

In Taksim, With My Friend



This photograph was taken in 1944 in Taksim plaza. The one on the left was a close friend, he is deceased, Izak Benhabib. The one on the right is me. What I remember about that day, we just came from military service and we went out together. He was engaged then, broke it off, I gave him advice, don't worry, don't take it to heart and so on. I was a bachelor.

There were mobile photographers in Taksim, they took this picture.

I was born on May 6th, 1919 in Kuledibi in Istanbul. I was born on the street they called Kal de los Frankos (the synagogue of the Italians). We lived in Kuledibi all through my childhood.

My mother raised me, there was no preschool or such then, in addition, we did not have a nanny or an au paire.

I was a soldier when the Holocaust was taking place in Europe, from 1941-1944. and Anatolia was in the dark. The lights would be out in Kayseri, in Malatya (two cities in the central section of Turkey called Anatolia), there was no electricity at night. We were 550 nonMuslims in the military, Greeks, Armenians and Jews, ten corporal sergeants and one officer. They gave us blue uniforms for the airport, then an order came, they removed the Armenians, they gave them brown uniforms, to build roads. We went from town to town and were discharged from Çanakkale.

My friends outside of school were Jewish. We would go out when we were free, we would go to the movies, meet with the girls every day after homework, have fun with them. There was Benhabib in Kuledibi, izak Benhabib, he had a very beautiful voice. There was a tallish rock under the tower, he would sit there and sing. There was a famous singer called Tina Rossi, he would sing her French songs. All the girls would come out to the windows around him. We would tease and have fun. We

had this friend, Benhabib. Peyse Levi, Yonas Kohen, Lazar Arovas and one unlucky guy who drowned in Florya, I don't remember his name.

There were good families in Kuledibi. % 80 of the Eastern European Jews lived in Kuledibi. There were no Ashkenazi Jews living in places like Hasköy or Balat. They were all at Kuledibi and Tünel. Later they slowly left. I was in Kuledibi until I was 16. All my friends were from there. There was Benhabib, there was Levi, Yonas Kohen, Lazar Arovas. We all lived close to each other there. There were all Jews.

?I cannot say anything as far as numbers but Istanbul was close to 100,000 people but I cannot know about Kuledibi, it was crowded.