

Mico Alvo's Class In The French Elementary School



This is a picture from the primary school. This was a French primary school, an "infantile" as it was called, run by the Mission Laique Francaise.

This was before the passing of the law that compelled us to attend a Greek primary school.

On the first row, fifth from right, seated is my cousin Rosa, the daughter of Sento, with whom we had only three months age difference. The woman on the right was a French teacher that was absolutely marvelous with small kinds.

The school was located where today is the bus stop Roi George. In the old days, the summer residence of King George was there. The building was then taken by the Mission Laique and established there the girl's high school and the primary school.

They were extremely well organized. They had even bought a building to house the teachers, which was called Maison des professeurs.

I first went to school when I was seven years old. But I already knew how to read. I knew the Latin alphabet and the numbers, my grandmother had taught me. I don't remember my mother ever sitting down to teach me.

At the French school my parents were paying fees both in primary and secondary school. When we had Smeralda she used to take us to school.

Otherwise, my mother would take us. It was very near our home, at the same bus stop. We would just walk down Papakyriazi Street, pass the road, and the garden of the school would stand right opposite.

I went to school together with my brother. We started going to school together, I don't remember having gone on my own. I went in the first class and he went in the nursery.

The school was a *préparatoire*, meaning what we say now primary school. I went there until the third grade. We used to wear white or blue uniforms. We had small tables with small chairs where we would all sit.

How the teacher managed to keep us so many hours in there, and teach us, I don't know. All lessons were being taught in French. We had a French teacher who specialized in young children and her name was Madame Doze. She was really good with children.

There were about twenty of us in a class, boys and girls, and we had the same teacher for all the different subjects. At the beginning when we were all little and until the third grade, we would have classes from nine in the morning until twelve or one in the afternoon, or something like that, I don't remember exactly the time schedule.

We would have classes on many different subjects, as they do in primary schools. To learn the language, the letters and the alphabet, they would tell us to write whole pages with "a" or "b", or numbers. They didn't teach us Judeo Spanish at all.

The French school was secular. No Hebrew or Religion was being taught. We didn't have a morning prayer. Most of my classmates were Jews.

Out of the twenty students, only four or five were non-Jews. We didn't celebrate any national holidays except on 14th of July, which was a French national holiday and we didn't have classes then.

I remember we also celebrated the end of the war, which was on the 11th of November, I think. We celebrated that at school. They would gather us all together, and some children would have poems to deliver.

I really disliked poems, because I couldn't remember them. We celebrated the 25th of March, and we would raise the flags. I don't remember celebrating the Saint Demetrios day (the Saint that is regarded as the guardian of Thessaloniki).

When I finished the third grade, this law came out, that all children had to have a primary school certificate from a Greek School. Only the children of foreign citizens were able to go to a school that was not Greek.

So at the fourth grade I changed school and I went to Schinas, which was very near my home.