

# Samuel Coyas

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Istanbul

Turkey

Date of interview: January 2005

Interviewer: Tuna Saylag

Samuel Coyas is an 82-year-old, caring and happy man. He doesn't really look his age. He has been an accountant for 60 years. This year he and his wife Berta Coyas celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary. Even though he is retired, just in the name of keeping busy, he goes to a friend's office in Eminonu [a business district on the European side of Istanbul] four days a week to do his accounting. He is an enthusiastic newspaper reader, and follows national and international developments closely. He is fond of solving crossword puzzles. He has some health problems like heart disease, and sometimes feels short of breath. Our interviews took place at their house on Hamam Sokak, in Caddebostan [a neighborhood on the Anatolian side, with a concentrated Jewish population] in which Samuel Coyas and his wife have been living for 28 years. They live on the eighth floor of a modern apartment building, which has nine floors and 30 apartments. Their apartment is spacious and well-lighted, and has four rooms.



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### **Family background**

My paternal grandmother's name was Neama Eskenazi Coyas and my grandfather's name was Samuel Eskenazi Coyas. I never met them. They used to live in Haskoy [a Jewish district on the European side of Istanbul], and later on they moved to Yedikule [a district of mainly Greek population on the European side of Istanbul]. My grandfather had died long before I was born. I don't know how and when he died, but I guess he died in 1917. My grandfather was buried in the Haskoy cemetery, but I couldn't find his name in the files. My grandmother, on the other hand, immigrated to the United States with my uncles after World War I, in 1918. My grandfather must have been an educated man. He was working at the Kazlicesme Leather Factory as an accountant. As you can see, being an accountant runs in the family.

My grandmother Neama dressed in a very stylish way. She wouldn't go out without wearing all of her jewelry. That's why they would say, 'Esta pasando la de las djoyas' meaning 'the lady with the jewelry is passing by', when she went out. In time, Coyas [meaning jewelry in Ladino] had become the nickname of the family, and started to be used along with Eskenazi. Because Eskenazi was a very widespread surname, we were given only the surname Coyas, when the 'Surname Law' [1](#) was passed in 1934. There is no other family in Turkey bearing this surname. As far as I can remember, my grandmother died in New York, in 1936 or 1937.

The roots of the Amon Family go all the way to Serez [today Makedonia province, Greece]. In the past, the Amons were a family who raised rabbis. It has been said that esteemed cabbalists were among them, but I don't know the names of any. My maternal grandfather's name was Izak Amon. I never met him either, and my mother didn't speak about him much. I guess he died young, but I don't know the date. My grandfather's brothers, one of whom was Rav Nisim Amon ['Rav' was the way the rabbis were and still are addressed], and his cousins, Rav Sabetay Amon and Rav Moshe Amon, were among the most prominent and respected rabbis of the time. Rav Sabetay Amon would go to the synagogue in Kuzguncuk [a district on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus in Istanbul] with his followers on Friday nights. In doing so he would pass through the bazaar, and if he saw an open shop owned by a Jew, he would immediately warn the man with a sharp look. Upon this warning, the shop owners would close their shops immediately, and go to their homes. He would also give Hebrew and Tora lessons to children in the synagogue.

My maternal grandmother's name was Estreya Amon [nee Illel]. Her family was from Haskoy. Later on they moved to Daghamam [a district on the Asian side of Istanbul]. I can still vividly remember my grandmother. She was a very nice and energetic woman. She would cover her head with a white scarf when she went out. She always spoke Spanish [Ladino] and knew how to write using the Rashi alphabet [2](#). In those times, nobody knew Turkish anyway, especially the women. All the Jews would speak Judeo-Spanish amongst themselves. The ones who spoke Turkish had a very bad accent. I learned Turkish when I started elementary school.

The Amon couple had three children: Vitali, Mazalto and Nisim. My grandmother lived with Nisim Amon, her younger son, till she died. He was a bachelor and was living with them when her husband was still alive. My uncle was the breadwinner of the house. My grandmother was very good at housekeeping. She would always cook and manage everything in the house until her son got married. She never got along with Sofi Taragano, her daughter-in-law. Due to the intense quarrels at home, she aged early, and died in 1934; she wasn't able to see my bar-mitzva. She was very fond of my mother, her only daughter, me and my brother. There was a dish which my grandmother would cook seasonally and which I liked very much called 'balkaba kon zirguela' [Ladino for 'pumpkin dish cooked with damson plums']. The pumpkin was cleaned, washed, then sliced and placed in the pot. After oil and salt was added, the damson plums, with their seeds, were placed over the pumpkin slices. The damson plums would add a sour taste to the dish.

My father, Yasef Eskenazi Coyas, was born in Haskoy. He worked at the Kazlicesme Leather Factory, as a blue-collar worker. He took part in the Gallipoli War (1915-1916) [3](#) when he was doing his military service, and was taken prisoner by the British. He was kept under arrest for two and a half years in London. His family couldn't get any news about him and thought that he had died. I don't have any information about the days he spent under arrest there.

My father had eight siblings, two of whom were women, and the rest were men. All of them, except his sister Rashel Deleon [nee Eskenazi Coyas], emigrated to the United States after World War I. [The Ottoman Empire in World War I] [4](#) Nisim, Sultana Matalon [nee Eskenazi Coyas], Eliezer and Eliya emigrated to the States. Rafael first immigrated to Britain and then to France, and Jak and Leon immigrated to France. The whole family was scattered. At that time, the Ottoman Empire was going through its last and most difficult days. There was a lot of unemployment. The foreign countries provided the immigrants with a lot of facilities. During that period, it was even said that a very large non-Muslim community, mostly Armenians and Syrian Christian Orthodox living in Harput [Elazig province, Eastern Anatolia], had all immigrated to the States.

All of my father's siblings were single when they left Turkey. The ones who immigrated to France got married to Christians, while the ones who immigrated to the States got married to Jews. All of them had children and grandchildren. When my father was set free, and returned home, he had no one from his family left in Turkey, except his sister. According to what my mother used to tell me, the day my father arrived in Istanbul, he went to see his sister Rashel Deleon. That night, it was the first anniversary of his father's death, and a *meldado* [prayer, yearly commemoration of the dead, the equivalent of the Ashkenazi *yahrzeit*] was being chanted at home for his soul. My father hadn't known about his father's death up until then. According to this event, it is possible that my grandfather died in 1917, but I don't have any information about the circumstances of his death. On the same day, my father also learned that his whole family had immigrated.

During certain periods of my life, I often met with my uncles – Rafael, Jak and the youngest one, Leon – who had immigrated to France. They sometimes came with their families to Istanbul. They – Jak and Leon; Rafael never came – usually stayed with us or over at my cousin Kemal Deleon's house. During one of their stays, we took them to the Yalova Spa Hotel, and stayed four or five days there. [Yalova is a district on the shores of the Marmara Sea. People used to go there for the summer.]

My wife, our children and I would sometimes go to Nice. We would either stay over at Leon's house or at a hotel, depending on the circumstances. We would go to Juan Les Pins [a neighborhood in Nice, famous for its beaches] to swim every day. We would greatly enjoy ourselves and laugh at the jokes Lucienne [nee Loubeau], Leon's wife, used to tell, even though neither I nor my wife could speak French well. We liked each other a lot.

All of the three siblings were engaged in the shoe trade. Jak and Rafael owned one shoe shop in which they were partners, and Leon owned another shoe shop of which he was the sole owner. The two shops were in different neighborhoods, but 'JOYAS' [Coyas spelled the French way] was written in capital letters on the signs of both of them. Their houses and business premises were across each other. Rafael's wife's name was Louise. They had no children. Jak's wife's name was Henriette, and they had a daughter named Jacqueline. Their youngest, Leon, was married to Lucienne, and they had a son named Michel Sami and a daughter named Daniela.

Living in Nice, a city that wasn't near Paris, and having Christian wives helped my uncles to survive World War II, without being sent to the camps. [Nice was in Vichy France, a German satellite lead by Marshal Petain, and not under direct German administration like the northern part of the country, including Paris.] But they used to say that they had had very difficult days. Leon had joined the [French] Resistance, who were fighting against the occupation forces, and he lived with

them in the mountains. He had a serious complication related to his heart, probably due to the exhausting days he spent with the opposition forces. Though he was the youngest one amongst the uncles, he was the first one to die, sometime in the 1970s; I don't remember the exact date. Jak died next, and then Rafael. I don't remember the dates either. Later on, though we wrote a great many letters to their wives, we didn't receive any answers. I don't have any information about what their children are doing. We lost contact with them completely.

Unfortunately, I never met my uncles who lived in the States. I remember them exchanging letters with my mother when I was young, and helping her a little bit financially when she became a widow. Also once, my cousin Leon Eskenazi in the States, the son of Uncle Albert, and his wife, and Norma Matalon, the daughter of Aunt Sultana, came to Istanbul in 1965. Though we met then for the first time, we immediately established a strong rapport and chatted for hours. Unfortunately, I couldn't receive any information about them either later on.

My mother, Mazalto Fortune Coyas [nee Amon] was born in 1893 in Daghamam, Istanbul. She was a tall, fair-skinned and very good-looking lady. She didn't cover her head. She went to the Alliance school [see Alliance Israelite Universelle] [5](#) in Kuzguncuk. She spoke French, Spanish and Greek, and knew how to write using both the Latin and the Rashi alphabets. The Amon family settled down in Kuzguncuk when their house was burned down during the legendary Daghamam fire [6](#). My mother, who was newly wed at the time of the fire, used to tell us frequently about this fire: how horrifying it was, how fast it had spread, how the people had fled in panic and didn't have time to save anything from their homes. A lot of Jewish families lost their houses in this big fire.

My father met my mother through his sister Rashel. They were distant relatives anyhow. They got married after a certain period of time and settled down in Yedikule. My father continued working at the leather factory while my mother was a housewife.

## Growing Up

I was born in our house in Yedikule in January 1923 [28 Tevet 5683 in accordance with the Hebrew calendar]. My brother, Izak, was born two years later. We were both sent to the Mestra [Greek kindergarten]. I learned Greek there. It was like my mother tongue. When they asked me something in Turkish, I would reply in Greek and say 'Postelani?' meaning 'how would you say it?' and search for the Turkish words in my mind. We had a dog named Florika and I liked him very much.

There was a great love between my mother and father. Unfortunately when my father died of pneumonia at a very early age in 1927 [23 Sevat 5687], my mother felt very desperate and sad. She had become a widow at a very early age, with two little children, and started struggling for existence. I was four and my brother was just two years old. That's why I remember my father very vaguely. I only remember him taking me to the bazaar in his arms. This is the only memory left in my mind related to him. My mother dressed in black for a year, wore a black hat and covered her face with a black scarf when she went out. But her mourning lasted all her life. She always talked about our father with love and longing.

My uncle Nisim Amon, who was living with my grandmother on Simitci Tahir Street in Kuzguncuk, took us to live with him when my mother became a widow. That is how we moved to Kuzguncuk. Nisim was very fond of his elder sister, my mother. My uncle supported us both financially and

morally, as a father would do. My aunt Rashel also frequently welcomed us at her house in Yedikule. We would stay there for days. In those times, family ties were very close, and there was a great mutual support amongst relatives.

My uncle's house was quite big. It was three-storied, so we all fitted in easily. There was a living room, hall and kitchen on the ground floor. On the second floor, there were three bedrooms, a large hall and a toilet. On the last floor, there was the attic where all the junk was stored away. We slept on the second floor, in the same room as my mother. I slept on the floor, while my brother slept in my mother's bed. The other rooms were used by my uncle and grandmother. Because the table in the hall on the second floor was bigger, we would use it to dine at when we had guests. We didn't have electricity at home, but we had running water. We would use the brazier for heating. Our cat would always lie down under the hot brazier.

My uncle had had to quit his education in medicine and start working in order to support his family, after he had lost his father. He was a responsible person. He used to speak good French. He was working at a big store and had a good salary. He was a very fastidious man. He would examine his water glass in the light to see whether it had any spots on it or not. He would wear a robe called 'Kurdi' [6](#), with fur lining, when it got cold in winter. During the weekdays, all the men, young or old, would wear long robes called 'entaris' [7](#) at home.

My grandmother's brother Nesim and his wife Klaris would frequently visit us. They didn't have any children. They lived in a neighborhood on the European side. They would stay for one or two months, when they came in the summer. Then the house would cheer up. They were very joyful people. In this way, my mother's sadness would fade away, if only for a short while.

My elder uncle, Vitali, wasn't like his brother Nisim at all. He was handsome, and full of life. He really liked enjoying himself. He wasn't like my younger uncle, who was sensible and responsible. He would never help his younger brother, who took care of both his mother and us. When he was doing his military service in Tekirdag [a city in the Thrace region, where many Jews lived], he met Merkada Saltiel, the daughter of one of the rich families of the city. They fell in love and got married. They immigrated to Cuba in 1924, due to unemployment, after their three daughters - Estreya, Vida and Fortune - were born. There, they had a son, whom they named Izak. They stayed in Havana for six years, and returned to Istanbul in 1930, when the circumstances over there also got worse. I remember the day on which they arrived, on a big ship, at the Istanbul Port, very well. We - my mother, my uncle and I - went to meet them. They settled down in Azap Kapi [a district on the European side of Istanbul] later on. His wife was a dressmaker. My uncle, on the other hand, never had a decent job all his life. He did everything, but never stuck to any of his jobs. At some stage, he even opened up a hamburger-shop in Persembе Bazaar [a trade center in Karakoy]. He died in hospital in 1955 having lost his sanity because of diabetes.

During the years we used to live with my uncle Nisim, my mother was trying to make some money by buying sewing supplies from the wholesaler and trying to sell them to her friends. Our comfort lasted for five or six years, till my uncle Nisim got married. From then on the atmosphere at home became uneasy. Sofi Taragano, my uncle's wife, was disturbed by our presence in the house. Upon this, we moved into the attic. As I mentioned earlier, my grandmother and Aunt Sofi didn't get along with each other either. Their fights were so famous in the neighborhood that we, the two siblings, would run to our mother in fear, when the screaming started. My mother, who couldn't



stand this uneasy atmosphere, decided to leave the house after a while, in 1933, though my uncle never wanted her to do so. After this incident, a coldness between the two siblings started, and they stopped seeing each other.

We then rented an apartment in a house that belonged to an Armenian named Araksi, on the same street. The apartment had two rooms. We had a wooden divan, a table, and a few chairs. I would sleep in the living room, while my brother slept in the same bed as my mother. We didn't have electricity; our only means of lighting was a gas lamp. We had running-water and would use a brazier for heating. We would heat the water, and wash ourselves in the wash-basin at home. Sometimes we would go to the hamam [Turkish bath]. My mother would wash the clothes by hand on a wash-board, and would do the ironing with the iron, which she warmed on the brazier. She used to cook our food on a coal stove called 'furfur' ['ornaya' in Ladino]. The 'furfur' was either fixed at the kitchen counter or was portable. It looked like a 10-kg oil can. First clay, then coal was placed in the stove. And a heat resistant grill was placed at the very top of the stove so you could place a pot on top of it. After lighting up the coal, the fire was fanned to keep it going.

That year, my mother started to work for an Armenian dressmaker in Uskudar [a district on the Asian side of Istanbul] for one lira a day – our monthly house rent was 4 liras – in order to make a living for us. She would leave home in the mornings, and go to work on foot, in order to save money. The distance between our house and her workplace was three kilometers. She would prepare our lunch before she left. I was ten and my brother was around eight years old. We would play with the ball or marbles in the street all day long till my mother came home. We would play with the ball reluctantly, fearing that our shoes, which were already old, would wear out even more. My mother, who had become desperate once, had cut the upper parts of her boots, which were left from her teenage years, and gave me the cut boots to wear.

I often saw my mother crying, and cried as well because I couldn't bear to see her cry. We had a lot of difficulties getting by. We bought our coal from the coal-seller Anastas [Greek name] either weekly or in kilograms. We couldn't afford to buy good oranges, and bought from the rotten fruits called 'tokadikas' [meaning 'touched' in Ladino] because they were cheaper. Whenever my mother was hard up, she would cut a piece from her 'kolana' [gold chain necklace in Ladino], which my father had bought her, and sell it, in order to be able to pay the rent. The necklace was one meter long.

Later on, when she became tired of going to work, she left her job in Uskudar and started sewing ties at home. One day, a thief broke into the house and stole her sewing machine when we had gone out to take some air. My mother felt very sad. Her livelihood was gone. A few days later, she sold the chain-watch, the last memory left to us from my father, and bought a new sewing machine.

My mother didn't lose contact with my aunt Sultana and my uncles, my father's brothers, who had immigrated to the States. She often exchanged letters with them. They would sometimes send money, in small amounts, to help us. When my aunt Sultana once sent a check for 150 dollars, we had to go to the Ottoman Bank on Voyvoda Street in Karakoy to cash it. We settled our rent and coal debts first, and then we went shopping. We were so happy that day, as if it was a festival! I'll never forget that day.

I started school at the 45th state Jewish elementary school in Kuzguncuk in 1929. The school changed its building three times. Finally, it moved to the very big house of Marko Pasha [9](#), which was situated in the upper part of Kuzguncuk. Turkish grammar was the subject which I liked most and was most successful at in school. I was a good student, in general. Our next-door neighbor, Madam Viktorya, taught me French for free. I owe the little bit of French I speak today to her. We didn't have much of a regular reading habit. There were only religious books in French and Hebrew, which had been left from my grandfather, at home. Later on, as I grew up, I started reading novels by writers like Alexandre Dumas [(1802-1870): French novelist and dramatist], and Michel Zevaco [(1860-1918): French novelist, professor and filmmaker] in Turkish. I even used to read one page to my mother each night. She liked this very much.

Like all other children of the age of six or seven, my brother and I went to the Mahaziketora, or to prayers in the afternoons for two hours. My mother attached a lot of importance to this. However, we only went on weekends during the school season. In the summertime, during holidays, we would go three to four times a week. One year a hazan [chazzan] came to Kuzguncuk, and set up a children's choir. We would sing some of the prayers, all together.

We weren't very religious, but trefa [treyf] meat definitely didn't enter our house. My mother would neither work on Shabat [Sabbath], nor touch the fire. We liked all the holidays and celebrated them according to the traditions. My mother would always sew us new cotton flannel pajamas during Rosh Ashana [Rosh Hashanah]. The Pesah [Pesach] preparations would start days before, and the whole house would be cleaned. The loksa [Pesach dishes] came out. There was even a special frying pan used for burmuelos [10](#). It was taken out of the closet and made ready for use. My mother would cook the 'Chufletes' dish, special to this holiday.

I couldn't go on with my education after elementary school because our financial situation wasn't good and I had to work. Poverty and having no father had matured me at a young age. Meanwhile the time for my bar-mitzva had come. My mother started preparing for it according to her means. She took me to Bahcekapi [a shopping street in Eminonu], and bought me a proper suit for my bar-mitzva. I didn't want her to have any expenses. Though I told her that this much preparation wasn't necessary, she didn't listen to me and said, 'Whatever is needed, will be done. I will not make you feel that you have no father.' She had Rav Avram Amram prepare a speech for me.

We celebrated my bar-mitzva at the upper synagogue [Virane Synagogue, built in 1840]. I gave a long speech, about ten pages, in Spanish, which I had memorized with a lot of difficulty. It was a very emotional speech, which also referred a little to our situation. Generally it was composed of sentences, which emphasized growing up without a father, and how our mother made sacrifices and raised us all on her own. All of the guests' eyes were filled with tears. We didn't make any other preparations besides this. Because I went to the synagogue, I knew all the prayers by heart. Then all the relatives came home to congratulate me. The house was filled up. We offered them lemonade and almond candy with a spoon. I don't remember receiving any presents. My mother was content for having been able to organize a ceremony, however small, for her elder son.

Two years later, unfortunately, we didn't have the same means for my brother. We celebrated Izak's bar-mitzva in the same synagogue without a speech having been prepared, only by carrying out the basic religious requirements.

Religion was a way of life in those times. Naturally, most of the families were devout. They would definitely send their children to the synagogue, and to the Mahaziketora. There were two synagogues in Kuzguncuk. The name of the first one, in the lower area close to the sea and the main street, was Kal de Abasho [lower synagogue] or Beth Yaakov [the big synagogue, built in 1878]. The name of the other one, in the upper part, on the corner where Tinman Musa and Yakup Street intersect, was Kal de Ariva [upper synagogue] or Virane Synagogue. In fact, they were close to each other. [These synagogues are still in use today]. Four tefilas [tefillah] were conducted every morning, and the synagogues would fill up for all four.

There were a lot of rabbis and hazans in Kuzguncuk. Rabbi Sabetay Amon, Rabbi Simon Benshushe, Rabbi Avram Amram and Rabbi Michel Abut were only some of them. They all had long beards. There was also a shohet [shochet]. There wasn't a mikve [mikveh], but there were two hamams. Dag Hamam was on Icadiye Street, and Little Hamam was on Meshruta Street. There was no yeshiva. When there was a meldado, all the rabbis would drop by that house, and would read the mishna, till melder [prayer] time. This was called 'Ezger' [a group of mainly old people who read the tefilin for people who do not have the time or the inclination to do so themselves. They got paid for it. They also went around houses to read for the souls of the dead].

We would definitely go to the prayers on Saturdays. The fire wasn't touched on Shabat. The gypsies did this job, and they would go around the streets and let the families know that they had arrived by shouting 'Bellows, bellows'. Also on Saturdays, the rabbis and religious men would gather in the synagogue's courtyard and read religious books, the Gemara. Afterwards they would summarize and debate it. In the afternoons, seuda shlishit [last Sabbath meal after mincha] was always served. Most of the families in Kuzguncuk were engaged in the paper trade, were poor and had difficulties getting by. These people wouldn't buy their coal all at once, but in kilograms. The rich ones would bring charcoal on ox-carts to their houses. This was burned on the braziers.

When a patient who couldn't walk had to be taken to a doctor or hospital, howdah-like stretchers, which were covered by curtains on all sides, and carried by a few people, were used. These were called 'Mafa'. On the other hand, horse carriages called 'Talika' were preferred for going around. A taxi in Kuzguncuk would be an extraordinary event. Everybody would gather around the taxi, and watch it. The streets were cobbled. There was no fixed marketplace. We had mobile greengrocers, yoghurt and fabric-sellers, who came to our doors. They would go around selling their goods which were loaded on donkeys.

We didn't have a club or an association. People would get together either in the synagogues or at homes. The synagogues had taken the role of social clubs in Kuzguncuk. The Jews lived in ghettos like Haskoy, Balat, Kuledibi and Ortakoy [see Jewish residence in Istanbul] [11](#). [Editor's note: There definitely existed a synagogue in these neighborhoods. The Jews lived in places around the synagogue, and had their own way of life.]

Kuzguncuk had been a Jewish town since the beginning of the 17th century. Many Jews and Greeks lived there. On the other hand, the number of Turks and Armenians living in Kuzguncuk was small. The Jews of old times [pilgrims] thought the Kuzguncuk area was very sacred because they believed that this land was the last stop on their way to Jerusalem. Therefore, the religious Jews preferred to be buried in the Kuzguncuk cemetery in Nakkastepe [district on the Asian side of Istanbul], in cases when they didn't reach the Promised Land. The house in which the Chief Rabbi



Deputy elections were held, is also there. [The Secular Council met there in 1872 to elect the Chief Rabbi. After much debate they selected Moshe Halevi as the Hahambashi of Istanbul.]

We were all like siblings. In general we weren't subjected to any hostile behavior from Turks. There wasn't any anti-Semitism in Kuzguncuk when I was young. But there always existed an uneasiness and fear within us, Jews. We tried to keep a low profile. Our mother would always warn us and say: 'Don't ever get involved in fights with the Turks.' We lived in a passive and introvert manner. We had slowly started to feel that the tolerant atmosphere we had had during the Ottoman period, wasn't present any more after the [Turkish] Republic [12](#) was founded. I suppose, this was the greatest factor in constituting our low-profile life model. Besides, incidents like the rising nationalist movements, assimilation efforts, and the Thrace Events [13](#) had made us very cowardly, especially when the many families who had escaped the Thrace Events settled down in Kuzguncuk. There was nobody around us who showed interest in politics. Anyhow, the number of non-Muslims taking part in politics and state affairs declined after the Turkish Republic was founded.

The most important political event I remember from my childhood is the death of Ataturk [14](#). I went to Dolmabahce Palace, like all the citizens of Istanbul. The line of people extended for kilometers. They were waiting to pass by his corpse and see Ata for the last time. The visit lasted for three days and three nights. All of Istanbul was there during the funeral. A lot of tears were shed. Ataturk's corpse was brought to the Seraglio, on a military carriage pulled by the generals, after a march which lasted hours. Then it was placed on a war ship, which then went to the Haydarpasa Train Station, in order for the corpse to be taken to Ankara. It was so crowded everywhere, that I was only able to watch the ceremony from Yuksek Kaldirim [the steep slope which connects Karakoy to Tunel]. A great ceremony was also prepared in Ankara. We all felt very sad. We couldn't accept that he didn't exist anymore. Turkey had lost her father.

There were a lot of Jewish tradesmen in Kuzguncuk, like the grocer, the butcher, the greengrocer, the dressmaker, people engaged in the textile business, and the cobbler. Besides, there were also educated people like the pharmacist Gabay [Sephardic name], and the doctors Dr. Amon, Dr. Robert Karmona, Dr. Pizante, Dr. Jozef Bardavit, and merchants, who were engaged in the dye and paper trade. Of course, there existed a class distinction between the certain levels of society. The ones who were rich lived near the sea, whereas the poor ones lived around the river bed region called 'Vinya' [vineyard]. The neighborhood relations were very sincere. When we made visits, we would offer to each other coffee, and sometimes 'atramus' and 'liparidas'. [Atramus: a kind of legume like the broad bean. The grains of the bean were washed and left in salty water for two days. The grains, which became yellowish, were peeled and eaten. Only Jews ate this. Liparidas: a kind of salted and dried fish.]

Men would spend their time either at the coffee houses or by going around with their friends, when they didn't work. Everybody could go to these coffee houses. They played either cards or backgammon and chatted while drinking tea and coffee. These places were favored especially after work and during holidays. Women would usually stay at home. Families would sometimes go to Baglarbasi [a neighborhood, where mostly Armenians lived], to watch the theatrical company. The most famous actor of the company was an Armenian named Karakas. He used to play all the leading roles. Someone from the company would come on a horse carriage, and announce the program with a megaphone: 'Othello or The Wife of an Arab [this was a slogan of the announcer of the play Othello, referring to Desdemona, the wife of Othello, the Moor or in other words Arab] is

going to be staged in our theater this Sunday'. They would go through all the remote streets making this announcement.

Later on, when the era of cinema began, we started watching silent films on a raised deck. When the film started, a man would go to the piano next to the curtain and start playing it. In this way, the silence was broken. I watched the first sound movie at the Beylerbeyi Cinema, which our school had taken us to. It was Tarzan. I remember watching the film and being totally amazed. I liked it very much. From that moment on, we kept shouting 'Aaaaaaa', like Tarzan did in the movie.

On [Turkish] Independence Day [15](#) arches were set up, students and soldiers would perform official parades on the main streets. Apart from these kinds of celebrations, Ayios Pantelemon, the Greek Church in Kuzguncuk, would prepare a big fair once a year and the whole of Icadiye Street would be decorated with flags. This day, which coincided with the summer season, was celebrated as the Saint's Day, if I'm not mistaken, the one who gave the church its name. The Greek coffee houses would all set up their tables outside. Greeks from all over Istanbul would come and pray first, and then would drink the healing water from the spring of the church. Entertainment was prepared at night. Everybody would dine, sing, and dance together. Jew or Turk, we would all go to the fair and enjoy ourselves. Everybody was looking forward to this day with anticipation. Besides, also during Easter, which coincided with our Pesah holiday, Icadiye Street was decorated with flowers. We would sing and dance, with the hand organ accompanying us. As the poetess Beki L. Bahar said, Kuzguncuk was a town, where 'the ezan [the call to prayer for Muslims], the can [church bell], and the hazan lived together in love.'

Our very religious neighbor, Marko Cerasi, found me my first job. Monsieur Cerasi would say 'al ken va vinir a la tefila, le var topar echo' meaning 'I'll find jobs for whoever comes to tefila'. In this way, he encouraged us to go to the synagogue every morning. My first job was to work with a cap dealer on Mercan Slope [a trade center in Sultanhamam, on the European side of Istanbul] for 1.5 liras a week, at the age of 13. My job there was to cut the rough material around the caps, and arrange them. But the regular cutting work damaged my hands within a short period of time. All my fingers got swollen. Besides, the money I received was only sufficient for my ferry ticket. I quit working there after a month and started at another place, which made military uniforms. I also quit that job, because I was paid monthly, not weekly. My mother didn't have enough to provide for my travel expenses, all through the month.

After a little while, Sami, the son of our neighbor Baruh, placed me as an apprentice at the Farhi Textile Wholesale Shop in Sultanhamam. I used to do all the cleaning and office-boy jobs there. Within time, I started measuring the fabric rolls. The same firm had a retailer branch in Karakoy. Later on they placed me there to work. I stayed in that firm till I was drafted. The Farhis were a rich family. They used to live in the well-known Cumhuriyet Apartmani [Republic Apartment in Taksim, a luxurious apartment building which housed the richest families of the time]. Mr. Farhi's wife was the sister of Albert Siyon, the 'glass king' of the time. Unfortunately, the Siyons lost all of their fortune after the Wealth Tax [16](#) was introduced. The Wealth Tax didn't affect us, because we were poor. But we heard that a lot of wealthy Jewish families like the Siyons suffered from it.

## **During the War**

I was drafted at the age of 19, on 25th October 1942. World War II was going on with all its violence. I did my military service for three and a half years, in Akhisar, Adana and Ankara. They

gathered all of us at the Sultan Ahmet Mosque in Eminonu [also known as the 'Blue Mosque'] before the first distribution to our units. We were crammed into the mosque. They kept us waiting there for three days. We slept on the floors. The toilets were very dirty. They took us to a hamam, near the Sirkeci synagogue on the last day. The water wasn't running properly. We stepped into the showers with our shoes on. They put our clothing into very hot pipes called 'irons', and killed all the microbes. Then the posting started. They put us on ships filled with sheep and goats, and took us to Bandirma [the Asian side of the Sea of Marmara]. There, we were placed one over the other in black wagons, which were like the ones that carried the Jews during World War II.

In the morning, we arrived in Akhisar [a suburb in the Aegean Region]. They gave us a ration of food, comprised of olives, raisins and tahina. Then, carrying heavy backpacks, we walked for 25 kilometers till we reached the 18th battalion. They vaccinated everyone for typhoid fever. After we had worked in road construction for two months, they sent us to Devebagirtan. There, they separated the Jews and the Armenians, and sent us, the Jews, to Manisa [a town in the Aegean], to the so-called Jewish Farm. [The so-called Jewish Farm was Kayalioglu School, built by Jews that had settled in Akhisar (near Konya). Students would learn about agriculture, applying its theories in the gardens and fields that belonged to the school and they even had a winery in the basement of the school building.] It had a big siyon [magen David] at its gate. Jews used to live there in the past. After staying there for one or two days, they sent us to Ankara.

There were a lot of young Jews who were doing their military service at the Ankara Youth Park. They sent me to the Cubuk Dam, which was in the vicinity. The soldiers used to drink alcoholic beverages regularly there. When a group of us, and I was part of that group, complained about this to the higher officials, we were sent to the Adana Road Headquarters Seyhan River regulator construction for being informers. [Adana is a town in the Mediterranean.] The Germans were responsible for the construction and used the soldiers as workers. Three of us would walk, the dam's water running below us, on the narrow wooden beams, which were 50-60 meters high, and carry another beam on our shoulders. My legs used to shake with fear.

A few days later, the commander took me on as an adjutant upon his wife's wish, who had just given birth to their child. Most of the people in road construction were rough people. 95 percent of them were Armenians. I guess, the commander had chosen me because I was young and had decent looks. As an adjutant, I did the cleaning and shopping and so forth, in other words everything that was asked from me. In this way, I was saved from carrying beams up on the heights. After two months, when the commander was assigned somewhere else, I asked to be appointed to another post in order not to have to return to my old one. Upon this, I was assigned to the Taskopru [an administrative district of Adana] Team Chief Commandership, as a typist. I learned how to type there. The other soldiers were working in road construction. The famous singer Dario Moreno [17](#) was also with us. He used to sing and play his guitar at the Adana Officer's Club.

Each time some part of the road construction was completed, our unit would move on towards the border. Except for the work, life was very monotonous there. We were in the middle of open fields, like deserts, and slept in tents. There were a lot of Armenians among us. Anyways, the Armenians were always assigned to road-works. One of them was a skilled actor; I don't remember the name now. One day he asked our commander for permission to stage a play. He started to prepare things once our commander had given him permission to do so. He gave a job to everyone. Soon, a stage was constructed with the beams and pieces of wood that were scattered around. Our actor friend

gave everyone a part to play and put on the play 'A good judge of people'. [The play was based on a novel by Andre Maurois (1885-1967): pseudonym of Emile Herzog: French biographer, novelist and essayist.] I played a woman's role because of my 'petite' looks. I don't remember the plot, but the play was a comedy. We had rehearsed a lot and memorized our lines. Most of our Armenian friends were talented when it came to the arts, and thus created all of our costumes, make-up, and sets. They had me wear a dress and a bonnet, and with the make-up done, they turned me into a good-looking lady. We performed the play three or four times. The commanders and the other soldiers watched us and burst out laughing.

The road had reached Ceyhan [an administrative district of Adana]. The commander here would drink at night and then go into the tents of the soldiers and either make them sing or beat them.

Due to the events that had taken place in history, they would approach the Armenians suspiciously, and didn't want to let them out of their sight. Furthermore, when one day the news spread that President Ismet Inonu [18](#) would pass through Adana, as a precautionary measure, they withdrew the Armenians from the construction site for a few days. They usually had the Jews work for airport construction at the Air Force Headquarters.

The road construction in Adana reached Hassa [border gate of Iskenderun with Syria]. We were changing places according to the construction. One day, in 1944, we heard that 18 Jewish soldiers working in road construction, two of whom were from Kuzguncuk, had fled to Israel [British Mandate Palestine] via Syria [French Mandate]. I was the first one to hear the news because I was working in the office. That year they abolished the Road Construction Units [19](#). They sent me and two of my friends to do office work at the Ankara Mobilization Head Office. There, we had the chance to read top secret documents; they had two moons on them as a marker. Most of them included warnings about Armenians, saying that they should be watched closely. We demolished all the documents by tearing them apart.

It was the war years. In the military we didn't receive much information from the outside world. We sometimes learned from friends who were discharged how the war went on, and what the Germans' situation was. But we learned everything when we returned to civil life. We had heard about the ship, Struma [20](#), which departed from Constanta [today Romania], and was sunk in the Black Sea; but the Wealth Tax, was the thing most spoken about. It was said that many people had gone bankrupt and that some non-Muslims had been deported to Askale, due to the Wealth Tax. There were also wealthy young men in the military. These would cry whenever they heard from their families. Their fathers were taken away. Everything they had - even their coffee cups - were taken.

My uncle Nisim Amon also lost all of his fortune during this period. He had three children, one of whom was a girl, Estreya, and the two others were boys, Izak and Jojo. Before the Wealth Tax, he used to run a haberdashery store and had a Turkish partner. His business was quite good. But when he was asked to pay the Wealth Tax, he had to sell his share to his partner, in order to pay the Wealth Tax. He had to move from the house he lived in to a smaller, cheaper one. Later on, he had to work as an office-boy at the firm he had once owned. His former partner had become his boss. He couldn't accept the situation and changed jobs. At his new workplace, they often sent him to Anatolia, to sell goods. His standard of living declined considerably. His financial situation never got back to its former state.

The ones who were drafted to the 20 military reserve classes [21](#) did their military service at the same time I did. These people were up to 30 years old and had been drafted before. During that period so many people were drafted that most of the families were left without men. Especially in small cities, only the old, women and children remained. Many years later, my father-in-law, Hayim Baruh, would tell us that he too had been sent to Askale. During that period, his wife was the one to support the family, taking care of both the business and home.

I spent the last years of my military service in Ankara. It was very cold there. Close to the time of my discharge, I got pneumonia. They took me to Ankara Gulhane Military Hospital [today's Gulhane Military Medical Academy, founded as a military school and hospital in Topkapi, Istanbul in 1898 and transferred to Ankara in 1941.] I came very close to death. I remember the doctor having a consultation about me, as if I was an important case, with his students. Later, because a nurse gave me a wrong calcium shot, my arm was left damaged. Upon this, they gave me six months' leave and sent me home. In this way, my military service ended in 1945. My brother Izak was drafted and sent to Sivas six months after my discharge.

I never met any refugees from Europe. Only before the war, in 1935-1936, I had heard that the Brod brothers, who were among the biggest textile traders of Sultanhamam, and of German Jewish origin, protected the Jewish factory owners, who had fled from the dreadful turn of events in Germany and come to Turkey. I also heard that the brothers had helped the ones who wanted to go to other countries.

The war years were tough years. The conditions in both civil and military life were really hard. People suffered under food scarcity. It wasn't possible to find flour. Sugar and bread were bought by ration books. Raisins were used instead of sugar. There was blackout each night. We would cover our windows tightly with thick, dark curtains. We lived in fear that the Germans would attack any minute. Rumors were spread among the Jews, that gas chambers were being prepared in Edirne. [Editor's note: After Germany occupied Greece and Bulgaria they were at the Turkish borders in Thrace and rumors were spreading that as soon as the Nazis arrived in Istanbul, they would use the ovens of the local Balat bakery, 'Los Ornos de Balat', to exterminate the Turkish Jewry. This created considerable anxiety among the latter, though the story, apparently was entirely without foundation.]

Sometime after I came back from the military, I started working at the Bedikoglu firm on Cakmakcilar Slope [the slope extending from Mercan to Beyazit in Eminonu], which was engaged in textile business. I measured the fabric rolls and sold the material. My boss was of Syrian origin. My salary was more satisfactory compared to the past. We were again living in Kuzguncuk.

All of my friends were Jewish. We weren't members of any association or club. My greatest hobby was the cinema. On weekends we would go to the cinemas in Beyoglu, and then to the Greek pastry shop in Tepebasi, to eat a special kind of cake, 'milfoy' ['millefeuille' in French, a small layered cake made of puff pastry filled with custard and cream]. Cars were very rare. We would always use the ferry and the tram, and sometimes go in horse carriages. We didn't go on holidays, but went swimming, to Buyukada [the biggest of the Prince Islands in the Sea of Marmara, near Istanbul], and met friends on Sundays.

My best friend was Izak Bonofiyel. He lived in Kuledibi [district around the Galata Tower in Istanbul]. He was two years younger than me. He was very tall. He was engaged to Suzan, who was



one of our female friends, and got married before me. They had two sons. We couldn't keep our close relationship after the military service was over. I think they now live in Nisantasi [district on the European side of Istanbul].

We especially met with my aunt Rashel very often. Because they lived in Yedikule we would first take the ferry from Kuzguncuk to Eminonu, and then get on the train in Sirkeci to go and see them. [Sirkeci is the main railway station on the European side for trains to and from Europe.]

## **After the War**

When the state of Israel was founded in 1948, we felt so happy that we celebrated it like a festival. Especially the day the Israeli Consulate was opened in Taksim was worth participating. A large crowd had gathered. All of us were shouting 'Long live Israel', with Israeli flags in our hands. It was an unforgettable day. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Israel. I don't know whether we could have this kind of public celebration today or not, if the same event was to take place again. During that period, a big immigration wave from Turkey to Israel took place. There was a lot of propaganda. Many of our acquaintances and relatives left. Some stayed, some returned many years later.

In time, especially after my son went to study at the university in Israel, the idea of emigrating started to take shape in our minds. We even started financial preparations for it. But we couldn't make it, couldn't change our way of life. The ones who went and returned depressed us. Life conditions weren't easy there. We gave up. But we still go visiting the country every year.

I went on with my work at the Bedikoglu firm. Meanwhile, the government had made the keeping of an accounting book obligatory for all merchants. Upon this, a young man named Zeki Abaci, who had a degree in economics, was employed to do the job. Since I helped him, I started learning about accounting as time went by. I was quite eager for knowledge. I went to Bab-i-ali [a neighborhood near Eminonu, where a large number of bookstores and newspaper printing houses were located] to buy books on accounting. I expanded my knowledge. Zeki would check the things I did. He encouraged me by saying: 'You can do this work. And I'm here, whenever you need me.' I started to become known in the market. Within time the number of the firms whose accounting I did increased to 20. Back then we didn't have calculators, and I would spend hours at night after dinner, trying to balance the books. When the first calculator appeared, I immediately bought one. I don't remember the brand, but the second one I bought was a Facit [Swedish mechanical calculator, the first model came out as early as 1918]. My children grew up, listening to the sounds of this machine.

In business life I met some [22](#) people from Salonika, who were of Jewish origin, but had become Muslims later on. But none of them were my friends. Most of them knew Spanish. Their cemeteries were in a different place. They were in Uskudar-Bulbul Deresi [see Donme Cemetery in Uskudar] [23](#). All of them were well-educated and owned businesses. They were regarded as non-Muslims [by the state authorities] during the Wealth Tax period, and had become liable for the Wealth Tax.

I got engaged twice, after the military. But we didn't get along, and I was separated from both of them. Later on, I got engaged to Bulisa Baruh, who was born in Tekirdag in 1932, through 'proposition' [arranged marriage]. My cousin Jak [derivative of Yaakov] Deleon introduced us. Jak's

wife Viktorya and Bulisa's uncle Aron Ojalvo were siblings. Bulisa would sometimes come to Istanbul to visit her uncle. Once it was clear that we liked each other, my uncle Jozef Deleon and Bulisa's father, Hayim Baruh, got together and came to an agreement. I received 3,000 liras as dowry. A few months later, my mother, my brother, my aunt Rashel and her husband Jozef, their son Cako [derivative of Yaakov] and his wife Viktorya, and my cousin Estreya, uncle Nisim Amon's daughter, all went to Tekirdag by bus for the engagement. In those times, we could either go to Tekirdag by bus in four hours or by ship in six hours.

The Baruh family lived in the Jewish neighborhood. There, we were welcomed in a very nice way. The house was filled with friends and relatives, who had come to congratulate us. Long tables were set up, we ate and drank, and stayed over at their house for two days. Some of them went to my mother-in-law's sister to stay over night, as there wasn't enough space left for them to sleep. My uncle Jozef Deleon slipped our engagement rings on our fingers. I had brought a red heart-shaped box of chocolates, as a present. We were engaged for a year [before we got married].

Bulisa was educated up to the elementary level. During that period, Tekirdag wasn't a developed city. Girls weren't sent to secondary school, but were apprenticed to dressmakers to learn the job. My fiancée spoke Turkish and Spanish, and like all the other girls who grew up in the provinces, knew how to sew and do needlework. During our engagement period, she often came to Istanbul and stayed over at our place. Meanwhile, we had moved to a larger house – my brother, mother and I – again in Kuzguncuk.

Later on, we started calling my wife Berta, to be more modern. We would always speak Spanish amongst ourselves. My fiancée had five siblings, of which three were girls – Neli, Ester and Mari – and two were boys, Izak and Liya. Berta was the eldest of the siblings, and thus the biggest helper of her mother. She brought up the youngest one, Liya, or Eli.

My mother-in-law, Rebeka Baruh, was a housewife. She was very capable. She could do anything from planting seeds to cobbling, and from painting walls to sewing. At the same time she was very 'aver livyana' [Ladino for 'humorous'].

My father-in-law, Hayim Baruh, was originally from the Island of Marmara [in the Marmara Sea]. He owned a textile and a grocery shop in Tekirdag. He worked together with his elder son, Izak.

Their house, located in the Jewish neighborhood, was two-storied. There was a big hall, a room, a large kitchen, and a toilet at the entrance. On the upper floor there was again a large hall and two rooms. The furniture was composed of a cupboard made out of wire, a table, a sofa, four or five chairs, and a few beds. They had a small garden, in which they planted vegetables. There was also a well in the garden. In order to keep the melons, watermelons and the drinks cool in summer, they would hang them in the well. They were middle-class people. My mother-in-law and my father-in-law always spoke Spanish. They knew the Rashi alphabet. They were moderately religious. They would celebrate the holidays and go to the synagogues. They didn't pay much attention to Shabat.

As the years passed, all of my wife's siblings except Liya got married when they were still quite young. Izak got married to Suzi Nasi, the daughter of the Jewish neighborhood's chief in Tekirdag. They had two sons, Vitali and Yuda. They lived in Tekirdag for a long time. But when their children came to Istanbul for their education, and the Jewish population in Tekirdag started decreasing, they sold all their possessions, left Tekirdag and came to Istanbul to settle down here.

Neli got married to Jak Malki, a cheese manufacturer from Edirne, and went there as a bride. They had two sons, Beto and Vitali. They came to Istanbul for the same reasons I just mentioned, and at about the same time. The other two girls also came to Istanbul and settled down here.

Ester married Avram Mizrahi, from the same neighborhood, and Mari married Hayim Barokas, from Corlu [a city in Thrace]. Ester and her family lived in Kuledibi, while Mari and her family lived in Ortakoy. The Mizrahi family immigrated to Israel in 1968, after their two sons were born.

Mari had two daughters whose names were Suzi and Beti. But unfortunately she lost her husband at a very young age [in 1981], and then her elder daughter, who had leukemia, at the age of 23. She didn't get married again. She lives with her daughter and grandchildren in Istanbul.

We used to go to Tekirdag with the children for 15 days in the summertime to visit my in-laws, when they were still living there. The other sisters would also come with their families, and the two-storied house would be filled up to the last mattress. It was delightful. Especially on Shabat mornings, when the men came home from the neighborhood's synagogue, all the family would sit at the 'dezayuno' [breakfast] table, which was prepared by my mother-in-law, and had everything on in, from pastry to watermelons, and raki [24](#), cooled in the well. We could never get enough of it. Then we would go to the seashore, for long walks. We chatted with relatives and friends, who we met on the streets.

Years later, at the beginning of the 1970s, if I remember correctly, when my mother-in-law and my father-in-law learned that their youngest son, Liya, who had become a doctor and was in London then, had decided to emigrate to Israel, they decided to leave their business and house in Tekirdag to their eldest son, Izak, and emigrate to Israel. They did so and lived in Bat Yam till the end of their lives. Both of them died in 1981, 26 days apart from each other. Liya specialized in ophthalmology and became a very famous doctor [Dr. Eli Baruh], and the pride of the family.

Our official wedding ceremony took place in the Beyoglu registry office on a Saturday. Our close relatives didn't leave us alone. Our witnesses were my uncle Jozef Deleon and Albert Eleivy, who was a very close family friend. We received a lot of flowers from our friends and colleagues. After the ceremony we gave out 'bonbonyeras' [wedding candies] to everyone. My wife wore a tailor-made black suit and a pink hat. She held a bouquet of gladioli in her hand.

Our wedding took place in accordance with our traditions in the Beth Yaakov Synagogue in Kuzguncuk. We were married on 31st December 1950. All of our relatives and friends attended the ceremony. Chela, the daughter of my cousin Cako and Viktorya, was the flower girl. They had her wear a long dress, which looked like the wedding-dress. Later on, all of us went to the Reks Studio in Kadikoy to have our photograph taken.

We had borrowed Berta's wedding-dress, from our Greek family dressmaker, Eventiya, who lived in Yedikule. My mother had known her for years. When my mother went to Eventiya to have a wedding-dress made, she told my mother that her own, which she had sewn herself, was in quite a good condition. Upon this, my fiancée decided to try it on, and saw that the moiree gown fitted her as if it had been made for her. We rented my black tuxedo from the 'Horozlu' shop. This shop was in Tunel, on Galip Dede Street. It was a very old company. The owners were the Taragano family. Especially the Jewish men would rent what they needed such as a black tie, hat, gloves and bow ties for their weddings from this shop. The shop still exists today.

In the evening, we gave a dinner-party for all our relatives and friends at home. But after a few hours we left them at home and went to the Park Hotel in Yesilkoy, for our honeymoon. We stayed there for three days. It was one of the nicest hotels at the time.

My mother and my brother were living with us. Our house was quite big. My son, Yasef Jojo Coyas, was born on 3rd June 1952 at Zeynep Kamil Hospital in Uskudar. We had his brit milla at home. At that time, moel Geron used to perform these operations. A circumcision robe was sewn from crepe de Chine for the baby. My mother carried and placed him on a pillow which was on my uncle Nisim's lap – finally the two siblings had become reconciled – and then the circumcision took place. All of our relatives and close friends were present at the ceremony. Later on, a big table was set up. We all dined together, and handed out candies, as had become the custom. He was the first grandchild of both families [the Baruh and Coyas family], and hence the darling of his uncles and aunts. He was a very naughty child. We sent him to the Mestra nearby, at the age of three. Atina, Marika and Pandeli, two Greek sisters and their brother, were looking after small Jewish children in their small and simple home. This was the only kindergarten facility in Kuzguncuk.

In the meantime, I had managed to buy a small refrigerator and an Orion brand radio for our home.

We had another son in 1954, who we named Hayim. But he was only able to live for a month, due to a sickness [intestine abnormality] from birth. He was at the hospital throughout this month, with his mother.

In 1955, I bought the second floor of a three-storey apartment building [Sumbul Apartments] that had been built in front of our home. We moved there.

In 1955, the events of 6th-7th September [25](#) happened. That day, my uncle Leon and his wife Lucienne, my cousin Kemal Deleon and his wife Merso, were over at our house for a visit. My wife was pregnant with our third child. All of a sudden, we heard noises coming from the street. When we went down, we saw that everything was in flames and that some people were attacking the homes of non-Muslims. At that time the newspapers published a second print run, saying that the Greeks had burnt Ataturk's house in Salonika. The public was enraged. Our guests had left to go to the ferry station, but they came back upon witnessing the chaos. My uncle who was living in France said that 'they had seen World War II, but nothing like that'. Our Turkish neighbors saved us from absolute disaster by telling the attackers that there weren't any Greeks or Jews there, but only Muslims. They saved our lives. We all hung Turkish flags on our balconies in an attempt to prevent the attacks.

The next day we had to go to Beyoglu for some business. The scene was unbelievable. Shops had been burnt and looted. Silverware, furs, fabrics, refrigerators, furniture and many valuable goods were scattered in pieces on the muddy ground. All doors and windows were broken and stores had been looted. There were rumors of rapes in Yedikule, which had a large Greek population. Towards the evening, going out into the streets was banned, and tanks started patrolling the streets. But it was too late. It was witnessed that some people became rich in two days after the incidents. After a while, the Cyprus conflict [26](#) started.

My daughter, Fortune Tuna Saylag [nee Coyas], was born on 19th March 1956. She was also born at Zeynep Kamil Hospital. On the 40th day we had the vijola [27](#) at home. My daughter had black hair unlike my son. She was a better-behaved child, compared to her brother. She didn't crawl on

her knees, but on her bottom, by rubbing it from left to right over the floor. Everyone who saw her laughed. When she turned three, we also sent her to the Mestra.

My brother, Izak Coyas, was born in 1925 in our house in Yedikule, just like me. We grew up like twins. We lived through our childhood difficulties together. Though I was only two years older than him, he put me in place of our father. My mother also sent him to the Mestra, then to the Marko Pasha elementary school and the Mahaziketora. After his bar-mitzva, which took place at the Beth Nisim synagogue, he started working for a cap-dealer. After I came back from the military, he was drafted as a soldier and went to Sivas for 36 months. He lived with us till he got married. He got married in 1954, to Kadem Sevevi, the daughter of a family from Ankara, through proposition. He left us and settled down in an apartment with his wife, near our place.

In 1956 they had a son named Jojo, and then, in 1960, a daughter named Fortune. After a while, he bought the apartment below mine on the ground floor and became my neighbor. In this way, we were all together again. Our wives also got along very well. We lived in peace and love for years. We celebrated the holidays together, usually at my place. Our children grew up like siblings.

My brother was very fond of my son, Jojo, as he was his first nephew. He used to take him out quite a lot, especially when he was single. As he was a very patient person, who loved children very much, this habit of his continued after he had his own children. He would gather both mine and his children, and take them to the cinema, or to Luna Park [amusement park], or to the parks on Sundays. He would usually buy presents and have little surprises for them. My brother, in a way, was the Santa Claus for our children. His wife was like a second mother to my children. When I went on trips with my wife, we always left our children with them. My son and daughter would feel happy about our leaving instead of feeling sad.

Izak was engaged in the shirt trade with an Armenian partner at Cakmakcilar Slope for many years. They lived in Kuzguncuk till 1977. When the Jewish population in Kuzguncuk decreased, they sold their house there and moved to Caddebostan. He retired after marrying off his children. When they lost their daughter-in-law at a very young age to cancer, five years ago, they moved closer to his son, who had become a widower with two children, in order to support him. This went on till his wife Kadem had a stroke. Upon this, they returned to their home. His daughter immigrated to Israel with her family seven years ago. Our relation, based on love, is like in the old times. We visit them every week, on Saturdays.

In 1958, on the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the state of Israel, I went to 'la Medina' [Ladino for 'The State', here meaning Israel] for the first time. The country was developing slowly. Immigrants were being given encouraging rights [aid and support]. I visited relatives, and did some sightseeing.

I was very fond of traveling and seeing new places. We went on our first boat trip to the Mediterranean countries in 1962. From then on we spent all the summer holidays either going to Israel or visiting other countries. Most of the time, we would take the children with us.

We had a large and harmonious circle of friends in Kuzguncuk. We still meet with the ones who are still alive today. We would always speak Spanish among ourselves. All of our children were mostly the same age and would spend their time together. We would gather in our houses by turns on Saturday nights. We would have dinner, chat, play cards, and enjoy ourselves. The men would play



poker and the women, cooncan. Our friend, Izak Franco, had a very nice voice. He would sing Greek songs or Turkish Classical Music, and we would listen to him with great pleasure. Sometimes we would go to the cinema, theater, or to the fish restaurants on the Bosphorus – mostly to the Kuyu Restaurant in Arnavutkoy, on the European side – or to night clubs that had music like Guney Park, Sato, and Gasgonyali Toma. There was the Sunar Cinema and the City State Theater, near our place, in Uskudar.

When the weather was good, we would go for picnics on Sundays, to Polonezkoy, Sile, Yakacik, and Kulaksiz. [Towns on the Anatolian side, within two hours' reach of Istanbul.] We would also go to the Kucuksu Beach [a neighborhood on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus, half an hour's drive from Kuzguncuk] for swimming. When we went for picnics, each mother would prepare something to eat, like dry koftes [meat balls, popular in Turkey and the Balkans], stuffed peppers, and 'filikas' [Ladino term for flaky pastry, filled with cheese/minced meat/aubergines]. Then we would eat all together, sitting in the grass, in the open air. Our laughter and jokes could be heard all over the place.

We would usually get on the public bus, and go to Kanlica [a neighborhood on the Bosphorus, famous for its yoghurt], to eat yoghurt by the sea. Our children also had their share in all these trips. Neither of us had their own private cars, but we were so many that we rented either a bus or a minibus to go for picnics or swimming. We usually went to Yalova or Cinarcik [a town near Bursa, famous for its hot springs] all together, for holidays, and stayed there for seven to ten days. Especially in the spring, we would go to the Camlica Hill, to get some fresh air. In order to go to Camlica, we first climbed up a long, steep slope, which connected Kuzguncuk to Fistikagaci, then we took the tram to Kisikli, and then we would walk all the way to Camlica. Those places were untouched then. Istanbul's population wasn't as intense as it is today. There were no settlements or establishments on Camlica.

The Kuzguncuk hills, or Bella Vista, were also very nice. Especially the hill called 'Three Pine Nuts', taking its name from the three old and big pine-nut trees on it. We would go around the green fields and pick daisies and poppies. Today, instead of the green, you can see the slums covering the hills of Kuzguncuk.

We were always in contact with our relatives. We would always visit our elders, during the holidays, especially my uncle Nisim and my aunt, who used to live in Kadikoy. We used to meet with our siblings every week. I got along especially well with Hayim and Avram, my wife's sisters' husbands. Avram and Ester Mizrahi, used to live in Kuledibi, while Hayim and Mari Barokas lived in Ortakoy. Because we lived in Kuzguncuk, we always used the ferry to go the European side. The Bosphorus Bridge hadn't been constructed yet.

We were carrying on with our traditions, celebrating Purim, Hanuka [Chanukkah], Kipur [Yom Kippur] and all the other holidays. We would go to the synagogue during Pesah and Rosh Ashana, we would get together with my brother, and the two families would have the holiday meal at our house. The usage of loksa didn't exist anymore. We would chant the Agada [Haggadah] for two nights at Pesah. Special dishes were prepared for the holidays. My wife could cook very well, just like her mother. I liked albondigas de prasa [leek meatballs] the most.

Usually we didn't pay much attention to the kasherut [kashrut], but we never ate trefa meat during

the holidays. We didn't pay much attention to Shabat either, but usually our wives wouldn't cook or work on Saturdays.

On Shabat days a different atmosphere prevailed in Kuzguncuk. After having breakfast at home, the Jewish ladies would put on some make-up and their most stylish dresses and go out for a walk. The public watched them in admiration. The ladies would go to the tea house near the ferry station and would watch the sea, while eating pumpkin seeds, and chatting. Everybody knew that the day was special for Jews.

Because we didn't know how they would react, and whether or not they shared our feelings, we didn't speak about Judaism or Israel with the broad public. We spoke Spanish and Turkish with our children. But they always replied in Turkish to us. They understand Spanish very well, but can't speak it well enough.

We buried our elders in the Jewish cemeteries and had religious ceremonies. We chanted the Kadish ourselves. In the old times, we would say the yearly prayers for the souls of those we lost at home, and we would have dinner afterwards. But in recent years we have been doing this in the synagogue because we have grown too old [to organize it at home].

My boss closed down the shop in 1963 and emigrated to the United States. I opened up a new store and took over the customers. I knew most of them anyways. I also started running an accounting office at the same place.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the good middle-class families of Kuzguncuk started to leave the place slowly because migration had started to Kuzguncuk, and the quality of the people who came wasn't the same. Some of the Jews moved to Moda, others to Sisli, which was the most popular neighborhood at the time. The ones who didn't want to leave the Anatolian side, preferred Kadikoy and its vicinity. The old way of living didn't exist anymore. We moved to Nisantasi reluctantly, after a while, when all of our friends had left Kuzguncuk. Our house there was on rental. Our daughter was happy with this situation, because she was close to both her school and her friends.

We started going to Buyukada in the summer. We used to rent a house, which belonged to a Greek baker, near the ferry station. Some of our friends were also here. We weren't members of a club. Generally we would swim, or sit in tea gardens in the open air and chat. Since there weren't any motor vehicles, the air was calm and clean. It was the women and the young who enjoyed the place most. Our summer adventure lasted for five or six years, till our daughter got married. Later on we moved to Caddebostan, and hence didn't go to a summer house any more.

Probably because I hadn't been able to study, I attached as much importance to my children's education as I could. My son started to study at the Marko Pasha School when he reached the age of elementary school education. Anyway, we didn't have any other school in our neighborhood. Meanwhile, he attended the Mahaziketora three times a week. All of his friends were from here. He started to attend the private Tarhan College, which had just opened then, after finishing elementary school. The curriculum concentrated on teaching English. In those times, the Jewish school in Sishane, Bene Berit was how people used to call it, wasn't very good.

We celebrated my son's bar-mitzva in 1965, in the Beth Yaakov Synagogue in Kuzguncuk. His uncle Liya prepared his speech. All the family bought new outfits for this special day. My wife had the

dressmaker Evantiya sew a new dress for her to wear at the synagogue and the festive dinner, given at night. She rented her hat from the famous hat-dealer Katya in Beyoglu. The synagogue was filled with our friends, relatives and neighbors. We gave out candies at the end of the ceremony. We also entertained our close friends at a dinner party, which we gave at the Lido Hall in Ortakoy. It was summer and hence the party took place outside, near the pool. The guests were entertained with dance music played by an orchestra. Lido was among the most popular entertainment halls of the time. I danced the first dance with my daughter, while my wife danced with our son.

At that time, my wife's youngest brother, Liya, was studying medicine in Istanbul. He was living with us, while his family was in Tekirdag. He was like a son to us. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine the same year my son graduated from High School, in 1969. [see English High School for Boys] [28](#) We decided to send both of them to a language school in London, in order for them to improve their English. We arranged the school and the places where they would stay. I went with them and helped them to get settled. A year later, my son and his uncle informed us that they had decided to go to Israel and continue with their studies there. Two years before that, my son had joined a 45-day trip, organized by the Israeli Consulate for the presentation of Israel, and had come back very impressed by Medina. During that period, many young people were emigrating. Also at that time, a lot of confrontations were taking place, between the rightist and leftist students at the universities in Turkey. [see Terror at Turkish universities] [29](#) It was impossible to get a proper education here.

My son graduated from the Sociology Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem [30](#). In 1981 he married Melek Gundogan, a pharmacist from Adana. We had the wedding in Israel, in a Sephardic Kal [synagogue] on Allenby [a major street in Jerusalem.]. Afterwards we had a dinner party for our guests in the hall of the synagogue. All of our friends and relatives came to the wedding, but nobody was able to come from Turkey, except for my daughter.

Today they have a 19-year-old daughter called Lisa and an 18-year-old son called Shmuel. My son is working in the administrative department of a hospital and his wife in a pharmacy. They live in Bat Yam. My grandson has just finished high school. He will start his military service in two months. We visit them frequently.

My daughter Fortune Tuna went to the newly opened Uskudar Turkish Girls College for her elementary education. She was hard-working like her brother. Then she took entrance exams for a few private French schools. She passed them all, but we preferred the Saint-Benoit Girls High School because the transportation situation was easier.

When my daughter was a young girl, the friends she hung out with were all Jewish. She used to go to Judaic clubs like Amical [31](#) and take part in their social activities. She would organize parties and quizzes, and perform in plays at these clubs. After finishing high school with a good grade, she took her university entrance exams. She was admitted to the Business Administration Department of Marmara University. In the meantime she was dating Albert Baruh Saylag, whom a relative had introduced to her. After four of five months his family came and asked for our permission for their son to marry her. We accepted, and they got engaged.

My son-in-law had graduated from the Pharmaceutical Faculty shortly before. His father was a gynecologist. They lived in Fenerbahce [a district on the Asian side of Istanbul]. He worked in the

State Railroads Hospital. His wife didn't work.

At the end of 1975, we agreed to this marriage. Immediately after that my son-in-law went first to Samsun and then to Bandirma, to complete his military duty of 18 months as an officer. We performed the engagement ceremony in the house, within the family, in April 1976. My uncle Nisim, who was still alive then, slipped the rings on their fingers.

Because of the situation in the universities in those days, we didn't want our daughter to continue going to school. But she insisted and started university. Her wedding took place on 9th October 1977 when she was in her second year. Before the wedding, my daughter and I went to Paris. In this way, we were able to make a trip together while she was still single. They got married at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. [32](#) It was a very nice and crowded ceremony. Everyone was excited because this was the first wedding in the family. My son in Israel and some relatives had come to Istanbul for the wedding. We gave a dinner party for friends and relatives at the Tarabya Hotel. There was also live music. Everyone danced and had fun. The newly-weds went to Izmir for their honeymoon.

We moved to our new apartment in Caddebostan after the wedding. The apartment below us was vacant. My daughter and son-in-law rented it. We watched our grandchildren grow up. As the conditions didn't permit it, my son-in-law couldn't work in his field, and started working for a company owned by three Jewish partners involved in selling tires. He is still working there. My daughter didn't work since her husband didn't want her to. Their first daughter, Sara Selin, was born in 1980, and their second daughter, Lisy, in 1984.

My family is an inseparable part of the Turkish Jewish Community. Maybe we are not very religious, but we have a very strong feeling of belonging. I believe we have passed this feeling on to our children and grandchildren, too. My daughter and grandchildren are members of many Jewish organizations, like GKD [33](#), and FKD [34](#). They spend their spare time there doing voluntary work. They organize parties, conferences and theater shows with their friends, and educate children. My daughter writes articles on art for the Jewish newspaper, Shalom. [35](#)

We are members of a nearby Jewish club [Goztepe Cultural Association]. We frequently take part in the activities, like going to concerts and the theater, celebrating the holidays, but are not working actively.

The way I practice religion hasn't changed. However, my son-in-law and grandchildren have been following the kasherut laws for seven or eight years.

I go to the synagogue on holidays or whenever there is a religious ceremony. My wife gathers the family frequently. She cooks traditional Sephardic dishes she has learned from my and her own mother, and teaches her grandchildren how to make them. Previously we would be more people getting together on holidays. My son-in-law's parents' uncle and aunt would join us too. Since we lost them, except the aunt, the number of people has decreased. Sometimes we go to Israel to my son's, to celebrate Pesah.

My wife meets with her friends twice on weekdays, and plays cards. Other than that, we spend our time together. We go to restaurants, to the theater, and shopping. Sometimes we gather at home with friends and chat or watch television. We go on vacation in summer. We mostly go to a hotel on

the beach. We can't go abroad as much as we used to, due to our age.

Four days a week, between 10am and 3pm, I go to a friend's shop and do the accounting. The purpose is to get out of the house.

I had a serious heart attack after a Far East trip in 1995. I've been through very hard times. They treated me with the 'balloon' method [percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty]. That same year I sold my shop and retired.

The synagogue attacks in 1986 [see 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue] [36](#) and 2003 [see 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues] [37](#) were terrible. Innocent people unaware of anything were killed. We lost friends in both incidents. We felt so sad, and miserable.

At this age my and my wife's only expectation from life is good health and the well-being of our children and grandchildren. I think that our grandchildren have a bright future. They are both well-educated, responsible young girls. Selin works as an architect, and Lisya is on her way to becoming a mathematician [computer programmer].

And our duty is to live the life God has assigned to us, without being a burden to anyone.

## **GLOSSARY:**

### **[1](#) Surname Law**

Passed on 21st June 1934, in the early years of the Turkish Republic, requiring every citizen to acquire a surname. Up to then the Muslims, contrary to the Jews and Christians, were mostly called by their father's name beside their own

### **[2](#) Rashi alphabet**

A Hebrew alphabet traditionally used for Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105) commentaries of the Bible and the Talmud, it is also the traditional alphabet of Judeo-Spanish. The Judeo-Spanish alphabet also used certain characters to denote the Spanish sounds that are alien to the Hebrew phonetics. Judeo-Spanish religious as well as secular texts were written in Rashi letters up until the introduction of the Latin alphabet, first by Alliance Israelite Universelle after 1860.

### **[3](#) Gallipoli War**

In order to establish contact with Russia through its Black Sea ports occupying the Ottoman Straits (Dardanelles and Bosphorus) was of strategic importance for the Entente at the beginning of World War I. In March 1915, 16 British army divisions landed in Gallipoli (European side of the Dardanelles) and attacks followed in April and in August. The war resulted in immense losses and sufferings on both sides. Although two beach heads were established the British were not able to further penetrate into Ottoman lands against the army of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Ataturk) and finally evacuated in February 1916.



#### **4 The Ottoman Empire in World War I**

The Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, as they were the ones fighting the traditional Ottoman enemy: the Russian Empire. During the winter of 1914-15 the Ottomans launched an ill prepared campaign in the Caucasus against Russia with the hope to be able to turn the local Turkish-speaking Russian subjects (Azerbaijan) to their sides. Instead the Russian counter-offensive drove the Ottomans back behind the borders and Russia occupied North Eastern Anatolia. In the spring of 1915 the Entente was to occupy the straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and ensure the passage of supply to the Russian Black Sea ports. British troops landed in Gallipoli (Dardanelles) but were not able to expand their beachheads against the army of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Ataturk); they evacuated in February 1916. Although the Ottomans were able to resist the British in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in 1915, they finally took Baghdad in 1917 and drove the Ottomans out of the entire province. Although the Russians made further advance in Eastern Anatolia they left the war after the October Revolution and according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) the Ottomans were able to regain Eastern Anatolia. Due to the Arab Revolt supported by the British as well as the direct British military intervention the Ottomans lost both Palestine and Syria; Mustafa Kemal was able only to withdraw his forces intact to Anatolia. Sultan Mohammed VI (1818-22) was forced to sign an armistice with the Entente (October 1918) and as a result British and French battle ships reached the port of Istanbul. The Sultan finally signed the Peace Treaty in Sevres in August 1920, according to which the Arab and Kurdish provinces and Armenia were lost as well as the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul, and the Aegean littoral was to be given to Greece.

#### **5 Alliance Israelite Universelle**

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum; nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865, then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople in 1867, Shumla (Shumen) in 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those that had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

#### **6 Daghamam fire**

took place in 1921 and spread in the direction of Uskudar-Yeni Mahalle-Icadiye-Sultanbeyli; 600 houses were completely burned down.

## **7 Kurdi**

Long Turkish home gown, lined with fur.

## **8 Entari**

(from the Turkish word 'entari') long-sleeved loose robe for both men and women; came in a variety of cuts for men.

## **9 Marko Pasha (1824-1888)**

born as Marko Apostolidis into a Greek family on Siros Island, he finished his medical education in Istanbul and settled there. He was the first doctor to be given the highest Ottoman title of 'Pasha'. He was the founder of the Turkish Red Crescent (equivalent to the Red Cross). Marko Pasha was known for spending time with his patients and offering them psychological help. In time, he became so renowned for this specialty of his that a saying began to be spread among the people: 'Go and tell Marko Pasha about your troubles', meaning 'there is no one but Marko Pasha who will listen to your troubles.' He is buried in the Kuzguncuk Greek Cemetery.

## **10 Burmoelos (or burmolikos, burlikus)**

A sweetmeat made from matzah, typical for Pesach. First, the matzah is put into water, then squashed and mixed with eggs. Balls are made from the mixture, they are fried and the result is something like donuts.

## **11 Jewish residence in Istanbul**

In the Ottoman Empire, due to the status of the non-Muslim but monotheist communities (Jews and Christians) in the Muslim state, regulated by the Sharia (Muslim religious law) the European style of ghettos did not evolve. Jews and Christians, however, usually resided in their own 'mahalas', that is neighborhoods in the Ottoman cities. Although forbidden to settle near mosques, Jews were allowed to reside virtually anywhere, yet it was the Jewish 'mahala' that remained the typical way of settlement up until recently. In Istanbul, Jews constituted the majority in some areas (e.g. Haskoy), in others they were substantial but still in minority (e.g. Uskudar). There were also cases when Jews lived in mixed neighborhoods, together with Christians and Muslims, sometimes sharing even the same apartment building.

## **12 Turkish Republic**

The Turkish Grand National Assembly gathered for the first time on 23rd April 1920, which signaled the foundation of the Republic. The Assembly organized and directed the Turkish War of Independence. On 1st November 1922, the Assembly abolished the Sultanate, thereby cutting off all ties with the Ottoman Empire. On 29th October 1923, after coming out victorious from the War of Independence, the Turkish Republic was formally established. The Assembly accepted democracy as the way of rule and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was elected the first president. On 30th October 1923, with the premiership of Ismet Inonu the first government was formed.

### **13 The Thrace Events**

In 1934, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, anti-Semitism was rising in Turkey too. In fear of disloyalty the government was aiming at clearing the border regions of the Jewish population. Thrace (European Turkey, bordering with both Bulgaria and Greece) was densely populated with Jews. As a result of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the rightist press riots broke out, Jewish property was looted and women were raped. This caused most of the Jewish population to leave (mostly without their belongings) first for Istanbul and ultimately for Palestine.

### **14 Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)**

Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

### **15 Turkish Independence Day**

National Holiday in Turkey commemorating the foundation of the Turkish Republic on 29th October 1923. The annual celebrations include military parades, student parades, concerts, exhibitions and balls.

### **16 Wealth Tax**

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

### **17 Dario Moreno (1921-1968)**

born as David Arugete into a Sephardic family in the Mezarlikbasi neighborhood of Izmir. After his father's death the family moved to the Asansor neighborhood, where Moreno became famous for his Neapolitan songs. Early in his career, he moved to Paris where he became an internationally

acclaimed singer and actor. He performed alongside Brigitte Bardot in 'The Female' (1959) and Eddie Constantine in 'Ladies First' (1963) as well as in the film classic 'Hotel Paradiso' (1966). In addition he appeared on stage with Jacques Brel, among others. (Information for this entry culled from <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0603916/> and other sources)

## **18 Inonu, Ismet (1884-1973)**

Turkish statesman and politician, the second president of the Turkish Republic. Ismet Inonu played a great role in the victory of the Turkish armies during the Turkish War of Independence. He was also the politician who signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, thereby ensuring the territorial integrity of the country as well as the revision of the previous Treaty of Sevres (1920). He also served Turkey as prime minister various times. He was the 'all-time president' of the CHP Republican People's Party. Ismet Inonu was elected president on 11th November 1938, one day after Ataturk's death. He was successful in keeping Turkey out of World War II.

## **19 Road Construction Units**

Non-Muslims were drafted there to make sure by the military elite that all those, considered unreliable are at one place, under control and without arms. These measures were taken by the military elite, without legal authorization though.

## **20 Struma ship**

In December 1941 the ship took on board some 750 Jews – which was more than seven times its normal passengers' capacity – to take them to Haifa, then Palestine. As none of the passengers had British permits to enter the country, the ship stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, in order for them to get immigration certificates to Palestine but the Turkish authorities did not allow the passengers to disembark. They were given food and medicine by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish community of Istanbul. As the vessel was not seaworthy, it could not leave either. However, in February 1942 the Turks towed the Struma to the Black Sea without water, food or fuel on board. The ship sank the same night and there was only one survivor. In 1978, a Soviet naval history disclosed that a Soviet submarine had sunk the Struma.

## **21 The 20 military classes**

In May 1941 non-Muslims aged 26-45 were called to military service. Some of them had just come back from their military service but were told to report for duty again. Great chaos occurred, as the Turkish officials took men from the streets and from their jobs and sent them to military camps. They were used in road building for a year and disbanded in July 1942.

## **22 Donme**

Crypto Jews in Turkey. They are the descendants of those Jews who, following the example of Shabbatai Tzvi (leader of the major false messianic movement in the 17th century), converted to Islam. They never integrated fully into the Muslim society though and preserved various distinctions: they married among each other, performed services in distinct mosques and buried their dead in separate cemeteries. Up until the Greek annexation of Southern Macedonia (1912,

First Balkan War) they lived in Salonika and were relocated to Ottoman territory (mainly to Istanbul) with most of the rest of the Muslim population later.

### **23 Donme Cemetery in Uskudar**

The predominantly Muslim Uskudar contains no Jewish interest apart from the cemetery in Bulbuldere Street. Opened in the early 20th century, this cemetery serves the Donmes (Jews converted to Islam in the 17th century, yet not fully absorbed in the Muslim society) who had fled Salonika after the city was annexed to Greece (1913). They also maintain a small mosque (Tesvikiye mosque) on the cemetery grounds. The Donmes share the cemetery with other Muslim communities marginal in Istanbul (i.e. Shiites).

### **24 Raki**

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

### **25 Events of 6th-7th September 1955**

Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of immigration occurred after these events and Istanbul was cleansed of its Greek population.

### **26 Cyprus conflict**

At the Treaty of Berlin (1878) the Great Powers, aiming to resolve the 'Eastern Question' by multilateral acts, limited both Ottoman and Russian influence in the 'Near East'. Independence was granted to most of the Balkan states and Cyprus was put under British rule. Greek Cypriots were continuously seeking the unity with Greece and widespread campaigns of terrorism were launched, especially after British authorities deported Archbishop Makarios, leader of the Greek nationalists, in 1956. Turkish Cypriots, with the backing of Turkey, on the other hand were demanding the partition of the island. In 1960 independence was granted and Makarios was elected as president. Large-scale fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots erupted several times and finally a UN peacekeeping force was sent in 1965. Turkish Cypriots demanded official recognition of their organization (which exercised de facto political control in the 30 Turkish enclaves) and the stationing of Turkish troops on the island to offset the influence of the Cypriot National Guard, which was dominated by officers from Greece. In 1974 the Makarios government was overthrown by the National Guard. Both Greece and Turkey mobilized their armed forces. Citing its obligation to protect the Turkish Cypriot community, Turkey invaded Northern Cyprus (20 July), occupied over 30 percent of the island, and displaced about 200,000 Greek Cypriots. In 1975 the island was partitioned into Greek and Turkish territories separated by an UN-occupied buffer zone. In 1983, Turkish Cypriots declared themselves independent from Cyprus; the resulting Turkish Republic of



Northern Cyprus, with Rauf Denktash as president, was recognized only by Turkey. By the late 1990s it was estimated that over half the population of Turkish Cyprus consisted of recent settlers from Turkey. Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, but the north was excluded.

## **27 Vijola**

Sephardic name-giving ceremony for girls at the age of eight to forty days. It is celebrated by the family in the presence of a rabbi, who blesses and gives the child her name.

## **28 English High School for Boys**

Founded in 1905 in the district of the Galata Tower by the British Consulate, primarily to provide comprehensive education for the children of the British colony in Istanbul. In 1911, Sultan Mehmet V gave the British Embassy a 5-storied wooden building in Nisantasi for exclusively schooling purposes. The school gained the status of high school in 1951 and also became coeducational. In 1979 it was nationalized and renamed as Nisantasi Anatolian Lycee.

## **29 Terror at Turkish universities**

In the period of 1975-1980 extreme tension arose between the so-called leftist and rightist fraction of the student body. The fight was about whether making the Turkish Republic a religious Islamic state (leftist position) or preserve the secular nature (rightist position). There were further fights within the leftist fraction too, between the communists and socialists. University education turned into chaos already in 1975: instruction almost stopped, and many students were scared to attend classes, as there were a great number of murders. The only university that was able to continue with instruction was Bosphorus University, mainly because all of its student body was basically leftist. It took five years for the government to finally pacify the situation by a military coup in 1980.

## **30 Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

In accordance with the idea of Zionism of founding a university of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, the cornerstone of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was laid atop Mount Scopus in 1918, and the university was ceremoniously opened on 1st April 1925, in the presence of world Jewry and British dignitaries. The First Board of Governors of the University, chaired by Chaim Weizmann, included such personalities as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Martin Buber, Harry Sacher and Felix M. Warburg as well as leading men of letters, religious and academic figures of international renown. By 1947, the university had grown to a large, well-established research and teaching institution, encompassing humanities, science, medicine, education and agriculture (the latter at a campus in Rehovot); the Jewish National and University Library; a university press; and an adult education center. In 1981, the historical Mount Scopus campus again became the main home of the university. It has since continued to grow, with the addition of new buildings, establishment of new programs, and recruitment of outstanding scholars, researchers and students, in fulfillment of its commitment to excellence.

## **31 Amical**

Jewish youth club, formerly located on the first floor at the back of the Sisli Beth Israel Synagogue in Istanbul, and frequented by university students, who took part in social and cultural activities like theater performances, conferences and dance parties.

### **32 Neve Shalom Synagogue**

Situated near the Galata Tower, it is the largest synagogue of Istanbul. Although the present building was erected only in 1952, a synagogue bearing the same name had been standing there as early as the 15th century.

**33** GKD: Goztepe Cultural Association, Jewish social club for people of all ages, founded with the aim of preventing assimilation.

### **34 FKD**

association for protecting the poor, formerly the Bnai Brith of Istanbul.

### **35 Shalom**

Istanbul Jewish weekly, founded by Avram Leyon in 1948. During Leyon's ownership, the paper was entirely in Ladino. Upon the death of its founder in 1985, the newspaper passed into the hands of the Jewish community owned company Gozlem Gazetecilik. It then started to be published in Turkish with one or two pages in Ladino. It is presently distributed to 4,000 subscribers.

### **36 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue**

In September 1986, Islamist terrorists carried out a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the Neve-Shalom synagogue, killing 23. The Turkish government and people were outraged by the attack. The damage was repaired, except for several bullet holes in a seat-back, left as a reminder.

### **37 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues**

On 15th November 2003 two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues. The terrorists drove vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside, however, 26 pedestrians on the street were killed; five of them were Jewish. The material loss was also terrible. The terrorists belonged to the Turkish branch of Al Qaida.