

# Red Entrance Gate or Stiška #15

This story about our home at 15 Stiška Street, is one of those that remained in my memory and greatly influenced my later interest in situations in the life of the city. **Picture 01** is a reconstructed facade from Stiška Street and that famous red entrance gate. It was created in 2003. The plan of the house is in **picture 02**.

I was born there in the last year of the first half of the 20th century. My mother Ivanka (**picture 03**), father Slobodan (**picture 04**), three children (**picture 05**) and my mother's mother Anka (**picture 06**) lived in this small, single-story house in the four rooms at the back of the house. They were entered from the yard and were all in a row. They were passed from one room to another. I remember that I and Nana, as we called my grandmother, slept in the last room. I also remember that this room was not heated in winter, and winters in Belgrade could be quite cold. I didn't remember that coldness as an unpleasant memory, I remember the big and heavy woolen quilts we used to cover ourselves with, which were very warm and comfortable.

Actually, only the first entrance room, the combination of the kitchen and the living room was heated. The rest of the house was heated only a little after we kept the door open. I mostly don't remember the interior of the house, except that we had a big, black stove in the first room that was used for both cooking and heating. It was fired with coal and wood, and it had to be constantly cleaned or emptied of ashes. I remember that later we moved a luxurious black wood sofa with a tapestry cover to the apartment we moved from here. I don't know where it was in this house, most likely in the front part of the house where we didn't go.

In the yard there was another small, dilapidated house where great-grandfather Radul's workshop was [**picture 07**] with a lot of very strange tools and some machines. Some of those tools, mainly for metalworking, we used years later because they were made of extremely high quality. Some have survived to this day, like these two small measuring devices [**picture 09**]. Grandfather Radul Bojović died somewhere before 1949, I don't remember that we shared house with him.

Radul was a very famous craftsman, and in our family there was a story that a small rifle that he made many years before (and which my sister Jelena still has), served my father as the first weapon when he was in the partisans during the second world war. He never wanted to confirm it, but he never disputed it, I don't know why? We used that room as a summer kitchen. In the summer, we lit the stove in this summer kitchen instead in the main house so that it wouldn't be too hot. I remember that house very well, it was where peppers were roasted in the fall and other winter food was prepared. Of course, sweets were also prepared from all kinds of fruit, and I was always nearby to lick the pot. I remember my parents panicking that I would fall into huge pots of hot sweet.

In the front, more luxurious part of the house, my great-grandmother "second" Jelena lived in rooms with large windows facing the street. In that front part of the house, we children as far back as I can remember never even entered. I remembered our "great-grandmother", the other Jelena (**picture 10**), as a small, unpleasant person, always dressed in black, as a sign of mourning for the great-grandfather. She appeared in the yard on extremely rare occasions, and outside of it, as far as I know, she never went anywhere or anyone ever came to her. Later, when we grew up, I always wondered what she lived on and what she ate. In my eyes she has always been old, sick and weak. She didn't love us at all, not even us children. None of us were related to her, and we had to put up with each other in the same house and the yard. Someone else lived in that part of the house, in a room, sort of in the basement, which was entered from the yard down a steep flight of stairs. Probably a tenant. Maybe she was taking care of her? The other Jelena probably also had some kind of savings after Radul's death, since he was considered a wealthy and respectable householder and craftsman.

My great-grandfather Radul Bojović married twice. From the first marriage with my great-grandmother, who always remained the first Jelena for us [**picture 8**], he only had my grandmother Anka, and from his second marriage son Aleksandar [**picture 11**], after whom I was named. Aleksandar. He was like his uncle Vojvoda Petar Bojović, also an officer. Aleksandar served in the Serbian Royal Army and during World War II he was in Skopje, Macedonia or southern Serbia, as the future Yugoslav republic was then called. There, also in his second marriage, he had two children, Jelena named after his mother and Dragan. Grandfather Aleksandar died on February 19, 1951 and left these two children, orphans in Skopje.

Aleksandar had two more children in Belgrade, from his first marriage with Sultana, sons Peter and Vladimir. My mother was very close to them and we saw each other quite often. Even today, we maintain regular relations with the Vladimir daughter, also Aleksandra, Saša.

Fortunately for my grandmother Anka Radule and his second wife Jelena did not object to my grandfather returning after her divorce to live in the house with his father. Milivoje Simić [**picture 15** is from their weddings in Algeria), Anka's husband and my grandfather, a rich merchant from Trstenik, the owner of a villa on Zlatibor that was converted after the WW II to the student resort, allowed my grandmother Anka, pregnant alone with the Serbian army to retreat through Albania during the First World War and finally give birth in Algeria. Her son, another Aleksandar, died quickly and was buried in the Serbian military cemetery. She was awarded for her services in the First World War, i.e. caring for the wounded and sick, and we still keep that decoration. **There is a wonderful story about all of this on my daughter's website, check it out.** My grandmother returned to Serbia and my mother Ivanka was born there in 1919. Anka soon divorced my grandfather and returned to live here with my mother. She was a teacher and together with her daughter served all over Serbia. The beginning of the second war found them in Majanpek, and from there they returned to Belgrade and to this house, where they stayed throughout the war. My father Slobodan also moved there after their wedding in 1946, and we, all the children, were born there [**picture 12**].

We also had a dog, an old shaggy, somewhat grumpy and unsightly, Fidela. She was on a chain all the time and I don't remember her ever being let off it. We played with her a bit, but only when they didn't see us from the house. We were constantly afraid that she was dangerous and old and not used to playing with children, that she also had fleas, so we were not allowed to approach her dilapidated wooden house in which she lived. She was really old and sick, so one day, which I remember very well, my father had to take her to the rendering plant, which meant that her suffering would end. It is probably the first really sad event that I remember from my early youth.

Radul, a locksmith, built this house around the beginning of the 20th century. The street part was built first, and the others parts were added later. Important fact is that he was the brother of Vojvoda Petar Bojović [**pictures 13 and 14**], a famous military leader [with the title of duke] from the Balkans and the First World War.

One day in the spring of 1954. [we all think it was April 20] everyone was whispering among themselves, something happened. Another Jelena died. What now? Family council brought the decision to sell the house. The main, and probably the only reason, was to at least partially compensate the children of grandfather Aleksandar, especially those in Skopje, since the house belonged to them in part after Jelena's death. In 1955, the house was sold to a tailor, who had a shop in it for many years afterwards.

This address, Stiška Ulica number 15, is actually not correct. Immediately after the Second World War, the name of this street was changed to Galsworthy Street, but no one ever called it by that name. So I also remembered only street old name. The street was known only for the fact that bus no. 26, connecting the city center with the far outskirts, Dušanovac, Šumice, Braće Jerković center, etc. This part of the city was called Čubura because in the Romany language, the language of the people who moved here from who knows where, it means high water barrel; in this area there was a spring whose water was clarified in that barrel.

Nearby there was, and still is, a very small park with a few swings, quite neglected at that time. Today a monument to Duke Petar Bojović was erected, but I think it's a coincidence, nobody knows today that he often visited his brother in the immediate vicinity. He also lived in close by but I don't know exact location. A little further is the Kalenić market. Across the street from our house was the famous Gavrilović bakery, where they still make the best rolls in town, and that would be all I remember from our old neighborhood.

We were still quite small when we moved out of this house [I was 6 years old] and we were not allowed to leave the yard, so my experiences with the outside world was mostly connected to frequent visits to relatives on my father's side who lived not far away in Džušina Street. For us little ones about a 15-minute walk through the Tašmajdan Park. Regardless of the proximity, the children from Dušina were very different, they were from Palilula, the border between our two parts of Čubura and Palilula ran along Boulevard of Revolution (former Aleksandar Street).

I know that we were very happy, satisfied, pampered and taken care of, mainly by our nana Anka, who was with us all day. We saw our parents mostly in the afternoon when they returned from work. We were still young for school, except for Svetlana, my oldest sister, who went to school here even before we moved and finished first and second grade. We spent our days playing and I remember from this period that I once went to Niška Banja with my grandmother Anka. Only me with her, because I was, so they say, very calm and good and it was not difficult for her to take care of me even in the spa. I also remember a wooden toy car that my nana bought me on the road, which I adored and kept for many years later, and also a rubber doll, like a soldier in a faded red uniform.

Somehow, as a conclusion, the faded red color emerges as the main characteristic of the memories associated with this house. This is most likely because years later we only saw a faded red fence and gate whenever we passed this area. I remember being very sad, even after so many years, when this house was demolished around 1975. Today, in its place, there is a five-story residential building with several shops on the ground floor.

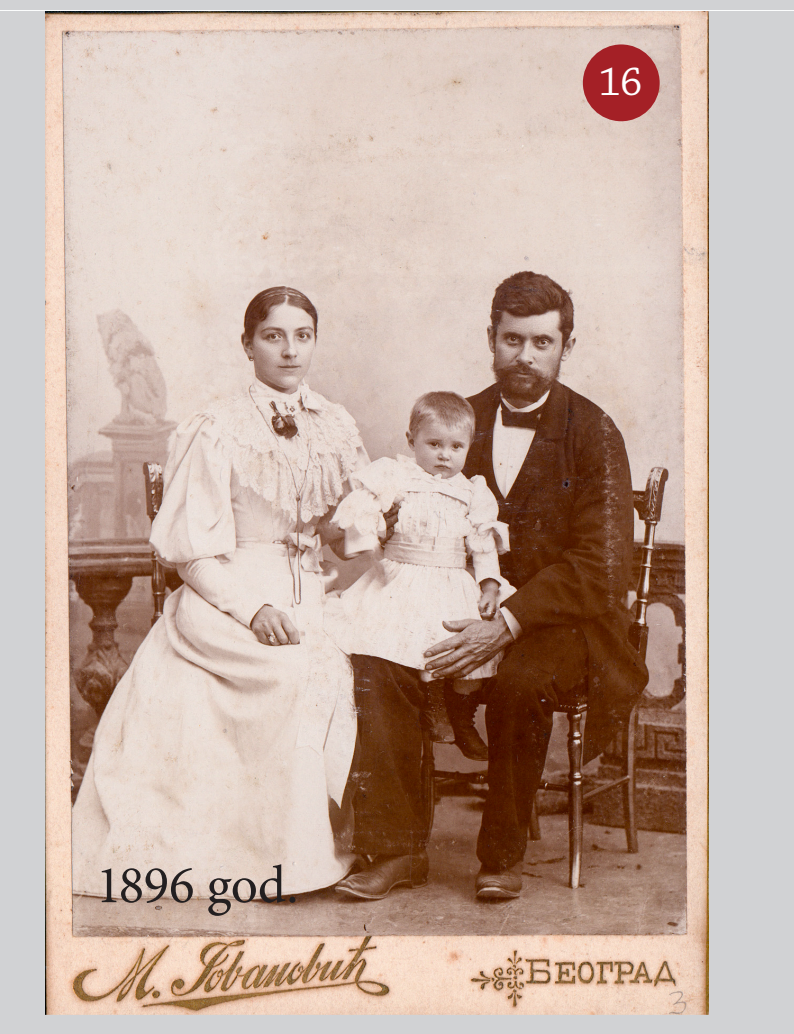
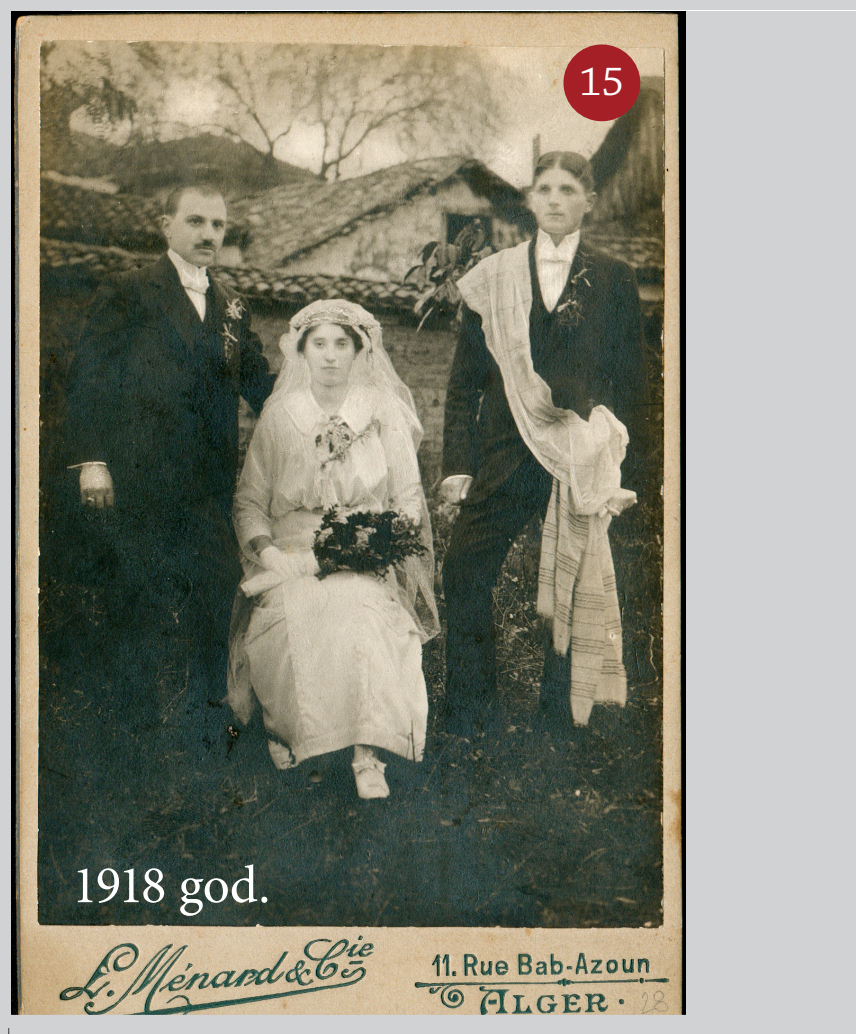
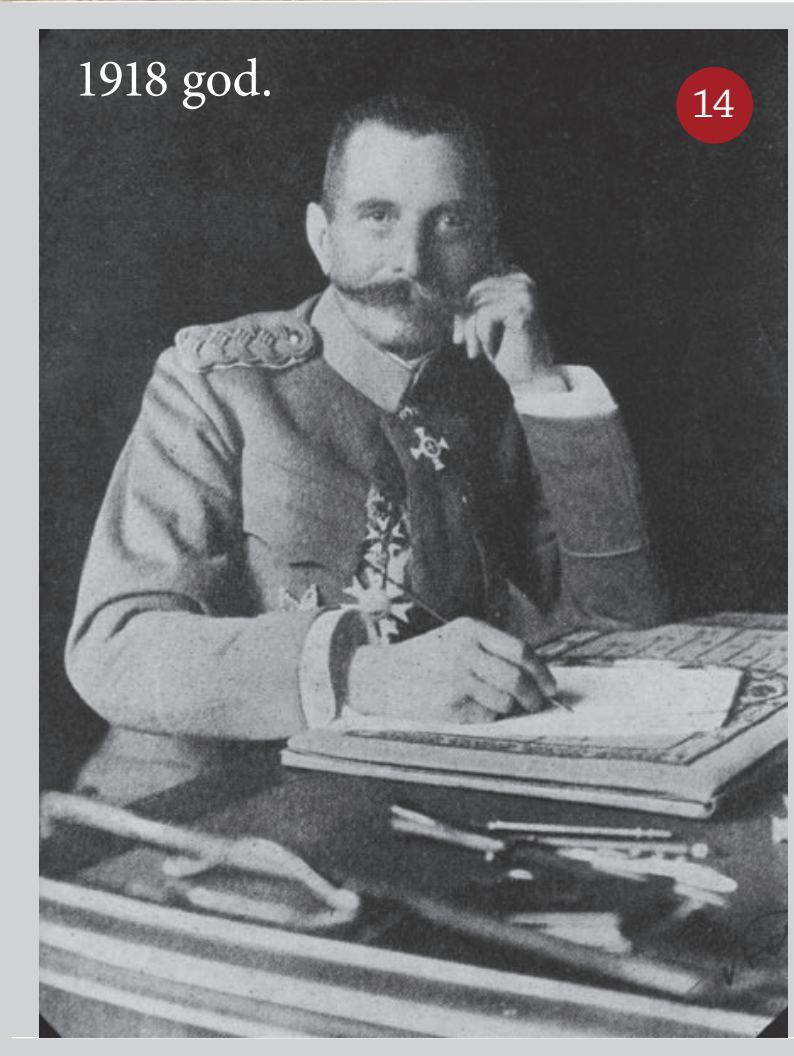
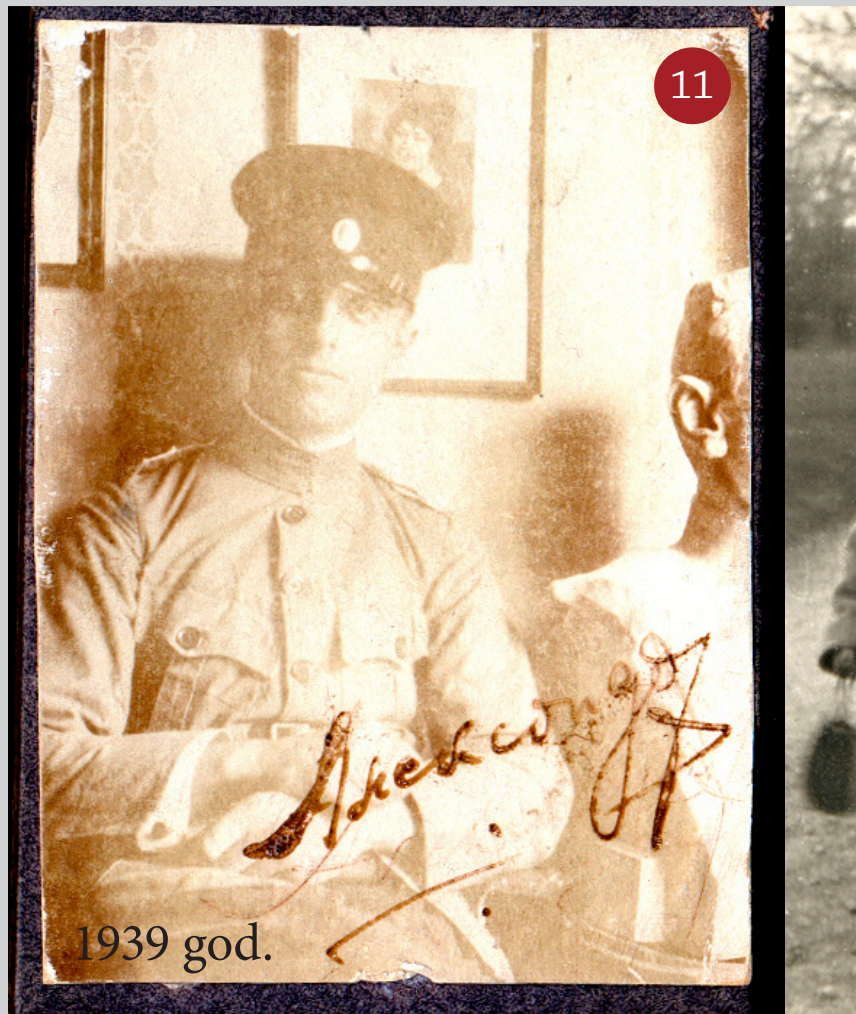
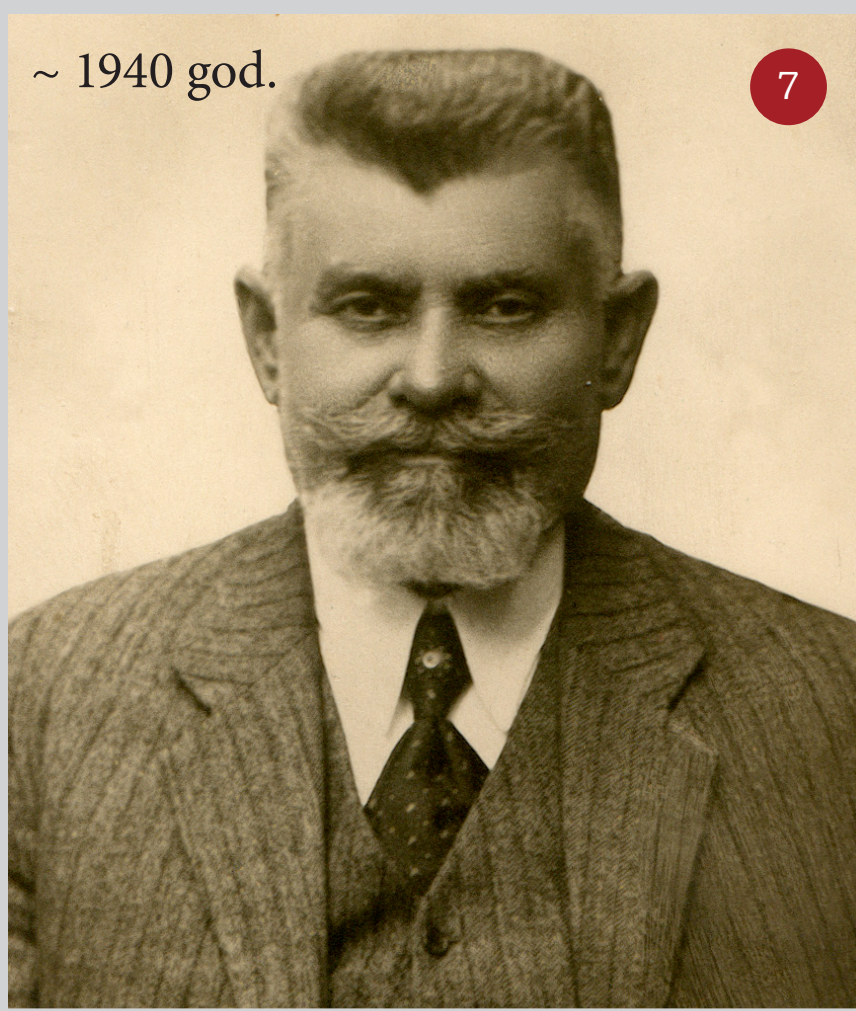
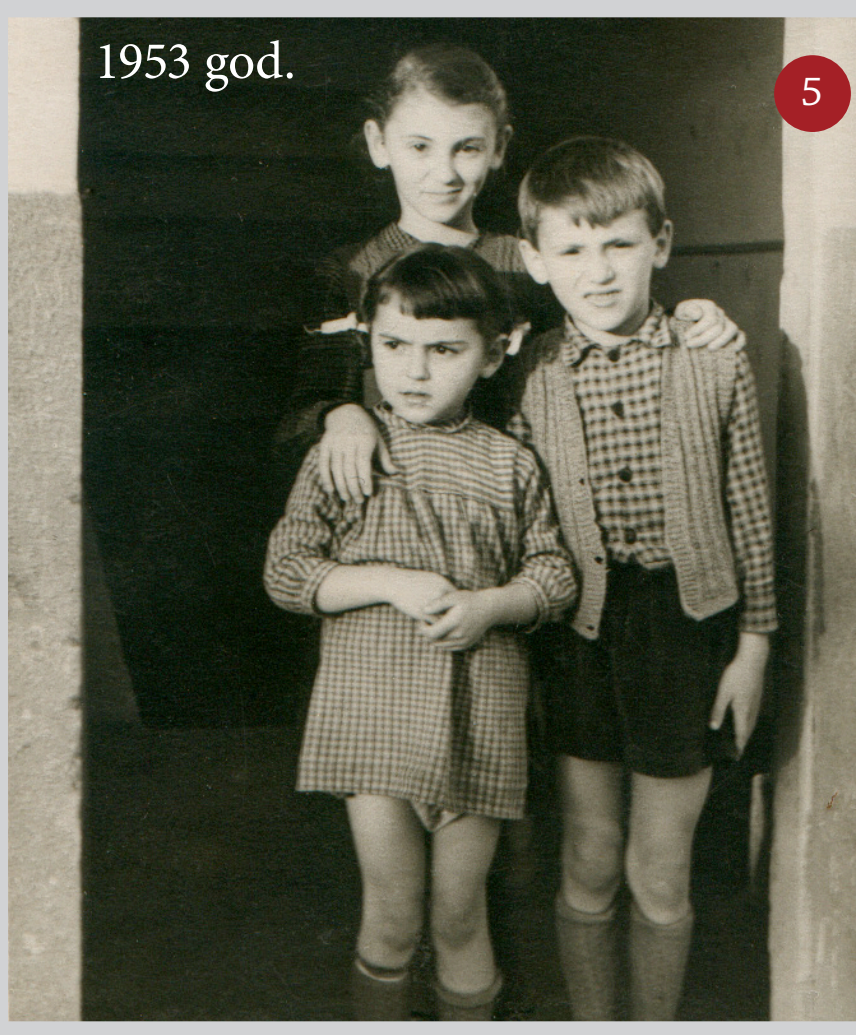
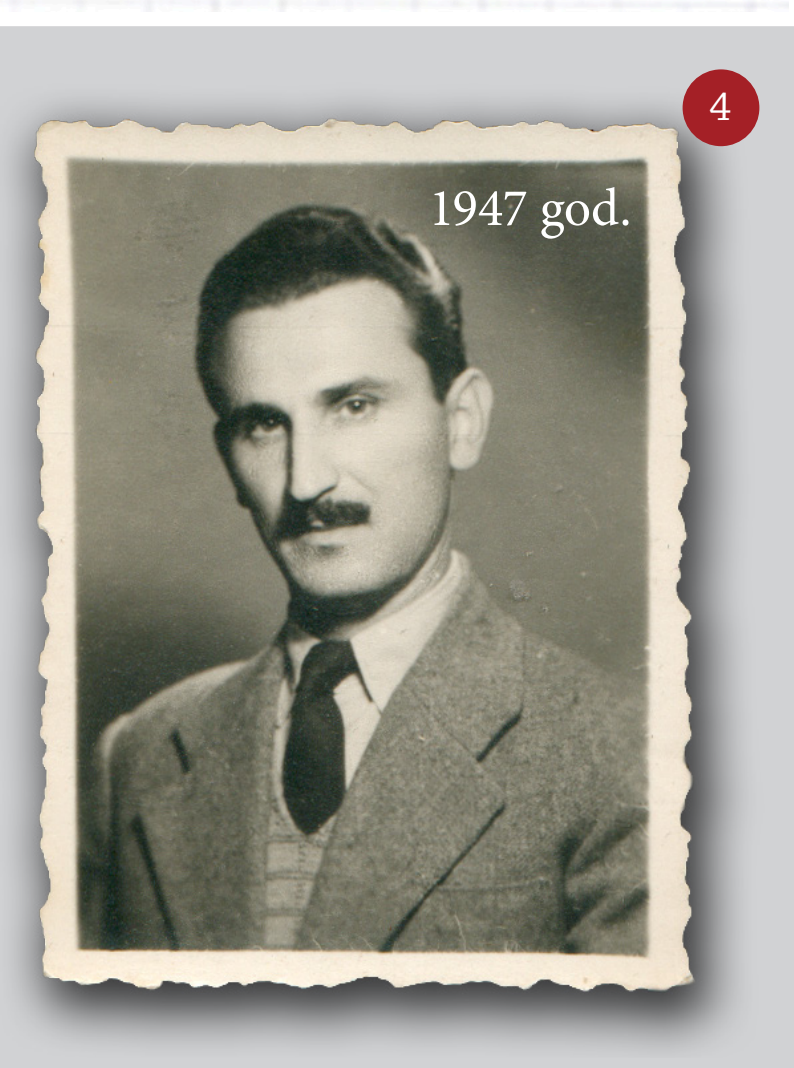
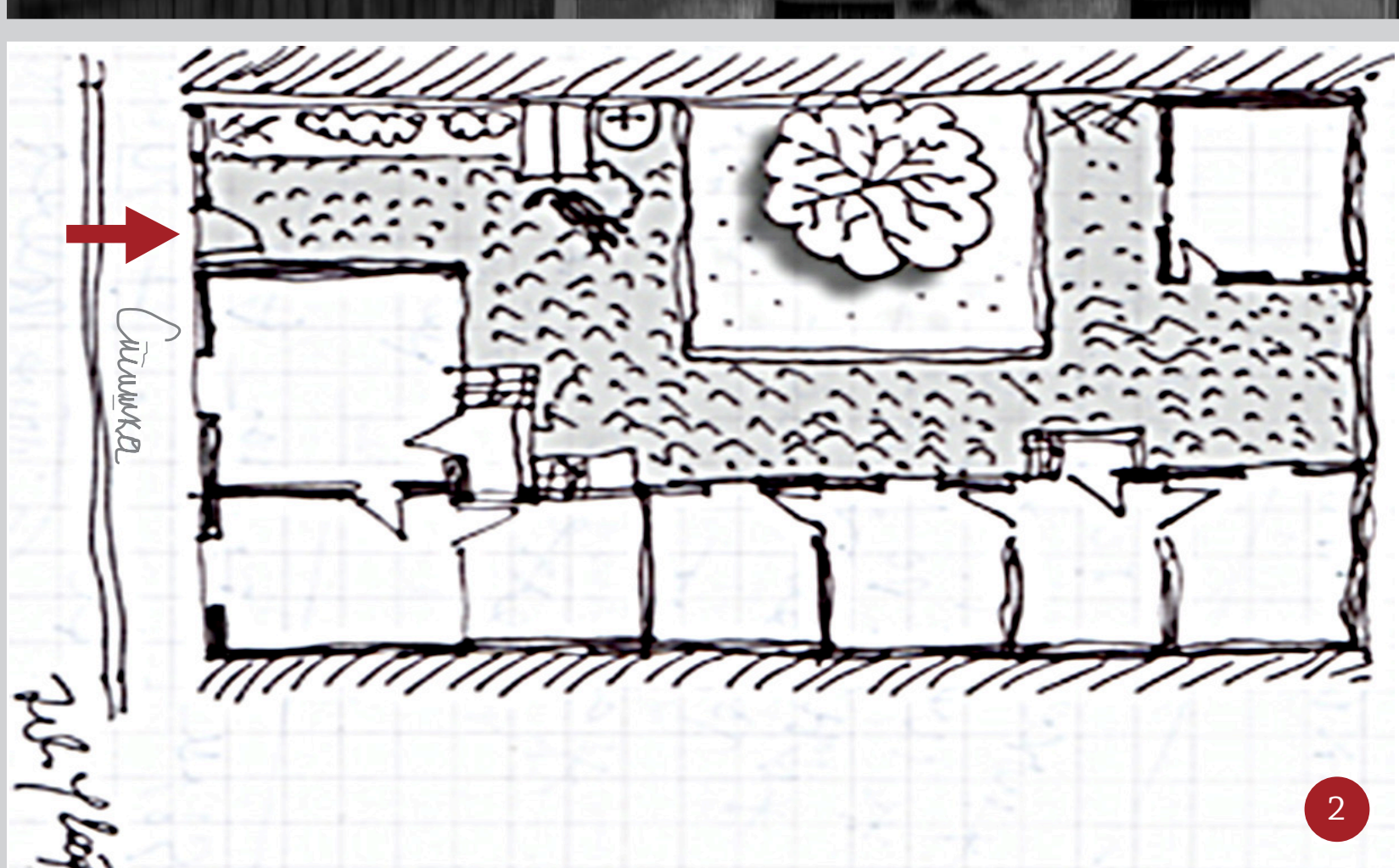
From there we moved to Karaburma, a distant suburb at the time, which actually turned out to be quite convenient at that stage of my upbringing. So the second urban story will be about pavilion no. 117, in the settlement of Karaburma.

**Picture 16**, one before last, is the oldest preserved picture in our family archive, Radule, first Jelena and nana Anka from 1896.

**Picture 17** is taken in 2023, white lines are where our original house stood until 1975.

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Written in Belgrade in 1971, then continued in Toronto in 2003 finished also in Toronto in 2023 and then translated to English in November 2023.



We have more stories like this, our favorite is **The Man Who Made Kites and the Little Girl Ko-Ko-San**, but maybe you will also like the story of the **Green-Haired Deer**? They are still on Serbian so come back soon for English Translations.