

Aron Alkalai's Parents Regina And Nissim Alkalai



This is a photo of my parents Regina and Nissim Alkalai in the 1920s. It was probably taken in Kyustendil.

They were already married and lived in Kyustendil. At that time my father helped my grandfather, who was a merchant. At first they lived in Kyustendil, but later they moved to Dupnitsa.

My mother's name is Regina Alkalai and she had two brothers and two sisters. Her eldest brother's name is Yosif Lazar. He was a lawyer and lived in Plovdiv. Her other brother's name is David Lazar. He was a merchant and lived in Kyustendil. One of my mother's sisters was Buka and she married in Sofia. Her other sister was Matilda and she lived in Dupnitsa. Her husband's name was Konorti and he was a tailor. Unfortunately, that is all I know about them.

My mother was a teacher in the Jewish school in Kyustendil. Probably she also worked as a teacher in Dupnitsa but for a short time. After she married, she stopped working under the influence of my father. He wished that she would only be a housewife. My mother knew French very well. She also played the guitar and knew songs in Ladino and in Bulgarian. I have seen her singing a melody and playing on the guitar to herself. In the evenings she would go on the balcony and hum a song for 'good night'. Times were more peaceful then and people were less demanding. We did not buy many clothes, did not rely on material things so much and people lived more peacefully than they

do now.

My father Nissim Alkalai had a lot of jobs. He had a hard life. At one point he was even a bartender and a cafe owner. When the water-conduit for Sofia was being constructed, he had a small canteen in the Rila Mountain. He cooked for the workers, who were around 150 people. But my father was a very good man and often gave them food on credit. That is why, he did not get rich from that job. There were some Italians who owed him a lot of money. At that time our house was mortgaged. My father had taken a loan from the Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' [Brotherhood] to buy the house, in which we lived. My mother told me that once my father threw in the stove some papers issued to him by a judge and with which he had to collect the money he was owed. He had won a trial against the people who owed him money, but at the last minute he reconsidered. My mother asked him why he was throwing those papers in the fire. He answered that the people had no money to pay him back. For example, one of them had only one cow. If he took it, what would the man have to eat? So, my father was very considerate about the others. The fact that there were five of us and our house was mortgaged was in the background. Because of that nobility and kindness my father was a much respected man. He had a lot of friends among the Bulgarians too.

I do not know how my parents met. When they married, my father was living in Dupnitsa. After they married, they lived in various rented flats in the center of the town. My parents spoke Bulgarian, but their parents spoke Ladino. After they married, I was born in 1921, my brother Rafael in 1923 and my sister Riri in 1928. The house where I was born had two rooms and was very humbly furnished. When I was young, we did not have electricity, we used gas lamps.