Yugoslavia

Chapter One

I

SAT ON MY BACKPACK in the narrow, hot, stinky, clamorous, smoke-filled corridor of the train, trying to get some sleep while other passengers walked into and over me en route to the bathroom and dining car. People had crammed themselves in every nook and cranny available—in the hallways, in the dining car, outside between the cars, even in the bathrooms.

It was June 1981. I was twenty-three years old and traveling from Vienna to Zagreb, Yugoslavia—the first stop in my yearlong journey through Eastern Europe in search of klezmer and of Jewish music, culture, stories, and life under communist rule. I would learn many things in the following year—both about myself and the people and places I visited—and I had just learned a very important and practical travel tip: in addition to the train ticket, you must buy a seat ticket if you want to sit on something other than your luggage.

It had never occurred to me that buying a train ticket in the Eastern bloc would not automatically guarantee me a seat. I was soon to learn that it was not uncommon for a railroad company to sell many more tickets than they had seats. What did they care? They wanted the revenue. Anyone from the West traveling from one country to another had to pay in U.S. dollars or German marks—usually at a much higher price than the locals paid. Most locals didn't have cars, so they were obliged to use public transportation, and the train was much quicker than a bus and cheaper than an airplane—in other words, the railroad company knew they could take advantage of the situation, and they did.

The upside: by the end of my trek, I had mastered the art of sleeping in a train hallway . . . standing up.

I resigned myself to a difficult journey and took out my banjoline. I had bought it for \$20 from an old hunched-over man in a flea market during my four-hour train layover in Budapest earlier that day.

Banjolines were commonly played in 1920s dance bands, and now I used my droll new instrument to compose a klezmer tune called "Maestral Hora and Bulgar." The hora was originally a popular Romanian Jewish dance, played in a hobbling 3/8 gait; it was often followed by an upbeat *bulgar* in 8/8. Similar to a *freylekhs* (an upbeat dance, generally in 2/4 time), a *bulgar* was danced as either a circle or line dance; it was popular in Bessarabia and South Ukraine in the nineteenth century through the eve of World War II. The name probably refers to the Bulgarian minority in Bessarabia. I had fun playing counter-rhythm to the rhythm of the train over the tracks.

ZAGREB

My train arrived in Zagreb at 8:30 P.M. Exhausted, I gathered my gear and walked to the only address I had, 55 Bukovacka Cesta, the Jewish Home for the Aged. The home had been built in 1957 with funds from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and from Jewish Material Claims against Germany. I had learned of the home (and other Jewish places I would seek out over the course of my journey) in *The Jewish Travel Guide*, published by the Jewish Chronicle of London. I was on a strict budget and hoped that I could get a free room in exchange for entertaining the residents with some Jewish music—I figured that Jewish music, like young Jews, was scarce and would be much appreciated. So I began the two-mile walk.

Although it was cloudy and drizzling, it was still excruciatingly hot and humid. Among all the negative things people kept telling me about the Eastern bloc before I left on my trip—that I was wasting my time searching for anything connected to klezmer, there were only a few Jews left and those who remained were all old, the communists forbade any kind of religious or Jewish cultural expression, food was scarce and one had to wait in long lines



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The Jewish History of Yugoslavia

f all the Balkan countries, Yugoslavia is the only one with a sizable Ashkenazic community as well as a Sephardic one. Yugoslavia was founded at the end of World War I in 1918 and comprised six republics-Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia; and two provinces-Kosovo and Vojvodina. Jews first settled in Yugoslavia during Roman times (third century C.E.), as evidenced by synagogue and tombstone inscriptions found near Split (Italian, Spalato) on the Dalmatian coast. Following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, Sephardic Jews started migrating to the Dalmatian coast from Spain, Portugal, and Italy. By 1521, this area of Yugoslavia was under Turkish rule, and the Jewish communities came under the authority of the chief rabbi of Constantinople.

In 1878, Serbia's Jews were granted complete civil, economic, and political emancipation by the Treaty of Berlin. The Jews in the other regions did not become full legal citizens until the end of World War I.

With an influx of Jews from the former Austro-Hungarian territories, Yugoslavia's Jewish population swelled to 76,654 by 1931. The Sephardim comprised about thirty thousand and the Ashkenazim about forty-six thousand, of which some twenty-two thousand were Hungarian. Until the 1930s, anti-Semitism had not been a part of Jewish life, but gradually it began to seep in from Germany. The Yugoslavian government initiated its first two anti-Jewish laws in October 1940. The first limited the access of Jews to high schools and higher education; the second stopped the granting to Jews of licenses for opening new businesses and restricted the renewal of licenses already granted.

On April 6, 1941, German forces, along with their Italian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian allies, invaded Yugoslavia. Eleven days later, the Yugoslavian government capitulated to the Nazis. Some five thousand Jews fought among the partisans. By the end of 1941, Belgrade became the first capital city in occupied Europe to be declared completely Judenrein (free of Jews). Those few Jews who were able to escape were hunted down by the Croatian and Serbian collaborators. Some sixty thousand Yugoslavian Jews perished in the Holocaust, many in the infamous concentration camps located in Nis (Macedonia), Sabac (Serbia), and Jasenovac (Croatia)—the largest camp. After the war, between 1948 and 1951, about nine thousand Yugoslavian Jews immigrated to Israel. In 1981 there were some seven thousand Jews in Yugoslavia.Today, there are 1,716 in Croatia, 3,300 in Serbia, and 1,000 in Bosnia.

when it arrived in the stores—I remembered being told that it was either damp or cold most of the time. Well, unless the Berlin Wall provided enough shade, it promised to be a hot, steamy summer.

Though overcast, it wasn't completely dark yet. The drizzle didn't bother me too much, because the poplars along the street provided a thick canopy. Most of the shops were closed and looked rather nondescript, except for the usual portrait of Premier Josip Tito hanging in each window. I hadn't eaten since lunch, but I was reluctant to go into any of the smoke-filled cafés. I was trying to detox my lungs from all of the cigarette smoke I had inhaled for eight hours, but more, I felt a bit uneasy. I didn't see any other tourists or backpackers like myself strolling the evening streets. I felt conspicuous and I sensed a lot of stares, especially from the young men who were just hanging out, drinking beer and smoking. I knew enough before I embarked on my trek not to display my being a foreigner any more than I had to. No flags, no buttons on my backpack, and just regular clothes except for the occasional T-shirt with a running-race logo. My Adidas running shoes even matched those of many of the guys hanging out.

Maybe my imagination was a bit overactive, but when I glanced at them they seemed to turn to each other with their roguish smiles to talk about me. Perhaps I was an easy target for someone to rob for a few dollars—currency that went a long way in the Eastern bloc. At five foot ten inches and 135 pounds (soaking wet), and carrying just about as much as I weighed, I was not an imposing figure. As it turned out, during my entire trip the only trouble I was to encounter would come from the police and border guards in each country.

A PLACE TO STAY

Three or four wrong turns later, I arrived at the Jewish Home for the Aged. The three-story building stood two hundred feet back from the street in a lush, tree-filled garden. A wrought-iron fence surrounded the compound. I was tired, famished, wet, and eager to get inside. Though it was past 9:30 P.M., I hoped someone would still be up to open the gate. I pushed and pushed the doorbell as the drizzle turned into a driving rain. Finally, an old man dressed in striped pajamas, bathrobe, and slippers shuffled down the path toward me. You can imagine the look on his face when he saw me. He unlocked the gate and opened it just enough to gape at me in utter amazement. He said something in Croatian, which I didn't quite understand, but the gist of it was "I am sorry we are closed and your grandmother is sleeping."

I answered him in Yiddish (my Croatian nearly nonexistent at that time), explaining that I was wet, hungry, and had no place to stay that night—and I was Jewish. Again he answered me, only this time, as he spoke, I gently pushed him to the side and walked into the yard. If nothing else, I hoped to sleep in my sleeping bag on the floor somewhere where it was dry. After a few seconds the old man scurried past me to get to the front door before I did. When he got there he yelled to me in German, "Wait, wait!" He then went inside, closing the door firmly behind him.

As I stood there waiting, I began to laugh at myself. I could just see trying to pull the same stunt at the Jewish Home for the Aged in San Diego. Needless to say, the police back home would have obliged me with a place to sleep, but here in Yugoslavia I was acting the same way I didn't want to be perceived: as the arrogant American. I realized I should not have assumed that I could stay there, but it was raining, late, I hadn't slept in over twentyfour hours, and I was desperate.

Four elderly women opened the door; three of them were wide awake, the other half asleep. They stood there for a moment in their nightclothes, dumbfounded by my presence. Then they all began speaking to each other at once. Finally one of them—a slender lady with an alabaster face, wearing a purple silk bathrobe and sleeping bonnet—pushed herself forward, shushed the others to be quiet, and said to me in perfect English with no trace of an accent, "Are you here to visit your grandmother?"

"Well not exactly. I'm here to—"

"Did you come to see your grandfather?"

"I'm sorry to be bothering you but I have no relatives here and I need a place to sleep for the night....I am Jewish."

"As you can see, this is not a hotel."

"I'm from the United States and I'm researching Jewish folk music."

"We are all Jewish and some of us know some Jewish songs, but it is rather late for us."

"No, I don't mean to record you tonight. I just arrived from Budapest and I need a place to sleep just for the night. See my sleeping bag? I just need some floor space." With a delicate smile, she gently pushed the women out of the way and closed the door on me. From the other side of the door I could hear her speaking to the other ladies, which prompted them to again all begin speaking at once. A minute went by, then the door reopened and the slender lady said:

"This is highly unusual, but since you have no place to stay tonight and you seem like a nice young man we have decided to let you sleep here. Please, what is your name?"

"My name is Yale."

"And I am Olga."

I walked in and followed Olga down a corridor that smelled of mothballs. There was room after room off of the corridor. We turned right, then Olga opened a door and showed me inside. The room was fully furnished with a bed, toilet, and bathtub.

"I hope you find this comfortable. There are towels in the cupboard and breakfast is at eight A.M."

"Thank you so much, Olga, I—"

"Please do come and join me at my table tomorrow. We will see what sort of Jewish music we might find for you."

I quickly got out of my dirty, sweaty clothes and took an enjoyable hot bath with the European-style flexible shower nozzle, washed some clothes, and dove into the cold, freshly laundered sheets. As my head sank into the soft goose down pillow, I remembered that I wanted to write in my diary religiously every night about that day's events. Not tonight, I thought, as my eyelids closed and I drifted off into a deep slumber.

Songs and Stories from the Past

The next morning I found myself eating breakfast with some eighty residents, mostly women, whose average age was probably around seventyseven. The home was intended only for elderly Jews but there were seven non-Jewish residents; as they had been married to Jews, they were allowed to live there as well.

As a vegetarian, I appreciated the delicious food on the menu so much that I had double portions: plain white bread with apricot preserves, a kind of hot farina, fresh tomatoes, leeks, red peppers from their own garden, pickled hot peppers, brinze cheese (like feta, only drier and sharper), tea, and thick strong Turkish coffee.

I sat with Olga (who I could not believe was ninety-one); Moises, eightythree; and Rut (Ruth), seventy-nine. I spoke English with Olga and some Yiddish and German with Moises; Olga translated our conversation into Serbo-Croatian for Rut.

I would soon learn that although there were Ashkenazim in Yugoslavia, a good portion of them had assimilated during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and thus had abandoned many of their cultural traditions—like speaking Yiddish as their mother tongue and playing klezmer music—in favor of adopting their host cultures. There was also a sizable Sephardic population in Yugoslavia, and their traditions, particularly their musical traditions, were very different from those of their Ashkenazim counterparts. So I was probably more likely to hear Sephardic folk music in Yugoslavia than Ashkenazic klezmer. Well, I shrugged to myself, I was here, I already had planned to visit a few other cities before traveling to Hungary, and there were *some* Ashkenazim living in Yugoslavia. I'd just have to work a little harder to find them.

As it turned out, I didn't have to look too far. Rut was Ashkenaz, from the small town of Senta near the Hungarian border. She remembered going to her cousin's wedding in Szeged, Hungary, at which Rom (Gypsy) musicians played both Hungarian and Jewish melodies. Rut actually remembered a Jewish waltz she and her father had danced to. She began to sing it, but I told her to wait just a moment, I wanted to record it. I ran back to my room, grabbed my tape recorder and microphone, and quickly set it up on the dining table. Wow! She sang a klezmer tune she remembered from seventy years ago. What better place than a Jewish home for the aged?

Rut had a pleasant voice and seemed quite proud to be singing for me. It was probably the first time in her life someone had recorded her singing. I asked her to sing it three times so that when it came time to transcribe the tune I would have enough examples of Rut's exact musical nuances. The melody seemed to have a Hungarian flavor that made perfect sense: when Rut had danced with her father at that Jewish wedding, she was living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

By the third rendition of the song, a group of twenty residents had gathered around the table to listen intently as Rut's voice rose in volume and confidence (as any good performer's would). After she finished singing, "WALTZ FROM SENTA"

Collected by Yale Strom



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several other residents pushed forward, volunteering to sing me some Jewish songs. I decided to take their names and room numbers so I could visit them individually and ask them a few questions about each tune and themselves. The fidelity would also be much better without the extraneous sounds from the others standing around watching.

Olga had become my surrogate grandmother, while I became the surrogate grandson for many of the residents. Olga (her Jewish name was Blumele) was born in Cepin near Osijek. She lived there with her first husband, a doctor. Then she moved to Demasuhara (today part of Romania), where she learned to speak Hungarian. She divorced and was remarried, to another doctor. Together they moved to Palestine in 1930. She was a strong Zionist and they lived at first in Jerusalem, but her husband couldn't make a living—too few patients—so after ten months they moved to Rabat, Morocco.

Olga loved Rabat, but life got harder for all the Jews in Morocco when Italy took control of the country. Finally, in 1943, Olga and her husband moved to New York City. There she designed and sold costume jewelry for Macy's. She got a second divorce (in Nevada) and remained in New York for six years. Then she went to Kalmar, Sweden, to visit her only child, her son from her first marriage. He wanted Olga to move to Sweden, but she was

Olga (on the right) with Rut at the Jewish Home for the Aged, Zagreb



IO A WANDERING FEAST

afraid she wouldn't be able to learn the language. Eventually she moved back to Zagreb. Olga was now a great-grandmother.

Olga so impressed me with her great health—no hearing aids, false teeth, or glasses—that I said, "To one hundred twenty you should live!"

"Anything too much is not good," she replied. "While I feel young everything is all right. When I will feel old then I will be ready to go and see my husbands."

Unfortunately, few residents were as cheerful and healthy as Olga. A sense of stark loneliness pervaded the home. There were elderly Jews who lived there because they'd never had children, or their spouses had died, or they had never married, and they needed some physical assistance in doing many of the mundane things of everyday life. Then there were other residents who could take care of themselves but wanted to live among their Jewish brethren. These people had lived their entire lives in small towns or even villages where the Jewish community had gradually disappeared from migration and death. This is what happened to Rut, who'd lived her entire life in Senta.

Though Rut and her husband, Ferenc, were the last Jews in the town by 1971, they chose to stay because they had a successful toy store. Rut had a cousin on her mother's side who had immigrated to the United States before World War II, but she lost contact with her, and the rest of her family perished in the Holocaust. Her husband was also the sole survivor from his family, except for a nephew who lived in Belgrade. Then in 1977, Ferenc died suddenly from a heart attack and Rut wasn't able to operate the store by herself. She sold it and moved to the Jewish Home for the Aged as soon as space became available. Rut only had to wait two years before she could move in; some other residents had had to wait as long as five years before being admitted.

Though the Jewish population in Yugoslavia was not large, most of its Jews were elderly. This was the only Jewish Home for the Aged in the entire country, and that created some real but morbid realities for those elderly Jews who were waiting to be accepted into it. Olga told me she received letters from friends who asked specifically about a certain resident who had been seriously ill. Was she getting better, or was death just sitting in a chair across from her bed, waiting for the precise moment to take her away . . . so others could fill the vacancy?

What bothered me most was seeing the residents' children visiting their parents, sometimes having to drag the grandchildren along. This reminded me of the times I had played klezmer music for the elderly Jews in the Home for the Aged in San Diego. The music occupied their minds for a while, but when I left many were once again overtaken by isolation. Before the Holocaust, in the shtetl (Yiddish, primarily Jewish town) the concept of a separate home for the aged was not known. Grandmothers and grandfathers lived with their children and helped to raise their grandchildren. I missed my grandma.

My intention had always been to stay a couple of days, maximum, before I left Zagreb for Split. I ended up staying another week with these incredible Jewish seniors. The night I left the home to walk to the train station, Olga

Makes about 5 dozen Yugoslavian bureks are close cousins to Greek pitas (as in spanikopita and tiropita). The difference is in the consistency of the dough and the flavor. The dough in the Yugoslavian burek is different from the phyllo used in the Greek version—it is more like our traditional pie dough. Bureks can be stuffed with spinach, potato, meat, or fruit. This filling will also work well for a Greek spinach pie. You can substitute one and a half 10-ounce packages of thawed, drained chopped spinach for the fresh spinach.

Burek Sasirom Spinat Yugoslavian Spinach and Cheese Pies

For the filling:

- ³/₄ lb. pot cheese or farmer cheese
 ¹/₃ lb. shredded Swiss cheese
 ¹/₄ lb. feta, finely crumbled
 ¹ large potato, boiled and mashed
 ⁴ medium eggs
 ² Tbsp. finely chopped garlic
 ¹/₂ lb. fresh spinach, washed well and finely chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

For the dough:

7 cups unsifted flour
1½ cups peanut oil
2 cups hot water
Extra oil for brushing *bureks*1 egg yolk and 2 tsp. water, beaten to-

gether for an egg wash

and Rut came to say good-bye. And just like typical Jewish mothers, they didn't let me leave without taking some food for the train.

"Yale, you won't find any cheese-spinach *bureks* on the train as good as ours—and they are still hot," said Olga.

I said good-bye to everyone and thanked them profusely for their warm hospitality and generosity. Then, with a lump in my throat, I hugged and kissed Olga, telling her I hoped to be back to see her. (And sure enough, three and a half years later I found myself back in Zagreb once again with my buddy Brian Blue—this time, Olga welcomed us both.)

1. For the filling: Combine all the filling ingredients and mix well. Set aside.

2. For the dough: In a large bowl, place the flour and make a well in the center. Add the peanut oil and 1 cup of the water and mix with your hands. If necessary, dust your hands with flour to keep the dough from sticking. Add the remaining water and mix until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl; do not knead or overmix. Cover with a clean towel and let it rest for 30 minutes on the kitchen counter.

3. Preheat the oven to 350°. Dust the work surface and a rolling pin with flour. Pinch off an egg-sized piece of dough and roll into a 5-inch circle. Place a heaping teaspoonful of filling in the center and fold in half to form a half moon. Trim the excess dough from around the filling and press the edges together with the tines of a fork, being careful not to puncture the *burek*. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling.

4. Generously oil the bottom of a shallow baking pan (a jelly roll pan is best). Brush the tops and bottoms of the *bureks* with oil as you place them in the pan. Then brush the tops with the egg wash.

5. Bake until golden, about 45 minutes. Serve hot or at room temperature.



YUGOSLAVIA I 3

Split

The houses and buildings of the coastal city of Split are made of white stone. Lush, decorative flowerboxes hang from nearly every window, and wooden shutters are opened in the mornings to let in the breezes off the Adriatic Sea.

On my first day there, I slowly traversed the cool, shaded narrow streets of the old city and ended up at the harbor. I walked the maze of smoothworn stone passages, which led me to Zidovski Prolaz (Serbo-Croatian, Jewish alley). I waited at the foot of the stairs of the Jewish Community Center thirty minutes before the *roshekool* (Yiddish, head of the Jewish community) appeared. Roundfaced and moustachioed, he had a scar across his chin. His name was Eduard Toyb. In perfect English, he invited me inside for Turkish coffee and biscuits.

A Sacred Torah and a Soccer Game

Eduard took me to see the Ashkenazic synagogue, built in the eighteenth century. Large marble columns ringed the perimeter of the sanctuary. In the middle stood the bimah (Hebrew, elevated platform) and set into the eastern wall was the Holy Ark. Eduard opened it and handed me a small, beautiful Torah.

"My mother saved this Torah before she was deported to Jasenovac, the death camp. She never returned home. It had been in our family for three hundred years, so she hid it with a gentile neighbor she had grown up with. After the war the neighbor gave it back to the Jewish community. Now when I touch the Torah I feel as if I am touching my mother's soul, and when the rabbi reads from it I hear my mother's voice."

Unfortunately, the rabbi rarely read from this Torah, as he came from Belgrade only to officiate at the funerals of members of the Jewish community. The synagogue itself was used only on the holidays.

Though there were some Ashkenazim among the eighty-one Jews in the community, I didn't get the sense from Eduard that I was going to find any unknownYiddish folk melodies or klezmer tunes.

Eduard invited me to a soccer game that night between the Jewish community's soccer team Maccabi and another local team. I sat with him and several young members of the Jewish community in a four-thousand-seat stadium. It was about half full. The Maccabi team was winning, and the delicious ocean breeze cooled the hot daytime temperatures. Although I had only just met the people I sat with, I felt a kind of warm familial feeling for them, a camaraderie. Though we were born in different countries in completely different circumstances, we were all Jews. We discussed what it meant to be a Jew in today's world, the importance of maintaining and celebrating one's culture, and what Israel meant to us.

I realized, as I sat with my new friends in that soccer stadium, that this trek was about more than just trying to collect some old klezmer tunes. It was about meeting the Holocaust survivors and hearing their incredible stories of their lives before, during, and after the Holocaust. After all, what was a klezmer tune without the human vessel to transmit it to others?

Dubrovnik

Early the next morning I was on a bus on the road that followed the rugged and picturesque Adriatic coastline all the way down to Dubrovnik, home of the third-oldest existing synagogue. I was curious to meet the synagogue's *shames* (sexton); Eduard told me he was quite a colorful character.

The city was once an independent republic allied to Venice. It sits on top of a rock that juts out into the Adriatic Sea like a beautiful medieval Mediterranean fortress. Hills dotted with small houses surround the walled city. Its main section was built around a large boulevard known as the Placa. From this main square, many narrow, twisting streets and alleys extend out and up into the surrounding hills.

The Placa was wider than any boulevard I had ever walked on before. Well-tended shops lined it on either side. To my left, shops and homes began at the foot of the mountain and continued upward. To my right, I could see the Adriatic through gaps in the fortress wall.

The marble stones underfoot were large and worn to a fine smooth sheen. A short cloudburst had just ended, which left the stones even shinier and extremely slippery. Just then I saw some young kids running and sliding down the Placa on cardboard, as if they were surfing the stones. Then my stomach reminded me it hadn't had any food since the evening before, so I bought some hot cheese and spinach *bureks* from an elderly street vendor. He sized me up as a foreigner and addressed me in English: "Where you from?"
"I'm from America."
"America, great country. You have big car?
"No, I don't own one."
"Why you here, tourist?"
"Actually, I'm here looking for old Jewish folk music."
"Jews no more. Maybe you find something at synagogue. Very beautiful

synagogue, over there."

He pointed to a street about a quarter mile up the Placa. But before I continued to the synagogue, I walked over to the sea wall and sat down, eating and gazing out at the calm Adriatic Sea. In San Diego I was accustomed to stunning views, but this one—with the high stone walls encompassing the medieval architecture, the flowering vines growing out of the wall's crevices, the little rocky islands that dotted the coastline, and the rainbow that swept over the horizon—was more spectacular than any view I had seen back home.

The Dandy and the Synagogue

As I was daydreaming, I spied a tall, lanky old man, wearing a yellow summer fedora and walking with a cane. He looked exactly as I'd imagined the *shames*, Emilio Tolentino, from Eduard's description. I figured that Mr. Tolentino would not look favorably upon a stranger's taking photos of him, but he was such a colorful character, tipping his hat to the ladies walking by, chatting with the open-air vendors . . . he was a regular Jewish dandy. I couldn't resist. I hopped down off of my perch and followed him, stealthily taking photos.

After walking down the Placa for half a mile, he turned left down Zudioska Ulica (Croatian, Jewish street). This was only the third city on my trek and already I had twice encountered a street named after the Jews. Of course, I knew that the original reason these streets were called Jew Street was out of a sense not of celebration, but of suspicion—a way to segregate the Jewish community from the non-Jewish. All of the former Jewish ghettos throughout Europe had Jew Streets, which, although created by the church, had been agreed upon by many rabbis. They too were worried about too much interaction between the Jews and non-Jews. Because the Jews were a very small minority, the rabbis knew all too well that it was easy and natural for many Jews to assimilate and adopt many of their non-Jewish customs. This particular Jew Street was actually a tapered passageway that ended at the foot of a hill, with steep stone steps leading up to homes that overlooked the city below. After Mr. Tolentino had gone inside the synagogue, I waited a few minutes before I pushed the doorbell.

Three stories up, an elderly lady stuck her head out of the window and yelled down to me. I wasn't quite sure what she was saying, but I knew enough Croatian to say I was Jewish and wanted to see the synagogue. She disappeared, and another minute went by before the big heavy wooden door slowly creaked open. Mr. Emilio Tolentino stood there, next to the large mezuzah (engraved scroll). Without saying a word, he waved to me to come in and follow him up two flights of narrow wooden stairs. Later I found out that Mr. Tolentino was a mere eighty-three years old; the elderly lady, who was his sister, was eighty-two; and he had an older brother who was eighty-nine. Just walking up and down the stairs several times a day would keep anyone young and spry.

As soon as I walked into the synagogue's Baroque interior, I was transported back several centuries. Three arches, all paneled in dark wood, divided the space. From the main beam on the ceiling hung a stunning antique Florentine chandelier. The bimah, again in the center of the room, was made from ornately carved wood.

As I stood there, wide-eyed and amazed, Mr. Tolentino (he seemed too venerable for me to call him Emilio) opened up the Ark to show me the fourteenth-centuryTorah scrolls. He explained that one of the Torahs had been carried by a family member all the way from Toledo, Spain, to Dubrovnik. (His family name was Tolentino because of his ancestral roots in Toledo.) Next to the Ark was a magnificent Moorish tapestry. This was a gift from Queen Isabella to her Jewish doctor at the time of the expulsion.

Some minutes later Mr. Tolentino's sister brought us freshly baked rolls, stuffed with brinze cheese and olives, and Turkish coffee. Since Mr. Tolentino did not speak a word of English, we communicated through his German, my Yiddish, and a little Hebrew. Unfortunately, I didn't speak Spanish, which would have made communicating in Mr. Tolentino's mother tongue, Ladino, possible. Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, is a Hispanic language, written in Hebrew characters, from the end of the Middle Ages. It had led to different dialects spoken by the descendents of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 in their different lands of settlement. While we spoke, my mind wandered to the foreseeable end of this sixhundred-year-old Jewish community. Who would take care of the synagogue when Mr. Tolentino passed on?

Sarajevo

This time I had a ticket for my seat, but the train broke down halfway to Sarajevo. There was not a cloud in the sky and the temperatures were in the mid-nineties with unbearable humidity. I sweltered in my couchette while the train stood still for two and a half hours, baking in the hot sun. Eventually passengers began to leave the train to sit under anything that offered some shade. I left everything except my violin on the train and went out to buy some soda water and sit under some tall shady trees.

With nothing better to do, I began to play my violin. This soon drew a small crowd. I played a couple of Serbian tunes I knew, along with some klezmer. Surprisingly, when I played the folk tune known in Yiddish as "Papirossen," a Rom woman joined in, singing some lyrics in Romani, and a young kid began playing the spoons. We had a regular hootenanny going in the middle of who knows where. After another hour the conductor blew his whistle and ordered us all back onto the train.

Split and Dubrovnik had offered intriguing architecture and, by virtue of being on the Adriatic coast, a natural beauty, but Sarajevo was even more breathtaking. The city sat in a valley surrounded by tree-lined mountains eight thousand feet high. A few scattered clouds hovered above the mountain peaks, letting in swaths of light that shone on the buildings below. The architecture was clearly influenced by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, with the minarets of mosques dotting the skyline. As the train slowly wound down the hill, I could see some of the homes and shops, and people walking on the narrow cobblestone streets below. There was a kind of Alpine feel to the city that mingled strangely with the open-air Middle-Eastern market.

The Young and Old of Sarajevo

I walked to the only operating synagogue, Ashkenazic and built in 1902 on the banks of the Miljacka River, which runs through the entire city. Several men sat in the synagogue courtyard, playing cards and backgammon,



smoking, and drinking Turkish coffee. They spoke Serbo-Croatian and Ladino. My walking in with all of my gear didn't make an impression on any of them except a man named Josip Stokic, who stood up and introduced himself in English.

He invited me to dinner that evening at his home. There I met his wife, Regina, and over a hearty meal, topped off with some homemade baklava, the Stokics told me of their experiences during the Holocaust. Regina had survived the Italian concentration camp on the island of Rab (the only concentration camp liberated by partisans), and Josip had survived as a POW in a camp near Nuremberg.

Before I left, Regina invited me back for lunch the next day. I would meet her son, David Kamhi (from her first marriage); he was a classical violinist but had learned some klezmer tunes before he began his classical studies in Odessa, USSR. Emilio Tolentino, Dubrovnik I left the Stokics' home in high spirits. The air was cool and smelled of the pine trees that dotted the mountainside. Finally—in, of all places, the heart of Bosnia-Herzegovina—I was about to hear some klezmer fiddle.

The next day, at the Jewish Community Center next door to the synagogue, I met Rosita. She was twenty-seven, had two small children, and worked as a secretary at the JCC. She had been trained as a journalist but it was difficult to find a steady job. She supplemented her meager earnings by writing an occasional article for Jewish publications throughout Europe. Rosita spoke excellent English and said she would gladly serve as my interpreter while I was in Sarajevo.

In the fall, she was going to Israel to take a course on becoming a Jewish youth leader and teacher of elementary Hebrew and Jewish history and religion. Though the Jewish community of Sarajevo was small, she was determined not to stand idly by and let it gradually disappear.

While we hung out at the Center, talking, eating pistachios, and drinking coffee, Rosita smoked, and pensioners, both men and women, played various games, read the newspaper, talked, and watched soccer on the television. They all spoke Ladino. It was fascinating to hear this old Jewish language. I had heard it only once before, at a meeting of Holocaust survivors at a private home in San Diego.

So far, the survivors and their children whom I had met during my travels had not only been very friendly but had freely given their time to me. It struck me that they had lived their entire lives there and didn't have to go to a museum to learn about the Holocaust. All they had to do was go out the front door to find the place where their friends and family had been murdered forty years earlier. They didn't take anything for granted, especially being Jewish.

As for the young Jews I met in Yugoslavia, I was beginning to see a pattern. The few who were interested in Jewish culture were, for the most part, interested not in religious Judaism, but only in secular culture. One cause for this was certainly the lack of religious infrastructure in their communities: if there was a synagogue, it was only open for the holidays, and if there were Shabes services, there was no rabbi to lead and to discuss religious issues with them.

The synagogue in Sarajevo was not open during the summer, because the few men who actually came to pray were at the seaside. Perhaps, I thought, after nearly four decades, the Stalinist-style regimes had successfully squashed most interest in religious Judaism by intimidation and propaganda. Or perhaps, because there was only one rabbi in the entire country (based in Belgrade), the younger Jews felt it was too difficult to learn Torah and Talmud without him. Or maybe religious Judaism just didn't seem practical in the scheme of their day-to-day lives.

Whatever the reason, the interest was still there among many that I met at the Jewish Community Center. One young man told me this:

"I would like to study Talmud but I only have a few free hours during the week to come here and study Hebrew. One day I will move to Israel and knowing the Talmud will not be a necessity for getting a job."

The King of the Orchestra

I invited Rosita to come along to lunch at Regina Stokic's. We took an electric trolley up and down the steep inclines of Sarajevo, past open markets, pedestrians, outdoor cafés, and historical architecture, and heard the muezzin call the Muslims to prayer. The trolley cost only fifteen cents, and it was the best "E" ticket ride I had ever had.

Regina's son, David, was solidly built, with dark hair and glasses. I was excited to learn that he had studied under my favorite classical virtuoso violinist, David Oistrakh, for two years in Odessa. Oistrakh was one of the greatest violin virtuosi of the twentieth century; my mother had taken me to see him perform when I was fourteen years old. What luck to now be sitting and chatting with one of his students! Even more exciting to me was that David knew first-hand of Oistrakh's connection to klezmer.

"My first two lessons with Oistrakh had nothing to do with any classical training," David told me. "He taught me a *doyne* and *freylekhs* with all the appropriate ornamentation." (The *doyne*—a rubato, semi-improvised melody—was the cornerstone of the Romanian klezmer repertoire. In this listening piece, the klezmer would show off his virtuosity through improvisation and *fioratura* [Italian, musical ornamentation], imitating the coloratura of the cantor.)

"Oistrakh's first violin lessons were from his father, who was a klezmer. This was probably about when he was seven or eight years old. By his twelfth birthday he could play all of his father's repertoire and some classical music he heard from other local musicians. Soon he was sent to study classical music with Stolyarsky in Odessa. "Yale, after those first two lessons he never spoke about klezmer music again."

David went on explain that both his own parents were Sephardic and never spoke about the Polish Jewish world of the klezmer. However, he had read some Sholom Alecheim stories as a kid, and therefore wasn't completely ignorant about shtetl life.

"The violin was the instrument of the Jews and the king of the orchestra," he said. "This is why I chose to play it."

Regina had prepared leek, garlic, and red pepper soup, homemade bread, and lamb *shishlik* for lunch, which we enjoyed on the patio. The view was magnificent. Below was the entire city with its twisting cobblestone streets; above, we could see where some of the facilities for the downhill skiers and tobogganers were being built for the 1984 Winter Olympics.

After lunch, I took out my violin and began to play a Hasidic *nign* (Yiddish, melody). After a minute, David asked if he could take a look at my violin. I hadn't planned this, but it was a wonderful idea. He began to play. Wow! My violin, which had been given to me by my uncle, sang in a voice I had never heard. I quickly went to get out my recording equipment. David played the *doyne* he learned from Oistrakh, who had learned it from his father; now I would learn it.

While I listened to this graceful, haunting melody I felt connected and transported to a time and milieu that belonged to my grandparents. Watching David play so intently with his eyes shut, while his mother and stepfather glowed with pride, I knew why the violin was once known as the Jewish instrument.

Leaving Sarajevo, I had mixed feelings. I would miss my newfound friends, but I was eager to continue my trek: the last two cities I was visiting in Yugoslavia, Novi-Sad and Belgrade, historically had sizable Ashkenazic communities. Surely I would find lots of klezmer there.

Novi-Sad

In Novi-Sad (Ujvidek in Hungarian), as in the other Yugoslavian cities I visited, an old woman dressed in the typical all-black of a Balkan widow in mourning found me at the train station and took me to her home, which 4

Leek, Garlic, and Red Pepper Soup

Makes 4 servings

' I 'his soup is so healthy and easy to prepare. It is surprisingly sweet for a vegetable soup, as the sugars in the peppers, tomatoes, and garlic will come out in the cooking. It makes a great starter for a variety of meals or can be served as a light meal with a salad. I prefer the second method of blackening the peppers, as it makes them easier to peel; however, for both methods, placing them in the paper bag steams the peppers, which helps loosen the skins for easier removal.

sweet red peppers	4 large leeks, washed, white part only,
₄ cup olive oil	sliced thin
whole head garlic, cloves separated,	7 cups chicken or vegetable stock
peeled, and chopped	Salt and pepper to taste
lb. tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and	
chopped	

1. Blacken the peppers:

Method 1: Preheat the broiler. Cut the peppers in half lengthwise, flatten them with your hand, and broil skin side up until blackened. Remove from the broiler promptly.

Method 2: With tongs, hold each whole pepper over a gas flame, turning until black all over.

Put the peppers in a paper bag to cool.

2. While the peppers cool, heat the oil in a large stockpot. Add the garlic and stir until lightly toasted; do not overcook, or the garlic will become bitter. Remove the pot from the heat.

3. Peel the skin off the peppers and remove and discard any seeds and membranes. Slice the red pepper into strips. Add to the stockpot with the tomatoes, leeks, stock, and salt and pepper. Return to the heat, bring to a boil, and simmer for 20 minutes or until the leeks are soft. Serve warm. doubled as cheap accommodations for travelers like myself. This woman's only splash of color was the bright purple parasol she carried. She was one of the fastest walkers I have ever met; I could barely keep up with her while shlepping all my gear and instruments. She'd get a block ahead of me and wave her parasol above her head like one of those tour guides at the Louvre.

Novi-Sad's only synagogue is a beautiful Byzantine structure with a stained-glass dome. Built in 1906, it is the fourth largest in Europe, seating one thousand people. The synagogue has two large cupolas that flank the sides of the building. In the middle of these two sides is the central part of the synagogue, with a giant stained-glass flower patterned window in its center. This synagogue once belonged to the Status Quo Jewish movement, which arose after the Hungarian government allowed Reform Jews to splinter off from the Orthodox Jews and create their own synagogues in 1867. Those Jews who chose to keep everything as it had been and not go with either group became the Status Quo Jews. The former Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Transylvania were the only areas with Status Quo synagogues. By the late 1970s, the Jewish community of Novi-Sad could no longer pay for the synagogue's upkeep, so they sold the building to the city. In return, the city allowed the Jewish community to use it whenever they needed to. At the time of my visit in 1981, the city was refurbishing the structure so it could be used as a concert hall. One can only imagine what it had sounded like, fifty years earlier, when a thousand voices in unison sang the Kol Nidre (Hebrew, all our vows) in this synagogue on *erev* Yom Kippur (Hebrew, the eve of Yom Kippur).

When I was there, the town's four-hundred-strong Jewish community still gathered at the synagogue once a year on Yom Kippur, where they would listen to cassettes of the sonorous devotional voice of the great Yossele Rosenblatt (1882–1933) singing several of the High Holiday prayers.

The Shabeses and other holidays were celebrated in Novi-Sad's Jewish Community Center, located nearby in a prewar four-story residential building complex that surrounded a common courtyard. In Jewish neighborhoods before World War II, it was common to find a small synagogue, Hebrew school, and sometimes even a *shoykhet* (Hebrew, ritual slaughterer) occupying the ground floors off of these courtyards. There were still four Jewish families living in this apartment building.

The Klezmer 78 LPs

Mr. Pavle (Pincus) Sarfberg, the former *roshekool* of Novi-Sad, lived in a prewar apartment building on a shady, tree-lined boulevard downtown, within walking distance of the philharmonic, theaters, art galleries, and outdoor cafés. A fanatical historian—not only documenting Novi-Sad Jewish history, but collecting it as well—Mr. Sarfberg had found some old 78 LPs of klezmer and a piece of sheet music dating from the 1920s in the attic of an old Jewish woman, the widow of a choral director, who had died three years ago. He had invited me to his home to hear these LPs and to discuss what he knew of klezmer.

When I entered his home I felt as if I had stepped back in time into an art salon of the 1920s. The high, open-beamed ceilings provided enough wall space for hanging large pieces of art. From the living room I entered a music salon whose walls were lined with beautiful cherrywood cabinets that held hundreds of LP recordings.

I would have thought we would listen to the 78 LPs in the music salon, but the whole apartment had been wired for stereo, and Mr. Sarfberg's favorite goose down, crushed-velvet armchair was in the library. I walked softly along the Persian carpet runner leading directly to the library. Mrs. Sarfberg brought in some tea, soda water, and little almond sugar cookies and joined us.

I guessed that there were several thousand books neatly shelved from floor to ceiling. There were ladders on all four sides of the room that slid along a rail from side to side, enabling Mr. Sarfberg to reach the top shelves. The books were on many different subjects, but the largest selection was on Jewish history of Europe.

"My father was an avid book collector," said Mr. Sarfberg. "When I was fifteen years old he told me that books were the portals to mankind's soul.

"I remember my father telling me, 'When you open a book, Pinchas, touch the pages, and begin reading it is as if you have revived a person that has been in a deep, deep sleep. You are now entering the essence of that person. To throw away a book, any book, is an *aveyre* (Hebrew, sin), especially if it is a Jewish book.'

"Thus I have continued the tradition my father started and will bequeath this collection to [the Jewish community]." An architect, Mr. Sarfberg had retired the previous year at the age of seventy-two to pursue in earnest his passion for researching and writing the history of the Jews of Vojvodina, and specifically of Novi-Sad. His intense interest in local Jewish history extended to his own family. He had traced his family's roots back two hundred years, where they originated from a small town in eastern Czechoslovakia. When I'd first met him, back at the Jewish Community Center, he had proudly showed me the *pinkes* (Yiddish, town register) that listed his great-grandfather's contribution to the previous Status Quo synagogue, when he made the pledge from the bimah on Yom Kippur in 1888.

I was amazed at the reverence that Mr. Sarfberg and other Jews I had met had for their personal family histories. It meant more to them than simply possessing a piece of Jewish memorabilia; they treasured these artifacts as a part of their ancestors' past, an integral part of the religious and cultural development of that specific Jewish community. These roots sometimes went back over five hundred years. And to think that one of the most common anti-Semitic diatribes used against the Jews of Europe for centuries prior to World War II was they were "rootless"—implying they had no deep commitment to their town and community and could therefore never really be trusted.

This endemic mistrust led to Mr. Sarfberg's being one of only two boys to survive the *aktion* of January 21 to 23, 1942. The Hungarian Arrow Cross fascists used a small labor-camp rebellion near the city as an excuse for the *aktion*. They searched and plundered Jewish homes and murdered the Jews inside. Fifteen hundred Jews and five hundred Serbs were rounded up in the main square, then marched to the Danube. There they were ordered to strip; then they were lined up and individually shot in the back of the head. Their bodies were thrown into the icy river. After that, the Hungarian fascists—the Arrow Cross of Budapest—ordered an end to the massacres and gathered all of the Jewish men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. They were subsequently put into Hungarian labor battalions and sent to Hungary and the Ukraine. Most died from starvation, exposure, and beatings. Mr. Sarfberg's twin brother was killed and his body dumped into the Danube.

But now it was time to listen to music. Mr. Sarfberg put on the first klezmer 78 LP. Released by Odeon in 1923, it was called "Bay Dem Rebns Tish" (At the *Rebe*'s Table). It was scratchy but the melody was still quite

discernible. While sitting there listening to this archival klezmer LP, surrounded by all these books (some over two hundred years old) in this magnificent home in Novi-Sad, I couldn't help but be excited and exhilarated. I felt as if I were an archaeologist finding a key piece of pottery that helped identify its maker, only instead of pottery I was finding archival sonic gems that other klezmer musicians back home would never find.

I had Mr. Sarfberg play both records (four tunes) three times each, for easier transcription when I returned home. Then he brought out the piece of old sheet music he had found along with the LPs. The title was faded, and one corner of the page, containing the last two bars of the tune, had been torn. The title was written in Yiddish: "Shimen's Ershte Valts" (Simon's First Waltz). The title intrigued me. Who was Shimen? Who had composed it? Did he or she write more than this one tune? I took out some staff paper and copied the tune, humming the melody as I read it.

When I left his apartment, my mind was racing about so many things, but especially about the success I had had in Yugoslavia with finding klezmer 78 LPs and sheet music and collecting field recordings from some of the least likely informants. What would I find in Poland or the Ukraine, where several thousand klezmorim had lived before the Holocaust? Maybe this was how the famous Jewish folklorist S. An-ski (1863–1920) and musicologist Moshe Beregovski (1892–1962) had done their field research before World Wars I and II.

The Jewish Soldier

In a pizza restaurant near Mr. Sarfberg's home, I recognized a man from the Jewish Community Center. I sat down and introduced myself. Zoran was on leave from his military duty, visiting his parents. Zoran's mother's grandmother had been Jewish before the Holocaust, but in the late 1930s she converted to Catholicism because she thought it would be safer for her and her family. After the war she converted back to Judaism. However, her daughter went to the baptismal font as a teenager and married a non-Jew. Both of Zoran's parents were in the communist party.

Zoran was like other young people I would meet later on in my journey who had Jewish blood, whether close or distant, but had been brought up with no connection to the religion and culture. Zoran had started going to the JCC two years before, as often as he could, so he could learn more about Judaism. He loved Jewish music in particular, so he joined the Zagreb Jewish choir and participated with them when he was allowed off his army base.

Zoran ordered a round of plum slivovitz for himself and me. After we had both gulped our shots down, Zoran leaned toward me.

"Yale, I want to tell you something I have not told anyone else."

"Sure, Zoran, what is it?"

He poured himself another shot of slivovitz and knocked it back even faster than the first one.

"Seriously, I think you will understand because you're Jewish and from America. I am not ashamed to say I am a religious man. I am only just beginning to learn how to read Hebrew, but when I sing Jewish songs I know I made the correct decision despite what my parents may think. I feel something in my heart that I can't describe in words. I am going to be circumcised. I want to be a full Jew to all the 'goyim' in the world. Where and when I am not sure, but it will happen."

I could see he was quite serious; it wasn't the slivovitz talking. I told him it was his and only his decision to make, as well as a brave and important one. He was happy to see my approval and encouragement because he hadn't told any of his friends yet. He was going to wait to be circumcised after his military service ended. Zoran told me a story of one young Jewish man who had served in the Yugoslavian army. He was born in Subotica and was taken to Budapest to be circumcised because that was where the closest *mohel* (Hebrew, circumciser) lived. In the army his fellow soldiers could clearly see he had been circumcised, so he was hassled with many practical jokes and called names like "Jew boy," "dirty Jew," and "Christ killer." It was definitely the right decision for Zoran to wait until he was out of the army.

We hugged each other as we said good-bye. I walked back to my room, thinking about the strength and conviction Zoran had to make the choice to be a Jew to the world, a world that all too often didn't act favorably toward us. I wondered, if I had been in his shoes, would I have chosen to "pass" as a gentile or not?

Among the Graves

You can learn a lot from a cemetery. Specifically, you can learn a lot about the history of a particular Jewish community from the gravestone design and inscription. That's why I made a point of spending an afternoon wandering through the gravestones and overgrown paths of the Novi-Sad Jewish cemetery, with the caretaker's two dogs following me expectantly.

In the Novi-Sad cemetery, the oldest, pre–World War I gravestones were made from sandstone, with inscriptions carved in either German, Hungarian, Yiddish, or a combination of the languages. The gravestones dated after World War I were all marble, with inscriptions in Hungarian and German, and the post–World War II gravestones had inscriptions in Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian.

The language that was used on each stone indicated the primary language spoken by the deceased. From this you could surmise what kind of Jew the person was. Gravestone inscriptions in German most likely meant that the person was more assimilated or at least acculturated to a degree that caused them to move in social and religious circles that separated them from the more religious, Yiddish-speaking Jews. Conversely, inscriptions in Yiddish meant the primary tongue of the deceased had been Yiddish and the person was more religious, probably with ancestors coming from Galicia, Poland. The inscriptions in Hungarian on stones dating from World War I to the present meant these Jews considered themselves ethnically and culturally Hungarian and not Yugoslavian (even after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). These Jews were often not as religious as their Yiddish-speaking brethren but were not as assimilated as their German-speaking brethren.

I also learned that the various pictorial carvings in the gravestones each told a story as well. For example, the split-fingered palm indicated the deceased was a descendant from the *kohanim*, the ancient high priests; a pitcher meant the deceased was a descendant of the Leviim, who served the high priests in the temple with various duties including washing their feet; a charity box with money being put into it meant the person had been generous; two Shabes candlesticks meant the woman had been pious; and a limb of a tree cut off at an angle meant the person died in their youth.

After I had walked around in the cemetery for an hour, the caretaker invited me into his workshop for tea. The caretaker, who wasn't Jewish, was eighty-six years old and hard of hearing. He smoked but walked with a strong gait and had a firm handshake. His workshop—where he worked on cars, chopped wood, and made the occasional coffin—had been the *kheyder tehoyre* (Hebrew, purification room) where the deceased had been ritually cleaned and prayers had been recited by the *khevre kedishe* (Hebrew, burial society). Now the only evidence that this had once been a sacred Jewish building was the large sign on the wall displaying a Hebrew prayer.

He was Hungarian and had grown up in a Jewish neighborhood, so he'd learned to speak some Yiddish. With his little Yiddish and German we were able to understand each other rather well. Eventually I asked him if he had ever been invited to a Jewish wedding or knew any Jewish music.

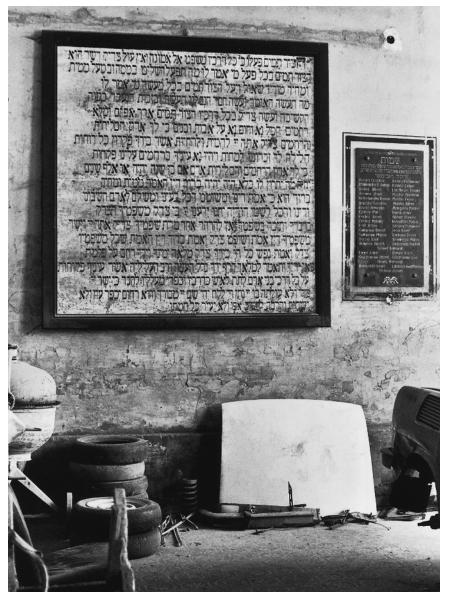
"My mother was a very good seamstress and her best friend was a Jewish woman who was getting married. My mother made the wedding dress and then the whole family was invited to the wedding. This was in 1905 when I was ten.

"The wedding was in a village near Zrenjanin. When we arrived by wagon I remember hearing a melody" [I proceeded to take out my tape recorder] "that never left my head." He broke off and began to sing the melody, then continued. "In the group there were five musicians—two were Gypsies and three were Jews. I can't remember all the instruments, but one Gypsy played the bass and one Jew played the trumpet. This Jew was a kid not much older than I was. They played all kinds of music, but I only remember that one tune and the people shouting 'He's coming, he's coming, the groom, the groom is coming.'

"After World War I, my mother's best friend went to America and my mother never heard from her again. During World War II, I was sent to a Hungarian labor battalion and first sent to Transylvania, then Transnistria. In Transnistria I saw the Jewish boy who played the trumpet, but he didn't remember me. But when I sang him the song he had played at the wedding, he began to cry and so did I. Unfortunately he died a few months later from typhus."

I thanked him profusely for his time and said goodbye. I was really starting to get into the thick of my research. I was learning to ask the right questions and I appreciated the luck I was having in finding such fascinating informants. Who would have ever thought one could find an old klezmer tune, never before transcribed, in a Jewish cemetery?

On the way back to my accommodations, I walked down to the Danube and found a new Holocaust memorial on the riverbank: a statue of a mother, father, and child huddled together before they were murdered. It was a beautiful afternoon, breezy, sunny, with billowy clouds moving swiftly in the sky. It was hard to imagine those fateful days of January 21 to 23, 1942,



Prayers for the dead line the walls of the former burial chapel in the Jewish cemetery, Novi-Sad

YUGOSLAVIA 31

"KHOSN'S MARCH" (GROOM'S MARCH) Collected by Yale Strom



when the Hungarian fascists rounded up and murdered those Jews and Serbs. Standing before this monument made me appreciate my fate even more, in a way I had never thought of—having been born in America and not in pre–World War II Eastern Europe like Mr. Sarfberg, or like the young Jewish trumpet player the cemetery caretaker remembered from that longago wedding in a village near Zrenjanin.

Belgrade

For me, going to synagogue is all about the music. If there weren't any singing I probably would rarely attend. Singing and *shuklen* (Yiddish, rocking, swaying) to the prayers helped me to better understand why I attended synagogue even though I didn't believe in the traditional Jewish concept of God. Was there something greater, more absolute than man? Most defi-

nitely, but I believed it was not only a Jewish deity but a puissance that ruled over all of humanity. Mother Nature, perhaps.

I learned to enjoy going to synagogue from being with my father. While sitting together we'd talk about sports, politics, and the Torah portion and sing the prayers loudly together, sometimes making up our own funny lyrics. It became a habit I relished. Now, when I go to the synagogue on my own, it is a kind of nostalgic trip back to my childhood, when everything seemed much simpler and I didn't have the cares and concerns I have today.

Of course, I also had a practical reason for going to synagogues on this trip throughout the Eastern bloc countries: synagogues were a good place to begin searching for informants who knew something about klezmer.

The Last Rabbi

In Belgrade's synagogue, I was able to meet Rabbi Zadeek Danon, the only rabbi in all of Yugoslavia. He had graduated from the yeshiva in Sarajevo before the war. During the services the rabbi would occasionally take out his pitch pipe, give it a little toot, and begin singing. He had a pleasant, soft, almost vaporous kind of voice and when he sang the prayers he closed his eyes and rocked from side to side.

I had attended the Belgrade service to say Kaddish (Hebrew, holy; a prayer said by a mourner for the dead) for the father of my new friend Julia. It was a good thing I came. I helped to make the minyan (Hebrew, quorum)—I was the tenth man. Without a minyan there wouldn't have been services and we wouldn't have been able to say Kaddish for her father.

I had met Julia the previous evening at a concert I gave at Belgrade's Jewish Community Center. I'd been invited to perform by Darko, the leader of Belgrade's Jewish community and organizer of a Jewish seminar that started the day after I arrived; the man originally scheduled to give the concert of Yiddish folk songs was ill.

"Do you know anything about klezmer, or anyone who might be from the Jewish community?" I had asked him.

"No, never heard of klezmer."

"OK. I'll give the concert."

The performance was part of the *m'lave malke* (Hebrew, the evening meal marking the conclusion of the Sabbath festivities). I was joined on guitar by one of the elder statesmen of the Belgrade Jewish community, Eugene

"Moshe" Weber. Professionally, Moshe had been an actor, but he was also nationally known as a translator from English to Serbo-Croatian of a number of well-known Jewish books. We played Hebrew, Israeli, and Yiddish songs that we both knew, and Moshe sang with great gusto.

After our set, some students who were attending the seminar joined us. Gradually our repertoire morphed from Jewish to Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, and eventually the blues.

After the concert and jam session many of us, including Julia, went for some drinks. Julia, a dentist with two young daughters, was the sole Jewish representative from the Rijeka Jewish community attending the seminar. She had recently gotten divorced and was getting more involved in the Jewish life in Rijeka.

Like several other women I had met at the seminar, Julia had been married to a non-Jewish husband. Many of the women told me their husbands were completely indifferent to their Jewish culture, which invariably caused a strain on the marriage. This indifference, among other things, had helped end Julia's marriage.

On the day we said Kaddish for her father, she was to return home on an afternoon train. I would be taking the same train, only she would change in Zagreb for a train to Rijeka; I would continue on to Budapest.

After services the rabbi invited Julia and me for a Shabes meal at his home. As we walked, Rabbi Danon sang several Ladino songs. They were beautiful, but it wasn't klezmer.

The rabbi lived in a small, modest home, nothing like Sarfberg's, but crammed full of Judaica. The rabbi's wife was very gracious and didn't seem surprised that we were there. She served up a Shabes feast: baked beans, a kind of beef stew, bread, peppers, salad, and for dessert, the sweet syrupy cake called *hurmasice*.

After lunch we retired to the living room, where we had marzipan and tea and listened to some Ladino folk music. I casually glanced up at the clock on the mantel—and realized our train was leaving in thirty minutes! The rabbi called a taxi for us and we hurriedly said our thank-yous and good-byes and raced out.

When we arrived at the station, I saw a huge line at the ticket window; I knew I would miss my train if I waited. Julia had her train and seat tickets already, in first class. I decided the best course of action would be to get on the

Prebanac

BAKED BEANS

Makes 4 servings

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 4 medium onions, peeled and chopped
- medium thick
- 1 Tbsp. paprika

1 large carrot, peeled and thinly sliced 3 bay leaves Salt and pepper to taste Water

1 20-oz. can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed twice

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Heat the oil in an ovenproof skillet and sauté the onions until golden brown. Add the paprika, mix in well, and remove from the heat. Stir in the beans, carrot, bay leaves, and salt and pepper and add just enough water to cover.

2. Put the beans in the oven and bake until the top is dark brown, about 30 minutes. Serve hot or cold.

train and deal with the conductor later—after all, how difficult could it be to buy my ticket on the train?

Safely ensconced, I looked out the window at the winding Danube as we followed it upstream toward Budapest. I was happily surprised to have collected more klezmer than I'd anticipated in a country where it was not as prevalent in daily Jewish life as it was in Poland and Romania. I felt optimistic about what I would discover in Hungary.

As the train left the station, I thought about all the people I had met during my brief stay in Yugoslavia. I also kept thinking about a thimble I'd seen at Belgrade's Jewish museum when I visited one morning to see if they had some information on klezmer.

The music archives had contained nothing out of the ordinary, but I was struck by the museum's glass-enclosed cabinets filled with relics of the

Yugoslavian Chopped Salad

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Makes 4 to 6 servings

Fefferoni are similar to the more commonly found *peperoncini*, but longer and thinner. You can substitute *peperoncini* if you can't find this Yugoslavian cousin—just make sure they've got some kick. The dressing is a simple red wine vinaigrette. Note that the salad must marinate for three hours before serving.

For the salad:	For the dressing:
1 15-02. can red kidney beans, drained,	2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
rinsed twice	4 Tbsp. olive oil
¹ / ₂ white onion, finely chopped	1 Tbsp. water
2 stalks celery, peeled and chopped fine	Salt and pepper to taste
ı large ripe tomato, finely chopped	
4 pickled <i>fefferoni</i> or peperoncini, stems	
discarded, chopped	

1. Combine the beans, onion, celery, tomato, and fefferoni.

2. Combine all the dressing ingredients and shake or stir well. Add to the salad and toss to coat. Let chill for 3 hours before serving.

personal daily lives of Yugoslavian Jews before the Holocaust: eyeglasses, combs, shoes, pocket-watches, diaries, and the like. To me these were even sadder and more poignant than the photographs of wanton murder.

One thimble had grooves etched into it, providing a better grip—and on one side of the thimble the grooves were worn smooth.

Standing there, I'd begun to wonder about the person who had once worn this tiny thimble for sewing and mending clothes. Perhaps they were special clothes for a little girl or boy who got all dressed up to go to the synagogue with Mommy and Daddy on Shabes. During the Shabes services, the child went into the courtyard to play with the other Jewish children. While playing, the child tripped, fell down, and tore that nice Shabes clothing. But

Hurmasice

POUND CAKE IN SYRUP

Makes 8 to 10 servings

I first tasted *hurmasice* at a Yugoslavian restaurant and was so captivated that I immediately began dissecting it to figure out how to make it. The proprietor was kind enough to give me a few hints (I think it was kindness—I may have been making a mess), and I went home to create this recipe. To me, this dessert represents Yugoslavia—linking aspects of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean. I've baked it with both butter and margarine, and I prefer the former—after all, this is a pound cake. That said, if you're serving a kosher meat meal or watching your cholesterol, use margarine (if it comes in a stick, it'll be better suited for baking). Butter makes it a bit moister. Note that the cake must soak in the syrup for three hours before serving.

For the cake:	For the syrup:
1 ¹ / ₂ sticks unsalted butter or margarine	1 ¹ / ₂ cups orange juice
1 ³ / ₄ cups granulated sugar	³ / ₄ cup granulated sugar
3 large eggs	
½ tsp. vanilla	
1 tsp. grated orange zest	

1¹/₂ cups sifted cake flour

1. Preheat the oven to 300°. Grease and flour a 13-by-9-inch cake pan. Line the bottom of the pan with cooking parchment.

2. In a large bowl, cream the butter with a mixer on high speed, gradually adding the sugar, for 4 to 5 minutes. Still beating, add the eggs one at a time, then the vanilla, then the zest. Switch the speed to low and gradually add the flour until the batter is smooth.

3. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 35 to 45 minutes, until a cake tester comes out clean. The cake should be well done and firm. While the cake is baking, prepare the syrup.

4. *For the syrup*: In a medium saucepan over high heat, combine the orange juice and sugar, bring to a boil, and cook until the sugar has dissolved. Set aside.

5. When the cake is done, remove it from the oven and, keeping it in the pan, cut it immediately into 24 squares. Pour half of the syrup over the cake and let soak for 10 minutes. Pour the remaining syrup over the cake. Cover and let soak for 3 hours. Serve at room temperature. the father and mother weren't angry because they knew it was an accident, and with their special thimble they would be able to mend that tear after Shabes.

The thimble had survived—but the child and parents were murdered just because they were Jewish. . . .

In 1981, no one could have imagined that a mere ten years hence Yugoslavia would once again be ripped apart, this time by civil war, which would be particularly devastating for the *kehiles*. Yugoslavian Jews, fleeing the conflict, decimated the already tiny Jewish population. Some joined their predecessors in Israel; others scattered to Western Europe and the United States.