



## **Gabriel (Gaby) Deleon Holocaust Survivor**

I was born in 1927 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia and raised in an emancipated Jewish family along with two elder brothers. In our family all major Jewish traditions were regularly observed but in general we not overly religious. My father was paying more emphasis on nurturing closer relationships with the broader community where anti-Semitism was practically absent. Schooled until the age of thirteen in my hometown I lived in a serene middle class family environment.

Yugoslavia was attacked and occupied by four different countries: Germany, Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary. In addition, within the country, a Nazi puppet regime – the Independent State of Croatia – was also formed. Out of all of them the Italian occupation was the most benevolent.

During the Holocaust years I had two close fatal encounters: one, when taken a hostage as a Jew in Sarajevo and released only after a few days because I was a minor; and the second one, when caught at the border between the State of Croatia and the Italian occupation zone with false documents. In both cases I was fortuitously helped by completely unknown individuals. In addition, there were various instances during our stay in Italy where strangers equally displayed courage and human generosity in helping us to survive.

During the Holocaust I lost not only my father, shot by the Germans as a Jewish hostage, but also over 60 percent of the extended family members, most of whom perished in concentration camps in Croatia. I survived with my mother and two brothers as civilian internees in Italy.

Repatriated back to Yugoslavia after the war I completed my education, including University, where I graduated and obtained my PhD in Geology. Only in 1971 I moved with my family to Australia. I was interested in communal Jewish affairs; in Yugoslavia, as a member of the National Jewish Executive, and in Australia with the Holocaust Child Survivors Group.

I greatly value personal bravery in whatever form. For that reason I found *Courage to Care* a potent medium in teaching the younger generation not only that injustices are omnipresent in the world but also that the best men are those who are able and ready to sacrifice for others.