**The Success Story of the Kabiljo Family**

On the eve of World War II, the population of the Yugoslavian city of Sarajevo numbered one hundred and fifty thousand residents consisting of Muslim Bosnians, Catholic Croatians, Orthodox Serbians, and approximately twelve thousand Jews.

On April 6, 1941, the Axis countries invaded Yugoslavia, and the German Luftwaffe began bombing Sarajevo. Nine days later, the Germans entered the city, and Sarajevo was annexed to the Independent State of Croatia—a puppet state established by the Hitler and Mussolini regimes and governed by the fascist Ustaše movement. The Jewish population was subjected to anti-Jewish statutes, arrests, and, later, mass expulsions. Most of Sarajevo’s Jews were transferred to the Jasenovac concentration camp between September and November 1941.

Immediately following the outbreak of the war, the Gestapo established a command post near the home of Muslim furniture dealer Mustafa Hardaga and his wife Zejneba, who lived with their two young children, Salco and Zerpa, and Mustafa's brother, Izet, his wife Bachriya, and their children.

Yosef Kabiljo, the owner of a local lead pipe factory, was Hardaga’s good friend and business partner. The Kabiljo house was badly damaged in the bombings, leaving the family homeless. Despite the dangers involved, the Hardaga family welcomed Yosef, his wife, Rivka, and their children, Binyamin and Buena into their home. The two families became one, to the point that the Hardaga women, who were devout Muslims, stopped covering their faces in the company of the Kabiljos.

It did not take long for Gestapo agents to appear on the doorstep of the Hardaga house demanding to check their papers. The Kabiljos hid in a big closet and were thus spared.

The Hardaga family continued to hide the Kabiljos until Rivka and the children managed to escape and go into hiding, first in Trebinje, then later in Mostar, which was under Italian control and, therefore, safer for Jews.

Yosef remained in Sarajevo. Eventually, he was arrested, jailed, and sentenced to be transferred to Jasenovac along with other prisoners. However, due to the harsh winter conditions, it was decided to keep the men in Sarajevo and put them to work clearing snow off the streets. One day, while thus occupied, Yosef was recognized by Zejneba Hardaga, who then began delivering food to him and the other prisoners, in spite of the great risks this entailed.

Some time later, Yosef managed to escape and returned to the Hardaga house. The family hid him and took care of him for months but, in light of the danger and the house’s proximity to the Gestapo headquarters, Yosef eventually decided to escape to Mostar, where he was reunited with his family.

The Kabiljo family was discovered and sent to the Italian concentration camp on the island of Rab.

Following the truce between Italy and the Allies in September 1943, the area became occupied by German military forces. The Kabiljo family was once again forced to flee, this time to the liberated zones in Kordon in Central Croatia, where they joined the partisan forces and thus lived to see the end the war.

Only approximately two thousand of Sarajevo’s Jews managed to survive, most of them thanks to the help of the Righteous Among Nations. After the liberation of Yugoslavia, the Kabiljo family returned to Sarajevo and to the Hardaga family home. It was then revealed to them that Zejneba’s father, Ahmed Sadik Shar’aluf, was killed in Jasenovac for the charge of harboring Jews.

Later on, the Kabiljo family immigrated to Israel and established itself in Jerusalem. At Yosef’s initiative, in 1984, Yad Vashem recognized the Hardaga family and Ahmed Sadik as Righteous Among Nations, and, the following year, Zejneba came to Israel to receive the title and plant a tree on the Avenue of the Righteous at Yad Vashem.

Yet the story of the Kabiljos does not end here. Fifty years after their rescue, the family got the opportunity to return the favor to their saviors. In 1992, the Bosnian War broke out, and Sarajevo found itself under siege. Zejneba Hardaga, who still resided in the city with her family members, received medical aid and food packages from the Jewish community in Sarajevo and the American Joint. However, the conditions she and her family were forced to endure remained harsh—they suffered from hunger and watched their fellow citizens get killed on the streets every single day.

The Kabiljo family looked for a way to help the people responsible for their survival. At the same time, Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, head of the Righteous Among the Nations department at Yad Vashem at the time, was also trying to assist the Hardagas. Eventually, at the cost of great efforts, some of which went all the way up to then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, they received permission to extract the Hardaga family from Sarajevo and bring them to Israel. They were transferred out of Sarajevo as part of the last Jewish refugees rescue convoy organized by the American Joint and the Jewish community in Sarajevo. On February 4, 1994 a plane carrying the Hargada family along with other Sarajevo refugees landed at Ben-Gurion Airport. They were greeted by quite the crowd, among them, Buena, the daughter of Yosef and Rivka Kabiljo.

Zejneba was given lodgings at the absorption center in Mevaseret Zion. Roughly half a year later, she passed away and was buried at the Beit Zayit Cemetery. Her daughter Aida converted to Judaism and took the name Sarah. She currently resides in Jerusalem and works at Yad Vashem.