

*Ponekada nam se dešavaju stvari koje nismo mogli predvidjeti, ponekad, prosto neobjašnjivo, nabasamo na informacije o nama poznatim osobama, o događajima i epizodama iz njihovih života koje nam nisu bile dostupne desetinama godina. I na žalost, ponekad su te epizode dramatične, pa i tragične. Desilo se nešto tako našem članu Dejanu Stojniću koji je neočekivano naišao na ispovijest svog djeda Monija Altarca, koju je ovaj davne 1955 i 1956 g. ispovijedao u pisacu mašinu Dejanovog oca Slobodana Bođe Stojnića. Redakcija SaLona je uz Dejanov pristanak odlučila da objavi ova sjećanja u četiri nastavka, kako su i zabilježena. Žestok razlog za ovu odluku redakcija je imala u činjenici da se radi o ličnom svjedočenju preživjelog jedne od najsurovijih zločinačkih epizoda II Svjetskog Rata, epizoda kada se čovjek najviše udaljio od humanizma, možda i više od onoga kuda je zagazio njemački nacional-socializam. Ovo zbog toga što ovdje zločin, masovni zločin, nije bio industrijaliziran, već je bio ličan i pojedinačan, unatoč svojoj masovnosti. Ta epizoda se zove **Jasenovac**. Za one koji ne znaju ili koji su premladi, pa im niko nije ispričao, Jasenovac je gubilište nezamislive surovosti, koje su hrvatski ekstremni nacionalisti – rukama svojih dželata – Ustaša, ustanovili i u kome su počeli svoju zločinačku rabotu još 1941 g, dakle prije mašinerija nacističkih logora istrebljenja, sa ciljem konačnog razračuna sa Srbima, Jevrejima, Ciganima, ali i rodoljubivim Hrvatima. Ukupni broj žrtava se izražava 6-to cifrenim brojkama. Ove priloge treba shvatiti kao protest protiv svih onih pokušaja koji su dolazili i koji će vjerovatno dolaziti sa samog vrha nove države Hrvatske, da se veličina tragedije umanji, pa čak i da se izjednače zločinac i žrtva.*

SALOMON MONI ALTARAC: SJEĆANJA IZ JASENOVCA

- OKOVI -

Bila je prva nedelja hiljadu devet stotina četrdeset i druge godine.

U logoru je vladala strahovita, nezapamćena glad. Ranije, nikada u svom životu ja nisam bio gladan. A tada sam bio toliko gladan da bih dao svoj goli život samo da sam se mogao najesti.

Borio sam se očajnički sa njom, sa glađu. Borio sam se sa ono malo svijesti koju glad još nije uspjela da zamrača. Konačno, nisam više mogao da izdržim. Predao sam se. Krenuo sam da tražim Isidora. Isidora Maestra.

On je bio kuvar u oficirskoj ustaškoj kuhinji. Ovih dana kuvao je topla jela. Mogao je do beskraj da uživa u njima, u njihovim mirisima. Nekad smo bili dobri prijatelji Maestro i ja. Sada smo oba bili u Jasenovcu. Ja već tri i po mjeseca na nasipu, sa okovima na nogama, sa okovima na ranama. Gvozdene iverice alki bile su jako oštre, a moralo se kretati, raditi. Nisu pomagale ni krpice kojima sam omotavao iverice alki, jer bi one uskoro bile sasječene. Isidor nije nosio okove, nije radio na

nasipu i nije bio gladan. Da li će me razumjeti, pomoći?

- Isidore!

Okrenuo se brzo prema meni. Kada su nam se pogledi sreli, u njegovim očima sam ugledao strah. Pogledao je brzo uokolo. Ne, bili smo sami nas dvojica. Onda je spustio oči ka zemlji i lice mu je postalo mrko. Čekao je.

- Isidore, prijatelju, ti znaš da ja nikada u životu nisam bio gladan!

Rekao sam to tiho i - teško. Rekao sam to i ućutao.

- Znam - odgovorio je Isidor.

- A, znaš li ti Isidore da sam ja sada toliko gladan da bih dao i svoj goli život samo da mi se najesti?

- Šta bi htio? - kaže mi on.

Ja bih te molio da mi iz one bačve u koju bacaš ostatke za napoj, daš jednu porciju, eto, da mi se najesti

- Jesi li ti lud, Moni - govorio je Isidor tihim glasom. - Ja neću stavljati svoj život na kocku radi jedne porcije spirina, ti znaš da je zatočenicima strogo zabranjeno da se kreću u blizini ustaške kuhinje, ti to znaš!

Da, ja sam to znao. Ali nisam više htio da znam. A sada smo,

evo, sami i on bi mi mogao pomoći, a da o tome niko ništa ne sazna. Treba imati samo malo hrabrosti. I malo samilosti.

- Isidore!

- Moni!

- Isidore, ti se plašiš!

- Da, Moni, ako nas uhvate, znam šta čeka i tebe i mene.

Da, ito sam znao. Ali šta je više smrt i ovdje predstavljala! Glad ju je sada bila nadjačala. Rekao sam:

- Svejedno ti je Isidore, ili te ubili danas ili sutra. Što ti Isidore toliko čuvaš svoj život?

Da, svejedno je - ponovio je za mnog Isidor, ali ne kao da meni odgovara, već kao da sam sebi govori, i lice mu se još više smračilo, kao da je naglo, mnogo, ostario. Onda je rekao:

- Slušaj! U jedan sat dođi kod kuhinje, Tamo ću ti, u metranskim drvim, ujednoj od šupljina, ostaviti porciju

- Hvala, Isidore

Bilo je negdje oko deset sati kada sam ovo sa Isidorom razgovarao. A on mi je rekao da dođem tek u jedan. Kako izdržati to, kako dočekati taj sat!

U pola jedan krenuo sam prema drvim, prema porciji. Drhtao sam idući ka ustaškoj kuhinji, zvjerao okolo da koga ne ugledam. Vukao sam se polako, teško i oprezno, nastojeći da ugušim šum lanaca na nogama. Konačno, bio sam tu, kod drva,

i ruke počele da drhte. Ubiće me, ovako, ovdje, pred ciljem, glasnog!

Naslonio sam se ledima na ono mjesto u drvim gdje je bila skrivena porcija. Naslonio sam se da bih je skrio - i da ne bih pao.

Koraci su se sve više približavali. Spustio sam oči prema zemlji. Onda su koraci stali. Ja sam gledao u čizme čovjeka meni još nepoznata lika. U elegantne, čiste, odlične čizme. To mi se nije svidjelo.

- Šta tražiš ti ovdje?

Bio sam prisiljen da dignem pogled prema njemu. Predamnom je stajao mlad čovjek, oštra lika, sa malim, crnim, brčićima. Postavio je ovo teško pitanje i promatrao me upitno. Osjetio sam kako stvar kreće rdavim putem. Bio sam se smeo.

- Gospodine natporučniče, ja slažem drva.

Znam, da sam smišljao laž dan i noć, ne bih je gluplju mogao smisliti. Drva su bila složena, a bila je nedelja. Zatočenicima je pristup ovdje bio strogo zabranjen. Ali, nisam znao šta da odgovorim. Mislio sam da će me ovdje, na licu mjesta, ubiti.

- Reci mi šta si tražio, ovdje, kod kuhinje?

Ja sam ćutao.

- Poznajesh li ti mene?

Ovo je bilo teško pitanje. Ali ton kojim ga je ustaša postavio, nije se salgao sa njegovim zastrašujućim smislom. Tome je još više zbunilo. A šta ako se on to samo sa mnog izigrava? Da li ga poznajem! Ako ga ne poznajem, onda ću ga upoznati. Neki dan se drao Ljubo Miloš: vi ćete mene već upoznati, bando židovska, b a n d o k o m u n i s t i č k a .

Ponijećete moj lik sa sobom u zemlju. Bando! Bando!

- Ne gospodine, ja vas ne poznajem.

- Otkada si ti ovdje?

- Tri i po mjeseca.

- Jesi li ti tada okovan?

- Da, gospodine.

- Zar ti ne radiš u mehaničkoj radionici?

Ne, gospodine.

- Hajde sa mnog.

Krenuli smo. Iza mene, u drvim, ostala je porcija. Ali, ja više nisam mislio na nju. Teška mora tištala mi je dušu.



Kako sam činio korak za korakom, srce mi se sve više stezalo. Jedva sam se vukao. Išli smo prema Savi. Strašna rijeka tekla je polagano, ogromna, mutna, prljava. Mislio sam da je to kraj. Bilo mi je žao. A onda smo naglo skrenuli. Sava je ostajala iza nas. Ustaša me je vodio prema lančari. Tu, gdje sam prvog dana bio okovan. Tu, gdje su se pravili okovi za desetine i stotine hiljada zatočenika. Ušli smo u lančaru. Ustaša je dozvaao sebi kovača Uroša Miletića. Naredio mu je:

- Otkuj ovom zatočeniku okove!
- Uroš je prišao s majzlom u ruci. Udario je dva puta i okovi su bili razbijeni. Nepokretni, okovi su ležali na zemlji.
- U tom trenutku osjetio sam kako mi na oči naviru suze. Ni danas, poslije toliko godina, ne bih umio objasniti kako mi se to desilo. Znam samo da sam se trudio, ali ih nisam mogao zadržati. Možda je to bila radost što su mi okovi pali s nogu, ili možda žalost da ću otići u smrt, u Savu. Ili, možda nešto treće što nisam više mogao razumom shvatiti, ali sam to nejasno osjetio, i suze su potekle.
- Pita me ustaša:
- Zašto plačeš?
- Ne plačem - kažem ja.
- Plačeš!
- Ne plačem, gospodine - ponavljam ja. I stvarno, nisam plakao, samo su mi suze tek bile potekle.
- Hajde, sa mnom!
- I, ponovo me vodi. Vodi me prema izlazu iz logorske kapije. A preko puta nje nalazio se Granik. Granik sa koga su hiljade i hiljade nesrećnika otišli u Savu. Opet mi se steže srce. A suze su prestale da teku. Pred očima mi se mračí. Idem opušteno glave, očiju uprtih u zemlju. Ne vidim ustašu, ali se upravljam prema njegovim koracima.
- Hej, kuda?
- Digao sam glavu. Ustaša je bio skrenuo od Granika. A ja sam se nesvjesno i dalje kretao ka njemu.
- Ovuda!
- Okrenuli smo lijevo, prema oficirskim ustaškim paviljonima. Počeo sam ponovo da razaznajem stvari oko sebe. I, bilo mi je lakše. Ušao je u prvu oficirsku baraku. Ja za njim. Vodi me u jednu sobu. Bila je prazna. Daje mi stolicu.
- Sjedi, - kaže,

Sjedam. Nasuprot meni sjeda i on. Gleda me. Gledam ja u njega. I, tako, ćutimo jedno vrijeme. Onda ponovo pitanje:

- Zar ti mene ne poznaješ?
- Gledam u njega upitno. Ne, ne sjećam se ovog lica. Nikada u životu nisam ga vidio.
- Ne, ne poznajem vas.
- Sjećaš li se kada si moga oca, koji je bio mašinovođa, bolesnog iz Trnova prevezao do Sarajeva?
- Da, sjećam se toga. I ovoga čovjeka ovdje, preko puta mene. Inije to bilo davno kada smo se upoznali, svega su dvije godine prošle od tada. I tri i po mjeseca, ovdje, u ovom logoru uništenja. Za te dvije godine nisam zaboravio ljude sa kojima sam se poznavao. Ali sam zaboravio za ova tri i po mjeseca.
- Da, gospodine ustaški natporučniče. Sad vas se sjećam. I sjećam se kada smo se upoznali. Bio sam šofer u Sarajevu i imao sam svoja kola. Bio sam taksi šofer. Bilo je veče i ja sam stajao kraj svojih kola na štandu u Koševu.
- Tad ste naišli vi. Prilazili ste mi nesigurnim korakom. Primijetio sam da se ustručavate da me nešto upitate.
- Želite nešto, gospodine?
- Da, želim da vas nešto zamolim. Ako me možete shvatiti i ako biste htjeli da mi pomognete. I ja sam šofer, kolege smo po zanimanju. Našao sam se u teškoj neprilici. Imam bolesnog oca u Trnovu i treba hitno da ga prevezem u Sarajevo da bih mu spasio život. Imam samo toliko da platim benzin, više nemam. Imao sam tu neke prijatelje, šofere. Zamolio sam ih da mi pomognu. Nisu htjeli, odbili su me. Bili su prijazni sa mnom, ali su me odbili. Vas ne poznajem. Nikada u životu nismo se vidjeli. Ne znam šta ćete mi reći. Ali sam prisiljen da vas zamolim da mi učinite tu uslugu. Možda ću vam se kasnije odužiti. Ako mi vjerujete....
- Rekli ste to i učitali. Iz riječi vam je izbijala nevjerica i očaj. A ja vam ni jedno pitanje nisam postavio. I nisam se, djeteta mi ubijenog ovdje u Jasenovcu, ni časa premišljao. Otvorio sam vrata od kola:
- Sjedite!
- Znam, htjeli ste u tom trenutku nešto da mi kažete, da mi se zahvalite. Ali, to niste učinili. Samo ste mi pružili ruku i rekli svoje ime. Tada sam vaše ime upamtio, sada ga se više ne sjećam. Tada to za mene nije bilo važno. Kao što nije bilo

važno za vas kako se ja zovem, kojim jezikom govorim, i koje sam narodnosti. I da li uopšte imam narodnost. Tada sve to nije bilo važno. Radilo se o tome da se spase jedan život. Život vašeg oca koji je ležao teško bolestan u Trnovu i nepokretan očekivao od vas pomoć.

Vozili smo se prema Trnovu. Pričali ste mi malo o sebi. Da radite kao šofer na teretnom Saureru kod pilane Rivolta u Bosanskom Brodu. Jadali ste mi se da tu nema kakve zarade, da se teško živi.

Stigli smo pred vašu kuću. Sjećam se, vašeg su oca iznijeli u komadu ponjave. S njim je išla vaša starica majka, koja je ponijela sa sobom nekoliko šerpi nagorjelih od čadi. Pravo da vam kažem, kada sam vidio tu tešku sirotinju, smučilo mi se u glavi. I nije mi bilo žao što sam se namučio ove noći.

Doveo sam vas na stanicu u Sarajevo. Sjećate se, zajedno smo iznijeli iznemoglog starca i smjestili ga u restoran. Naručio sam za njega i staricu čaj, a nama po jednu rakijicu. Onda sam rekao da sam, eto, učinio svoje i da je vrijeme da krenem.

Vi ste se digli. Rekli ste:

- Prijatelju dragi. Ne znam kako da vam se za sve ovo zahvalim. Učinili ste mi mnogo, mnogo ste mi učinili. Žao mi je što mogu da vam platim samo benzin. Dozvolite, koliko vam dugujem?
- A ja sam već ranije bio donio odluku. U onom trenutku kada sam vidio da vašeg starog oca iznose u ponjavi. I vašu staricu majku kako nosi nagorjele šerpe.
- Dozvolite, da vam ništa ne naplatim. Eto, jednom kada nađem kroz Brod, možete me počastiti.
- Stegao sam vam ruku i krenuo ka izlazu. A vi ste ostali nepokretni, sa otvorenim novčanikom u rukama. Mislim, u tom momentu, niste mogli da shvatite da i tako nešto može da se desi. A ja, prije nego što sam izašao iz restorana, za trenutak sam se osvrnuo. Vi ste i dalje stajali onako kako sam vas ostavio, samo ste, kada su nam se pogledi ponovo sreli, malo podigli kačket sa glave.

U znak pozdrava i zahvalnosti.

I, mislim - poštovanja.

Vodio sam ovaj nijemi dijalog u sebi. A onda sam rekao:

- Da, gospodine, sad vas se sjećam. Mnogo ste se izmijenili od one noći. A, - i mene su mnogo izmijenili....
- I - učutao sam. Neka ogromna tuga obujmila me je svega. Ne bih znao reći zbog čega. Možda što sam se sjetio starih dana. I, na jedan trenutak, na jedan strahovito mali trenutak, zaboravio na logor.
- Podigao sam pogled prema ustaši. Ali, on me više nije posmatrao. Podnimljen na obje ruke, očiju uprtih u sto, on je ćutao.
- Tada, prvi put kako smo se danas sreli, progovorio sam, a da mi nije bilo postavljeno pitanje:
- Htjeli ste da znate zašto sam bio kod ustaške kuhinje. Sada vam to mogu reći....
- Glas mi se prelomio. Osjetio sam kako mi se naglo grlo steglo. Ali, ne od straha. Jaga u ovom trenutku više nisam osjećao. Osjećao sam tugu i - glad.
- Ne, nije potrebno.
- Izvadio je olovku i notes. Pisao je. Zatim mi je pružio cedulju. Bez riječi.
- „Šefu ustaške kuhinje, Zatočeniku broj 375 dajte moj ručak i večeru“.
- I potpis.
- Krenuo sam teško. Čudno. Tri i po mjeseca nosio sam okove i bio sam se već tako navikao na njih da mi se činilo kao da njihovu težinu više ne osjećam na nogama. Sada, kada sam krenuo, osjetio sam kako mi okovi teško stežu noge, okovi kojih tu više nije bilo.
- Na vratima sam zastao. Samo jedan trenutak. Ali se nisam osvrnuo. Izišao sam napolje. Bila je nedelja i neka čudna tišina u logoru. Trebalo je sada da krenem u kuhinju. Ali, u šta da primim hranu?
- Na jedno dvadesetak metara od kuhinje ležala je jedna ogromna kamara gvožđa. Tu je bilo nabacano hiljade posuda svih mogućih boja i oblika. Od hiljada Cigana ubijenih ovdje u logoru.
- Uputio sam se prema kamari.

Ovo je posljednji dokumenat koji nam je stavljen na raspolaganje, o dramatičnoj i tragičnoj priči upisanoj onako kako je ispričao Salomon Moni Altarac, preživjeli iz Jasenovca. Ako su vam dostupni slični dokumenti koje bi htjeli objaviti, molimo vas da nam se javite

TESTIMONIES

*Sometimes things we could not predict happen to us; inexplicably sometimes we come upon information about persons known to us and about events and episodes from their lives not accessible to us for decades. Regretfully also, these episodes are sometimes dramatic and even tragic. One such thing happened to our member, Dejan Stojnić, who unexpectedly discovered the recollections of Moni Altarac, his grandfather as told into the typewriter of Slobodan Bodo Stojnić, Dejan's father back in 1955 and 1956. The editorial board of SaLon has decided, with Dejan's consent, to publish these memories in four instalments, reflecting the way they were recorded. A compelling reason for our decision was the fact that it is a personal testimony by a survivor from one of the most brutal criminal episodes of World War Two, where the distance of man from humanity was the greatest, probably even greater than the distance to which the German National-Socialism stepped in. It is because the crime, the mass crime, was not industrialized here but personal and individual in spite of its immensity. The name of that episode is Jasenovac. For those who do not know what it means or for those who are too young and nobody has told them yet: **Jasenovac** is a place of execution of unimaginable cruelty established by Croat extreme nationalists – by the hands of their executioners – the Ustashes, where they started their criminal actions already in 1941, namely before the Nazi extermination camps machine started; The purpose of Jasenovac was the final face-off with Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and patriotic Croats. The total number of victims is stated in six figures. The episodes published in SaLon should be understood as a protest against all the attempts that have been coming from the very top of the new state of Croatia to diminish the size of the tragedy and even to equate the criminal with the victim.*

SALOMON MONI ALTARAC RECOLLECTIONS FROM JASENOVAC - CHAINS -

It was the first week of nineteen forty two.

The camp experienced an extreme unprecedented famine. Before that I was never hungry in my life. But then I was so hungry that I would have given my life just if I could have something to eat.

I desperately fought it – the hunger. I fought it with the little consciousness that the hunger did not get to black out. Eventually I could not bear any longer I gave up. I went to search for Isidor. Isidor Maestro.

He was a cook in the Ustasha offices' kitchen. When cooking he could endlessly enjoy the aromas of the cooked food. We used to be good friends – Maestro and I. Now both of us were in Jasenovac. I was on the embankment for three and a half months already, with chains on my legs, with chains on my wounds. The iron edges of the shackles were very sharp and one had to move and work. The

rags that I wrapped the edges of the ring did not help either because they would soon be cut to pieces. Isidor did not have chains and he was not hungry. Will he understand and help me?

- Isidor!

He turned quickly to, face me. When our eyes met I saw fear in them. He looked hastily around. No, the two of us were alone. Then he cast his eyes to the ground and his face darkened. He waited.

- Isidor, my friend, you know that I was never hungry in my life.

- I know – he replied.

- And do you know, Isidor, that I am so hungry now, that I would give my life to have something to it?

- What would you like?

- Would you please give me a portion from the tub into which you threw the leftovers for slops?

- Are you crazy, Moni – he said in a low voice – I do not want to

risk my life for one portion of slops. You know that the prisoners are forbidden to come close to Ustashes kitchen, you know that!

Yes, I knew that. But I did not want to know any more. And, here, we are alone now, and he could help me so that nobody would learn about it. One should have just a bit of courage; and a bit of pity.

- Isidor!

- Moni!

- Isidor, you are afraid!

- Yes, Moni. Should they catch us, you know what awaits both you and me.

Yes, I knew that as well. But what death meant here. Hunger was stronger here. I said,

- It is all the same Isidor whether they kill you today or tomorrow. Why do you care so much for your life?

Yes, it is all the same, he repeated, but not if he were talking to me but as if he were talking to himself, and his face darkened even more, as if instantly he grew much older. He then said:

- Listen! Come close to the kitchen at one o'clock. There in a hollow among the piled wood I will leave you a portion ...

- Thank you, Isidor. ...

It was about ten o'clock when I had this conversation with Isidor. He told me to come at one. How will I keep on till that hour!

I set in the direction of the wood pile and the portion at half past twelve. I was trembling on my way to Ustashes kitchen all the time looking around and checking whether there is anybody in the vicinity. I was dragging on slowly, heavily and cautiously, trying to lessen the noise of the chains on my legs. I got finally to the pile of wood and saw the portion. You have behaved like a man, Isidor!

I stretched my hand to get hold of the portion. But I did not manage to do it. Some footsteps were approaching. Turning around I saw an Ustasha officer coming straight to me! It was impossible to think of anything to explain the situation or to do anything clever or to run away. I stayed still there; my knees turned to jelly and my hands shaking. He will kill me here, almost at the target – but hungry!

I leaned with my shoulder on the place in the pile where the portion was hidden. I leaned in

order to hide it, and also not to fall down. The steps came ever closer. I cast my eyes to the ground. Then the steps stopped. I was looking at the boots of the man whose face was still unknown to me. The boots were elegant, clean and of excellent quality. I did not like it.

- What are you doing here?

I was forced to look up. I saw a young man with sharp face and small black moustaches. Asking this hard question he looked at me inquiringly. I realized that the situation is heading in the wrong direction. I was perplexed.

- I am piling up the wood, first lieutenant sir.

I knew that the lie I just uttered was the most stupid one that one could think of. The wood has been piled up, and also it was a Sunday. The prisoners were strictly forbidden to be there. I did not know how to answer. I thought that he will kill me on the spot.

- Tell me what were you looking for here, near the kitchen?

I was silent.

- Don't you know me?

That was a difficult question. However the tone how the Ustasha has pronounced it was not consistent with its terrifying significance. This confused me even more. What if he only provoked me? Do I know him?! If I do not know him I will get to know him. Ljubo Miloš was shouting: you Jewish bandits and you the communist bandits, all of you will get to know me. You will take my features down there, Bandits! Bandits!...

- No, sir, I do not know you.

- When did you come here?

- Three and a half months ago.

- Were you put into chains then?

- Yes, sir.

- Don't you work in the mechanical workshop?

- No, sir.

- Come with me.

We started going; the portion staid behind me in the pile of wood. I did not think about it any more. Other dark thoughts were on my mind. With every step my heart was sinking; I was straggling to walk.

We walked towards Sava River. The huge horrifying river was moving slowly. It was dirty and muddy. I thought that it was the end and I was sad.

But then we suddenly changed the direction. Sava stayed behind. The Ustasha was taking me to the chains workshop. It was the place where I was set into the chains on the first day of my arrival. It was the place where they were making chains for tens and hundreds of thousands of prisoners.

We entered the workshop. The Ustasha called the blacksmith Uroš Miletić to come. He ordered him:

- Release the chain from this prisoner!

Uroš approached with a majzl in his hand. He hit twice and I was freed of the chains. Motionless the chains were laying on the ground.

At that moment I felt tears coming to my eyes. Even today, so many years later, I cannot explain why. I know only that I tried, but failed, to suppress them. It might have been my joy to be released from the chains or my sorrow to go to my death to the Sava River. Or even something else that I could not comprehend but could only vaguely feel. And I started shedding tears.

- Why do you cry? - The Ustasha asked.

- I am not crying. - I said.

- Yes, you do!

- No, sir, I do not - I repeated. And really I was not crying, it was just my tears coming down my face.

- Come with me!

And he led me again. He led me to the exit gate from the camp. Opposite the gate was the Granik where from thousands of the unfortunate ones were thrown into the Sava. My heart started sinking again. I had no more tears. My sight became blurred. I walked with my head down looking at the ground. I do not see the Ustasha but follow his steps.

- Where do you go to?

I lifted my head. The Ustasha was not going in the direction of Granika any more. Instinctively I did.

- This way!

We were heading to the left, in the direction of Ustasas officers residences. I started recognizing things round me again and I felt better.

He entered the first officers' barrack and I followed. He took me to a room. It was empty. He offered me a chair.

- Sit down. - He said.

I sat. He set opposite me. He watched me and I watched him. We were silent for a while. Then he repeated the question:

- Don't you know me?

I looked at him enquiringly. No, I could not remember the face. I never saw him before in my life.

- No, I do not know you.

- Can you remember when you took my ill father, the train engineer, from Trnovo to Sarajevo? Yes, I did remember the event; and that man who at that moment was sitting opposite me. Not so long ago did we meet. Only two years went by. And three and a half months in this camp of destruction. Over those two years I did not forget the people that I knew. But I did forget over these three and a half months.

Yes, I did remember when we met, the Ustasha first lieutenant, sir. I was a driver in Sarajevo and I had my car. I was a taxi driver. It was evening and I was standing by my car at the stand in Koševo.

Then you came along. You were approaching with an uncertain pace. I noticed that you hesitated to ask me something.

- How can I help you?

- I would like to ask you a favour. Would you, please, try to understand me and help me? I am also a driver. We are colleagues by profession. I am in a desperate situation. My father is ill in Trnovo and in order to save his life I have to transfer him urgently to Sarajevo. I have only enough money to pay for the fuel. I had some friends - drivers here. I asked them for help. They did not want to help me, they turned me down. They were nice but they turned me down. I do not know you. We have never met before. I do not know what you will say. But I am forced to kindly ask you to do me that favour. I might reciprocate later. If you believe me...

You said that and fell silent. Your words expressed doubt and despair. I never asked you a question. I swear by the name of my child who was killed here in Jasenovac that I never had second thoughts about it. I opened the door:

- Do sit!

I know that at that moment you wanted to tell me something. But you did not do it. You only offered me your hand and uttered your name. I did remember your name at that time. I do not remember it now. It was not important to me then. Just the same as it was not important for you what my name was, what language did I speak or what was my ethnicity; or whether I belonged to an ethnic group at all. It was not important then. The issue was to save a life.

The life of your father who was very ill in Trnovo and not able to move he was waiting for your help.

We were on our way to Trnovo. You said a few things about yourself - that you were a driver of a Saurer truck for Rivolta sawmill at Bosanski Brod. You were complaining about your low earnings and your hard life.

We got to your house. I remember that your father was carried out of the house in a piece of an old rug. Your old mother came with him. She took with her a few pots black with soot. To tell you the truth I felt faint seeing that extreme poverty. I did not regret my effort that night.

I brought you to the station in Sarajevo. Do you remember? Together we carried out the exhausted old man and took him to the restaurant. I ordered tea for him and the old lady and for the two of us a brandy each. Then I said that I did what I could and that it was time for me to go.

You got up and said:

- Dear friend. I do not know how to thank you for all this. You have done a lot for me, really. I am sorry that I cannot pay more than only for the fuel. How much do I owe you?

I already made a decision before - at the moment when I saw your father carried out in that rug and your mother taking the soot blackened pans:

- Allow me not to charge you anything. Once, when my way takes me to Bosanski Brod you can buy me a drink.

I shook your hand and was on my way to exit. You stayed motionless there with an open wallet in your hand. I think that at that moment you could not understand that something like that could happen. Before leaving from the restaurant I looked back. You were still standing there as I left you, only when our eyes met again you moved your flat hat a bit up your forehead. As a sign of gratitude and - esteem I think.

This silent conversation took place only in my mind. Then I said aloud.

- Yes, sir. I remember you now.

You have changed a lot since that night. And I have been changed a lot. ...

I fell silent. A great sadness sized me. I could not say why. It could have been because I remembered the old days. And for one moment only, a frightfully short moment I had forgotten the camp.

I lifted my eyes to the Ustasha. But he was not watching me any more. Leaning on both his arms, gazing at the table, he did not speak.

Then for the first time since our meeting that day I spoke out without being asked before:

- You wanted to know what I was doing near the Ustasas kitchen. I can tell you now.

My voice broke down and I got a lump in my throat. It was not fear. At that moment I did not sense it. I sensed only sadness and - hunger.

- No, there is no need.

He took out a pen and a notebook. He was writing something. Then he gave me the piece of paper. Not saying a word.

"To the Head of the Ustasas kitchen

Give my lunch and dinner to prisoner number 375.

And his signature.

I started with a heavy pace. For three and a half months I had the chains on and had got used to them so much that it seemed to me that I did not feel their weight. But when I started then I felt the chain pressing heavily on my legs, the chains that were there no more.

I stopped at the door. Just for a moment. But I did not look back. I went out.

It was a Sunday and there was a strange stillness in the camp. I had to head to the kitchen now. But I had nothing to take the food in.

Some twenty meters from the kitchen there was a huge pile of iron. Thousands of pans and pots of all sizes and colours were laying there. They were thrown by thousands of Gypsies killed there in the camp.

I was heading to that pile.

This is the last document presented to us of the dramatic and tragic story as told by Salomon Moni Altarac, a Jasenovac survivor. If you had access to similar documents and would like them published, please get in touch.