

From: Dr Lavinia Davenport
Sent: Saturday, January 31, 2015 6:34 PM
To: sicke41@gmail.com
Subject: It was only a picnic

For me the essence of this excellent and unique autobiography about survival during the Nazi occupation of Belgrade lies in the depth of hope that the author feels regarding her 'disappeared' parents and brother. Right until the very end of *It was only a Picnic* we are still not convinced that they will never return. We join her in her silent prayer and faith. We too hope against hope. Throughout her story, Relly Alfandari Pardo keeps us in a state of suspended belief that the worst cannot happen. But it did.

How grateful I am that this book (written first in French, in 1990) has, at last, appeared in Serbian, the language of Relly's ancestors, because nowhere is it needed more than in Serbia where a veil of silence, for a variety of complex reasons, had been cast over the fate of the Jews of Yugoslavia in WWII. Only now, with Serbia's move 'back' into Europe are such issues beginning openly and freely to be discussed. For example, is Relly right when she says, 'On April 16th, after capitulation, the Jews of Yugoslavia did not belong any more. They stopped being Yugoslavs?'

The book is full of unforgettable scenes beginning with the last 'happy' photograph of the family in 1939. Such a contrast to the humiliation experienced by Relly when one German soldier orders her mother to carry his suitcase to the station and another forces her brother to toast Hitler. We share Relly's sweet sense of revenge when she never misses an opportunity to give the soldiers the wrong directions.

The moments of humanity from the local populace are understandably rare (which one of us would hide a Jewish child, if to do so would destroy our own family?) and, as such, the courage of the wagon driver who drives Relly and her mother to see her incarcerated brother and father, is even more impressive. He refuses to take any money for his good deed - 'We are human aren't we? I don't take advantage of the misfortune of others.'

Relly has been called Serbia's Anne Frank but, in the Serbian context, this book is more than the viewing of unspeakable events through the eyes of a trusting child. It is a unique historical document filled with remarkable details of the petty nature of Nazi brutality. Take the vivid description of the 'round-up' of refrigerators belonging to Jews. Relly asks the obvious question, with her kind of special humour seen in the book's title - 'How was one supposed to carry a refrigerator, even a small one, across town?'

Dr Lavinia Davenport
(Scenarist, *Meet Micky Jazz!* Any information regarding the musicians, Isa Alfandari, Bela Kupferberg, Mika Daniti and Moni Amodaj, gratefully received)