

Aleksandar Necak

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Belgrade

Serbia

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My family background

My maternal grandparents were both from Senta. Both families lived in the Jewish section of Senta but not in the Orthodox area, which was further outside the center.

Grandmother was born in Senta in 1885. She came from a considerably well-off Senta Jewish family. Her father, Moric Bergel, was a wheat trader in Senta who had his own mill and bakery. At the time there were laws forbidding Jews from owning land so he did not own any wheat fields. They say that he was "poziv na pogrom", "invited to the pogrom" because he had such a Jewish face. He was known to be very witty, constantly pulling practical jokes. Once, while my mother was in school he came to the school and had her called out of class in order to relay a very important message. She and her teachers were worried that something was wrong. But Moric just wanted to tell her that their cat caught a mouse and that she should hurry home for lunch. Some of his pranks had more significant effects. He had one brother who also lived in Senta and had a great fear of dying. Playing on his brother's fear of death, one day he had the local morticians go to his brother's house looking to collect his brother's corpse. After his brother learned that he had arranged this prank he never spoke to him again and the two brothers died without reconciling with one another. While he was a prankster, he certainly was not a traveler. He did not like to travel and rarely left Senta. Great-grandfather's wife Sirina [nee Stajnfeld] was born in Slavonia and at some point moved to Senta. She was much more observant than he, who was always looking for a way to avoid religious practice and observance. He died in Senta in 1939.

Great-grandfather and great-grandmother had two children, Andras and Tereza, my grandmother. Andreas studied pharmacy in Budapest. During these studies between 1915-1920, he changed his family name from Bergel to Ormos, a Hungarian name. Ostensibly he changed his name to improve his academic and professional opportunities in Hungary. He also met his future wife, Suzana Halpert, in Budapest. She was from a Hungarian Jewish family but moved to Senta with Andras after he completed his studies. Andras had his own pharmacy in Senta, where he worked until he was deported. When he and Suzana were captured he brought with him a vial of poison, which they both ingested on the way to Auschwitz. My grandmother Tereza Bergel lived most of her life in Senta until she was killed in Auschwitz. She finished a middle school for women, as was the practice at the time. She married my grandfather Dr. Kalman Hacker, also from Senta. They were two opposite personalities but, according to my mother, they had a good relationship.

Grandmother was always traveling and going to parties whereas grandfather was much more sedate and studious.

Grandfather came from a very poor family. His family was too poor to pay for his studies and he received a scholarship from a Catholic organization in Szeged [Hungary]. They financed both his bachelor's degree and his doctorate in Berlin but did not make any religious pressure on him. After finishing his doctorate he returned to Senta where he taught Greek and Latin in a local gymnasium. He spent his life close to his books and was not interested in traveling. Grandmother took after her father, Moric, who was not religious whereas grandfather was traditional in his religious practices. He went to synagogue and observed some of the traditional practices and was an active member of the *Neolog* community. [Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into to (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.]

Grandmother accepted these practices as the status quo at home but when she was on her travels she would not adhere to them. Grandfather died young, at the age of 51, on December 2, 1929 and is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Senta. He had one sister, Berta, who lived in Novi Sad. Berta, her daughter Kati and the rest of her family were killed in the raid of Novi Sad in January 1943.

Kalman and Tereza Hacker had one daughter, Suzana Hacker. My mother was born in Senta on February 25, 1915 and raised there. She studied at the secular gymnasium in Subotica. In 1932, at the age of 17, she married Dusan Necak, a Serbian officer in the Royal Yugoslav Army who was stationed in Subotica. They were married in Prilep [Macedonia] in a Serbian Orthodox church. At the time of the marriage my mother changed her name to Dusanka Necak. She was not religious and did not observe any Jewish holidays or practices nor did she observe the Serbian Orthodox practices. They had two children, my sister Marina and me. As father was an officer in the army we moved around a lot during the pre-war years but regardless of where we were most of our friends were people from the Jewish community in that town. When I was born we were living in Novi Sad, and by the time the war started father was already permanently stationed and working in Belgrade.

During the war

When the war began we were living in Belgrade. At the time mother's mother, Tereza, was also with us. When the Jews were rounded up in Belgrade she moved us in with family friends, the Djordjevic family, who lived on Knez Milos Street. Grandmother went back to Senta and mother did not tell anyone where she had moved us, thereby breaking all connections with her past. Mother went into this form of hiding because of her Jewish background but also because she was a member of a revolutionary group that had killed a police officer and whose members were being arrested. We lived with this family for the first half of the war and around 1942 we moved to stay with another family in Belgrade, also named Djordjevic. At one point, when all the Jews were told to register themselves with the authorities in Tasmajdan Park mother went to register herself. The clerk she handed her papers to looked through her paperwork and saw that there was no mention of her Jewish background. He ripped up her registration form and advised her that if ever asked she should make up a story about her parents' background and would thereby avoid registering herself

as a Jew. While we were living with these two Djordjevic families we were able to walk on the street and do many daily tasks because we had Serbian last names and had distanced ourselves from the family and friends.

At the beginning of the war, my father was captured and was taken to a camp in the Italian occupied zone. He escaped from that camp and was traveling back to Serbia by train when he was spotted by an acquaintance in the Zagreb train station. The acquaintance had him arrested and he was immediately deported to Jasenovac [concentration camp] where he was killed.

After the war

After the war we remained in Belgrade where mother worked as a financial clerk. My mother currently resides in the Jewish old age home in Belgrade. My sister Marina died in 1996 in Belgrade. I live in Belgrade with my wife, Matilda. I'm a semi-retired architect and Matilda, a landscape architect.