

Luna Davidova

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Sofia

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My family background

My family came from Spain in the middle of the sixteenth century after the Jews were expelled from Spain [see Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [1](#). They settled throughout Europe - a big part of them settled in the Balkans, in what was then the Ottoman Empire, where they were welcomed. My father's surname is Katalan, which may be a testimony to our coming from Catalonia. Nevertheless I chose Davidova as my artistic name, which I still use. Davidova is the paternal name of my father and it became the surname of me and my sister.

My mother's surname is Bidjarano. I can remember my maternal grandfather, David Bidjarano. He was a shopkeeper and he had an old house in the center of Kazanlak on the Jewish Street. It had two floors - there was a kitchen with a fountain and a stone sink downstairs. Upstairs there were two rooms with couches by the windows and a coal brazier, where they boiled coffee - they drank a lot of coffee. In this room there was a big ancient mirror as well as a wide bed where my grandpa lay and was dying slowly for almost two years. I could still hear him calling my grandmother to give him some water or medicine. He always wore a black suit, his shoes were always shining and he had a bowler hat - I don't remember him ever being careless or untidy.

We never visited them without being given something- my maternal grandmother, Beya Bidjarano, would open a cupboard and offer us some dried morellos or other delicacies. In front of their house there was a vine trellis with splendid white grapes. We almost didn't talk to grandma - she seemed to us terribly old yet she was very kind and loved us very much. I remember her sisters - Ester and Luna who lived in a small house in a remote place near Kazanlak called Kulbe. Both of them were widows - Ester was a gentle and peaceful woman, a fastidious person who was always resting on her arms. Luna's son had been a soldier and disappeared during the Balkan War [2](#)- she spent all her life waiting for his return but she never heard anything from him. Luna was a lively, alert and even ironic woman; she smoked a lot - she rolled her cigarettes by herself. My maternal grandmother, Beya Bidjarano died on the 11th of June 1943 - the very same day when we were



interned from Kazanlak. Our friends and neighbors buried her there after we had left.

Both of my grandfathers were religious. My maternal grandfather was more religious, he read in Hebrew and attended the synagogue regularly. They almost didn't leave home except when they went to the synagogue or visited some relatives. All my grandparents conversed in Ladino - we called it Judeo-Español. David and Beya hardly knew Bulgarian - David more or less managed; he was a shopkeeper after all. But my poor grandmother knew just a few words in Bulgarian - she called the window 'pendjura' - Quiero a sentarme hasta la pendjura [Ladino: I would like to sit next to the window] - and she said 'furkulitsa' for 'fork' - these are both archaic Bulgarian words.

I remember my paternal grandfather, David Katalan. With his first wife Luna he had three children: two sons, my father Buko and Gavriel and one daughter, Solchi. My grandmother fell sick with tuberculosis and died in Vienna where she was buried. - When my husband and I went to Vienna we tried to find her grave but we couldn't. Then my grandfather married a Jewish woman from Istanbul whose name was also Luna. They had two children together, - Shella and Berto. I don't remember the maiden name of my Turkish grandmother but I remember that she was a very beautiful woman, an aristocrat and she didn't like doing the housework at all. Her sister Fortuna came with her from Tsarigrad [historical Bulgarian name for Istanbul; means the City of the King]. She was a spinster, hunchbacked, but extremely intelligent, and she did the housework. David Katalan had a little grocery store in the village of Turia near Kazanlak; he then settled down in the town of Kazanlak where he was engaged in rose oil trading for a while and he built a big and beautiful house. It had three floors and on holidays the whole family gathered there.

My mother Sara was the youngest child in her family - she had three brothers and one sister. The eldest brother, Buko, left for Plovdiv where he was a bank officer. Her second brother, Raphael Bidjarano, graduated with a degree in medicine in Vienna and he came back to work as a physician in Kazanlak. Her third brother, Yakov, was a naïve and good-hearted man who couldn't finish whatever he was doing.

My mother's sister, Oro [Ladino: gold], was a very beautiful woman; she fell in love with a young Bulgarian from Kazanlak. At that time this was considered setting a terrible precedent, almost a scandal for the Jewish community and her relatives; they renounced her and they didn't want to see or to hear anything of this beautiful woman. Later she married a wealthy Bulgarian in Plovdiv - he had some business in the oil and gas industry. They had two daughters, Beti and Rezhina. Later on they forgave her the mistake and she could come and visit us in Kazanlak. - During these visits I was fascinated with her beauty. Afterwards they divorced, her husband left for Egypt with one of their daughters and she left for Paris with the other one in 1935 or 1936. She survived the German occupation in France, her friends and neighbors hid her. After the war she and her daughter made a little industry of prêt-à-porté. In the beginning of the 1960s I visited them on the outskirts of Paris where they lived at the time. My aunt Oro was almost senile at that time but when she saw me she looked at me for a long time and finally she smiled - as if she understood who I was. But she didn't say a word.

My mother, Sara Bidjarano, was born on the 24th of May 1904 in Kazanlak. She finished the Girl's High School in Kazanlak - it was a rarity for a girl to graduate at that time. She married my father very young in 1924 at the small synagogue in our town. After the wedding they went on a honeymoon trip to Vienna - as long as they lived they never stopped talking about this trip. She

was a housewife all her life, a fastidious person - she sewed, knitted, cooked, did the shopping. She had a great sense of humor., She was a cheery and sociable person;, people loved her and visited her to drink a cup of coffee, to have a talk, to exchange gossip. She was very beautiful - she had green eyes and copper-red hair that she sometimes wore in a great shining chignon; she also had red freckles to match her 'djindjita' -- as her red hair was called. This was a great discomfort to her - she applied different creams to her freckles in hopes to remove them, but none of them worked. She loved reading and she liked to visit the the chitalishte. [3](#).

My parents observed the rituals of the Jewish holidays at home because they respected the traditions although they weren't religious at all. I can't remember if they ever stepped inside the synagogue. The synagogue had two floors. The Jewish school where my sister and I studied until the fourth 4th grade was also there. The curriculum was the same as in the Bulgarian schools but also included Hebrew, the Torah and Jewish history. In the same building apart from the synagogue and the school there was a big hall with a gallery. Its door had a lattice window -women with head coverings gathered there to attend the ceremonies. Men were downstairs and also wore something on their heads. Only men went to the cemetery for the funerals.

In the yard of the synagogue and the school there was a little house where the dead were washed according to ancient tradition - they were buried naked only with a sheet. There was a woman called Tanti Reina [Ladino for queen], she was rohesa - the person who washes the bodies of the dead and prepares them for the funeral. She had an extremely strong spirit, she looked after the sick, she and she knew how different diseases should be cured. It was as if she had been born to help people and she did it without receiving anything in return. She also had a family;, she had two daughters.; Sshe was one of a kind - I don't remember seeing anybody else like this in my town. There was not a special kosher store in town but at the market hall there was a special label on the veal and the lamb - 'KOSHER'. We took the chicken to our rabbi or to his assistant the shammash, to get them slaughtered.

My father, Buko Katalan, was the first-born son of the Katalans. He was born on 7th September 1902 in Kazalan. He finished the Boy's High School in Plovdiv., Hhe was an atheist and a communist. Before 9th September 1944 [42](#) he was imprisoned several times, for example in the Stara Zagora Prison in 1935-1936 for a couple of months and in 1941-1942 in Kazanlak as a political prisoner under the Law for the Protection of the Nation [53](#). He was fluent in Spanish, French, Russian and German. He also spoke excellent Turkish and loved the Latin proverbs. At home we read Dostoevsky [6](#) and Chekhov [7](#) in Russian, as well as YeEsenin [8](#), Poe, Heine, Zweig, Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. There was even an Italian Bible. My father was a Bohemian - he was fond of drinking with friends, of laughing and joking. He maintained a friendship with Chudomir until the end of his life [Dimitar Hristov Chorbadijsky alias Chudomir (1890-1967), - a well-known Bulgarian humorist] until the end of his life. Chudomir visited our home very often;, they played backgammon and talked about books, poetry, painters and theater. He staged some plays at 'Iskra', a chitalishte in Kazanlak.

My father's sister, Solchi Montiyas, nee Katalan, was born in 1907/8. She graduated from the French Catholic College in Rouse. In the family they were afraid she might convert to Catholicism but she married a handsome and wealthy Jewish man there - Mony Montiyas. They had two sons, David and Monti. When I was only 13 or 14 I visited them in Rouse; it was the first time I left Kazanlak. I traveled by train and for me Rouse was almost Europe - one of the most presentable

Bulgarian towns: there were paved streets and trams. They were very hospitable; it was a splendid period of time I spent there and I'll never forget the fish they brought from the Danube.

My father's brother Gavriel Katalan was born in 1917/8. He finished the Technical High School in Kazanlak. He was handsome like a god - a slender and radiant man. He was the leader of the young people in Kazanlak. There were several Jewish organizations in Kazanlak - Hashomer Hatzair [94](#), a quite left leaning youth organization; Maccabi [see Maccabi World Union] [105], more right wing and Zionist. Gavriel was the life and the soul of Hashomer. They played volleyball, he read a lot and told them about Bulgarian and the Jewish history. He was a witty guy with a great sense of humor and he was a born leader. Among the Hashomerists he met his future wife. She was a wonderful girl, she was tiny and she had black eyes. She helped him in all his doings - he was Ah Gavriel and she was Ahot Rashka [In Hebrew, Ah - brother; Ahot - sister]. They left for Israel in 1947-1948 as did Solchi and Mony Montiyas together with their families. Gavriel worked as an aircraft mechanic and died in 2000 in Israel.

Shella Gateva, nee Katalan, my father's stepsister, was born in 1926. She finished the Girl's High School in Kazanlak; then she became a chairwoman of the UYW [116] at high school. She went to Stara Zagora to work in the Komsomol [see Bulgarian Komsomol] [127] and finally she came to Sofia where she worked in the Central Committee of the Komsomol, and she taught Biology at the Sofia University. She married a Bulgarian, Mitko Gatev alias Yavorski and used his surname - Shella Gateva. She left for Israel in 1997 and nowadays she is safe and sound there - and a professor of Biology.

My father's youngest brother, Berto Katalan, was born in 1928/9. He left for Israel in 1942 and he is there now - safe and sound as well. He was just a boy when he left: - an idealist, a Zionist, he who dreamed of founding an independent Jewish state. We have always felt as if we have two Fatherlands: First, Bulgaria, the real, large and principal one where we were born, where we lived and worked. And then the other one - a dream, a fiction for founding a state that we knew we could always take shelter in even if it is far away.

Kazanlak used to be a small town in my childhood - its population was about 15, 000. There were many Turks, Gypsies, Armenians, Karakachans as well and as 500 or 600 Jews, roughly 100 to 120 families [see Bulgarian Minorities] [138]. We led a quiet and calm life in the town; there was a wonderful harmony and mutual understanding among the ethnic groups. I don't remember anybody ever stealing anything. My father had excellent relations with the Turks, a great number of his friends were Turks and they drank wine and rakia [strong Bulgarian grape brandy] together, they played backgammon and visited each other. From these times I still have two friends - a Turk, Miryam, and an Armenian, Elis. I didn't witness any anti-Semitism in these years.

The market-day in Kazanlak was on Tuesday - the peasants came from the villages with donkeys and saddlebags to the market-place. The whole town woke up and the great dalavera began [dalavera is slang for; the bargaining process, sometimes accompanied by unfair practices]. I don't know what both my grandfathers sold in their stores but they earned the living for their two families. I remember that my father began to work in his father's store but he spent the whole day in the store of bai [Bulgarian; a respectful form of address] Petar on the opposite side of the street. Every time we went there they played backgammon. Even today I can't figure out where the money came from, what we did for a living but we weren't hungry or without clothing. Once a year

we were bought shoes and new clothes were sewed for us.

On Tuesdays my aunt Shella, my sister and I went to our grandfather David Katalan's store to ask him for money: 'Granpapa, nos vas a dar un leva por merkarbos halva [149]'? [Ladino: Grandpa, would you give us one lev to buy some halva?]. He always pushed the money to the back of the drawer and said: 'No tengo, ija, no hay' [Ladino: I don't have, daughter, I don't.] and he showed us the empty drawer. He was never lavish in giving money. But our maternal grandfather, David Bidjarano, always gave us one lev and we went to a confectioner's across the street called Gineolu to buy either chocolate halva or boza [150] and ice-cream.

At the market-place there were numerous little stores and most of them were Jewish: the shoemaker's, the furrier's, the glassware store, the tinsmith's; there was a nice bookstore, a barber shop and a lot of cafés as well. I remember even the names of the bigger stores - 'Lilia' and 'Zlaten Luv' [Bulgarian: Golden Lion] where they sold fabrics, there was one called 'Zelena Zvezda' [Bulgarian: Green Star] where they sold needles and threads; and 'Bratstai' -- the abbreviation of Bratia Staikovi - The Staikov Brothers -- for yarn and wool. All these were typical fare of small traders.

Growing up

I was born on 5th August 1926 in Kazanlak. In fact it was on 31st July but my father had been expecting a boy so much that when I was born he was so angry with my mother that he didn't go to the municipality to register me for five days. So I have two birthdays but in both cases my zodiac is Leo. I remember the house where I was born - the old house of my paternal grandfather at the back of the synagogue and the Jewish school. Afterwards our wanderings began: - we have never had our own house, we've always lived as tenants. But our lodgings were always in the center of the town and they have were never been small - we have had two, three or even more bedrooms in our apartments. I remember the house next to 'Iskra': - it had a lovely yard with boxes and many other trees. Afterwards we lived in Penyo Radev's house next to the Rozarium [aA rose garden in Kazanlak, which is in the Valley of Roses where rose oil is produced]. Our landlord wasn't very kind - he always scolded us because we picked cherries. And then we lived with Dr Bukovsky, a dentist - this was while we were interned from Kazanlak.

My childhood was very good because we loved each other - especially my sister, Beti and I. We have never been envious of each other; I don't remember our parents having ever beaten us. Our mother pinched us when she didn't get on well with her housework. We were a little bit angry with our father because of his Bohemian lifestyle but it was n'ot a tragedy because my mother accepted him as he was. He called our place Dreimädchenhaus [German: the house of three girls]. We talked both in Ladino and in Bulgarian at home. That's why I know Spanish quite well. We often visited our grandparents, especially my mother's parents.

In summer we went on trips to the Chanakchiiski baths near to Kazanlak and to Pavel bath [bathing resorts with hot mineral water springs] - we rented a cart, we packed all the pots, saucepans, pans, hot plate and some clothes and we rented a lodge. We didn't have a bathroom in Kazanlak and on Friday afternoon we went to the hammam [a big public Turkish bath]. The teliaks [Turkish for bath attendants] scrubbed our backs, took out some leeches from some little jars and put them on our temples to suck the dirty blood. We lay down on sheets, we drank lemonade and it was a great afternoon kef. [161].

In the summertime we went to the River Tundja or to a beautiful place called Kainardja. The River Tundja was far from town - the River Baz Baya crossed it. The old Green Bridge was there and the Turkish mosque was nearby. Several Jewish families gathered together, we had everything ready for eating - there was rakia and wine for men. We spread out rugs by the river and the children had baths while the men played backgammon. We put the watermelons and the cantaloupes to cool in the water along with the mastika [172] and the rakia. There was a little restaurant nearby where you could order some kebapche [Bulgarian: grilled pieces of minced meat].

We played many games in my childhood: - we played hide-and-seek and hopscotch; we rolled hoops with a stick. There was a special game - we called it the ring-game. All the children squatted in a circle and one of us got out of it and put a 'ring' somewhere in the clothes of the other children. The ring itself was a trifle, a piece of junk and the one who received it had to feel it and to run for the one who had hid it. I remember that at the back of my grandfather David Katalan's house there was a large meadow with a huge nut-tree that produced a lot of nuts. We went there to shake the nuts down and the owners always scolded us. We made some balls from mud and buried them because we believed that they would become iron; we did the same with grains and beads - we put them into little boxes and buried them because we thought they would turn to silver and gold.

On the other side of this house there were fields - yellow in the fall with lots of cornflowers and poppies. We walked through the fields to collect these flowers and make wreaths. There was a factory beyond the fields - we called it the Silk Factory as well as the airplane factory. Farther away was the Oreshaka [walnut grove] - now all the trees have been cut down. We used to go to the Rozarium because there were many golden butterflies that we had fun trying to capture.

I remember the first time when I went for a drive with a car - it belonged to one of the richest families in our town, the Shipkovs. They were several brothers who were rose-traders and had a big and beautiful house. This house seemed to me like a palace - it had towers, a lovely yard with a reservoir and several big pine-trees. In the yard there was also a garage with one or two cars. When I was 11 or 12, I was friends with their daughter Ani and one day she took me to their house; and it was like a miracle - the iron gates opened and Ani's father said to the driver: 'Get in the car and take a drive over to town.' It was my first encounter with modern machinery. When we lived in Dr Bukovski's house, there was a bicycle on the wall and I learned to ride it. I rode it up to the Rozarium and to the old river. The first radio in the 1930s was also a great wonder, the first telephone, too. My uncle Dr Bidjarano was among the first in Kazanlak who had a radio and telephone; , I' am not sure if the radio was Philips or Telefunken.

My favorite holidays were Purim and Pesach. On Purim, a joyous holiday, we walked around with little bags hanging on our necks - our mothers sewed them especially for the holiday. We visited our neighbors who gave us something - a coin for example. We disguised ourselves: - we put masks not only on our faces but we even put on whole costumes if we could find any. On this holiday some sweets were made - very fragrant white candies slivers. Pesach was a cheerful holiday, too. The whole family gathered on this day at the house of my grandfather David - with the prayers, with the meals: the matzah, the lettuce and the eggs. The eggs should be boiled the whole night with some onion flakes until they become brown and then they should be baked in the oven. We ate hens, there was a drink made by from raow nut kernels soaked in water and put into jars. The nut kernels had incredible flavor and aroma. There was also a cake with the funny name

tishpishti [in Bulgarian a play on words, since it sounds like 'tri puti pishti' which means 'it cries three times'] and another one called- masapan. The latter was made with sugar and almonds only - without being baked, just ground almonds and sugar are mixed together to a certain point - punto as we say in Ladino. I can't say we've never eaten pork; - we ate it but in the market hall they sold preserved meat, kosher - our rRabbi slaughtered the calves and the chicken there.

I finished the fourth 4th grade at the Jewish school. - I remember some of our teachers there: the rRabbi, Hezkiya and Aronov. Then I attended a Bulgarian Junior High School and I enrolled in the Kazanlak Girl's High School where I studied until the sixth 6th grade. I was a keen reader as a child: - I loved Jack London, Mark Twain. 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' was one of my favorite books. I wasn't a diligent or ambitious student but my results were excellent., I knew my lessons well. In high school I had only one notebook in which I wrote everything - my friends have always laughed at me because of this. I was a member of my uncle's organization [Hashomer Hatzair]., I had many friends in the Jewish quarter and at school - some of them are my friends up to this day. I loved going to the cinema - there was a cinema at the chitalishte and we went to see movies. I cried a lot and I remember that when I saw 'Les Miserables' I was very tormented by Cosette's and Jean Valjean's destiny. I perceived very sensitively everything I read or saw - I've shed so many tears over these things. I began reciting there - I was regarded as a good performer of recitations at school but until I first came to Sofia I had not taken part in a play.

During the war

When Hitlerism began [in Bulgaria the beginning of Hitlerism was officially decreed in 1941 when Bulgaria became an ally with Germany] and the Law for the Protection of the Nation was adopted under the pressure of Germany, some small organizations appeared in our town. Of these, the most malicious were the members of 'Otetz Paisii' [means Father Paisii (1722-1773), the ideologist of the Bulgarian Revival from 18th cCentury] and the Legionaries [see Bulgarian Legions] [183]. Brannik [194] was a massive state organization such as the Komsomol in the years after 9th of September 1944. They were given suits, but I had some friends from the high school who were members of Brannik - wonderful and progressive girls [The expression 'progressive' was quite common in socialist times: People with left-wing political ideas were called in this way following the philosophy of Karl Marx about the 'historical progress' toward a truly human world]. This was at the time when the severe measures were introduced and stores were closed, you couldn't own two houses, there was a curfew and occasionally the Legionaries smashed some windows. But there has never been any pogrom or maltreatment. They were just a small group that consisted of a few people.

My family had a lot of Bulgarian friends, I felt perfectly well at high school. When we were forced to wear the small stars [in Poland and elsewhere the stars were much bigger than in Bulgaria and they had to be worn on the sleeve], my schoolmates were shocked;, they felt guilty. The star was made from bakelite plastic, it was 3x3x3 cm in size and it was yellow with a black line on the edge. When we were interned, all my classmates came to see us off at the station. So I have never felt any anti- Semitism.

When the War began and the Law for the Protection of the Nation was promulgated, my father was forced to go to the labor camps for three years - from the beginning of spring until the late fall. All Jewish men were forced to work at these forced labor camps [20](#). My father was sent to the Rila or

to the Rhodope Mountains near to the borderline with Greece - the villages of Liubimetz and Krushevene - to crush rocks and to build roads. We felt fear in the air, there were talks about where the people who had been interned were sent.

I remember clearly how a train full of Hungarian Jews arrived in Kazanlak. It was before our internment in 1943; the echelon stopped in our town and many people came out of the wagons. They were accommodated in the yard of our Jewish school. The local Jews managed to take a lot of them to their homes in order to get them fed and cleaned. A girl came to our house - I shall never forget her although I can't remember her name. She was a beautiful girl at the age of 14 or 15 with a large braid. She was alone, she had no parents and I can still see her red coat with white furs. She stayed for a couple of days at our place; almost everywhere there were several Hungarian Jews. But then they were taken back to the wagons and the train left. Almost all of the Hungarian Jews were annihilated with the exception of those who managed to run away and those who had realized what was to follow.

We were given a couple of days to sell our household goods before the internment on 11th June 1943. Peasants came from the villages with their carts to make the dirt-cheap bargains but they had no guilt - we were to be led away and we didn't have the right to take anything except a bundle with some clothes and a blanket. We gave my father's library and a beautiful office desk to our Bulgarian friends. Afterwards they returned them to us.

We were interned in Lom, on the bank of the Danube [see Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] [2115]. There were many Jewish families there who welcomed us at the railway station and took us to a big school called Fotinov. We settled down in the classrooms. It was summertime, vacation for the students - and we were about 50 people in one room - men, women and children. We slept on the ground. There was a vast yard where we washed ourselves, we kindled a fire and our mothers cooked beans, lentils or potatoes. We had strictly fixed hours to do the shopping in certain stores. Some friends of ours sent us parcels with food. One night we even had policemen in our room - one of the officers across the street had taken a look at two splendid sisters. They were 20 years old, they had black hair and green eyes. They were, incredibly beautiful creatures and he came at night to do some zulumlutzi [zulum, pl. zulumlutzi - from the Turkish, meaning outrage, harm]. They wanted to make my father work at the port but he refused - he could afford to refuse and so he did. Once we went to have a bath because we got infested with lice.

In September when the school classes began the Kapons took us in their house - we lived in one room with another family; we changed our clothes in shifts. Then a wonderful guy took us whose name was Rangelov. He was a lawyer. He went to the countryside with his family because of the bombardments and left his house at our disposal. He didn't want any rent for it. Our Bulgarian neighbors often gave us meals - grilled fish for example. I finished the seventh 7th grade in Lom but I can't remember anything from the school - neither the teachers, nor my classmates. My sister and I worked in the confectioner's. - we We cleaned nuts and brought our parents whole bags filled with nuts. Then we went to work in a workshop where we cleaned fruits such as apricots, peaches, etc. and we put them into containers, barrels or the like. They probably used fresh fruit to make some jam or compote to send to Germany. And we were paid for our work - I was 16, my sister was ten and we earned a few stotinki [1 Bulgarian Leva is equal to 100 stotinki].

My uncle, Raphfael Bidjarano was interned before us, in 1943, to the village of Morava [Svishtov district] with his wife Rozeta and his children Albert and Reni. He was given a cabinet to examine the sick. In August 1944, I think it was during the Government of Mushanov [Mushanov was a minister. The Prime-Minister at the time was Muraviev], when we could remove our yellow stars, I went there to welcome the Soviet army on the bank of the Danube - we owe our liberation from Fascism to them. For the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews some say we are indebted to the Bulgarian people, others say to the King Boris III [2216], still others say to Peshev, Dimitarrov [2317] and the deputies or to Exarch Stefan [2418].

Post-war

When we came back from Lom to Kazanlak we stayed in my uncle's house because we had nowhere else to go. He had a big house and we lived there in one room for quite a long time. Afterwards we found a flat. In 1945 I finished the Kazanlak Girl's High School and in March 1946 I came to Sofia. A friend of my father found a job for me as a teacher at the primary Jewish elementary school on Osogovo Street in the third dDistrict. I replaced the teachers when they were absent, I was also a secretary of the school and I paid the salaries.

I enrolled in Sofia University to study French Philology but I never took great efforts so I left during the third semester and I stayed as a teacher at the school. I still regret not graduating but I do know French very well - I can read, translate and speak it. I have been five times to Paris and I've managed quite well. My mother's tongue is Bulgarian; I also speak Ladino. I'm not fluent but I can read and write in Spanish. I'm fluent in Russian- I've got the feeling and the passion for this language. I can read English but very poorly - my husband spoke it fluently as well as my sons who had private lessons.

My sister, Beti Davidova, was born in 1936. She finished the Kazanlak Girl's High School and after she graduated from the Sofia University in history., Sshe taught in Kazanlak and in the village of Alexandrovo where her husband worked as a physician for a while. Then she was a high-school teacher in Sofia and finally she retired as an editor in the publishing house 'Narodna Prosveta'. Her husband, Mois Nisimov, graduated in Medicine in Prague and now he works as a pediatricist. They got married in 1958 in a civil ceremony. Their son, Ilya Nisimov [(born in 1960)] is an excellent doctor too - he is a neurologist at the First Municipal Hhospital in Sofia. My sister was one of the most beautiful girls in Kazanlak. She is a, very sociable person and she has many friends in Sofia. - Hher home is always open for guests -- Abraham's home as we say. And she is a public figure as well:, she is in charge of the cultural activities of the elderly people in Shalom [25](#). I have been a chairwoman of a Jewish organization, WIZO [Women's International Zionist Organization]. I've been several times to Israel on account of this. Nowadays I am an honorary chairwoman of this organization.

When I came to Sofia I was fascinated by the theater. I have inherited the artistic inclinations of my father. I took part in a performance at the Jewish chitalishte, Emil Shekedjiisky;, it was still called Bialik at the time. [see Bialik, Haim Nachman (1873-1934) - famous poet who wrote in Hebrew. Born in Russia, since 1922 he lived in Germany where he was Head of the Hebrew Writers Union] [26](#) I recited Vaptszarov's poetry [see Vaptszarov, Nikola] [1927] one of the classics of Bulgarian literature - 'Oh, Mother, Fernandez was murdered.' Then Nikolay Masalitinov [famous Russian and Bulgarian director, Head Director of the National Theater 'Ivan Vazov' in Sofia (1925-1944)] was

staging a Jewish play by Shoaalom Aleichem [28](#) called 'Tevye the Dairyman' starring the great Bulgarian actor Leo Konforti as Tevye. I took part in it on the stage of our chitalishte and obviously it turned out to be fine because Masalitinov was carried away by my performance. He said: 'You should go and apply at the Theatrical Academy.' It happened by chance -- well probably not only by chance -- I was admitted in September 1948 to VITIZ [Vissh Institut za Teatralno I Filmovo Izkustvo - Higher Institute for Theatrical and Film Arts]. I graduated in 1952 and I was immediately assigned to the Mladezhki Teatur [The Youth Theater].

In the first several years after 9th September 1944 many Bulgarian Jews left for Israel - 35-40,000 people. The third district where the school was located became desolate due to their departure; in Kazanlak there is only one Jew left nowadays. But a lot of people remained here, mostly the communists. When we came back to Kazanlak after the internment the people welcomed us; my father became a secretary of the chitalishte 'Iskra'. He was a communist and that's why he stayed in Bulgaria. We were 'progressive' - I was a member of the UYW, then of DCYU [stands for Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union], and of the Komsomol -- we were fond of these great ideas. And if they were not realized, it was due not to the ideas themselves but to the people who tried to realize them. Communism turned out to be a mistake, maybe a criminal attempt, but not because of the criminal essence of the idea but because of the people who tried to make it real. Communism, socialism - these are things dreamt by Jesus Christ as well, the same Ten Commandments are found in the principle of the great ideas and ideologies. But neither Christianity nor socialism made them real. I applied for membership in the Party in 1950 and I was accepted as a member in 1953. I am still member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party [the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party].

My mother has never been member or supporter of any parties. My father was a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party but he was expelled in 1963 in Kazanlak because he stood up for a friend of his, an ex-military officer named Slavov. Later my father was invited to join the Party but he refused; he was very grieved. My parents lived in Kazanlak until 1966 when they came to Sofia to live at my sister's place.

In the Jewish school where I worked until 1948 I had a good salary, I was given a scholarship during my study in VITIZ by the Konsistoria [the Jewish Community Foundation]. I also won an award named after Georgi Dimitrov [29](#), thus I had no material troubles. Otherwise we went on brigades [3020], I recited Smirnensky [Hristo Smirnensky (1898-1923), - famous Bulgarian poet], Vaptszarov, Mayakovsky [31](#). When I first came to Sofia, I lived at on 38 Iskar Street 38 in the same room where my husband came to live when we married. Our first son was born while we lived there, in the student lodging. In 1958 we moved to the flat where I still live - we don't have any other property. We remained proletarians until the end.

As an actress I advanced quickly through the ranks; I took part in a lot of radio shows, in radio plays, I read poetry. I made several TV performances and I participated in several films - the best role I had was that of Varvara in 'Tobacco' [Dimitar Dimov (1907-1966) - one of the classics of Bulgarian literature. His novel 'Tobacco' - Tiutiun - was stigmatized by the cCommunist ideology as 'bourgeois and Freudist' when it was first published in 1951 and he was forced to re-write it]. But it seemed that I was not created for cinema; my good roles were those in the theater. I had many recitals - Yavorov's poetry for example; we made performed plays with Chaprazov and Duparinova [famous Bulgarian actors]. Nowadays the young people don't know me but there are some adults

who see me and say: Ah you are Maria Stuart [from Friedrich Schiller's play], or 'Aesopus'!, or ah yes, 'A Holiday In Arco Iris', ah you acted in 'The Stone Guest' by Pushkin [32](#). I can remember quite well ten or fifteen roles that I had, as well as my excellent colleagues and directors. I've always had good relations with my colleagues - I have never been envious of someone else's role, talent, or intelligence. And I have been respected for this quality of mine. This is one of the very few things that give me the self-confidence of a good human being.

Married life

When I was at the Youth Theater I married Haim Buko Levi whom I knew from the Jewish chitalishte. He was born on 9th September 1920 in the town of Dupnitsa. His father was a shoemaker, a good and modest person. My husband had two brothers, Hertzal and Simcho, and one sister, Marieta alias Marcella. Hertzal was a building manager for 'Trud' newspaper; he lived in Sofia and after 1989 he left for Israel [see 10th November 1989] [33](#). Simcho was a kiosk vendor in Dupnitsa and he left for Israel with his wife and his two sons, Izi and Sami, in 1989. Marieta alias Marcella was a housewife in Kjustendil.

My husband graduated from the Svishtov University in Economy, then he studied Law at Sofia University but he didn't graduate. He was a journalist; his main interests were in economics. He worked within different newspapers - the daily 'Trud' [Labor], the biweekly 'Evreiski Vesti' [Jewish News] as well as the weekly 'Ikonomicheski Zhivot' [Economic Life] from where he retired and received his pension. His political ideas were the same as mine - he was a communist, a socialist. In 1952 our friendship and love began; in 1953 we got married in a civil ceremony. My husband died in 1995 in Sofia.

We have two sons, - Anri and Albert. Anri, the older one, graduated in Chemistry, Microbiology and Foreign Commerce - he has two diplomas. He is fluent in English and Russian, he can use French and Italian and I regret that we never spoke in Ladino at home. Nowadays he is unemployed. Albert, who graduated in Economics, left for Israel in 1991. He has one daughter, Lora. She is a student of Economics at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia.

Half of my friends are Jews - now the Jewish community is what binds us together. I celebrate the holidays, we attend the synagogue but this is just a tradition - we are not religious. Our children are atheists, too. The breakdown of the diplomatic ties between Bulgaria and Israel was very hard for us. We thought that this nation had the right to its own piece of land. Maybe the Jews have made mistakes regarding the Palestinians but I think that these conflicts stem from the Arab world. They have enormous territories but none of them give asylum to their Palestinian brothers. The Jordanian king Hussein expelled them, no one wants them and they felt envious of this land and decided that Jerusalem belongs to them. If you open the Bible you will see that everyone has conquered this piece of land - the Syrians, the Babylonians, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Turks. But the country is still there, it is the birthplace of this nation according to the Bible.

I've been to Israel several times. During the communist rule we didn't say that we had relatives there, it was forbidden although my uncle and aunt were there. In the beginning we didn't send them any letters. Neither did they because it could do us harm. Our politicians didn't make just a few mistakes - they made many. We began to correspond without difficulties from the beginning of the 1980s. After the ottepel [Russian for thaw; synonym of perestroika] [34](#) my aunt Solchi and my uncle Gavriel came to Bulgaria to visit my father and my aunt Shella. She was still here in Bulgaria

at the time.

Since we were socialists, the changes that we experienced after 10th November 1989 were very hard for us. We stand for a social politics that supersedes the incredible division among the people. It is the awful division of people into rich and poor that binds me to socialism; I feel it with my heart. We lived painfully through the terrible things that happened - the plunder, the fire in the House of the Party, the destruction of the Mausoleum: a whole series of negative events. Here in our park they destroyed the huge garden that led to Bratskata Mogila [the Monument of those who died in the anti-Fascist fight] because they were afraid that someone would go and lay a flower commemorating those who were killed in the name of just an idea.

I don't get any help from the Jewish community but there are people who do. My pension is regarded as big but it is n'ot enough. In my flat it is cold the whole winter. I simply can't figure out how to make ends meet. I have nowhere to get money from - if I do take part in some artistic shows, I do it for free, because of solidarity.

As for the Hungarian Revolt [see 1956] [35](#), the Prague Spring [36](#) - I consider these events as an expression of the peoples' discontent and disagreement; each nation has the right to do it. It's a matter of importance how the opposite side would react, the side that bears the guilt for the state of affairs - they should think how to act too. In the Soviet Union, as well as in Russia, there has been a lot of anti-Semitism, in Romania too. Not to speak of Poland - there is terrible anti-Semitism there. In France there is also anti-Semitism but I've been many times to England and I haven't experienced this there. There is no anti-Semitism among our Balkan neighbors, Greece and Turkey.

My mother cooked very well, she made a special mayonnaise with chicken and fish. She also made a meal called apio with celery and lots of lemon juice,, it which is served cold. She cooked a lot of meals with aubergines, especially a kind of moussaka [a meal of potatoes, minced meat and yogurt]. And a special meal made from zucchini - andjenara. I loved her baked blue tomatoes minced with meat croquettes. She also cooked okra with a lot of tomato juice. I learned to cook all these meals, my sister too, and now my daughters-in-law, the Bulgarian girls are fond of them and cook them. And I don't know whether they will pass this tradition on to their children. I don't have this particular contact with my grandchildren. But I suppose that mothers will pass the things on to their children that they themselves like.

Translated by Atanas Igov

Glossary

[1](#) Expulsion of the Jews from Spain

The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Izmir, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Edirne, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Vidin).

2 First Balkan War (1912-1913)

Started by an alliance made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. It was a response to the Turkish nationalistic policy maintained by the Young Turks in Istanbul. The Balkan League aimed at the liberation of the rest of the Balkans still under Ottoman rule. In October, 1912 the allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire and were soon successful: the Ottomans retreated to defend Istanbul and Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace fell into the hands of the allies. The war ended on 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

3 Chitalishte

literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc. The first such organizations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival [18th-19th century] and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

4 9th September 1944

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

5 Law for the Protection of the Nation

A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

6 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

7 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904)

Russian short-story writer and dramatist. Chekhov's hundreds of stories concern human folly, the tragedy of triviality, and the oppression of banality. His characters are drawn with compassion and humor in a clear, simple style noted for its realistic detail. His focus on internal drama was an innovation that had enormous influence on both Russian and foreign literature. His success as a dramatist was assured when the Moscow Art Theater took his works and staged great productions of his masterpieces, such as *Uncle Vanya* or *The Three Sisters*. and also had some religious instruction.

8 Yesenin, Sergei Aleksandrovich (1895-1925)

Russian poet, born and raised in a peasant family. In 1916 he published his first collection of verse, *Radunitsa*, which is distinguished by its imagery of peasant Russia, its religiosity, descriptions of nature, folkloric motifs and language. He believed that the Revolution of 1917 would provide for a peasant revival. However, his belief that events in post-revolutionary Russia were leading to the destruction of the country led him to drink and he committed suicide at the age of 30. Yesenin remains one of the most popular Russian poets, celebrated for his descriptions of the Russian countryside and peasant life.

9 Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.⁴ Hashomer Hatzair: A left-wing youth Zionist organization, established in 1932.

10 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with

branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

11 UYW

The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'etat in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

12 Bulgarian Komsomol

The communist youth organization in Bulgaria in socialist times. The task of the Komsomol was to spread the ideas of communism among worker and peasant youth. The Komsomol also aimed at providing a communist upbringing by involving the youth worker in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. Komsomol: The communist youth organization in Bulgaria during socialist times. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism among worker and the peasant youth. The Komsomol also aimed at providing a communist upbringing by involving the youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education.

13 Bulgarian Minorities

Some of the larger Bulgarian minorities are Turkish (800,000), Roma (300,000), Armenian (13,500), Tatar (4,500), Jewish (3,500). These are rough figures, based on a 1994 census. Further minority groups are the following: Gagauz (1,500), Orthodox Christians who speak a Turkish dialect, and have a home territory in Gagauzia, Moldova. Karakachan (5,000) are a Greek speaking ethnic group. There is also special minority going by the name of Pomak. These are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, who are not properly identified in the national Census, but who are said to number between 150,000 and 200,000. (new entry)

14 Halva

A sweet confection of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and largely enjoyed throughout the Balkans. It is made chiefly of ground sesame seeds and honey. 9. Halva: A sweet confection of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and largely enjoyed throughout the Balkans. It is made chiefly of ground sesame seeds and honey.

10. Boza: A sweet wheat-based mildly alcohol drink popular in Bulgaria.[15](#) Boza: A sweet wheat-based mildly alcoholic drink popular in Bulgaria, Turkey and other places in the Balkans.

16 Kef

Comes from the Turkish word keyif meaning delight, great pleasure akin to Arab kayif - well-being. The word is very common in Bulgarian and it is used often.

17 Mastika

Anise liquor, popular in many places in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East. It is principally the same as Greek Ouzo, Turkish Yeni Raki or Arabic Arak.

18 Bulgarian Legions

Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. Bulgarian fascist movement, established in 1930.

Following the Italian model it aimed at building a corporate totalitarian state on the basis of military centralism. It was dismissed in 1944 after the communist take-over.

19 Brannik

Pro-fascist youth organization. It started functioning after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

20 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

21 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria

Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

22 King Boris III

The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Most Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

23 Peshev, Dimitar (1894-1973)

Bulgarian politician, former Deputy- Chairman of the National Assembly. Peshev was the leader of

the group who opposed to deportations of Bulgarian Jews. According to Gabrielle Nissim, author of the book 'The Man Who Stopped Hitler': 'He was the only politician of high rank in a country allied with Germany who broke the atmosphere of complete collective silence with regard to the Jewry's lot.'

24 Exarch Stefan (1878-1957)

Exarch of Bulgaria (Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, subordinated nominally only to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople) and Metropolitan of Sofia. He played an important role in saving the Bulgarian Jews from deportation to death camps. In 2002 his efforts were recognized by Yad Vashem and he was awarded the title 'Righteous among the Nations'. Exarch Stefan (1878-1957): Mitropolite of Sofia and head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, who played a significant role in the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews. In 2002 together with Patriarch Kiril he was recognized as one of the Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem.]

25 Shalom Organization

Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.

26 Bialik, Chaim Nachman

(1873-1934): One of the greatest Hebrew poets. He was also an essayist, writer, translator and editor. Born in Rady, Volhynia, Ukraine, he received a traditional education in cheder and yeshivah. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1901 in Warsaw. He established a Hebrew publishing house in Odessa, where he lived but after the Revolution of 1917 Bialik's activity for Hebrew culture was viewed by the communist authorities with suspicion and the publishing house was closed. In 1921 Bialik emigrated to Germany and in 1924 to Palestine where he became a celebrated literary figure. Bialik's poems occupy an important place in modern Israeli culture and education.

27 Vaptsarov, Nikola (1909-1942)

born in the town of Bansko, Vaptsarov ranks among Bulgaria's most prominent proletarian poets of the interwar period. His most well-known volume of poetry is 'Motoring Verses'. Vaptsarov was shot in Sofia on 23rd July 1942.

28 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level.

The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

29 Dimitrov, Georgi (1882-1949)

A Bulgarian revolutionary, who was the head of the Comintern from 1936 through its dissolution in 1943, secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1949, and prime minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949. He rose to international fame as the principal defendant in the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933. Dimitrov put up such a consummate defense that the judicial authorities had to release him.

30 Brigades

A form of socially useful labor, typical of communist times. Brigades were usually teams of young people who were assembled by the authorities to build new towns, roads, industrial plants, bridges, dams, etc. as well as for fruit-gathering, harvesting, etc. This labor, which would normally be classified as very hard, was unpaid. It was completely voluntary and, especially in the beginning, had a romantic ring for many young people. The town of Dimitrovgrad, named after Georgi Dimitrov - the leader of the Communist Party - was built entirely in this way.

31 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

32 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

33 10th November 1989

After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms

followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

34 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

35 1956

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

36 Prague Spring

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.