

With My Mum



My mother Ester Levi Bivas (in center) and my second older sister Mireille and I at a coffeehouse behind Saint Joseph highschool in Moda, where we used to go for summers. The owner was a Frenchman named Mr. Jean. We were good friends. The lower part of the coffeehouse was open, it was a public beach. We would swim in the sea from there. Sometimes we would go in from Moda, swim all the way to Kalamis and return. The sea then was really the sea. My mother Esther Levy Bivas was born in 1885 in Balat. From what my aunts told me she was always the top student in her class, and finished primary school, junior high and highschool as valedictorian. My mother who was known to be the most beautiful girl in Balat was of Italian descent. My mother first started to work with the famous industrialist and merchant of the time Lazaro Franco who was of Italian descent. In 1919, through the help of this same person, she was transferred from Salonika to Istanbul Bakirköy [a neighborhood close to the Istanbul Atatürk airport. Previous name: Makriköy] and was appointed as principal to Ittihad ve Terakki Lisesi(highschool) (Union et Progres) which provided education in French just like Galatasaray Sultanisi, and we moved in to a special flat that was designated for us in the school. Within less than two years, in 1921, when my father and mother were appointed gentleman and lady directors of the newly opened Jewish orphanage (Orphelinat) in Ortaköy [a neighborhood on the shores of the Bosphorus Rumeli], this time we moved to a flat that was designated for us in the orphanage and stayed there till 1928. My mother died in 1932 at a very young age. When she was returning from an acquaintance's house in Tünel, she fell and hit her head while trying to get away from dogs that were attacking her in the street and lost her battle in the Or Ahayim hospital that she was taken to three days later. My second older sister Mireille (Meri) was born in 1914. After finishing Haydarpasha Jewish highschool's junior high department, she continued in the American Constantinople College (American Girls'

Highschool) and was married in the Zülfaris Synagogue to Robert Güzelbahar in 1933, she had two daughters. Ezel who we call Dolly, and Emel who we call Pupu. Both of them are graduates of the American College like their mother.