

## LESSON 2: RESOURCE 4

### Brothers Hamid and Xhemal Vesel



*“Our parents were devout Muslims and believed, as we do, that ‘every knock on the door is a blessing from God.’ We never took any money from our Jewish guests. All persons are from God. Besa exists in every Albanian soul.”*

Our deceased brother Refik was the first to be honored in Albania as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem. Now we both have been given the same honor for sheltering the family of Joseph Ben Joseph as well as the Mandil family. Under the Italian occupation Joseph worked for me [Hamid] in my clothing shop and Moshe Mandil worked in our brother Refik’s photography studio. Both families were refugees from Yugoslavia.

With the coming of the German occupation in 1943 both Jewish families were moved to our family home in Krujë.

Xhemal walked the parents night and day for 36 hours to our family home. We dressed them as villagers. Two days later we transported the children to Krujë. During the day we hid the adults in a cave in the mountains near our village. The children played with other children in the village. The entire neighborhood knew we were sheltering Jews. There were other Jewish families that were being sheltered. One day the Germans were conducting a house-to-house search looking for a lost gun. They never found the gun and executed the soldier who lost it.

We sheltered the Jews for nine months, until liberation. We lost all contact with the Ben Joseph family. They left for Yugoslavia too early and we feared that the retreating Germans may have killed them. The Mandil family also left for their home in Yugoslavia. Our brother Refik visited them, after the war, and studied photography with Moshe. The Mandil family subsequently immigrated to Israel.

Four times we Albanians opened our doors. First to the Greeks during the famine of the World War I, then to the Italian soldiers stranded in our country after their surrender to the Allies, then the Jews during the German occupation and most recently to the Albanian refugees from Kosovo fleeing the Serbs. Only the Jews showed their gratitude.

Story as told by Hamid Veseli and Xhemal Veseli

*On May 23, 2004, Yad Vashem recognized the brothers Hamid and Xhemal Veseli as Righteous Among the Nations.*