Kozara [mountain].

At the time, I was only six and a half years old.

Finally, we reached the midway point. The Ustasha did not know what to do with us. They encircled us with a barbwire fence on a field. We were standing in the sun. There was no shade for us anywhere. Really, they kept us there like cattle. We stood there for a few hours. The Ustasha just did not know what to do with us. Later, as an adult, I learned that the Stara Gradiška concentration camp was filled with prisoners. So they had to empty it out so we could fit in. There was even a word that the Ustasha would kill us on the spot. But, the decision was to first kill those already emaciated.

Once more, we were ordered to march to the Stara Gradiška camp. We had no water or food. By this time, we lost track of time because we didn't know how long we were traveling in the wagons; what was day and what was night. It was just ghastly.

We arrived at the Stara Gradiška concentration camp. We were in front of the Kula [tower], which was a prison during the first Yugoslavia.

This is where the children's misery began. First, the children were separated from their mothers. The newborn babies were snatched from their mother's breasts and thrown like loaves of bread. It was very sad. [The survivor fights with tears.]

I was with my aunt. I had an older and a younger brother. My younger brother disappeared. [With tears in her eyes, the survivor continues the story.] Who knows, perhaps he is alive somewhere. My older brother and I survived.

At the Kula entrance, the Ustasha took away all of our possessions. The only valuable thing I had was a pair of earrings I wore. The Ustasha took them.

Then we entered the Kula prison. The hell began. All of the young women, strong and capable to work, were sent to Germany for slave labor. The children were taken away to the camp for children. I think that nowhere in the world existed a concentration camp just for children, except in Croatia at that time. Nowhere did I have heard about it. Nowhere have I read about such a thing. This was a unique camp for children in Croatia, during World War Two.

My aunt hid me under her big Slavonian style skirt. I was tiny. Therefore, I remained with my aunt in the Stara Gradiška camp.

My troubles had begun. The inmates had to hide me. I lived on the first floor where there were solitary cells. There, there was a recess in the wall, and there I lived, like an animal. The inmates

would cover me with some rags.

Later, I could not get around the camp. However, when I was able to wander, when the Ustasha weren't around, I roamed the camp. I knew every inch of the camp. I used to break off bits of cement from parapets and buildings, which, when I was very hungry, I would eat. Any little piece of grass that would appear, I would eat that too. [The survivor wipes tears].

I must tell you this too. Four men, gravediggers, as we used to call them, used to come to collect corpses. One of them was a tall and a big man. Every day they would carry corpses and their hands would be soiled. They would take grass out of their pockets and clean their hands off, and then they throw it out. I could hardly wait for them to leave because, I would then, eat that grass. And, when that big man saw what I was doing, he then secretly, so no one could see, would bring me grass to eat every day. Ćedomil Huber, the Survivor's Association President told me that that man survived the camp.

Our food consisted of some kind of liquid in which you were able to see some sauerkraut. In reality, it was just water thickened with cornflower. It was bitter and awful tasting. However, it was something to eat, because this was the only food in the camp. In addition, I must tell you that there was crushed glass in this liquid. This was well known among all female prisoners. When we drank it, if the glass were at the bottom, we would stop and try to throw that portion away. However, we were all very hungry, so we would drink it, and therefore consume some of the glass as well. I ate that liquid too.

I will tell all I can remember. After all, I was just a child. I remember a trench, which was on the right side, as soon as you walk into the camp. This was, let's call it, a toilet. It was a long open trench-latrine full of feces and worms. It stank badly. One day, a Jewish woman fell into it, while she was using it. I guess she fainted. The inmates proceeded on to take her out. I remember vividly this incident. I was screaming because all I was able to see were her fingers. The inmates took her out. We had very little water, and the bit we had was used to wash her off. We had only one well in the Stara Gradiška camp. The water was as muddy as the Sava River. So that everyone could get a bit, we would have to wait until it would get clear before we could use it. This bit of water was used

to wash her off. She died as soon as they washed her off.

In the camp we all got scabs; and of course, lice too. The Ustasha shaved my hair off. They took my clothes off, my rags that I wore, which were not washed since my imprisonment. Then, the Ustasha painted our bodies, I guess with, quicklime. Something stung my body horribly. My entire body was encrusted. Because I had horrible sores, I still have scars on my knees from that incident even today. I recall the immense pain. I remember it very well. [She talks with sad face and tears in her eyes all the time].

Next, I remember huge barrels. At least, they seemed to me that way at the time. Inside them, there were old immobile dying women. They were crawling on top of each other. They were filthy. It was just horrible. And when it would rain, I had nowhere to go, so I would get in with them. Two grannies from my mother's village died there. I remember when that happened. My fellow sufferer Petrović, who will speak today, knew those two women.

I also remember an incident, which I should have told earlier. A woman had tried to jump into the well when the Ustasha took her child away. They prevented her. But, because of that, they locked her up in the tower. She was pregnant. Up there, for days, she cried. I do not know if she was in labor or what. It was just dreadful to listen to her cries. One day we did not hear her any more.

Now, I will tell you how I got out of the camp. I remember my last day in the camp. A man came into the camp looking for his daughter. He could not find her. He had gotten permission to take someone out. Then, he saw me. He saw a nothing, a rag; a skeleton with big stomach. He told me that he saw just two big sad eyes. He asked if he could take me, and the Ustasha approved. That's how I was saved. I am very thankful to him. His name was Lazar Stanojević. He was from the village Maja, near Đakovo. [Tears barely holding in her eyes].

I must tell you, that while I was in the camp, I used look forward to seeing something that that no one is usually ever happy to see—gravediggers. I was happiest then, because when they arrived I would get grass, which meant I had something to eat.

I used to suck on my thumb so much that I had no skin left. It was one big sore. But after the war, when everything went back to normal, and whenever I would get hungry, I would still suck on my thumb. It took me a long time to get rid of this habit.

That's not all. After I got out of the camp, I was very hungry and I ate. Consequently, I had intestinal obstruction. I had to have surgery, from which nearly I died.

Please forgive me for crying.

Written statement of Ms. Ljiljana Ivanišević

My name is Ljiljana Ivanišević, and I, as a child, was imprisoned the Jasenovac Camp No. 5, Stara Gradiška. I was brought to the camp August 11, 1942 from the Serbian village Veliko Nabrđe that unfortunately, does not exist any more.

This golgotha of mine began when Ustashas packed us in the livestock wagon like sardines. Both old and young died, deprived of water and food. For how long a period we stayed in the wagons, I cannot tell, but we stayed there until they made a place in the Jasenovac camp. There the men were separated from women, and the children were put again in the wagons and transported to Okučani. There other prisoners coming from Kozara joined us and then everything turned into hell.

Ustashas forced us to go on foot, 14 kilometers, to Stara Gradiška. I was barefoot, like the others. We had to run, and blood was everywhere. Children cried, and the old and sick were falling down. Those who could not go further were killed on the spot—real hell—at halfway we had to wait until the camp in Stara Gradiška was emptied. Eventually we moved and reached the place from where only dead could leave—the hell on earth, even worse.

The hell on earth, even worse: The children were taken away from their parents—abandoned mothers with hands outstretched toward the children disappearing somewhere, children screaming, Ustashas hitting them violently,—broken chains, golden rings, money, blood—. Younger women were taken into the labor camps in Germany, children into children's camps, which existed only and only in Croatia, and the old and sick were left in Kula [the tower building at Stara Gradiška].

We were all shaved to the skin and were deprived of everything valuable. Half-naked, without food and water, we waited for death to come. The commanding officer, Ante Vrban, together with two most cruel Ustashas, visited the camp every day and chose the ones

to be taken to work in Mlaka and Jablanac. I thought that by working I could earn food [if I went with them], but unfortunately that was far from the truth. Instead they were taken directly to be killed. This was the way to make a place for new [people] to come.

I remember big barrels with worms, which they gave us as food. Some empty barrels lay aside, and I used to crawl inside and sleep there. Beside me old women were dying, flies gathering on their bodies. My knees, face, hands were all in wounds. I still have those scars. I used to suck my finger when I was hungry so that the skin was peeled off, leaving the open wound to fester.

I remember the trench, which served as the toilet. I watched the women squatting there with their intestines hanging down. When I saw mine, I thought that I was getting a tail.

I remember the screams of a woman in labor who could not make it dying in pain.

I remember peeling off the wall and eating it.

I remember the corpses being taken out, the barrels with women crawling one over the other like blind cats, dead and alive-worms, flies—.

A gravedigger was taking them out, and he used to wipe his hands with the grass, which he took out of his pocket. I waited for him to leave and voraciously, like an animal, ate the grass, which was left on the earth. The “big man,” as I called him, noticed this, and each time he came, he brought me some grass. I learned that he stayed alive through the war and that he died some 10 years ago.

I was saved and went out of the camp, thanks to a good man who came to take his daughter. She was not there, and he asked if he could take me instead. By that time, I was the only child in the camp, and I did not look like a human being at all. I could not walk. My body consisted only of bones and a big stomach with wounds everywhere. I looked abandoned and dirty like a famished animal.

They gave permission. He wrapped me into his coat and took me home. It was Lazar Stanojević from the village Majar, near Đakovo, and it was 1943.

I went through a difficult period. I ate voraciously and had problems with my stomach and intestines. I had three surgeries and hardly survived, but still I am very grateful to Lazo Stanojević, a man who gave me a second life.



Mr. Savo Petrović
Jasenovac Survivor
Escaped April 22, 1945

Mr. Savo Petrović

Conference testimony

Note: Mr. Petrović, a surviving prisoner from the Jasenovac camp 3C, was one of the participants in the breakout from the camp on April 22, 1945.

Mr. Petrović read his testimony, which was written in Serbo-Croatian. He also brought with him, to the conference, the same statement someone translated to English in Yugoslavia. The text here is an independent translation of what Mr. Petrović said. The difference between this version and the written, translated statement is minimal.

I was born in 1925 in the village of Veliko Nabrđe, commune Đakovo, [which after WWII got to be in] the Republic of Croatia. There I lived with my family until August 11, 1942. From August 11, 1942 to April 22, 1945, I witnessed all the disasters of one concentration camp and asked very often: “Is it possible that the human organism can endure such humiliation, suffering, and abuse?”

In the early morning hours of August 11, 1942, the Ustasha came into our pure Serbian village and beat off all the inhabitants of Veliko Nabrđe as well as those from the neighboring Serbian villages of Paučje, Čenkovo, and Borovik—about 2,000 women, children and adults were taken to Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. All over the village there were screams, fear, and feelings of despair and hopelessness. Ustasha were around with knives, rifles, and heavy guns. People collected the most necessary things, dumped them in the carts and just started to walk away in a row toward Đakovo, either on foot or on village carts. At Sajmište, in Đakovo all our belongings were taken, and then we were loaded into the cattle wagons in which we traveled all night through to the Jasenovac camp with no water and food.

On that doomed day, 192 families with 900 members from Veliko Nabrđe were deported to camps; 380 villagers from Veliko Nabrđe did not await the liberation. They yielded to tortures by

Ustasha in the camps. The camps removed from the Earth whole families and mutilated those who remained alive.

When we entered the camp, we were greeted with arms, and we were beaten. We were taken to an open field within the camp where a group of Ustasha and some officers were waiting. They ordered us to deliver our precious belongings that we had with us, even food if somebody had some on him, and then they removed our clothes. We were naked and thus left for the whole night and day. [Survivor reads his written statement, obviously with difficulty]. Women with children to 14 years old were separated and sent to Stara Gradiška. There they separated children from their mothers and then young and healthy women were sent to force labor in Germany. Older women were taken apart and killed. Among them there was my own mother. [The survivor stops and looks at the audience].

We, the men, were divided into two groups: the weak on one side—they were liquidated immediately—and we the younger were given old clothes and some of us were destined to camp “3C,” which was called the camp for extermination. When we were settling down in the camp, the more experienced prisoners were giving pieces of advice: “Beware. Here you listen and you keep quiet. Here you say nothing, you ask for nothing. Keep in your mind that everyone can beat you and kill you—with burning wire, with mallet in the head, with a knife in your throat and chest. People here admit the things that never did.”

In the camp 3C were the most horrible days in my life. I have seen how the naked people are flogged and how they get killed for no reason, how old people weep like children. I saw dead people with their stiff looks and the pupils in their eyes dried. I have seen many who were beaten with every step they made, and uppermost, when working on building the Sava River dam. Shovels were frequently used to crush inmate’s heads. Shooting executions were public. They killed my mother and my uncles so I remained alone in this world.

In the camp 3C, there were no sheds—let alone beds. In a small space, lots of people slept under open sky. The camp 3C was divided by wire. On one side there was a camp with Gypsies, which was used for gathering, and into that camp every morning weak people, those unable to work, would be brought. From that point they were taken for execution. In the camp there were more and

more dead each day. Ustasha were machine-gunning people. Sometimes for whole night. That is how they exterminated the inmates.

We were distributed in groups and expected to go to work on building the dam, which was named “the dam of death.” I have not seen anything like that in my whole life. We used to work in rain and mud. We did not walk to the work place. We had to run. And we had to work while running and with incessant beatings and killing of the imprisoned. Corpses were on the road to the camp and on the dam. Every day helpless people were killed and “built in” to the dam soon after. Every moment we were on alert for our lives. The camp 3C also contained a great number of prisoners who were chained. They also had to go to work and that in the front of the column with strict Ustasha orders: “Chained, forward!” And we, the rest in the column, four by four, after them, with constant scolding and beating and order to keep on running. Many of those who were chained just fell off and on that path to the dam they remained. Working on the dam was very difficult so that great many prisoners perished in building the dam. Land was shoveled; with shovels it had to be built, and with shovels people were beaten and killed. We used to carry the land with hands, in our caps, we pushed carts, pulled with horse carts, very often in the open, exposed to the cold, or to high waters of Sava [river]. People exhausted from difficult work and hunger were just falling aside and many did not have power to stand up, and nobody dared help them, since everyone who would offer any help would be killed. In this way, many alive or almost alive were “built in” in that disreputable dam. I was watching my uncle Mladen when he fell over. No one could come nearer. We placed over him almost alive some soil-the damn is being built on. From the dam we returned into the camp using the same method, only we are less in number. We suffer beating again and hits with metal cylinders of the rifles. In the camp 3C our “bed” under the open sky is waiting for us again-cold nights as our cover since there is no place for us in the sheds. Apart from being killed when working on the dam, many from the camp 3C were taken to Gradina and liquidated. On the dam, I was working for twenty days, and since I got exhausted from this work and hunger, I stayed at the camp, not knowing what this would bring. Every weakness and staying behind from work meant death. I was saved because they

asked for 20 people to build paths around the Ustasha dwellings, so that I was disposed to work on that.

When in 1942 the dam was finished, the rest of the prisoners were killed, and the camp 3C gains another function. In the camp 3C were imprisoned the prisoners condemned to death, without food or water, since the Ustasha wanted to see how long a man can endure. Weak, exhausted and hungry prisoners died en masse, but still some of them survived. Every morning gravediggers used to come. They collected dead and they took them away. One day they witnessed a horrible scene. The live ones were eating flesh they ripped off the corpses of their dead comrades. Cannibalism occurred. When two prisoners from camp 3C tried to escape through the wires for the house that was left empty, they got stuck in there and they were left there to die from hunger, thirst, and cold. It was in the winter of 1942, one of the coldest winters in the history of the world. It was the end of the camp 3C. On that place in the spring of 1943, as ordered by Ustasha, the prisoners had to plant some vegetables.

In the annals of the disreputable Jasenovac camp, the chains will be remembered forever. There were thousands of chains carried by the prisoners, most those who were working in the open. I was chained, too. Between the fetters, there were chains once worn by the worst criminals on galleys. The chain was tied with rope to the belt so not to disturb in heavy work, and we moved more easily. For the first time I used to wear the chains for one month, and later off and on in a few occasions. It always happened when somebody tried to escape from the camp.

I also used to work in a group for work in the woods for three and a half months. When the group for woods was liquidated and in which I worked, where by some chance I was still alive, I was shifted to work in a chemical shop. There the engineers were ordered to try to get soap from human corpses. We had to provide some medicine for dysentery. We cleaned Ustasha clothes, most bloodied, disinfecting the fur clothes. Since the commander Pičili was the main constructor for all the tortures, he had the large pots designed for boiling bodies of murdered inmates. In the chemical workshop, I awaited the end of the Jasenovac camp. In 1945, I was saved by breaking out on April 22, 1945.

By working in the camp, I was taking the destiny of all the prisoners. I was hungry. I was beaten. I was working the hardest

work, and all that while sick from typhus. Days were going by-two, three-the eternity. Some prisoners died from hunger, sickness and physical exhaustion, the others were killed, the third were arriving every day. The sufferings and victims had no end.

Thanks.



Mr. George Zivkovich

Jasenovac Survivor

Mr. George Živković

Conference testimony

I can speak either language, but I am going to use English as I can express myself better in English. And also I want to say something to the people that are of the Croatian descent. If I say “Croatian fascist,” if you feel that you are a Croatian fascist, then you can feel that way. But if you feel that you do not belong to them then don’t worry about it, for I am not talking about you. I am talking about the Croatian fascist I lived under and what they have done to me.

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is George Živković. I came to the United States in 1949. I was 12 years old. I went to Womeny (spel?), Pennsylvania. First I came to your great city of New York. I landed in LaGuardia [airport]. There were 73 of us children to be adopted by the American parents, and I was the only Serbian there. As it happened, a colonel in Emboli, Italy, gave me his last name Živković. He was Branimir Živković, Yugoslav Royal Army. Some fascist do not like the expression Chetnicks, for to them Chetnicks is everybody that murdered them: the fact is if Chetnicks got to them it is because they killed their [Chetnik] families. But that is the way it goes.

So let me go on. I got to Pennsylvania, I was accepted by my parents. Marta and Marko Živković who lived in Pennsylvania. I was immediately accepted not only by Marta and Marko Živković, but I was accepted by their friends and neighbors, my parents and their family, which was my uncle John (Jovo) Tomić and Dorothy Tomić and their three children now Doctor Nichola Tomić, Engineer George Tomić and Teacher Caroline Tomić. I grew up with them. I was part of the family. I finally had a family.

When I got here over your city, when I flew over you city—you have to understand I was only 12 years old kid—I looked down and I said "Dear Lord, don't ever let war come to this place." That was my first thought. Then we got to some school here, in New York, somewhere. We were housed for couple of weeks. I guess they wanted to fatten us a little bit. Then they took us to different places

and finally I was brought to Pittsburgh, to the old Alegen County airport (it was still there). My mom and dad met me there. I call them "my mom and dad" because they were there for me...

By the way, the first thing my [new] dad Marko Živković and my mom Marta Živković told me was: "Georgy, learn the American language. You, learn the American history. You learn American culture. You become American first. But do not forget—you are Serbian."

Also, my mother noticed... I used to run throughout whole house at nights from nightmares—thanks to my fellow countrymen—who call themselves "Ustashas." By the way, Domobrani [Ustasha home guard], to me, were not different than Ustashas. They were just another kind. I have tell you that. I remember them well. Old bag.

You gotta understand one thing, Ladies and Gentlemen, and I am sure you do—when people do something wrong to a child—it is burning my soul. It is there—for ever! I used to run throughout the whole house at nights screaming my head off. My American mother would come to me and say: "Georgy, Georgy, you are OK, son. You are OK. You are OK" Also my American mother and my American father, one night, they heard me, they saw me as I layed down there screaming and talking in Serbian—because I could not speak English at that time. My mother and my father told me later—they heard me say that time, in Serbian: "Nemojte mi ubiti majku—molim vas!" ("Do not kill my mother—please!"). [The survivor stops for a moment.]

Well, I was not always George Živković. My misery started in place called Kostajnica, on the Eastern side of the River Una. It sits right there. It is predominantly Croatian populated. My mother worked there, for people in Kostajnica. She was worked there... as a house servant—for guy named Pavelić. [The survivor stresses the name as it was also the last name of the Ustasha fuehrer]. Pajo Pavelić. *Znaš ga, iz Zagreba.* (You know him, from Zagreb.—trans.)

Anyway, I found that all my miseries started to blank out. In 1961 I started to dig. I talked to people. I asked everybody: "Hey, can you find out something." And nothing happened. Finally, in 1972, I met that gentlemen through my cousin Caroline. He went to Yugoslavia. He came back with all the information I needed. The only thing I remembered—my natural mother thought me—and that was: Janja Janus—that was her name. She was known as

Eva—Evica from Kostajnica. Glina kotar (county—trans.)... Selo (village—trans.) Brubanj.

When I got the facts from this gentleman and [the facts] about my family—27 years later... 'Cause I knew nothing, OK? I knew nothing. I knew only I was Đorđe, Đuro Janus... And I finally found that—during the war—I was maskerading as Croatian. I got away. That is why I am still here. After the war—when I got to the Serbs—"Janus" did not sound to me as a Serbian name. So, I did not tell them what my name was... So, I told my mother and my father and mother, Marko and Marta Živković, until I was 28 years old, and when my first son was Christened...

But anyway, it all started back in 1941 when they bombed Belgrade. I remember the first thing—my mother showed me Nazis. My mother showed me a picture of a young couple. She was crying and she told me in Serbian—"They killed my sister." [The survivor stops.] Apparently my aunt. And her family. When Nazi bombed Belgrade.

Then I first heard the term "koljači"—which I do not know how you express that term in English—I don't know—massackres? People who cut people's throats? Yeah, butchers. They came into Kostajnica, from Muslim side, from Bosanska Kostajnica, over there and started killing the Serbs. And naturally, in no time at all, my friends and neighbors, my fellow countrymen, started turning their backs on me. For some of them could I understand why. I could understand because under the Croatian law of that time if a Croatian family was to hide me—a five year old Serbian boy—they would kill the whole family and me. That was the law of Ante Pavelić [WWII Ustasha leader]. That's the law, I think, of Tuđman too. [At the time of this conference, Franjo Tuđman was then current Croat President].

[Applause]

You know—if you come with the idea, again, that you can not hold any government job [in today's Croatia] if you were not—for four generations(!) of pure Croat blood... It reminds me of my past and I do not like it.

Anyway, one night, as my mother worked for this man, *dobrovoljac*, a volunteer from America [who came to fight for Yugoslavia in the First World War]. She was taking care of him. He was an older man. She was talking care of his house. She had a cow.

We lived in a small place—about a size of two car garage. We were dirt poor. We had nothing. We were dirt poor.

At night. Ustashas came at night took him away. My mother heard the commotion. She woke me up... She said "Đuro, come on." She took me out to a small vinijak (a vineyard—trans.) behind the house. She told me to lay down, on my belly, in the rows between the vines. So I did and she stayed with me for a while. At dawn she decided to go to the house to get us something to eat. She told me: "Don't move. Don't answer anybody. Don't say nothing. If anybody calls you don't answer. Just lay there." So I did.

Can you imagine? At night—and I knew because my mother told me: "If they catch you they will kill you." And I did not want to die. I did not want to die. I was five years old. I did not want to die. I was not ready for it.

Here I am laying down on the ground, between the rows, waiting for my mother to come back... And they called me: "Đuro, Đuka *dodi vamo*—come here We are looking for you." And I was worrying about my little heart pounding. I am holding my breath because I was afraid they might hear me. And I knew what gonna happen.

So that time, that went over finally and they started putting a word out that all the Serbs that went hiding—they can come out. They want to do nothing to them. They want to make them a part of the Croatian state... And those who want to convert... This is hard for me to come to grips. And I finally came to it. My mother had a decision to make. Either to become a Roman Catholic or get us both killed. So we were converted. And people here, logoraši (camp inmates—trans.) know of, or heard about Croatian priest in Kostajnica, Magarac [actually Franciscan Vlado Margetić]. He converted us. And, as matter of fact there is a picture—Pete [Makara] has it—there is my mother on his computer.

I wanted to tell you. I wanted to show you the book... of when Magarac converted us. But in meantime my mother got a word that my grandfather was burned alive. The Janus last name did not help him at all—because, apparently he did not want to tell them, he did not want to deny that he was a Serb...

She got the word and she was sitting there crying... and I was too young to understand, to get the grasp. Now, after years of research I can put it all together. She told me that my grandfather was dead. I

found out 47 years later that Ustashes burned him alive. Why? I don't know, but what it is—I found out from a Chetnik from Brubanj that my grandfather owned a house, on a top of a hill, in Yugoslavia—built of a white marble. [The survivor explains, in so many words that his grandfather was quite rich.] ... But my mother, age 12 and my uncle age 14 had to go to other houses to be *sluga* [servants—trans.]

So, for a while we went to a [Catholic] church. They put us on the left side. The right side was reserved for the Ustashes.

Monday through Friday they were killing the Serbs—men, women and children—in Kostajnica. I can point to you places, right now, in Kostajnica where they buried people. You talk about desecration! I was there in 1972. Trying to find my mother's grave—because I wanted to put a marker. Guess what? The cemetery, used to be Serbian cemetery, went from 100% to about 10%. Croats built their houses—in Serbian cemetery, in Kostajnica. OK? My mother is laying under somebody's house or somebody's yard. That is a fact!

So, after my mother got the news about my grandfather, her father, she did not want to go to the [Catholic] church any more. She thought: So, what's the use? What's the difference? Her friends told her: "Janja, you have to go to the church."...

One day I was playing outside in a yard, alone. No-one was there. Everyone just disappeared. Like everyone knew what was going on—for some reason. I knew where my mother was at. She was working in the field with some women... And all out of a sudden, this one, I guess our next door neighbor because my mother knew him, in Ustasha uniform, came to me with rifle on his shoulder, like that, and asked me: "*Đuro, gde ti je majka?*" (Đuro, where is your mother?)

I said, "In the field."

"Show me."

So I run ahead of him. There were seven, eight, women in the field, working. I yelled at my mother: "There is an Ustasha behind me!" When the women heard the key word—Ustasha—they bolted. They took off. They yelled at my mother: "Come on, come on, Janja—let's get out of here!" My mother said: "No, I can not leave my son. I cannot. I will not leave my son!" So he [Ustasha] finally caught up with us. He took us back. I guess because my mother

knew him, he let us pack a little bag with some ham.

I don't know how I got to Jasenovac. I know when I got to Jasenovac, they put us at some place with some wall.

Note: We will stop here, as Mr. Živković's statement regarding his time in Jasenovac was repeated in more detail in his interview.

***Post-conference interview with Mr. George Živković (at shore)
by Nadja Tesić***

Ms. Nadja Tesich: You spoke yesterday that you spent part of your childhood in a Concentration Camp Jasenovac.

Mr. George Živković: I said—. Yes.

Ms. Tesich: How much did you spend in the Concentration Camp of Jasenovac? How old were you when entered that?

Mr. Živković: I was five years old.

Ms. Tesich: Five years old and how old were you when you left the Camp?

Mr. Živković: Jasenovac?

Ms. Tesich: Hm.

Mr. Živković: I was only about two to three months there.

Ms. Tesich: Okay. To establish once again, your name is?

Mr. Živković: My name is George Živković. In time of Jasenovac my name was Đorđe [Serbian for George], Đuro Janus.

Ms. Tesich: Okay. Which was the one of your real family?

Mr. Živković: It was the name of my real mother. My father's name was Jovan Čizmić.

Ms. Tesich: Okay. Now, what I am really interested and this is very painful, I am aware of that, are there any images that to this day you associated Jasenovac. If you would, think of one or two images.

Mr. Živković: Yes. One particular image was one of the first ones I arrived. When we came in, the previous group was emptied already. It was empty. All brick yard and there was wall approximately five to six feet tall, to eight feet, I can't judge it. And one of the particular images that sets in my mind is that woman and her daughter. She was approximately twelve to fourteen years old. They came in later. They was right in front of my mother and me. The woman asked my mother if she could help her put up, leg up,

her daughter to the wall because her husband and her son were here and her little girl wanted to wave at her brother. My mother obliged that and the two of them pushed and gave the girl leg up. She looked over the wall, she waved to her brother and then she said to her mother in Serbian: “I see them, mom, I see them, mom. And they wave back to me, oh mom. They are beating him now. They are killing him.” She just went shocked. She just start screaming. And so, they lowered her and there was, I don’t know how big maybe the wall. Ten to fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, the Ustahas came in and they took away the girl and mother. I didn’t see personally, for example, as they was walking to this particular, they held us in front a, there was a well and on the right there were toilets and the shed. We was on the left side, right next to the well. We lived out in a nature, under the skies, you know, no food, no blankets, no nothing, no kind of comfort and when they took the girl and the mother they announced us that we were not allowed to talk across the wall, not allowed to wave to anybody and that we will be strongly punished. Strictly, very punished. So it was, I guess, a couple of days later this thing go around the Camp, everybody was like sardines all packed in and so new lady came in and my mother was talking with her and I asked my mother for some water and my mother said: “No Georgy, we don’t have, I don’t have any more water”, and I said: “But mom, the well”, and she said: “No, you can’t have the water”, and they started talking about it and I heard them saying, my mother, that lady and my mother said: “They threw the girl in it after they tortured her”.

Ms. Tesich: Is there one sound you associate with Jasenovac. Sound?

Mr. Živković: It was hardly any sound, you know, at least I did not hear. In Nineteen Forty or maybe Forty One I was, I almost died of fever. And when I went back to Yugoslavia to see the parts of my family and the way I did it, the only way that I knew was my mother’s first name, maiden name, her nick-name and her last maiden name. She taught me this other things, but I would not comply, I could not remember all that she taught me. Jana—Janus she was known as Evica—Eva. She was from Glina, Kotor, a county of Glina, post office Glasnić, *selo*, village Brubanj.

Ms. Tesich: Is there anything about Jasenovac that you as a grown man still dream about or have nightmares about?

Mr. Živković: As a grown man I stopped having nightmares. I thank my new parents Marko and Marta Živković and my mother's family, I called them my mother and my father—Jovo Tomić and his wife Doty Tomić and their children Nicolas, George and Caroline. They sort of, brought me in and listened to me and talked to me and my parents, my new parents because when I first came to the United States I would scream my head off and ran through the house and my mother, my new mother, would grab me and she said: "Georgy, Georgy, you are okay. You are okay." And so, gradually my parents, after my mother took me to the family doctor and the doctor told: "Mrs. Živković, the boy went through trauma and he is going to be O.K. and grow out of it". So she kept working on me, and my father, like, for example, and they would say do I like so and so, and I said: "Yeah, I think they are nice people". "You see Georgy, they are Croatians, so and all Croatians are not the same". Or, these are Germans and whatever. All that people I remember they were killing Serbs, they were for me, to me, as the little boy they... So they did marvelous job on me, until Nineteen Eighty Nine all that came back. In Nineteen Sixty One I decided to find my family, my natural mother's family but the irony of it is that in one time I was in station place called Iljica. My aunt was in Spainke which was only eighty miles away and I couldn't find it.

Ms. Tesich: And what happened in Nineteen Eighty Nine?

Mr. Živković: It was in Nineteen Sixty One.

Ms. Tesich: Sixty One? That is when you started searching?

Mr. Živković: Yes, that is when I started searching. In Nineteen Seventy Two my cousin Caroline, her family, her mother's side, she was Bobić, she went to Krajina to visit her mother's family. She was going all around and her cousin Radenko Bobić took her all around with his car and she being nicely hidey and she told him: "I have a cousin who is in American army and is stationed in Frankfurt". So he said: "I am not far from Frankfurt". So, she gave him my address and one day he showed up in my house and my wife told him I was in the hospital because I had burns on my leg from leaking of a heating pad, chemical burn. And so, I was laying there in a military hospital and my wife sent him to the hospital in Frankfurt and I heard three people speaking Serbian and one said: "Well, I don't see Živković here", and I said: "I am in here", and so from that moment on we, kind of, made friendship and one day I was still about how I

tried to find my family and everything else and he said: “George, I am interested”, and he went there and came back about three weeks later and laid papers on my desk, on my table, and said: “George, here is your information”, because some of the stuff I told him there was people in Yugoslavia who knew that was me, I don’t know how I remember but I was two to three years old when I was in my aunt house, and I told him when he sees my cousins to tell them that and they said: “Yes he was in our house” because they had a little brother and I guess he died and my mother gave me to them. That’s how I found.

Ms. Tesich: Do you think you would have been different person without Jasenovac?

Mr. Živković: Yes, I would have.

Ms. Tesich: What do you think?

Mr. Živković: Yes I think I would be very different person.

Ms. Tesich: How?

Mr. Živković: In a way Jasenovac did me harm because that stole my childhood away from me and the Ustashas. But in a way they also made me strong and if I didn’t know, which I didn’t, about Croats and Serbs, I didn’t know of any of that, I didn’t know about religion, I didn’t know none of that. I knew from the time I was a little boy that Ustashas will kill me because I was Serbian if they caught me and that I have to watch out what I said around Croatian people.

Nadja Tesich: O.K. Now, you mentioned you would have been different. How? What do you remember.

George Živković: Before Jasenovac I just remember this little house that I was in. I used to call it Vrpolje but it is called Vripolje, no, I called it Vripolje and it is Vrpolje in Slavonia, when I was little boy. That’s another way they knew who I was and with my mother, what I remember most, even that we were dirt poor, she used to take me in Kostajnica and there on the bridge there was a setup like a little boxes. She would buy me either cheese, *sir*, cottage cheese, it comes on a cabbage leaf and also she would buy me a little bit of raisins and she gave me a lot of love but just she had to work very hard in order to keep us alive.

Ms. Tesich: What did she look like?

Mr. Živković: To me she looked like a very beautiful woman. My mother, that guy Petar Makara, he has on his computer, he has

picture of my mother. My mother to me looked very beautiful, she was taller than I was, naturally, I was small. Before Jasenovac if she disciplined me she disciplined me, you know, either with switch sometime depending of what I did. After Jasenovac, my mother would never hit me, never did anything. She would say in Serbian: “*Bog ga je kaznio, ja necu vise*”. (“God made him suffer. I will not.”—transl.) I will never punish him, anymore. She didn’t.

Man’s voice: Where is your mother’s grave now?

Mr. Živković: My mother’s grave is—. I buried her in Kostajnica, in Serbian cemetery St. Nicolas. And the funny part of it is that my mother knew that she was going to be killed. The reason that I know now as a grown man, because that she one day, she told me: Đorđe, if something happens to me the documents are in *opstina* (commune—transl.) Kostajnica and if I, if something happens to me, if one day the Croats will come to you and ask to burry me in their cemetery you are not allowed to do that. I want to be buried in Serbian cemetery. That’s what for Serbs is “So, help me God”. You know, now that I am a man, I understand, and now as a married man, I am married to a German, my wife is a wonderful person, she, before I got married I told her my children are going to be christened in Orthodox Church in honor to my natural mother and naturally to my new mother.

Man’s voice: Where is her grave now?

Mr. Živković: Her grave is in Kostajnica in cemetery St. Nicolas, *Sveti Nikola*, and I went there in 1972 to look for cemetery. My wish was to put a marker for her one day. I always said it from time I was a little boy, from time I remember, from time I got to States, I went from hell to heaven, so as far as I was concerned. And I went back to cemetery and I looked for my mother’s grave. It was one tenth of what I remembered was one. There was houses. Croatian built houses in our cemetery. I didn’t know if they dug her up or if she was in somebody’s house or in somebody’s yard and I told them and they said no, it was always like that. It was not! It was one tenth of its original size. I went to *maticar* (registrar—transl.). I don’t know what they call in English.

Ms. Tesich: Mayor’s Office.

Mr. Živković: I went to Mayor’s Office and I took out, I gave him my ID card and put it on the table and told him I am Đorđe Živković. Previously I was known as Đorđe, Đuro Janus and the

guy, if he, the *maticar* (registrar—transl.), the way he said that, if he would have been here or in Germany I would have brought him across?... , I swear to God. He said yes, I knew your mother. I just put my hands in my pocket, I just pushed it down as I could because for me it was very emotional, just the way he said it. And then he changed his tune, he started being nice to me and said I don't know about it but you can go to Zagreb and ask the people she worked for, and I guess one of the clerks he got to him, apparently he saw the look on my face, so dark, I understand I become very dark when a dark *celo* (forehead—transl.) comes across my face when some people really get to me. This girl came to me, I went to the Bank to change some money, someone was running after me and the clerk said: "Mr. Živković, speaking Serbian, your mother was honest hard working woman. You too were dirt poor", which I already knew all that but it felt good because this man cared to explain to me and to, kind of, smooth over what the other guy did not mind.

Ms. Tesich: Well, it sounds like you had the mother who loved very much.

Mr. Živković: Yes, I did. I did. And I went to Zagreb from there, that's what he told me, he gave me address of the people my mother used to work for, and when I went there this guy's name was Pajo Pavelić. He told me "I am Pajo Pavelić, when I walked in, "Whom do I have honor to talk with?" and I said: "You have honor to talk to Đorđe Živković, former Janus", and he said: "Đuka". He looked at me closer and he said: "Yes, you look like your mother. You have some likeness to your mother". So we went upstairs, him and his sister and he started talking and his sister said to me, and he gave me all kind of information that my family would not give me. You know, for example, his uncle was my God-father in *crkva Svetog Peobrazenja u Zagrebu, pravoslavna crkva* (the church of St. Transfiguration in Zagreb, orthodox church—transl.). I can't translate that one. But it is a church in Zagreb, Serbian church. And he has also a document which I have right now which is in my attaché case, which is *knjiga rodjenika* (registrar of births—transl.), he took [inaudible] and put my name and date I was born and which I never knew, because when I met up with Chetniks in Nineteen Forty Six they, kind of, looked at me and said: "What's your last name," and I would not tell them Janus because to me it didn't

sound Serbian. So I was in [inaudible] and in [inaudible] again. I thought, well there is guy, this big guy with *sajkaca* (Serbian traditional cap—transl.) on and this big *kokarda* (cockade, Royal Yugoslav Army symbol—transl.) on his head and he said: “Boy what’s your name”. “Sir, I don’t know”. And he said: “How would you like that to be Živković.” I said: “Yes, I would.” He was a cap commander of cap Ebolly. He was the Royal Yugoslav Army.

Ms. Tesich: So you became Živković because of him?

Mr. Živković: Yes.

Ms. Tesich: This is what you told the other day in the conference.

Mr. Živković: Yes. So he took me in. And I stayed Živković because I was adopted. Then the Chetniks put my name in Srbobran for adoption. My [new] father read that name and he had the son whose name was George Živković, identical like mine. So he talked to my mom and they decided they was going to adopt me. An normal waiting time at that time was five years to get to the States. I guess my dad knew some people because I was there only six months later. I came to New York. I went to Pittsburgh and I think you got it already on tape

Ms. Tesich: But there is one thing I do not understand. When you were adopted, your mother was alive, or not?

Mr. Živković: No, no. My mother was killed by Ustashas, I told you that.

Ms. Tesich: It’s okay.

Mr. Živković: I was about six years old.

Ms. Tesich: It’s okay.

Mr. Živković: Let me explain to you.

Ms. Tesich: No. It’s O.K. It comes from the other one. I just want to clarify. She died actually?

Mr. Živković: She was killed.

Ms. Tesich: She was killed. And when you were in the Camp or afterwards?

Mr. Živković: We was sent to Germany on forced labor. We was somewhere about one night train ride away from Leipzig. I remember that name, it was burning my mind. And we was there I don’t know for how long. Maybe six months, eight months, a year. And no Germans was atrocious with us and then Nedić [leader of the Serb quisling government under German Nazi occupied

Serbia], he had some kind of a document signed with Germans there to allow any Serb who did not want to stay there to come back to Yugoslavia or I don't know how my mother signed to go back to a hornets' nest. So when we came there, when we came back my mother knew this woman outside Kostajnica, Serbian woman, friend of hers. She put me with her, I don't know why. She put me with that woman and I don't know, couple of months later, one day two little boys of where my mother and I stayed, came up to me and just said: "Your mother is dead". And so, when I got there my mother was dressed. The women, the Serbian women already dressed her and laid her out on the table. I had to go around and beg candles from Croatians for their Easter or Christmas candles because I did not have any. But any way ... it was a kind of ... I was kind of shocked. It did not hit me until after we buried her. And two weeks later, at first, the woman said: "You can stay with us, you can stay with us". And one day she said: "I can not feed you. I have two of my own. You have to go. Go to that house, your mother used to work for that people. They are friends of yours, you mother's", and you know, six years old, so I went there. The guy had one cow so I was supposed to take care of that cow, but six years old and I said I can't do that. And I stayed there for about a couple of weeks, few weeks, and he pointed out to a house, another Croatian house, except that this woman was married to Dr. Tadić. He was one of the doctors that got away from the Ustashas. She was Croatian and he was Serbian. And when they came for him he got away from them and she took me in, because she and my mother were old friends. They was more classy and more money, you know. She took me in with her little boy, she had little boy, and when we were in I heard her mother, her mother said in Serbian, in Serbo-Croatian: "*Baci to srpsko govno napolje*". Throw that Serbian shit outside. And she was saying: "Mom do you want to throw your grand-son out too. He is half Serbian". So, I don't know what happened but one day the grand-mother came to me and said: "I have to get you out of here. My daughter is dead. She died of *tifus* (typhoid—transl.)". But I don't believe so because two days before that I was running around Kostajnica. There was a woman hanging from the tree with a bunch of stuff written on Serbo-Croatian. I couldn't read at that time and I thought it was familiar, but then again I was not sure. I think it was.. I think that they hung her.



Mr. Božo Švarz

Jasenovac Survivor

Mr. Božo Švarc

Conference Testimony

Note: Mr. Švarc gave this testimony in Serbo-Croatian. He used a written text as his aid. Mr. Makara gave an abbreviated translation into English for the audience. The text presented here is not result of the abbreviated translation. This text is an integral, detailed translation of what Mr. Švarc said.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am neither a historian nor a demographer; that is why I will talk only about what I personally went through and about horrors that I personally saw in the Ustasha concentration camp. I was arrested on 27 of May, 1941, in Zagreb together with about 175 Jews, the youngsters. The oldest ones were about 20 years old. This was one of the first groups captured by Ustasha.

We were taken to prison camp “Danica” in Koprivnica. From that prison camp, after a month’s time, we were taken to Jadovno. This camp had about 4,000 prisoners and about 300 to 400 of them Jews. [The survivor helps translator translate every part of the above statement].

Jadovno was liquidated, I think, somewhere by the end of July in 1941. All of the prisoners were thrown into a mountain crevice, which was then covered with concrete. What should be stressed is that Jadovno is on mountain Velebit at height of 1600 meters [over 4800 feet]. Only ten of us, the young ones, were left alive. We were taken by Ustasha Lieutenant Janko Mihailović, who was a classmate to those ten of us and who finished high school with us. We were to be sweepers.

As, at that time, the town of Gospić was handed over to Italian control Ustasha transferred us to Jasenovac. I stayed in Jasenovac until the end of 1941. There I survived many horrors, one of worst being the liquidation of the concentration camp Krapje. Krapje is located very close to Jasenovac, few kilometers away, in some wetlands.

One should know that the winter of 1941/42 was extremely

severe. One night, in that Krapje camp it was ordered, "Gather!" That meant that all had to get out of the barracks and to form lines. As the lines were formed, out of machine-gun nests they started shooting on the people. Those who did not die there were ordered to take their shoes off, form a line and start running toward Jasenovac. It was also ordered that no one should be the last in the line. But in any line, of course, some one has to be the last. The one who was the last was murdered.

The next day inmates of Jasenovac were ordered to go back, collect the dead and, with snow, clean the traces of blood.

I was then working as an electrician [in the camp] and when I got to [river] Sava to inspect some electric motor I saw dead or half-dead bodies piled up as if they were wooden logs. The size of the pile was close to the width of this [long conference] table and high close to its height.

It was clear that not every-one in the pile was dead. Ustasha would walk around the pile and if they noticed that someone is still breathing they would take bayonet [knife on a rifle] and take out person's heart.

Today there was a lot of talk about number of people murdered in Jasenovac. I was not in situation to count, but during the six months I spent in Jasenovac I saw that every day a new train composition filled with prisoners would arrive but—at the same time—the number of prisoners in the camp never increased.

What I know exactly, including their first and last names, were 30 members of my own family who were murdered by Ustasha during the year of 1941.

At the end of 1941, I was transferred to Stara Gradiška. At that time, Stara Gradiška was not yet a concentration camp. It was still an old prison. [The translator translates it into "a concentration camp" but the survivor, who obviously understands English, insists that it was then—only an old jail]. It was a prison where freemasons, Croats from Zagreb, were enjailed. Five of us were assigned to them as their servants. They were soon released, and Stara Gradiška became, very soon, a large concentration camp. There, in my sixteen months of being inmate, I experienced the worst of the horrors. The worst one I witnessed was the torture of children brought from Kozara [mountain]. [The translator adds explanation that Kozara was a stronghold of Serbian partisan resistance].

The weather was nice, somewhat like today's day. But when they [Ustasha] started to pull the children out of that prison, all the children were shivering as a branch in the wind. The Ustashi then had a competition in cruelty. I saw how Ustasha grabs a child and whirls it so long and so fast until the child flies away leaving the Ustasha holding the [child's ripped off] arm. The other [Ustasha] would throw a child up and try to catch it on his bayonet [knife].

A special section of Stara Gradiška was reserved for Croatian women, of Communist party. Those were suffering from typhus and dysentery.

As I do not want to torture you [the audience] with those horrors so I will abbreviate my presentation.

In the summer of 1942, I was transferred to Feričance, in Slavonia. We were brought to another camp, part of Feričance, called Obradovci. There we were to guard cattle that Ustasha stole from Serbs. We guarded the cattle and Ustasha guarded us. There were thirty of us and thirty of the Ustasha. From there seven of us succeeded to escape. It was clear to us that the summer is passing and when it is over they would take us back to Jasenovac. So we decided that it was better if we got killed while trying to escape than to go back to Jasenovac. The village of Obradovci is at the foot of Papuk Mountain, which, at that time, already contained active Partisan units. We managed to escape on September 12th, 1942, and already on 13 September 1942, we joined the Slavonian Partisans.

As a conclusion of my short presentation, I'll say that only 10 of us survived Jadovno! This is how many of us were brought [from Jadovno] to Jasenovac. Out of those ten who were taken to Jasenovac, only I survived because I managed to escape.

I should also mention this: Recently, Croatian press published—and I believe [President of Croatia in 1990's] Tudjman used it in his book—the statements of some ten or twelve Serbs who in 1942 were allowed to leave Jasenovac. It should be clear to anyone that Serbs who were let go from Jasenovac in 1942 had to be Ustasha collaborators. Secondly, the statements they give then [in 1942] were given to a commission of the Nedić Quisling Government. [The Nazi German force formed that government in occupied Serbia]. The depositions given were very anti-Semitic in their nature.

I claim that not a single Jew has ever been released from the

Ustasha concentration camps. Only those who managed to escape survived. Out of Jews who lived on the territory of Independent State of Croatia, eighty percent were murdered.

Thank you.

Note: Mr. Švarc did not come with full text of a statement. Instead he brought an abbreviated text that was just to remind him about the events he was to talk about. It is obvious from this text (submitted also in English) that Mr. Švarc did not have enough time to say many things he intended. For example, in his written text he mentions “Ljubo Miloš and his killings” and “My personal event with Ljubo Miloš, Commander of the Jasenovac Prison Camp. Barbaric Ustasha.”

From this written text, we also learn that Mr. Švarc, after joining the Partisans stayed in the Army until his retirement. He retired with the rank of Colonel. He also received ten decorations—most of them war decorations.

Many Yugoslav Jews survived by joining the Partisans. According to Dr. Jaša Romano’s Jews of Yugoslavia 1941-1945: Victims of Genocide and Freedom Fighters (Belgrade, 1980, page 303), 2,993 Jews joined the Partisans, and out of those, 722 died fighting. In the Partisans, there was no discrimination against Jewish fighters, and many of them achieved high ranks. Mr. Švarc’s short biography is given on page 497 of Dr. Romano’s book.