

# Güler Orgun

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Interviewer: Anet Pase

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Güler Orgun is a small woman of 70, with small light brown eyes, short white hair, more Balkan in type than Turkish. She always has a smiling face. She looks like a gentle grandmother who always has a story to tell. She always wears a sort of loose checkered shirt on top of a high-collared T-shirt, slacks and flat-heeled shoes. She lives in the Cengelköy district on the Asian coast of the Bosphorus. She drives her own car. As she puts it, she likes to look for a different occupation, a different excitement every five years. She speaks English and French well, and Ladino and Spanish fairly well. In short, she is someone interesting, whom I always enjoy meeting and chatting with. Only after meeting with her and talking for some time, could I

perceive the person beneath that soft appearance. Güler Orgun has a strong personality. She could decide to settle in Polonezköy, while living in Istanbul and being engaged in commerce. She was then able to end a lucrative business in Polonezköy and undertake something completely different. Güler Orgun now works at Shalom [1](#), in the publication of the monthly supplement El Amaneser [2](#). She also takes a course in Modern Spanish for the Sephardic Jews at the Cervantes Institute of Istanbul.



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## Family background

The house my mother's family lived in was situated in Sirkeci, on the European side of Istanbul. My mother's paternal grandmother lived with them. She was called appropriately 'La Senyora' [Ladino for 'the Lady'], as she was the real mistress of the household. However, I never got to know her real name. Beside my grandfather, La Senyora had also a son called Haim, who went to America and whom, therefore, those of my generation did not know.

My mother's maternal grandmother, Miryam Levi, nee Yafe, also lived with them. I believe she was born in 1847. We called her Nonika - the diminutive of nona, or grandmother. I remember her very well since I was six years old when she died. She was a tiny, dainty lady with white and wavy hair,

and she always wore a 'tülbent' [muslin scarf] tied at the back of her head. Slim and small, she probably weighed no more than 45 kilograms. She must have shrunk in size with age, as many elderly people do. She always wore black.

Nonika died in 1943, probably at age 96. My mother thought that she was a real philosopher in all fields. Like many people in our society, she had a proverb or saying for every situation. Both Nonika and my maternal grandmother, who were born in Istanbul, knew French, but always spoke Ladino [3](#) at home.

Nonika had only one child, my maternal grandmother. When I was born, they had already moved to the neighborhood known as Bankalar [a district on the European side of Istanbul with an important Jewish population]. We, the children of my generation, never knew the house in Sirkeci. The women's days were spent doing housework. As far as I can remember, my family members then didn't go out very much, although they visited their neighbors quite a lot. The whole building was occupied by Jewish families. It was called Rashel Han and located on Bankalar Caddesi. The neighbors were indeed like close relatives. They included the Benaroyas. They went to each other's apartments with no notice at all, all the time.

My grandparents had not been able to pay their 'Varlik Vergisi' [Wealth Tax] [4](#) and most of their furniture, therefore, had to be confiscated. I am not sure whether I was just told about it or just remember it faintly, because I was barely five or six at the time, but I'm quite certain I saw the furniture being taken away by horse carriage, down Bankalar Street.

When the government enforcers came, only a room where Nonika happened to be in at that moment, had the door closed. When they tried to go in, they were told, 'That is a toilet and there is an old lady in there, let us not disturb her.' So they didn't go in. That is how the furniture of that one room wasn't taken away. Nonika said afterwards, 'Had I known the outcome in advance, I'd have stuffed more furniture in there.' But they had come without warning.

After that, very little furniture remained in the apartment - a few chairs, a wooden table, etc. That is why Nonika slept in an ingeniously improvised bed on chairs, as follows: She had six chairs, which she placed three by three, facing each other, and placed a plank on them and a small mattress on top. During the day, they put away the bedding and used the chairs to sit on. My cousin Meri tells me that Nonika loved her and frequently allowed her to sleep on her chair-bed together with her. Nonika had books in Ladino, written in Rashi [5](#) letters and read Meri stories from those books. Meri remembers this vividly.

We were lots of great-grandchildren. She had a brazier in her room. She gathered us around it, and burned cloves to exorcise us, literally. She murmured some things in the process. We sat with crossed legs around the brazier, while she exorcised us by turning her hand holding the cloves over our heads, to protect us from the evil eye. I remember her distinctly - her and those pleasant scents.

I found out recently, from family documents, that my father's father, Izak David Nassi was born in Istanbul in 1855. I believe the family moved to Romania from Istanbul, as they had cousins here, maybe children of cousins. There was a Mayir Araf and an Eskenazi family whom we used to see often. The Eskenazi family's mother was Rashel Eskenazi. She had two sons, Jak and Marsel, and two daughters, Viktorya and Suzan. Another relative of theirs, Beki Eskenazi, was married to a

Yaesh. Their niece was an opera singer in Istanbul, a mezzo soprano, named Süzi Leal.

My grandfather got married in Constanza probably in 1894 and had children there. In Constanza, he worked in a bank called Marmarosh Bank, as a wheat expert, but applying his expertise to the insurance side of banking. Wheat is merchandise that is transported in bulk in big cargo ships. He could evaluate how many tons a shipment weighed just by looking at the wheat hold. Thus the bank could insure the goods. The skill strikes me as utterly extraordinary in retrospect. Later, when we looked at the documents he left us, we realized that he held the title of Doctor. I guess he was a Doctor of agriculture.

Constanza is a city on the Black Sea. My father's family used to live in a house built on steep rocks by the water. The house had a garden, nevertheless. When the family members went to bed, they fell asleep listening to the waves hitting the rocks. This was at the beginning of the 1900s. At that time, they had a horse carriage with a coachman. Their economic situation was quite good - living in a house with a garden, employing a coachman... This implies that working for the insurance department of a bank in those days paid well.

In Constanza, the family used to dress in uncovered [unveiled] fashion. In the only picture we have of my grandfather, he wears the modern clothes of a bank employee of that period, that is to say, a jacket, shirt, etc.

My father's father, my father and his sister used to speak Romanian among themselves. My father's mother, Neama Nassi, had passed away at a young age. They moved to Istanbul two or three years after her death, around 1920. My grandfather had been appointed to the Istanbul branch of the Marmarosh Bank for which he had been working.

Upon their arrival from Romania, the three of them - my aunt Viktorya, my father Henri, and their father Izak Nassi - settled in Altinci Daire [another district on the European side of Istanbul with an important Jewish population]. Afterwards, they moved to a rented apartment in the Findikli neighborhood [a district on the European side of Istanbul, on the shore of the Marmara Sea].

My grandfather worked for two years, but by that time, the Marmarosh Bank was not doing well. The management started to liquidate slowly, dismissing many of their employees. As the first to be dismissed were the elderly, Grandfather's turn came early. He did not work thereafter; he stayed at home and died in 1936 of cirrhosis of the liver.

My father always mentioned his father with respect. It was my mother who talked more about the character or other aspects of her father-in-law. She always mentioned him with love.

A silver pocket watch was passed on to us from my grandfather. My father used to take it out once a month, take it apart with care, clean it with some type of fuel and put it back in his safe. We also had another heirloom, a chiming clock, which hung on our wall. They had brought it from Romania. It was encased in carved wood, with a pendulum, and had been given to my grandparents as a wedding gift. I am lucky and proud to have both the pocket-watch and the chiming clock, which I shall cherish forever.

My father's mother was Neama Nassi. I know little about her other than her name and that she passed away in 1917, when my father was 14. According to my aunt Viktorya, she was in ill health nearly all of her life. This is why she is remembered mostly sitting in an armchair, with covers on

her legs. We have a quilted baby cover she made herself - a cradle cover. The embroidery on it is unbelievably fine, with silver and colored threads. Although she was in poor health, she prepared that cover for a baby Viktorya might have one day. Unfortunately, she died in Romania at a relatively young age.

My mother's father was from Canakkale [a city on the Anatolian shore of the Dardanelles, with an important Jewish community at the time]. His name was Mose Benezra Finanser, and he must have been born, by my estimation, in 1865.

He came to Istanbul to work as a very young man. At first, I believe he owned a street stand, selling towels in the business district of Mahmutpasha [an important retail shopping district on the European side of Istanbul]. Then he married my grandmother, Ester Levi, who was only fourteen years old. They lived in a house in Sirkeci and had nine children together.

Later, my grandfather became an independent salesman of textiles; he sold textiles to shops and derived an income by getting a commission from the owner of the goods of the factory. Many of my uncles did the same or a similar job - one of them owned a wholesale textile shop himself - with the result that the textile business became the equivalent of a family profession or occupation.

At the purchasing power of that time, an earning of a golden lira by my grandfather in a given week, was enough to delight my grandmother who would say, 'This week we are fine, we'll have plenty of food to eat.' Despite their modest income, my mother told me they had a fine, merry life. In fact, she remembered those days with nostalgia. On special occasions like holidays, they would fill baskets with varied foods, hire a boat and go on picnics to the historic Kagithane [a recreation area, formerly a summer residence of the Ottoman Court], on the coast of the Golden Horn. Incidentally, the free day of the week then may have been Friday, instead of Sunday, and besides Saturday for religious Jewish folk. One year, I think they went to Beykoz on the Anatolian side for the duration of the summer.

In Sirkeci, they occupied a house with a big living room, all 16 of them. The 16 included: my grandfather's mother whom they called 'La Senyora,' my mother's grandmother, who was affectionately called 'Nonika,' my grandmother and grandfather, the nine children, plus some uncles and aunts, too, as I am sure of the number 16.

Remarkably, the only person working among those 16 people was my grandfather who, as noted, derived an income by selling textiles, on commission, to shop-owners for resale.

In the house's large living room, the family gathered around a big table, surrounded by couches with lots of cushions on them. Most evenings, after dinner, they told stories and sang songs, with special attention to the children, who dropped off to sleep, starting with the youngest, on the cushioned couches. As each child fell asleep, my grandfather would carry him or her to the upper floor in his arms, and place him or her on his bed. The children were not ordered to go to bed; they were allowed to stay right there, with the grown-ups, until they fell asleep.

My mother had a recollection about her father's military service. As my mother was born in 1900, she was 14 years old when my grandfather went to war at the outbreak of World War I [6](#). He was a fair man, blond, with blue eyes and pink cheeks. My mother remembered, 'One day, a certain time after he left, there was a knock on the door.' My mother answered it and saw a dark, almost black,

thin man she didn't recognize. She ran to her mother saying, 'There is a soldier at the door.' It seems that my grandfather had 'dried out' while he was away and turned into someone emaciated and dark.

Incidentally, in normal times he would drink a small glass of raki [7](#) every evening, just one. So, when that was not possible, he lost his joy and good spirits. 'When he came back,' my mother remembered, 'he started to drink his raki again and soon regained his former weight and fair and pink- cheeked appearance.'

Although I had heard quite a bit about the house in Sirkeci from my mother, I was to learn something new concerning it years later. My uncle Izak had lost his sight due to diabetes and was about to go to Israel. We went to see him off and say good-bye properly. He gathered us around him, my children and all and Uncle Izak said, 'I remember something strange: when I was very small, we used to live in a house in Sirkeci. Another family occupied the upper floor, but we lived as if we belonged to a single household. We would go up an open flight of stairs several times a day. In the hall above, that family had at all times a big cushion, reserved for their grandfather - a blind and very old man. After feeding him in the mornings, they would place him on that cushion for the remainder of the day. A favorite pastime for us, children, was to go up and sit on that cushion with the old man, and listen to him talk to us. I never imagined that the day would come when I myself would become a blind grandfather.'

Thus, I learned that they shared that house with another family which had a blind grandfather. As time went by, the then children grew up, got married and some of them left home and that house. However, my eldest uncle Nisim never left; he always lived with my grandfather.

When the Surname Law [8](#) came into effect, my grandfather's family changed their surname from Benezra to Finanser, even though apparently they didn't have to. At that time, some of the registry officials accepted to register the existing surname, whereas others claimed that a new surname had to be adopted. This is why many people modified their names slightly, registering them as Tamfranko, Barmizrahi, Öztoledo, etc.

## Growing up

When my cousins and I were born, the family had already moved to Bankalar Caddesi. I remember the residence vividly. It was in an apartment building called Rashel Han. It had four rooms and a big hall where they ate, a kitchen, an alaturca bathroom, and a small toilet. Many people lived together in the apartment. There were ceramic-tile stoves almost in every room. In the rooms which didn't have a stove, they had a brazier.

As one entered the apartment, on the right-hand side, stood a big cupboard reaching the ceiling, where they kept their mattresses and beddings during the day. At night, they would spread them out. They could not have separate bedrooms for everyone, because they were so many.

On holidays, like the Anniversary of the Republic, one could observe from the windows the trams decorated with paper flags passing through Bankalar Caddesi. My grandfather sat cross-legged on cushions on the wooden sofa facing the street, smoked the 'narghile' [water-pipe], looking out of the window, and fondled his 'tespîh' or beads on a string.

By the time I start remembering those days, my grandfather was no longer working, but he would unflinching go to see each one of his children on a different day of the week. For example, he came to us on Tuesdays, always walking up Bankalar Caddesi, regardless of the distance. We lived in Taksim [a district on the European side of Istanbul] then, which wasn't near. We knew he would be coming on Tuesdays; so, on those days my mother cooked dry beans and pilav, his favorites, for him. On Fridays, he went to see Alber, and another child on other days, always walking and always wearing a regular suit and a tie - his uniform on those occasions.

'Sari Madam,' now a two-level road in Shishane [a district on the European side of Istanbul, at the corner of the Bankalar street], was an open-air garden/café then. My grandfather had a story about it. After he retired, and when the weather was nice, he used to go to Sari Madam to play backgammon passionately. Those familiar with the game know that backgammon is a game that often generates heated argument and even quarrel...

As grandfather's eyesight began deteriorating with age, his backgammon partners started to cheat by lying about the numbers on the dice he threw, and he started to lose. Never one to give up, he hired a young student whom he paid to sit beside him and read his dice, and he started winning again! This must have been the first and possibly the only occasion in the world when a 'dice reader' was employed... successfully, I might add, in this case.

During his lifetime, my grandfather gathered all of his children and their families in his home for the religious feasts. On a typical Passover seder, we were thirty to thirty-five people around the table. He used to read the Haggadah himself and performed all the rituals meticulously. At the conclusion of the seder, we each took turns kissing his hand. This, too, was part of the ritual. He sat at the head of the table and paid great attention to those traditions up until he passed away. When he died, that tradition died with him.

Throughout his life, Grandfather's children were very respectful, very affectionate towards him. His death and its aftermath made it clear to everyone - and certainly to me - that he, and primarily he, had been the one who had kept the family together. After his death, the various family members went their own ways. After him, there were no more festive gatherings or anything remotely like that. Some of the uncles tried to organize small reunions for a year or two, but they soon realized that it didn't work. The magic had gone with the beloved magician that he was - at least for his grandchildren like me. My grandfather died in Istanbul, in the Bankalar home, in 1952, at approximately 87 years of age.

My maternal grandmother, Ester Benezra Finanser, nee Levi, was born in Istanbul. She was 14 years old when she married Moshe Benezra. They had children immediately, twins, who didn't survive. A year later, my eldest uncle was born. My grandmother was 15 then. They had eight more children in the following years - seven boys and two girls in all - quite an achievement for my grandmother who was her parents' only child. This prompted my mother to say about her mother, 'I don't remember a time when she wasn't pregnant!' My mother was the third child, but the eldest girl.

I was told that when she was pregnant and there was no one in the room, Grandmother used to scrape the whitewash off the walls and eat it, probably to satisfy her need for calcium. Often, people would ask her which of her nine children was her favorite. She would reply, 'For me, each one of them is an only child.'



When my grandfather did his military service during World War I, my grandmother supported the members of the household - which were numerous - by sewing cloth sacks for an exporter of hazelnuts. The exporter supplied the rolls of cloth and my grandmother, with the help of the children, did the cutting up and the sewing. Grandmother knew how to sew other things very well, too, but she had enough of sewing clothes for all her children, and once told my mother, 'Don't ever learn how to sew, because if you do, you'll spend your whole life sewing.'

While they led a modest, family-centered life, they knew a certain Benbasat family, to whom they were very close. Every Thursday, my grandmother packed her children and went to spend the day with Madame Benbasat, her best friend! I believe the Benbasats lived in Sirkeci, too, in a mansion-like house, with many floors, and a large kitchen down a few steps from the street level. There, a number of servants and cooks worked seemingly endlessly. The kitchen's door was never closed, to allow them to serve food to the poor who happened to pass by.

Some of the children were probably already married when the core family moved from Sirkeci to Bankalar. They were by then a much smaller group. In the Bankalar home, there were Nonika, my grandmother Ester, my elder uncle's wife Sara, and my aunt Rashel, who was mentally disadvantaged, but could do physical work - a total of four women in one house, with no need for hired help, which they couldn't afford anyway.

They used to prepare all the traditional Sephardic dishes. I don't know if they followed the kashrut rules. Since the name of a Jewish butcher called Dalva in Shishhane was often mentioned, I suppose they bought kosher meat from him, although I am not sure if they kept a kosher house in all respects.

In the week of Chanukkah, in my grandmother's house, they used to hang a chanukkiyah on the wall. It was metallic, but I don't remember if it was made out of silver. They put oil in it. My grandmother made cotton-wrapped wicks for the occasion. Each night, the entire family gathered standing around the chanukkiyah and recited the appropriate prayer, after which they lit a wick, an additional one every night, until the seventh, when the feast was over. After the prayer and the lighting, they sat, sang songs, and told jokes. Every Friday night, too, my grandmother placed cotton wicks in a special glass, lit them and said a prayer. Once when asked why, she said it was 'for our dead.'

My grandmother stayed home most of the time. The rest of us used to go to see her. She was a tall, slender, darkish, graceful woman. She liked to wear dark clothes, brown or black house dresses, high-necked. When I knew her, her hair had already turned white. She wore her hair in a knot on the back of her head.

She owned a gold chain we called 'kolana.' Later, when she got older, that is to say, when she felt that her end was near, she broke the 'kolana' into pieces and gave a piece to each of her granddaughters, which we cherish as a reminder of her.

My grandmother's death was unusual in its speed and simplicity. One day, my aunt and my grandmother were alone at home for a few hours. Grandmother was sitting on a chair, looking out of the window. At one point she said, 'Rashel, will you fetch me a glass of water; I am thirsty.' By the time Rashel went to the kitchen and came back with the water, Grandmother had gotten up from her chair, lay down on the sofa and died. We always said, 'What a nice way to die. One

minute, she was looking out of the window, a few minutes later, she was gone.'

My uncle Nisim, her eldest son, had died earlier. His death had affected her deeply and caused her to age, to become a really old woman, suddenly. It is said that the loss of a child is the worst thing for a mother. Grandmother was 83 when she died in 1968.

My grandfather had a brother called Haim. My generation didn't know or ever see him. Yet when my mother was still a child, he used to live with them. In 1907, he married Ermoza Zara. She was an aunt of the Zaras who had a shop in Galatasaray [in the center of Beyoglu (Pera), a district on the European side of Istanbul]. I heard that Haim Benezra went to America at the beginning of the 20th century, and that people wondered if husband and wife would separate as a result. However, after a while the wife joined him in America. We never heard of them again.

My father, Henri Nassi, was born in Constanza, Romania, in 1903. His family lived in a beautiful place in a farm-like setting - an independent, detached house built on steep rocks overlooking the sea. They had chicken that roamed in the garden and laid their eggs anywhere. My father, who was the youngest sibling, loved to search for the eggs, before he started going to school, and was delighted when he found some.

My father was very blond, with nearly white hair. My aunt loved her youngest brother; she used to say, 'He was like a small chick. When we wanted to call him for dinner time, we called: 'Dinner is ready, piu piu piu piu piu, Rikutsule!' [the Romanian diminutive for the name Henri].'

This was at the beginning of the 1900s. The family had a horse-carriage and a coachman who used to take the children to school. My father's greatest joy was to sit beside the coachman, especially when he was allowed to hold the reins and the whip.

Their mother-tongue was Romanian. My father knew a little Greek, but just picked up by ear. He came to Istanbul permanently when he was 17, but he never spoke to me about what he did in Romania until then. He was a realist; he lived in the present and thought mostly of tomorrow, never of yesterday. For him, memories were not relevant...

But this changed one special day in 1990, when my daughter was about to go to Scotland for her master's degree and doctorate. Before leaving, we went to see Grandfather and Grandmother one last time, in their home. He took my daughter aside, led her to a small room next to the living room and told her recollections of his childhood in Romania - something he had never done with anyone before, including me. I heard him tell my daughter that he used to sweep floors in a factory, worked at a printer's shop, and did other odd jobs in the summers or in the evenings after school.

My father was born and raised Jewish; I am certain, for example, that he had his bar mitzvah. He had the necessary instruction for it, which I'm sure he always remembered because he had a very good memory. However, a few years after coming to Turkey, and before getting married, he changed both his name and his religion in order to acquire Turkish citizenship. He adopted Islam on paper and the name Avni Tuncer.

When he and his father came to Istanbul, my father started working as an assistant accountant at the Marmarosh Bank, where his father was working. Both worked there for about two years, until 1922. Thanks to his gifts, such as his superior intelligence and very good memory, Father rose quickly to a good position in the bank's accounting department. But at that time, the Marmarosh



Bank's financial situation and prospects started to deteriorate, forcing it to downsize, liquidate and dismiss many people, offering them an indemnity. Significantly, for our story, however, employees who resigned did not qualify for an indemnity. As they dismissed the older employees first, my grandfather's dismissal was impending.

The year was 1922, the end of Turkey's War of Independence [9](#), and the eve of the Republic. Father had already decided to go into commerce on his own. He felt strongly that he did not want to spend the rest of his life as a bank clerk. Besides, the bank was closing down anyway. But since father and son had both been on a fixed salary, they had not accumulated anything remotely resembling a capital.

Before my grandfather's dismissal was due, Father went to the bank's director and said, 'I would like to ask for a favor. You like me and you promoted me. I want to go into commerce on my own, and I need your help. You have been dismissing employees. Could you let me go by dismissing me, so that I can get an indemnity, which I can then use as capital, to start my own business?' At first, the director balked, asking my father not to leave, because the bank appreciated his work.

Later, Father would remember that day as 'the day I committed the greatest faux pas of my life. I told the director, 'Should I stay and remain an employee for the rest of my life?' I didn't realize that the director himself was an employee! It really was a disgraceful thing to say to the kind man. How could I do this! But the man was really mature. He didn't say anything in anger. He just repeated, 'Don't leave, stay,' etc.' But my father said, 'No, I've made up my mind, I'll go into business.' 'In that case,' said the director, 'I'll pretend I dismissed you and pay you the indemnity, but on one condition: You'll take your father along. If you both leave together, I'll give you two indemnities.' My father accepted.

So, with the three months' salary for both of them as capital, he launched his own business formally, with the proper legal registration and all. He was entirely on his own, which he liked. He rented office space in a historic building called Cermanya Han, in Sirkeci, on the corner opposite the establishment Atabek. Cermanya Han, which still exists, is a building with a round tower, which belonged to the Deutsche Orient Bank then, but is owned by the Yapi ve Kredi Bank at present. Father had two rooms on the sixth floor.

One of the first things Father did was to obtain or consult the commercial directories and yearbooks of various countries, which contain information on the manufacturing industries and companies, their products, addresses, etc. He also got himself a typewriter, and started sending 'offers of service' to those addresses.

My father had a talent for languages; he knew French, and he had also picked up some German. He contacted, among others, manufacturers of aluminum kitchenware, glassware, and injectors. There was no manufacturing to speak of in Turkey at the time; practically everything was imported. He wrote, 'I am a young man. I am applying to be your representative in Turkey.'

My father succeeded in obtaining lots of representation rights for a range of goods like thermometers, caps for carbonated-drink bottles, clasps for gloves, etc. He went to the wholesalers of such goods and got orders from them, which he, in turn, passed on to the factories abroad. After the goods arrived and the client paid the factory, the latter paid my father a commission, something like 5 percent, for his services.

Father was then twenty years of age and still a bachelor. The first years of being on his own were hard times, but he managed to support the family.

He got the representation rights of a very important essential oils producer in Switzerland, namely, Chuit, Naef et Cie., which later became Firmenich. This was a business owned by such a prominent family that, when Eisenhower visited Switzerland, he stayed at their mansion.

My father was hard-working, almost a workaholic, and was absorbed with the business day and night - just like I now think of El Amaneser day and night - and succeeded in controlling 80 percent of the market in essential oils. They called him 'Avni Bey, the Essence King.' When he earned this royal title, he hired a secretary and expanded the business. The secretary was a nice young woman called Viki Abuizak. She became like one of the family.

Incidentally, it is possible that Father took a Turkish name earlier because he thought it would help him when starting a business. I should note, however, that all his friends were members of the Jewish community; he never had any non-Jewish friends, ever.

Already while working at the Marmarosh Bank's accounting department, he was a member of the Jewish Amicale society, or club [10](#). On weekends, young people in pairs, a boy and a girl, used to visit the homes of members of the community, with money-boxes, and collected donations for the society. He thus took part in the social life of the community. Then he volunteered to do the accounting - a skill he had developed at the bank - for the community-run Or-ahayim Hospital [11](#) for no pay.

As the years went by, he was more and more busy with his commission work and could not spare time any more to work pro bono for the Or-ahayim Hospital. At that time, a young woman volunteered for the hospital job: my mother! They met as he was transferring the accounts to her. She fell in love with him immediately.

My father was not very tall, 1.74 meters, but largely built; he weighed 80 kilos. His hair, which was originally blond, progressively became light brown. He had brown eyes. He liked to dress elegantly, and had ties of all colors. My mother, Ema Benezra Finanser, was three years older than him. She was 'mignonne,' slim, 48 kilos, 1.58 meters, had bright blue eyes and light brown hair - all in all, a dainty lady.

After a few weeks, during which Mother took over the Hospital's accounting, my father was out of sight. About six months later, my mother was walking in Beyoglu - her family used to live in Bankalar caddesi - when upon reaching the Galatasaray Post Office, it started to rain torrentially. She took refuge under the eaves of a building, trying to figure out how best to cross the street.

Just then, she saw and immediately recognized my father holding a black umbrella and saying, 'Would you allow me to escort you across the street?' She promptly accepted. He opened his umbrella, gave her his arm, and they crossed the street arm in arm under the umbrella. Then my father said, 'How will you walk home? Please, let me accompany you there'... which he did.

That is the moment when it all happened. They made a date to meet again and started to see each other. This was in 1931 or 1932. In the months that followed, whenever he fetched or took her home, he would go up to her apartment and meet my grandparents, who liked him. In time, however, they started to attract people's attention, which gave way to gossip in the community.

People said, 'Avni Bey is seeing a girl, but she is much too young for him.' Although my mother was three years older than my father, she was so petite and dainty that people thought she was much younger than him. My mother enjoyed relating this with a laugh.

Mother was in love with my father and probably so was he with her. He in particular was a serious person. They reportedly said such old-fashioned things to each other -always in French, their common language - that they made me laugh. For instance, my father said - we used to speak French, so I'll say it in French, because the thought and the words are so quaint: 'Je l'avais compromise: je devais lui promettre mariage.' [French for: 'I had compromised her honor, so I had to promise marriage.']

But marriage was not possible. At least not yet, because he had an unmarried sister. At that time, according to tradition, as long as there were unmarried sisters at home, a man could not marry. That is why he said, 'I cannot get married until my sister does. If you accept this fact, we can live together and plan a life together, but marriage will have to wait until my sister herself gets married.'

My mother readily accepted, being so in love. My father then said to my grandmother, 'I want to ask your permission on a serious matter. Ema is my wife in the name of God, and in whose presence I gave her my word. But I cannot marry her because my sister is not yet married. However, please rest assured that I will fulfill all the obligations of a husband to her and never desert her. Please, allow her to live with me.'

Since my father had gone in and out of their house for some time, they had come to know, love and appreciate him for the serious and correct person he was. So, they trusted that he would keep his promise and granted him the permission he asked for. My mother moved to his family's home occupied also by her father-in-law and sister-in-law, and they all lived together for quite a long time, without their being married. I never heard of something so modern, especially so indicative of my grandparents' open-mindedness, in the 1930s!

This was a courageous decision, indeed. The interesting part is that the whole community, that is to say, my mother's father, a simple man who had come from Canakkale, her mother, the local Jewish community, all those who gossiped if they saw two people going out together, everybody accepted the situation. Nobody censured their living together without being married, and nobody turned their backs on them.

Their broad social life continued as before. It is noteworthy that their friendly relations with people of their own social level continued unaffectedly. Nobody seemed to care, maybe because they really considered themselves and lived like married people in every way, but just could not make it official, because of the sister's situation.

When after five years, my aunt got married, I believe - though no one ever admitted it openly - that it was just to end this untenable situation, as my mother had become pregnant with me. Also, they were not getting any younger. My mother was already 37 when she gave birth to me. So, in 1936, they had a double wedding - my father's and his sister's. I was born in 1937.

Five months after I was born, they moved to Talimhane in Taksim [a district on the European side of Istanbul]. My grandfather had already died by then. When I was maybe two, we started going to

Büyükada [a summer resort on one of the islands in the Marmara Sea] for the summers. After summering in various rented houses until I reached five, we bought a house in Büyükada. We used to go to picnics there, with baskets filled with food; the grown-ups used to play cards or backgammon under the pine trees. My father also played a game called 'bezigue' at home.

My father proceeded with his business. He traveled to Europe two or three times a year; acquired more representation rights; and often went to Switzerland to visit that essential oils factory, which was still central to his business. Sales representatives came here from the Swiss factory as well; on those occasions, they visited the clients together.

My father also dealt in hardware, injectors, hot water bottles, hernia belts, etc. He imported all kinds of goods that are sold in pharmacies, other than medicines. The business was booming. He now occupied four rooms on the 6th floor of Cermanya Han. He employed an office boy and two or three qualified staff. When at work, he always wore a suit with a shirt and a tie.

In 1942, the Government imposed the so-called Wealth Tax. The Turkish name my father had acquired earlier helped him weather the infamous tax. Non-Muslims were heavily taxed, but Avni Tuncer, who had a capital of 30,000 liras, was assessed that amount. He was thus able to pay the tax and avoid being punished or fined. He struck bottom, yes, but his possessions were not confiscated. They took away from my grandmother's house, beds, cupboards, etc. but nothing from us.

On the other hand, the Anavi family I knew well did not fare as well, to say the least. They were in the paint business. Their assets, including real estate, were evaluated at 3 million liras at the time. They were taxed 1 million liras, which was not so bad, except for the sad fact that all goods and real estate had to be sold almost immediately. With everyone selling and liquidating their assets at the same time, prices plummeted. The Anavis' possessions worth 3 million liras brought just 700,000 liras, which they paid, but still owed 300,000 liras.

So, in order to force him to pay this debt, but more to punish him, Father Anavi was sent to Askale [labor camp in Eastern Turkey] to work in stone quarries, with the ridiculous daily pay of 125 kurus. How could anyone pay 300,000 liras with a daily pay of 125 kurus! But after several months, the ordeal ended when the tax was rescinded, and the Anavis did not lose their father, which was not true of all those who sent their loved ones to Askale.

Shortly after the Wealth Tax debacle, my father was drafted for the 20 Classes [12](#) by the Armed Forces, together with my uncles. He served for eight months in a place called Dumlupinar, planting trees. He never had anything bad to say about the treatment he received during his military service.

### **During the war**

When World War II started, my father had a commission of 5000 francs owed him by the Swiss factory. He sent them a cable saying, 'Don't send me my commission. Don't even write me about it. Just keep it. I'll let you know when I want it.' They complied. In 1945, when the war was over, he wrote them, 'You can send it to me now.'

With that money as capital, he started his business anew, literally from zero. He was nevertheless, step by step, successful. He still had the factory representations - he had lost none of them. He

started working on commission again. He had also started to import the essential oils for himself, as an importer. The customers placed their orders with him; he imported the goods on his own; and distributed, or resold them. He earned, in the process, both the commission and the profit from the import transaction.

In 1945, when my father started working again, I was eight. By 1947 or 1948, a couple of years after the war, business was doing so well that they could afford to send me to the English High School for Girls of Istanbul, which was an expensive school, and they could buy a house in Büyükdada.

Father bought a car, too, a pre-war 1938 blue Nash. It was like a tank. He was the first member of the family to own a car. He hired a Greek chauffeur, to give him driving lessons. When Father was at work, the chauffeur worked the car as a taxi. At that time, the license plates for private cars and taxis were not different. In two to three months, Father learned how to drive. He used to take people for drives to the Bosphorus, to places like Tarabya [district on the shore of the European side of the Bosphorus], or on picnics to Circir [recreation area and famous drinking water source on European side of Istanbul]. We were very proud to own a car, as nobody we knew did.

The fruits of my father's hard work included then also a rowing boat, on which he installed sails after one year. He and I often went sailing together. Father learned to ride a bicycle at age 48. After that, we went touring around the island on our bicycles. We were friends, my father and I. We did all those things, including swimming, together. He taught swimming to my cousin Meri and myself by throwing us into the sea and saying, 'You'll learn to swim by splashing about.' And we did.

When we were in the city, not the island, we used to go to the cinema with the neighbors every Saturday afternoon, and had dinner somewhere afterwards. Despite his sweetness with me, Father had a hard disposition. I remember one of those post-cinema dinners with mixed feelings. When Father's order - fish with mayonnaise, I remember - arrived late, after everyone else was served, despite assurances that it was ready, Father was so upset that he dumped the plate down the waiter's head and left the restaurant in anger.

When their finances improved, my mother and father made a list of the things they wanted to do or acquire. As my father was very methodical, their wishes were prioritized: first, a house on the island, which they bought; next, a car, which they also got; and then, a trip to Europe and a diamond ring.

## Post war

When the turn had come for the trip to Europe, my father could not get away from his business. He proposed to send my mother, anyway, but as she did not want to go alone, he sent her with his sister on a cruise to Italy, Nice and Marseilles. The year was 1950. The two of us, my father and I, remained behind and had a lot of fun together, as we were such good friends. He took me to eat delicacies like tripe and döner kebab, and taught me how to enjoy life. We had a splendid time, the memory of which lingers.

Then, before my mother was back from her trip, he was seized by a serious illness: meningitis. On her return, my mother found him in hospital. Meningitis is an illness with the dismal recovery rate

of one in a million. If kids struck by it survive, they do so with severe brain damage; grownups simply do not survive... Then, all his friends told him, 'Avni Bey, if working all those years was worthwhile at all, it is for a day like this. Go to France.' My mother and father agreed, and they went to France. He was admitted to a hospital there, had brain surgery but came out of it in a coma. Every evening, the doctors told my mother, like a refrain: 'It is a hopeless case. Be prepared to lose him, because you probably won't find him when you return in the morning.'

He remained in a coma for 15 days straight and had to have a second brain operation. He still lay in a coma, surviving on serums, etc. On the third day after the second surgery, while still in a coma, my mother observed a faint movement on his lips. She put her ear to his mouth and heard him whisper, 'Je ne vais pas mourir, je ne peux pas mourir: J'ai une fille a marier.' [French for: 'I shall not die, I cannot die: I have a daughter to marry off.'] This shows how much he loved me, as well as his strong attachment to life.

After that, slowly, very very slowly, one eye, one lip, one finger a day, he started to recover. It took him three years to achieve a partial recovery, re-learning first sitting and then moving, first by wheel-chair and then on crutches. They stayed there for a full year, which I spent with my Tantika.

At that point, my mother came back, and my father was transferred to a rehabilitation facility in Switzerland. He remained there for about the next two years, moving about on crutches. He returned to Turkey when he was able to graduate to a walking stick and after an absence of nearly three years. He had a capital of 300,000 liras when he got ill; not a penny had remained by the time he was back.

For the third time in his life, Father had to start a business from scratch, with the added difficulty that he had lost his hearing with the meningitis. The ossicles were damaged - a condition that cannot be corrected with a hearing-aid because sounds are heard in such a distorted manner and with such interference as to cause a terrible headache. As he was very intelligent, he could communicate by guessing what people were trying to say. However, the kind of business he was in necessitated visiting customers, showing samples, and actually doing a 'selling' job.

Before Father had gone to France for treatment, the son of a cousin, Jak Eskenazi, was working for him. Jak was a very dynamic and hard-working young man, and had mastered the job. My father left him in charge, and was able to keep his representations. But he lost eventually and seriously. When my father came back, the same Jak Eskenazi, who also turned out to be clever, went to the essential oils factory in Switzerland and told them, 'Avni Bey is back, but he lost his hearing, and he is old and invalid. Take away his agency and give it to me.' And that is what happened, and this, in essence, is how my father lost the Swiss agency.

This was a terrible blow to him, because he thought of Jak as a son. He did not get over this for the rest of his life. To survive, he hired another person to continue with the other, insignificant agencies - dealing in goods like kitchenware, pots and pans, etc. - by sharing the commission fifty-fifty with him. That man followed up the contacts with the clients.

Understandably, my father's social activities practically ended after meningitis struck him at age 49, he spent three years in hospitals, and lost his hearing after that.



The year was now 1958. In the meantime, I had gotten married and divorced, and come back to live and work with my father. When we imported goods, the cases of merchandise went from Customs straight to the client's store. They would telephone and say, for instance, 'I'll pay on 20th June,' and my father would note on a small agenda, 'The firm Voreopulos-Behar will pay 3000 liras on 20th June.' I would say, 'Shouldn't we establish a contract, an IOU?' He would answer, 'Of course not. That man is a businessman in Tahtakale. If he says 20th June, there is no need for an IOU.' And come 20th June, the money would arrive at our office. Those were different times, when paying on time was a matter of honor, and a phone call sufficed.

After Taksim, we lived in a rented apartment in Shishli [district on European side of Istanbul] for a few years. In 1964, my father bought an apartment in Yeshilyurt [suburb on the European side of Istanbul, close to the airport]. It was the first time we owned our own home, not counting the small house on the island. Apartment buildings in Yeshilyurt are surrounded by gardens on four sides. Our apartment was in a three-story building, with seven dwellings. We bought an apartment away from the center of town for my sake.

After one year, I got married and moved to my husband's house, while my parents remained in Yeshilyurt. They were quite happy there. My father used to commute to his office in Sirkeci by train, which was easy for him in his condition.

Father was an authoritarian person; so, when I decided to marry a Muslim Turk, I faced the difficulty of introducing my future husband to him first, before telling my mother. I told my future husband to come to our office in Cermanya Han. Shortly before he appeared, I told my father, 'There is someone I am seeing. He wants to marry me. I invited him to come and meet you.' My father simply said, 'OK.'

Then Günel arrived; I introduced him; he sat down. There was a brief silence, after which my father said, 'I am going to ask you something.' Günel said, 'Go ahead.' My father asked, 'Do you like white [feta] cheese?' Günel was surprised and replied, 'I like it a lot.' 'Well, then,' said my father, 'I give you the girl.' My father liked to joke.

I worked with my father for nine years. By then, we represented an important Dutch factory which produced raw materials for the enamel industry, called Ferro Enamels. I worked until I became pregnant with my second child. I left in 1968, and my husband took over. He worked with my father for ten years, and the business really developed during this time, maybe owing to Günel's enterprising approach or to the business climate, or both... Yet by 1978, both of us had had enough of business life and decided to quit. We so informed the Dutch factory, and they designated another representative.

My father loved life so much, but his life was so limited after the young age of 52! Yet I never heard him complain. He had such a great personality! Only at the very end, in the last six or seven years of his life, when he could hardly see any more, due to cataracts in his eyes, and when, after a lifetime of reading, he could not even read the paper, he told me, 'You cannot imagine how bored I am, not being able to read anything.' That was the only complaint I heard from him in all his life.

After my mother passed away [in 1997], my father continued to live in Yeshilyurt. But one year before his death, his apartment was to be given to a builder, to be demolished and rebuilt. We could not take him with us, because our apartment in Cengelköy [district on the Asian shore of the

Bosphorus] was too small, and my father's physically constrained lifestyle would not fit ours. He was not in a position to live by himself, either; so, he had a caretaker and a cleaning lady.

We rented two adjacent rooms for him in an old people's home on the road to Kayisdagi [district on the Asian side of Istanbul], moved his own furniture there, and arranged one of the rooms as a sitting-room with a sofa where his caretaker or I slept alternately. We furnished the second room as a bedroom for him, with his own TV set, etc. It was like a two-room suite. He lived there for seven months, until his death in 1999, at 96.

My mother's name was Neama, the name of her great aunt, but they called her Ema. Her surname was Benezra at birth but it was changed to Finanser, with the introduction of the Surname Law.

Mother was born in 1900. Birth dates were not known for sure in those times, because births were not promptly registered. My mother 'chose' the 14th of July as her birthday - the date of the French Revolution, which she loved. She had it registered and even celebrated it on occasion.

Mother attended the Alliance [13](#) school in her youth, reaching it from Sirkeci, where they lived, by crossing the Galata Bridge daily on foot and walking all the way to the School in Tünel. She was always the top or the second best pupil of her class. She wore to school the dresses my grandmother sewed for her, either light blue - like the color of her eyes - or white in color.

Mother had eight siblings. As she was the third child, she saw her mother pregnant most of the time and helped raise many of her siblings. She took so much care of her brother Eli, who was 18 years younger, that she loved him more like a son than a brother. She would tell me, 'He is not your uncle, he is your brother.' As I was an only child, this is how I came to have an uncle/brother.

In my mother's youth, her family had close relations with a family called Benbasat. When Mother finished the Alliance school, she started working for the wholesale drug supply company named Sisa-Benbasat, as an assistant accountant. She worked there up until she got married, and she liked to boast about knowing the place and price of some 3000 products the company sold. My mother was an all-around conscientious worker who enjoyed her work.

During World War I, when her father was drafted - possibly at the same time as a couple of his sons - Mother was the only member of the family with an outside income, which enabled the family to survive, other than the contribution of those hazelnut bags that my grandmother used to sew.

My mother carried a great responsibility, indeed, because she had to work not only to support the whole family, but also to pay all the school fees, given the importance they attached to education. She used to worry about what would happen to them if something were to prevent her from working.

The worry was to prove justified, in her eyes - at least initially. One day, she fell seriously ill and lay unconscious for five whole weeks, with a high fever. When she regained consciousness, her first thought was fear of what may have happened to the family. Then she heard people singing, children running up and down the stairs four steps at a time, on their way to play, foods being cooked and life going on. 'Right then,' said my mother, 'I realized that nobody is indispensable and that the whole burden of life is not just on one person's shoulder.' She made this her life's philosophy.

My mother liked to tell whoever would listen about her childhood in Sirkeci. With hindsight, I am so sorry we used to interrupt her. We said, 'Mummy, it's enough; you've already told us about it a hundred times.' We didn't take any notes of those gems. How I regret this now!

My mother was a member of the Amicale Society. Later, she applied to do the accounting for the Or-ahayim Hospital, a function which my father had been performing. She met my father as he transferred the books to her. My mother fell immediately in love with him, and courtship - in the form of going out together - followed.

As I mentioned earlier, tradition constrained my father from marrying, because he had an unmarried elder sister at home. Nevertheless, with my grandparents' explicit permission, my mother moved to my father's house, and they lived there as husband and wife for five years, at the end of which my aunt decided to get married - so that my father could at last get married, too - and they had a double wedding. I strongly suspect the double event was somewhat precipitated by my mother's pregnancy with me.

When my mother moved to my father's house in Findikli, my grandfather Izak Nassi and my aunt Viktorya lived there, too. My aunt used to do all the housework. When my mother joined the family, the two women started sharing the housework. They used to do the laundry by hand, then climb up to the terrace on the roof to hang it out to dry. All this manual work was difficult for my mother, who had always worked as an accountant and was not accustomed to do such housework.

Every evening, when the men came home from work, the four of them used to go to a pastry shop in Beyoglu to treat themselves to cakes. The cost came to 25 kurush. My mother would say, 'The daily wage of a cleaning woman was 25 kurush. Yet I could never convince them to give up eating those cakes in Beyoglu twice a week, and engage a cleaning lady with that money.' It is about this matter that they first fell out with my aunt.

Mother got married late, at age 36. Before getting married, she converted to Islam, together with my father. According to what she told me, they needed to go to the Mufti together to get the necessary permission. The Mufti asked them why they chose to convert to Islam. They candidly said that it was in order to get Turkish citizenship for my father, who was Romanian. The Mufti signed the necessary permission promptly without giving them a sermon or making the least difficulty. My mother was very impressed with that Mufti's maturity.

I was born in 1937, when my mother was 37. When I was five months old, my parents moved to an apartment in the Tas Apt. in Talimhane. It was a very nice apartment. It had two bedrooms, a small room for the maid or nanny, an L-shaped living-room where stood my piano, an entry hallway, a kitchen, a full bathroom, a small half-bathroom, and a closet. It had central heating and a bathtub in the bathroom, though not the built-in [encased] kind, but an enameled, self-standing one on four feet. Hot water was available just twice a week. Later, 10-15 years later, in the postwar years, we installed a gas heater.

We owned a radio, a record-player and hundreds of records. We also had a number of books at home, although we mostly borrowed books from the French Cultural Center Library at the French Consulate in Taksim. Thus, we had the possibility of reading a great number of books, which was important for Mother and I, who normally devoured a book in the span of two days.

My mother had a foot-operated sewing machine. To use it, she had to attend a sewing and machine-embroidering course at the Singer Sewing Machine shop, because her own mother had not taught her how to sew.

I don't remember Atatürk's [14](#) death because I was just a year old, but my parents went to the funeral and said they had never seen such a large crowd all in tears.

My parents hired an Armenian lady as a nanny for me. Her story is particularly interesting. Her husband had died during the Armenian Massacre. She fled to Istanbul from her village Keskin Maden near Ankara, with her two children of two to three years of age and worked as a servant at the Armenian Orphanage. Her children grew up there. Then she entered our service, renting a small apartment in Tarlabasi. She managed to take care of her children there and at the same time to work in various capacities in our house.

She formally lived with us, but she got up at four every morning; went to her children's apartment, which was at five minutes' distance; she made them breakfast, and prepared them for school. By the time we got up at seven, she was already back, to take care of us. I can truly say that she raised me. My mother was bed-ridden for two years with rheumatism. That lady did all the housework, cooked for the family and took care of me.

She also raised her two children, both of whom grew to become doctors. Her name was Nuritsa, and her sons, the doctors, were Jan and Minas Apkaryan. She worked for us until I was 13. Then, after they became doctors, her sons took her with them and did not let her work any more. The whole thing makes a touching story with a happy ending, I think.

As I grew up, my mother had also hired the younger sister of my Uncle Jak's wife, to act as a 'mademoiselle' [governess] for me. Vivi was 16 or 17 then. She stayed with us, and took me out for a stroll or to the park. I suppose she needed the income, and my mother took her in to help out. At one point, Vivi got married and left.

I should also note that when I was four, Madame Claire Kamhi, my Uncle Izak's mother-in-law, started giving me piano lessons at home. Then there was a Mademoiselle Nanasoff, a young White Russian woman, who also came home to give me ballet lessons. As the above shows, when I was a child, my mother made me do all those bourgeois things!

My mother treated me very well. However, as I had a nanny and a 'mademoiselle,' she didn't care for me physically and in a detailed manner. She mostly told me stories, fables and tales from the Bible. She did not feed or dress me; others did that generally.

We did not have special Friday, that is, Sabbath eve dinners. I did not have any formal religious training. The nearest thing to it occurred when my mother took me in her bed, where we sat, while she told me stories from the Bible: Moses leaving Egypt, Jacob's quarrels with his brothers, etc. She was such a great story teller; she made all those stories come to life, though more like sweet, semi-educational fiction than religious training.

We did our shopping at the corner grocery store. There were a green-grocer and a butcher, both in the neighborhood, in Talimhane. There were also a small dairy shop that sold products and eggs; and two grocery stores, the Nea Agora and the Taksim Pazari. We did not go to the open market; we didn't need to. An itinerant, street vendor used to pass by, with a horse carrying two large

baskets overflowing with fresh vegetables and shout, 'Zarzavatciiiii' ['vegetable man' in Turkish], and we bought what we needed from him thus: we lowered a basket tied at the end of a rope; he weighed the goods and put them in the basket, which we then pulled up.

A yoghurt vendor also passed by almost daily, with two flat containers of yoghurt from Silivri, balanced on a long stick resting on his shoulder. It was a kind of thick, solid yoghurt, which had to be cut with a spatula and placed on a dish. On winter nights, a sahlepe vendor passed. All the vendors we dealt with were Muslims; the only Jewish shop owner in the neighborhood was a merchant of 'tuhafiye' [haberdashery].

Most of our neighbors were Jewish. They had close relations with my mother. They visited each other to have coffee. We, my nuclear family, spoke French at home and read the Journal d'Orient [15](#). My parents' common language was French, because my father, who had come from Romania, did not know Ladino when they met. My mother spoke Ladino with the neighbors.

My mother's favorite pastime activity was to play cards - a game called 'kumkam'- with the neighbors. They had set 'days' for it. They also got dressed up to do window-shopping in Beyoglu. Mother had a brooch and 'chevaliere' ring she always wore. She was always well groomed, with make-up and manicured hands. We had a Greek lady in our building, who came to our apartment for a day's work and sewed very elegant clothes.

My mother's brothers rarely came to visit us with their families. Mother, on the other hand, was very attached to them and called them often. They came to see her, but mostly by themselves.

My mother used to apply 'ventosa' [suction] cups to our back, to fight colds. The treatment worked as follows. You burned a piece of cotton dipped in alcohol and placed it in the ventosa cup, or 'cupping glass,' which sucked out the oxygen and produced a vacuum. Then and quickly, very quickly, you applied the cups to the bare back with a 'plop-like' sound, pulling the surface flesh in. She stuck five or ten of those to our back. These were kept on for a few minutes. The effect was hurtful and pleasurable, ticklish, at the same time. Then, they wrapped a piece of cotton around the end of a pencil, dipped it in iodine and drew horizontal and vertical lines two to three centimeters apart on our backs. As part of what I can call the 'ceremony,' mother also prepared infusions of linden tea or chamomile. We had hot water bottles as well.

In the summer, we went to Büyükada, where we rented a house. My mother took care of the move. The moving firm was called Emanetci Sultana but, in fact, we never saw Sultana herself, if she ever existed. A man called Leon came home, packed our stuff, transported it to the island and delivered it there. He wrapped everything in big 'harars' [large sacks made of haircloth]. Refrigerator, beds, everything traveled to the island in summer, and traveled back to town in fall.

Later, when we bought our own house, we acquired two or two sets of everything - one for each residence. Almost as a rule, everything we left in town during the summer, furniture and all was covered with bed sheets to protect them from dust.

When I turned five, my parents bought a small house in Büyükada. We spent three months a year there, coinciding with the schools' summer vacations. The house had initially three rooms; later on they added a room in part of the garden. In those years, there was no running water on the island. We had a cistern that stored rain-water, and a water-tank which we filled using a hand-pump. The

house had a big, curved terrace and a small garden. A gardener came once a week to take care of the garden.

When we lived in Büyükkada, we, the women, went to the Turkish Bath for Women every week. Like the rest of the children and womenfolk, in the evenings, we went to the quay, the boat landing, to meet my father returning from work by boat. Sometimes my mother would sit in an outdoor cafe by the sea and watch, with binoculars, my father and I go sailing.

After I reached school age, I attended the Aydin Okul elementary school in Taksim. We had a neighbor, Berta Rutli, who was a graduate of the English High School for Girls [16](#), and had a daughter, Nadya, of about my age. On her strong suggestion, my mother enrolled me in that high school when I was still in second grade. In those days, admission was through early enrolment, or registration, not through testing. Early on - as early as when I was in second grade - my mother knew in her heart that English would be an important language to learn. That's why and how I entered the English High School and learned English.

We did not eat out too often, but I remember going to Rejans, a White Russian Restaurant in Ayazpasa, to Fisher, Abdullah Efendi's and a place, I believe, called Piknik, which was a simpler, informal restaurant. In the summer, we went to a fish restaurant called Selekt on the Iskele quay by the sea, in Büyükkada.

The year now was 1950. I was 13 and had started high school. My mother and aunt had gone on a trip. My father and his sister's husband were no longer on speaking terms, due to differences they had had in business. When my mother returned from her trip, she found my father in hospital with meningitis. Shortly thereafter, they went to Paris for treatment. I remained in Istanbul with my aunt for more than a year - the two of us, with my mother being far away, and no father!

When my father got ill, my mother sold the summer house in Büyükkada, because they needed all the cash they could get. While they were abroad, I got engaged to Ceki Karasu. They knew nothing of it until they returned. But as both families were suitable and the people mutually acceptable, there was no objection. The result was that I got married at 17, at the Neve Shalom Synagogue [17](#). My parents had to sign for me because I was a minor. Three and a half years later, when I got divorced, they gave me again their full support. They were aged between 55 and 60 at the time.

I have always worked. When I was married and lived in Ankara, I worked as a secretary. In 1958, when I returned to my father's house after my divorce, one day I told my mother that I wanted to start working again. When she reported it to my father, he said, 'I need a secretary myself. Instead of working somewhere else, let her come and work for me.' That's when I started to work for my father.

We lived in that apartment in Talimhane [part of the district of Taksim, on the European side of Istanbul] until I was 23. In 1960, we left that apartment after 23 years and rented an apartment in Sisli. At that time, my mother said, 'Instead of paying two rents, let Viktorya move in with us.' And so she did. In 1964, for the first time in their lives, they bought their own apartment - in Yesilyurt, for my sake - because I had voiced the opinion that it was better to live away from the city. After about a year, I got married and left, while they remained in Yesilyurt.



In 1965, when I decided to get married to a Turk, I introduced him first to my father. Later, after I had gotten married, my mother told me one day that, when my father had heard I was going to marry a Turk, he had asked her how they ought to react, how they should take it. And my mother said then, 'We have no other alternative but to accept, because if the young ones have their minds set on something, they go ahead and do it anyway and if we oppose them, we'd be the losers. If you don't want to lose your daughter, you better say nothing.' And that is what they did, or didn't do!

The respective families did not socialize, although they paid each other a visit of courtesy. My husband Günel's mother had died when he was 14. He had been raised by his aunt. She invited us one day and we took my mother there. And the aunt came once to Yesilyurt to visit my parents.

When they lived in Yesilyurt, at first, they employed village girls as live- in maids. With time, they had help only once a week, then once in a fortnight.

In 1964, when they moved to Yesilyurt, my mother made a large circle of friends from the Jewish Community. For many years, they got together in each other's houses to play 'kumkam,' the card game I mentioned earlier. I still call them to inquire about how they are.

My mother was a lively, cheerful person, who enjoyed life. She loved telling jokes. One day, when my children were between eight and ten years of age, she called them to her side and said, 'You are old enough now; I can tell you adult jokes from now on.' My children remember her with a great deal of affection. They say, 'Who else has a grandmother who told her ten-year-old grandchildren adult no-no jokes?'

My mother also liked to have some fun on her own. When I started to go horseback riding as a sport, she started to attend the horse races at Veliefendi [racetrack of Istanbul] and do a bit of betting.

In 1995, when my parents got really old, I moved in with them. At that time, of my mother's eight siblings, only Eli, the youngest brother, was still alive. He used to visit his elder sister at least once a month. On such a visit, he said it was time to think about how they wanted to be buried. My uncle wished them to return to Judaism. For this reason, he went to the Chief Rabbinate, to inquire about what this entailed. He learned that they had to apply to the Mufti and get written permission. But they were already 95 years old and did not leave the house any more.

After thinking about it for a week, my mother told me that they had discussed the matter with my father and that, as they had a Muslim son-in- law and Muslim grandchildren, and as these were the ones who would continue the family, and while they would always remain attached to their past, with love and respect, they had decided to be buried as Muslims.

My mother lived all her life exclusively in Istanbul. She died in Yesilyurt on 16th May 1997, one Friday evening at 8 o'clock. She was exactly 97 years old. Early on Saturday morning, we applied to the Municipality of Bakirköy and got permission to bury her in the Altinsehir Cemetery, during the noon 'namaz.' The imam who conducted the service, probably understood that we were Jews in reality, because he said, looking us in the eyes: 'We now invoke all our prophets, from Moses to Muhammed.' This touched me so much that I still remember it with tears in my eyes and recall that very mature imam with gratitude.

Now let me tell you about my aunt Viktorya, my father's elder sister. Viktorya was born in 1895, in Constanza, a port city by the Black Sea. My aunt, Tante Viktorya, was very close to us. I called her Tantika. Women enjoy speaking and tend to share a lot; and so did my aunt. She spoke frequently about their house, whereas my father did not.

Viktorya was educated up to the secondary level. Interestingly, she attended a Greek school in Constanza. She knew Greek very well. Since her mother was ill most of the time, my aunt did housework from a very young age on, and was very good at it. She also knew how to sew very well. I have in my possession an old foot-operated Singer sewing machine which she had brought all the way from Romania to Turkey. It must be 100 years old, but is still in good working condition.

In 1917, when my father was 14 years old, their mother died. My aunt was 22 then. Being the only woman of the family, she had to take care of her father and three brothers, which meant keeping the house, cooking and acting as a mother to them. Of course, it is possible that they had help in the house, considering that they employed a coachman - you don't have a coachman and not afford a maid - but I don't remember any mention of helpers.

When they came to Istanbul in the 1920s, Tantika was a young girl. She loved people and established good relations with the neighbors in no time. She learned a great deal from the friends she made, yet she had some skills others didn't have and knew some things from Romania that people here did not know, like preparing chicken with dried apricots. Here's the recipe:

Put to soak 300 grams dried apricots for about an hour. Sauté pieces of chicken in a pan, in sunflower or olive oil until slightly brown. Add half a cup boiling water, salt and pepper, cover and simmer until juice is almost completely reduced. Transfer chicken to another dish. Place drained apricots in bottom of pan, add cooked pieces of chicken, cover with boiling water and simmer until only a small amount of sauce remains.

This is a typically Romanian dish. Viktorya knew and prepared Sephardic dishes Romanian style. When introducing me to certain recipes, she pointed to the differences between Istanbul and Romanian cooking. For example, she said that they never added bread crumbs to the meat when preparing meatballs, and that she had learned to do that in Istanbul.

She did all the housework herself. I know for certain that they did not employ any help in Istanbul. As I noted, she knew how to sew very well. She sewed all my clothes until I was seven or eight years old... She cooked and did the washing all by hand.

Viktorya was rather heavily built and had light brown hair. She was not particularly pretty, but walked keeping her body upright and with a self-confident allure which reflected her strong personality. She was of medium height. She valued cleanliness and orderliness, which were reflected in the way she kept herself - no hair out of place, so-to-speak. She liked to dress well, chic but on the formal side, suits in the winter, sun dresses or prints in the summer. She always wore jewelry: pins, earrings, rings. All in all, she was a doer, hard on herself. She never spent an idle moment. When she had nothing to do, she found something to sew.

My aunt was deeply sorry that her brother had to stay engaged for five years because she wasn't married. I believe this caused her to marry somebody who, under normal circumstances, would not have been her first choice, nor apparently vice versa. The groom's decision was facilitated by the

lure of a small dowry and participation in my father's business. It is very likely, that Israel Levi married Tantika for the little amount of money and the job. Tantika was about 40 then, her husband a little younger.

It was not a successful marriage, to say the least. Nor did it lead to a fruitful business relationship with my father. After a few years, my father and he had a fight and separated, and were not on speaking terms. This was terrible for Tantika, who loved her brother dearly. For a long time, during the day, she would come to see us 'secretly.'

After about 15 years, the said Israel Levi found a pretty Greek woman and left my aunt, who went on living in her apartment. My father supported her. Later, we heard that he was paralyzed. I used to tease my aunt by telling her that it was a good thing she had divorced, because she would have had to care for a paralyzed man now!

When I was a child, my aunt did not live with us literally, but in practice she did, because she lived just one street away, and not having any children of her own, she came to us daily, right after sending her husband off to work and making her bed. She stayed with us practically till dinner time.

As she didn't do the shopping herself, she used to cook whatever was available, always imaginatively, always with pleasure. She loved being useful: she either did the housework or she sewed - mostly for others.

She was a most obliging person. If anything needed to be done in the house, she felt she had to do it. She worked incessantly. She was a truly good person. She lived in Lamartin Caddesi in Taksim and had a neighbor, who had to work during the day, despite having a boy of three or four. Tantika took care of that boy until he started school. She took him with her, gave him his lunch, put him to nap, and when he woke up, she dressed up and took him for a walk from Taksim to Galatasaray. All this without any pay, just to help a neighbor.

She took care of me, too - this way and much more. She was like a second mother to me.

She also loved going out a little every day. She went strolling in Pera, looking at the shop windows. Or she and my mother went to play cards, with friends. In those days, the women of our community used to meet in the afternoons to play card games like 'kumkam.' As they lived in the same neighborhood, my mother and Tantika had the same friends.

Then, in 1960, we had to leave the apartment where we had lived for 23 years, because the landlord's daughter had gotten married and needed it. Until then, we had been paying a rather low rent. When we were forced to move, our rent went up significantly. Then, as I noted before, my mother said, 'Since Viktorya comes to us everyday and only goes to her own apartment to sleep, we may as well all live together, rather than go on paying two rents.'

This appeared quite logical for economical reasons, but led to unforeseen friction between the now two ladies of the house. Viktorya was accustomed to being mistress of her own house. My mother liked to linger in bed in the mornings and got up at 10, do her housework whenever she felt like it, or just leave it for the next day. Therefore, when Viktorya got up at 8 and finished all the work, my mother got cross and said, 'I was going to do all that after I got up at 10!'

When this friction arose, my mother found that she had had enough of being together day and night with her sister-in-law and go to play cards together as well. My aunt got offended and stopped going out together. For a while, she had some friends and relatives apart from my mother. But she soon stopped seeing them and started to sit at home, seemingly unhappy, more and more.

All the hardships Tantika had suffered in her life were reflected - one might say - in her appearance, which was rather tragic. Through much of her life, she had been sad and somewhat gloomy, as opposed to my mother who had a cheerful disposition. Viktorya suffered from high blood pressure and chronic gastritis, and had to take all kinds of pills.

When I got married and had my own two children, Tantika preferred to come and stay with us and take care of them, and to help me out, which I needed because I was working. She was like a grandmother to them, came over on Monday mornings and went home on Friday evenings. She did this willingly and generously because that's the kind of person she was.

Then she got older. When my children grew up and started to go to university, I invited her over and fetched her on occasion, not to work but to spend a week with us from time to time.

All this time, she continued to live in my parents' house. In 1977, she suffered a slight paralysis, then recovered and lived another two years. Two years later, she had a relapse but did not recover this time. She was admitted to the Or-ahayim Hospital, where she passed away after three months, in the year 1979, at the age of 84.

My father's elder brother, David Nassi, who was three years younger than Viktorya, was born in 1898 and raised in Romania. The only thing I know about him is this: when he was 17, he volunteered to fight in World War I. He served in the Romanian army and fought from 1915 till 1918. When the war ended, he came home. Three months later, when he turned 20, he was called to do his military service. He tried to explain that he had served in the war as a volunteer for three years, but was told that volunteering was one thing, military service another. He got so infuriated that he ran away, deserting home, family, country, everything. They never heard of him again.

One day, 10-15 years ago, my telephone rang. Somebody speaking Spanish - almost as little as me then - said, 'I am Moshe Nassi.' I got terribly excited: it was my uncle David's son calling! He and his wife had come from Israel and were staying at a hotel in Aksaray. I immediately went to fetch them and took them to see my father. Their meeting was very emotional. My father told his newly-found nephew all the things he did not know about our family. He didn't even know that our grandfather's name was Izak, nor that he himself was named after a younger brother of his father, who had died at a young age. We gave him photographs.

Moshe, on his part, told us what had happened to David after he left Romania. David crossed to Bulgaria, where he started to work on a farm and married Blanca, the daughter of a Jewish family who also worked there. They had a boy and a girl, whom they named Moshe and Nehama. They emigrated to Palestine before World War II. My cousin Moshe is exactly my age, his sister Nehama seven years younger.

When Moshe turned ten, his father died. Their mother raised the children. As they lost their father at a very young age, they did not know much about his family background. I don't know how he found out that we were in Istanbul; apparently, he got our name and address from the Chief

Rabbinate.

A year after Moshe's visit, his sister Nehama also came and met my father. That encounter was as, if not more, emotional as the earlier one with her brother. Nehama was only three when she lost her father. When she saw my father, therefore, she clasped both his hands and held them for the duration of the meeting. Now, we keep in touch with them by telephone and e-mail.

My father's second brother, Moiz Nassi, born in 1900, worked in the same bank as his father, as 'cash collector.' Every Friday evening, he would go to the various villages where the Marmarosh Bank had branches, by horse-carriage driven by a coachman, collect the cash, bring it to the main branch, and lock it in the main safe. On a winter day, when passing through a forest, his party was attacked and robbed by brigands, who killed the horse and the coachman, and left Moiz for dead. He remained lying in the snow for three days. When they finally found him, he had pneumonia and died three months later. He was about 18.

My eldest uncle, Nisim Finanser, born circa 1896, was in the wholesale textile business on commission, in Sirkeci, like his father. He was married to Sara Baruh and had two sons. He died in 1958 of a brain hemorrhage. His elder son Moris moved to Israel and died there. His younger son Alper is exactly my age. He still lives in Istanbul. Both Moris and Alper attended the St. Benoit French School.

Pepo Finanser was also in the same business. He was married to Rashel Tovi. They had a daughter, Esterika. They lived in Istanbul but emigrated to Israel towards the end of their lives. Pepo died there in 1971, as did his wife shortly after. Their daughter still lives in Israel.

Alber Finanser opened a wholesale textile shop in Asirefendi caddesi. He had a partner called Katalan. Alber's first wife died when she was only 23. They had a daughter, Meri, who lives in the USA currently. Alber got married again - to Estrea from Kadiköy. They had a daughter, too, Ayten. They lived in Yazici sokak, two or three buildings away from the famous Dogan Apt., which used to be called Botton Han then. They did their shopping from the window, with a basket tied to a rope.

Concerning the laundry, Meri told me that all the neighbors gathered on the roof terrace [taraca], lit up fires in the open, on which they heated water in enormous cauldrons, and did their washing all together. They then hung the washing to dry on ropes that were extended from each other's windows on opposite sides of the street, from one end to the other. I witnessed the laundry hanging in the streets thus all the time. Lots of photographs of this exist and attest to it, too.

Meri and Ayten attended the Ste. Pulchérie French School. After a long and successful career of 40 years as a dress-maker - she had an atelier in a part of her house, with 5 Mexican girls helping with the sewing. She made haute-couture 'sur commande' clothes for fashionable ladies who came to her house for the fittings - Meri went to university at the age of 69, got her BA in French, then went on and obtained her master's degree from Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

Alber Finanser lived in Istanbul, but moved to the US, to live with his daughter Meri, after his wife died. He died there in 1988.

My uncle Alber had many books written in Rashi letters, which were passed on to him from his father's household. Before going to America, he donated them to the Chief Rabbinate. I hope they kept them well.

Leon Finanser was a customs agent. He adopted the name Cemil Finanser. He was married to Sūzan from Edirne. They didn't have any children. They moved to Israel in the 1970s. There, Leon adopted the name Ari Finanser. He died there in 1989. As far as I know, his wife Sūzan still lives in Israel.

Rashel Finanser had typhus at the age of two and a half. The terrible disease, with its very high fever, caused brain damage. She did not develop well mentally due to that, but was able to learn housework, which she did very well. She worked at home every day until noon and went to the Sari Madam Tea Garden in the afternoons. All the women of the neighborhood who frequented that garden were very fond of her. She was a good, simple person. Maybe because of that, she was our favorite aunt, when we were children, because she liked to play with us.

Aunt Rashel lived with my grandmother, until my grandmother's death in 1962. Then she went to live with her younger brother Jak. Grandmother had made my mother responsible for Rashel's welfare after her own death. So, my mother arranged for all the brothers to contribute to her upkeep. Rashel was of great help at Jak's house, as she knew how to do housework, including cooking, ironing ... everything. She continued going to have tea at Sari Madam in the afternoons. But Jak died relatively young, of cancer.

After that, still on my mother's initiative and with her organizational skills, all the brothers contributed to pay for her to stay at the Old People's Home at the La Paix French Hospital. She was already quite ill with diabetes. She lived for about two years at the La Paix and died there of diabetes, in 1976.

Izak Finanser had a wholesale drug supply company, buying drugs from the various producers and distributing them to the pharmacies. He attended the St. Benoit French School. He married Naile Kamhi and had a daughter named Aysel, who attended the Ste. Pulchérie French School. Towards the end of his life, he lost his eyesight due to diabetes. His daughter Aysel, who lived in Israel, came to Istanbul in 1984 and took him there. Izak died there in 1986.

I don't know what Jak Finanser did for a living. He was married to Öjeni and had two sons, Moris and Viktor. Jak died in Istanbul in 1974. His wife and sons still live here.

The youngest brother Eli Finanser also attended the St. Benoit French School. He had a wholesale business of pharmacy equipment. He was married to Vilma Bubic and had two daughters, Etel and Rozi, both of whom attended the Ste. Pulchérie French School. Rozi then went on to the St. Michel Lycée and the Academy of Fine Arts, where she studied Textile Designing. Eli died in Istanbul in 1997. His wife and daughters still live here.

Most of my uncles' children are businessmen.

My mother's brothers went to the synagogue most Saturdays as well as on religious holidays.

I was born in Istanbul on 23rd February 1937. I am an only child. My mother was 37 years old when she gave birth to me. When I was five months old, we moved to the Tas apt. at No. 33/1 in Taksim, Talimhane, Sehit Muhtar caddesi. I remember this well because we lived there till I was 23.

When mother suffered from a severe case of rheumatism, my parents hired an Armenian nanny called Nuritsa for me. She always used to tell me two stories when she put me to bed; one was 'Tas



Bebek' [The Stone Doll] and the other 'Asik Garip' [The Wandering Minstrel]. Unfortunately, I never heard the ending of these stories because she was so tired that she fell asleep before me. Apart from a nanny, I had a 'mademoiselle' who took me out to the park. I also took piano and ballet lessons then, thus fulfilling all bourgeois requirements.

When I was about two years old, we started going to Büyükada to spend the summers. There, in the evenings, we used to meet my father at the 'débarcadere' [quay]. We hired a rowing boat and my parents swam.

When World War II started, I was barely three. What impressed me most then and has stuck in my memory, were the dark blue spring-roller blinds - we called them 'stors' - on the windows, which we had to pull down in the evenings in order to block out the lights. This was part of everyone's routine called 'black-out.' I still have those 'stors' which I keep in case they come in useful some day, because they were made of a very strong tarpaulin-like material.

Of course, basic foods like bread and sugar were rationed, but - thanks to my parents' care - I was not affected by that.

I never attended kindergarten, which made me feel deprived and was a source of frustration, because all my friends did.

The year 1942 saw the imposition of the 'Varlik Vergisi' [Wealth Tax]. My father's situation was affected less by the tax than by the war itself, but improved on the whole after the war. After several years of being a seasonal renter in Büyükada, he bought a house there, as well as a boat. After using it as a rowing boat for a year, he installed sails on it and took me sailing with him. We learned to ride a bicycle together, my father and I. He was 45 then, and I was eleven. We toured the island on our bikes, sailed and swam together.

During the summer, in Büyükada, my mother and I went to the women's Turkish Bath. It was a small hamam. There was a central place where everyone washed together, and three small, private cubicles on one side. Skinny women wearing bath-wraps made of thin cotton cloth, from the waist down, called 'peshtamal,' used to massage and scrub us, literally, with rough mitts that felt like steel wool.

We used to go to my grandparents' house every holiday without fail. My grandfather was very particular about that. We were a crowd of 35 people around the Pesach table. He read the Haggadah himself and performed all the Seder rituals.

In my parents' house, there was no observance of religious or traditional customs. We went to the synagogue only for weddings or funerals.

When I was a child, my father's elder sister Viktorya, who I called Tantika, did not live with us, but she came to our house every day and stayed until just before dinner time. She took great care of me and was like a second mother.

I attended the Taksim Aydin Okulu elementary school and the English High School for Girls.

My father was an authoritarian person but always indulgent with me. He was very fond of me; he talked with me and was concerned about me. I trusted him implicitly. Once, while in elementary

school, I was having difficulties with my 'Yurttaşlık Bilgisi' [Citizenship course] homework. I asked for his help. He sat with me for a couple of hours and explained it to me. He did it so well that I always got 'Pek İyi' [a 'Very Good' mark] on that subject after that day.

Most of our neighbors were Jewish. Relations were very close. They all visited each other for coffee, coming to us frequently. They spoke Ladino among themselves. I consider French my mother tongue, because that was what we spoke at home.

I never spoke Ladino myself. My cousin Meri tells me that when our grandmother spoke to me in Ladino, I answered in French, being so stubborn. And they thought I did not know or understand it!!! But I did understand everything. One day, I must have been around eight, during a neighbors' gathering, they told a somewhat spicy story, and I burst out laughing. Then they realized that I understood - and that put an end to it: they stopped telling spicy stories in my presence!

When I was eleven, we traveled to Izmir by train. Trains were very chic then, with sleepers known as 'Wagon-lit' and 'Wagon-Restaurant.' The trip lasted a whole day. My father was in the essential oils business. He had agents in Izmir, namely, two partners who were called Sadi and Krespin. We were invited to Krespin's house where I stayed for a month. They had a boy of my age, Daviko. This David had kites that he put together himself, with long tails made of newspapers. For the first time in my life, I flew kites in the fields, whirled tops, ran and played in the streets with other children, got tired, sweaty and flushed, in short, I learned how to be a child in Izmir. As an only child, I had been a quiet child at home, with my books. That is why Izmir has had and will always have a very special meaning for me.

At eleven, after finishing elementary school, I started attending the English High School. It was for girls only at that time. It was situated between Galatasaray and Tünel, in Beyoğlu [Pera]. It still exists, but as the Beyoğlu Anadolu Lisesi for boys and girls. I used to go back and forth by tramway. Those days, I received one lira per week from my parents as pocket money, which I tried to save by sometimes walking - or running - to school, because the tram cost 3 kuruş, and I used that saved money to buy books.

In high school, all subjects were taught in English - sciences and math, literature, language, grammar and all. In the afternoons, Turkish Language and Literature, Grammar, History and Geography were taught in Turkish. The pupils were Turkish, Greek, Armenian, and Jewish. Foreign nationals could attend the elementary school and did. Among these, there were English, Italian and Greek nationals. The elementary school was for foreign nationals only, but when they reached high school, they joined in the 6th grade, with the Turkish nationals who came from the prep classes where they had learned English.

The subjects taught in English had foreign teachers, and those taught in Turkish had, understandably, Turkish teachers. There were no Jewish teachers. Most of the teachers were English and came from England under two to three-year contracts. Only in the preparatory classes, there were two woman teachers who seemed to have been there forever. My colleague Karen Gerson Sarhon, who is 20 years younger than I, learned English from the same teacher as I, 20 years later.

My friends and I used to visit each other in our homes after school hours. Of course, normally one has only two or three close friends.

On weekends, I went out with my cousins, especially with my uncle Alber's daughter Ayten who was my age, and her friends, because I was not an outgoing person and did not make friends easily when left to myself. Ayten went to Ste. Pulchérie French High School and had lots of friends from her class. I joined them and we went to the cinema at 4:30 on Saturday afternoons. We ate Profiterol chocolate cakes at the Inci patisserie. Hot dogs had just started to be popular then. We went to a place called Mandra in Tünel to eat hot dogs, and to drink 'tursu suyu' [pickle veggies' water] at a place in Sishane. In Beyoglu, across from the Saray Muhallebici, there was a place called Atlantik, which had started selling hot toast sandwiches with cheese.

We had books at home, but we borrowed many more from the French Cultural Center Library at the French Consulate in Taksim. In this way, my mother and I could read a great number of books, about a book every couple of days. Reading was my hobby; in contrast, playing the piano was a chore. I remember reading in bed, at night, with a small lamp, under the cover, till three or four in the morning.

When I became aware of what had been done to the Jews in Europe, I could not believe how such a thing was possible. Later, from books, I learned that similar treatment had occurred all along the centuries. For instance, in a book called 'The Last of the Just' [by André Schwarz-Bart (1928-2006), French author of Polish-Jewish origins]. I read in detail all the horrible things that had been done to Jews through one to two thousand years in different parts of the world. Then I realized that the mass killing was not new, just that it had gotten worse and worse as time went by.

After World War II, when there was a wave of Zionism, there emerged several secret societies in Istanbul. I joined one of them called Betar [18](#), together with some friends. We used to meet secretly, once or twice a week, in the houses of some of the members, about 10-15 young people. They taught us Zionism and a few words of Hebrew.

After attending a few times, a close friend and I thought, 'They tell us to go to Palestine. Why don't they go themselves?' This got on our nerves and we stopped going. Among all those people, I know only one who actually went to Palestine. But, of course, they say that about 35,000 people went when Israel was founded [19](#).

In 1950, when my father got ill and went to Paris with my mother, to be operated on, I remained a whole year with Tantika at the age of 13.

I met my first husband at a birthday party. I was 15. The party was five to ten minutes away from our apartment in Taksim, but when I left, he accompanied me home. Then we started seeing each other, meeting in Taksim and chatting. His name was Ceki Karasu. I was in the 8th grade.

That summer, Tantika and I went to Büyükada. Although his family did not normally go to Büyükada, Ceki insisted and they did that year. We continued seeing each other on the island. One day, we were strolling in the street when we saw someone Ceki knew. He said, 'Let me introduce you my fiancée.' He had not proposed, formally or otherwise, before then, but through his act of introducing me as his fiancée, we became engaged - almost out of the blue.

Being away in Paris, my parents became aware of all this only upon their return. But as the families were suitable, there was no objection; and all was well. I got married at 17, with my parents' authorization, which I needed because of my age.

We got married at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. As my parents had converted to Islam before they got married, I was born Muslim. In order to get married at the Neve Shalom, I had to go through the process of becoming Jewish. For this, I needed to get the Mufti's permission. He asked me why I wanted to change my religion. I said that it was in order to get married. He then asked, 'Have you thought it over carefully?' I said, 'Yes,' and he signed the permit.

On the other hand, in a ceremony prepared by the Chief Rabbinate, I had to undress and get completely immersed three times in a bath [mikveh] in the presence of several women, and repeat certain words in Hebrew, which I did not understand. I gather that, coming from a family who was originally Jewish, still registered with the Community and paying Kizba [20](#), I did not need to take any lessons about my 'new' religion. Afterwards - after my Jewish identity was officially noted in my revised identity card - I could get married at the Neve Shalom.

Then Ceki went to do his military service in Ankara and I went with him. We stayed there for one and a half years, then returned to Istanbul.

I had left school in the middle of the 8th grade in order to get married. Later I came to regret this. While Ceki was doing his military service in Ankara, I started studying in order to take the secondary school graduation exams by working at home, without attending any classes, which was allowed. When we were back in Istanbul, I took the exams at the Galatasaray Lycée and passed.

I remember the events of 6th -7th September [21](#) because I had to take an exam on that day. We were in Caddebostan, so we did not hear or notice anything. When later in the morning I went to Beyoglu, I was quite shocked to see the streets covered in broken glass, torn furs and destroyed goods. We had to step on all that to be able to walk. By that time, the disturbances had ended, but all the shop windows were broken and the entire street of Beyoglu was covered, to a depth of 30-40 centimeters, with destroyed goods. I can't remember if the exam did take place or not that day.

Ceki tried to work in my father's office for a while, but they did not get along well. He found an interpreting job in Ankara; so we went back and lived there for another two years.

Strangely enough, the only anti-Semitic incident that happened to me in all my life occurred in Turkey but not through Turks. During my first marriage, while I was living in Ankara, I was looking for a secretarial job. At that time, many international petroleum companies were establishing operations in Turkey to search for oil, and I applied to all of them.

That anti-Semitic incident I mentioned before happened at the British Petroleum Oil Company. They gave me a form to fill, which asked for my religion. None of the other applications had asked for that. I wrote 'Jewish,' upon which they called me for an interview and said bluntly and unapologetically whatsoever, 'We cannot employ you because you are Jewish.' I was shocked and asked, 'So what?' They replied that they were careful not to employ people from different ethnic groups. And I said, 'I was born and raised in this country, and this is the first time in my life that I am told that there is something I cannot do because my religion is different.' They said, 'Sorry, this is our company's policy' and I didn't get the job, although I was fully qualified. I got a job, nevertheless, at the Tidewater Oil Co., which was an American company belonging to Paul Getty.

Later, my first husband decided to go to the US to study and stay there. I helped him actively to apply to numerous universities, but when he got accepted, I did not wish to go with him and

decided to separate. He left, and I stayed in Turkey. We had been married for three and a half years, without having children. I got married at 17 and divorced at 21.

This was not a particularly courageous thing to do, for it was fairly common to divorce. But in my case, it was an uncharacteristically courageous act, because Ceki had been a manipulative person, guiding me in every aspect of life. In time, I rebelled against this, being perhaps somewhat harsh because he refused to let me go. At that stage, my character, which was on the timid, docile and introverted side, had to change, and it did.

Then I returned to Istanbul, lived with my family and worked with my father, went horseback riding, traveled, had a wider and expanding social entourage, or circle of acquaintances and friends.

My parents were very supportive, although they probably were a bit sorry and would have wanted the marriage to have succeeded. But I could not bring myself to go to America with someone I did not love, leaving my family, and living under suppression. My close family consisted of three elderly people: my parents, who were already nearing their sixties, and the older Tantika. They would have had nobody had I left them, which I just could not do.

In fact, after I started working for my father, the last company I had worked for in Ankara, had a meeting at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, and asked me to do some secretarial work for it. Then and there, one of the persons for whom I acted as secretary, someone from Italy, offered me a job in Italy at a salary sufficient to live decently there: 250 dollars per month, which was attractive and consistent with prevailing salaries in the West.

I thought about it a lot, but did not take the job. Maybe if I had, my whole life would have been altered, but I could not abandon my people here. Eventually, they all died practically in my arms, which makes my decision, in retrospect, appropriate.

When I started to work for my father in 1958, I learned the business. After a year, Mr. Grünstajn, who had acted as our sales person, that is, took the orders, left us and I started to visit the customers myself. By that time, we had obtained the agency of the Ferro Enamels Company of Holland, which produced raw materials, installations, machinery and equipment for the enameling and ceramic industries. I went to Holland to learn the business.

In those years, 1958-1959 maybe, I was the only woman who drove herself to factories to sell raw materials and machinery. I was extremely well received. Even in Holland, when we visited factories and foundries, they were surprised to see me, because even there, there were no women in this line of work, and it surprised them all that the first woman to do this should come from Turkey.

After my divorce, I went to the Istanbul Atli Spor Kulübü [Istanbul Horseback Riding Club] with a friend from elementary school, Rozi Arditti. Thereafter, between my two marriages, from the age of 21 to 28, I went horseback riding and on vacations frequently with friends.

In 1964, my family had already moved to Yesilyurt.

I met my second husband in 1965 through a friend, Sehnaz Akinci, at the horse-riding club. She lived on the same floor, in the same apartment, as a lady called Mina Urgan. I met her for the first time when I went to Sehnaz's apartment. Mina Urgan had had a beloved classmate at the American College, Saffet Orgun, who had passed away, and had a son, Günel Orgun. He was a young man of

about my age, who had been married and divorced after three years. Mina thought that we should be compatible, and that being both divorcees, we could have some good time together. So, she introduced us. Günel had a motorboat. Mina asked my friend Sehnaz and me to a boat ride on a Sunday. We went and that is how we met.

At that time, Günel was on the verge of buying a farm by the sea in Datca [a town in southwest Turkey], together with four friends. The farm was called Mersincik and was situated at 18 kilometers from Bodrum, on the opposite shore, and could only be reached from there by sea. It was a dream-like place of 5000 dönüms [approx. 1250 acres]. Some 500 dönüms of it was flatland by the sea; the rest consisted of hills covered with trees that reached 800 meters. There were 1500 tangerine, orange and grapefruit trees, and a flock of 150 goats. The hills were full of olive trees of the variety grown for their oil.

Everyone dreams of owning a farm at some time or another, but the fact that Günel was about to realize that dream was one of the things that impressed me the most about him. Our mutual love of classical music also drew us to each other. We got married three months after we met, in 1965, and have been together for 42 years.

Mina Urgan, who had brought us together, was a retired professor of English Literature at the University of Istanbul. She later became famous with her best-selling book 'Bir Dinozor'un Anıları' [Memoirs of a Dinosaur] and its sequel, 'Bir Dinozor'un Gezileri' [Travels of a Dinosaur], where she mentions us, our family and our children.

We got married at the Üsküdar Registry Office. Günel is a graduate of Robert College [22](#). He had lots of friends from school, Turkish, Jewish, Greek, Armenians, etc., reflecting the diversity of RC's student body. His family was very Westernized. He teases me to this day by saying that my family is far more 'a la turca' than his. After all, my grandfather was from Canakkale, used to smoke the 'narghile' sitting cross-legged on the sofa, on top of cushions, played with worry beads, etc. In comparison, Günel's relatives were the avant-garde of the day, having been to Europe, studied at the Galatasaray Lycée, in short, much more Western than my relatives.

Shortly after we got married in 1965, Günel and I drove to Bodrum in my car. On the old highway, going from Milas to Bodrum, there was a very steep and curved road, winding through the pine forests, with a precipice on one side and a mountain on the other. That road was called 'Avram Yokusu' [Avram's Slope]. It must have been named after Avram Galante [Jewish historian who was also one of the first members of parliament after the Turkish Republic was founded], who was born in Bodrum. That road is no longer used, because there is a new highway going to Bodrum by the coast. A real pity.

From Bodrum, we crossed to Mersincik by boat and spent our honeymoon there. We had 2500 olive trees - of the eating-olives variety - planted. We did this by hiring 45 workers from the surrounding villages. They worked on daily wages and slept in caves that were around the farm. The wives of the 'kahya' and the workers cooked food in big cauldrons and baked bread in the oven situated in the garden. In 1965, Datca was a largely undeveloped place. As a result of the work we provided, a traveling open-air cinema came there, for the first time, because they got informed that our 45 workers had earned some money. Nothing like that had ever happened in the surrounding villages at that time.



When we got back, we rented a house on the Bosphorus, on the Asian coast. In those years it was cheaper to live in a 'Yali' [sea-side villa] than in an apartment in town. Günel worked in an automotive company called Tatko. He was in charge of the spare parts department.

Then we had two children: my son Orhan, born in 1966, and my daughter Gün, born in 1968. I worked in my father's office. My aunt Viktorya, who was like a grandmother to them, came to stay with us on Monday mornings and went back on Friday evenings. This continued until my son turned two. I stopped working when my daughter was about to be born, because Tantika had become too old to take care of two small children.

One day, my husband and I had a serious talk and considered the two alternatives open to us: either we moved near my parents' home in Yesilyurt and left the children with them when I went to work, or he quit his job and went to work with my father. We chose the latter because my father had a good business; we also reasoned that we could not leave him alone, as he could not hear well, could not drive, could not talk with the clients on the phone and that, in short, the business would collapse if we left.

I remember the particulars well: Günel used to earn 4000 liras per month, plus a bonus, at Tatko. He came to work with my father for 2500 liras per month. He worked there for about ten years, and the business prospered, thanks to his ability, regardless of how much the market situation may have contributed to it.

By the year 1971, we had saved up enough money to buy an apartment. But we had always lived in nice houses by the sea, with gardens, and could not envisage being squeezed in a town apartment. We looked at the choices a little away from the city in order to afford a house with a garden. We were lucky to buy a farm in Polonezköy [a village 15 km north of Istanbul, on the Asian side, founded by refugees of Polish origin, after the Crimean War] [23](#) for the price of an apartment in town.

We then started a poultry farm. Our intention was to stop working in business, as soon as the farm would support us because, by that time, Günel had had enough of city life in general and business life, in particular. The children, who were two and four when we moved to Polonezköy, later attended the village elementary school, which consisted of a single room where all 5 grades were taught by a single teacher. We had a very good life there. We owned cows, a few sheep, ducks, cats and dogs, and some 6000 chicken. Four families worked for us. We made a living by selling eggs.

There we lived a life completely different and removed from Jewish culture. We lived after all in a Catholic village populated by people of Polish origin. But my children have always been aware of my being Jewish, from what I told them and from visiting my parents' home frequently. They went to synagogue with me for weddings. After attending the wedding of one of my cousins, my daughter who was four, was so impressed that she said she wanted to become a bride when she grew up, thinking that it was a profession. Also, I usually cooked, and still do, Sephardic dishes like gratinated spinach and squash. As for circumcision, my son was circumcised at the age of eight, by a medical specialist.

We lived all year long in Polonezköy, summer and winter, for ten years. After elementary school, my children attended for one year a secondary school called Kültür Lisesi. I stayed with them in

Yesilyurt, at my parents', and Günel stayed in Polonezköy, where I went with the children to spend the weekends. At the end of that year, the Kültür Lisesi was closed down. Then, the children went to boarding school, at the Esenis Lisesi, for three years.

However, we would have had to move to town, when the time came to attend university. So, we decided to get an apartment in town and bought one in Cengelköy, before they finished the lycée. Eventually they both succeeded in being accepted to the Bogazici University [24 ]. It's then that we sold the chickens, and stopped the poultry farming.

We always spoke Turkish at home, but I spoke French with Tantika, and hearing the language almost daily no doubt helped the children a lot. Proof is that while at the university, they took French courses at the French Cultural Center, and were able to speak it after just two months.

During the four years when the children were in university, we drove to the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, the four of us, during the semester holidays.

While I managed the poultry farm in Polonezköy, my husband commuted daily by car to the office in Sirkeci. In 1978, he decided to quit commerce for good and informed the Ferro Enamels factory in Holland of his decision. They appointed a new representative, who was the technical manager of one of our customers. We offered to help him by transferring all our know-how and introducing him to all our customers. In fact, my husband worked with him for several months. Business turned out to be quite good the first year and the new rep earned a lot of money.

However, by the end of the year 1978 or 1979, Turkey was in a severe economic crisis, as a result of which imports stopped completely. Turkey had to reschedule its heavy external debt, accepting to repay it in installments in ten years. This affected us, too, since we had a commission due to us which we could not receive until the end of these ten years.

On the whole, though, our decision to stop the business when we did was quite fortuitous, as we would have been out of work at the end of one year. People who knew us thought that it was all pre-planned - that we had foreseen the situation and stopped in time. The truth is that it was just a matter of pure luck.

We had a similarly positive experience at a later date. In 1981, we sold our 6000 chickens and moved to town to prepare for our children's university studies. We had to do that because there were no dormitories available for people who were residents of Istanbul. So, we liquidated our poultry farm and bought an apartment in Cengelköy. Within a year after that, the poultry business collapsed, and people in it went bankrupt. In one case, the entrepreneur concerned - the Jewish owner of the Yupi poultry farm in Izmir - committed suicide. As things turned out, we stopped the poultry business just in time, again by pure chance.

My husband was 42 years old when he retired. His hobby was skin-diving and spear-fishing. When we moved to Cengelköy, he also started line-fishing with a friend who was a professional fisherman. They went out fishing by boat in the Bosphorus, the Marmara and Black Seas. Günel didn't engage in it for profit; he gave his friend all his catch but had a splendid time, which is what drove him to this activity. This he did for about four or five years.

After moving to Cengelköy, I, on the other hand, took a five-week course in hand-weaving rugs and kilims. After acquiring the necessary skill and familiarity with the business, I bought some looms

and started a cottage industry, together with a friend, Belkis Balpınar, who was a graduate in Textile Designing from the Academy of Fine Arts. We worked together for eight years, Belkis doing the designing and I supervising the weaving. Our workers consisted of housewives from Malatya, who lived in a district called Kavacık.

We bought the raw wool [fleece] from Konya and had it carded and spun by hand. Then we dyed it ourselves by boiling it in big cauldrons on open fires in the garden. We produced many valuable kilims in this manner, only one of each design. I took care of the production end on my account, that is, Belkis paid for the preparation of the yarn and I, who owned the looms and employed the workers, produced the final product - the kilims themselves.

According to this arrangement, known as 'sur façon,' I financed the whole process of manufacturing and charged so much per square meter. In turn, Belkis, who paid me by the square meter produced, sold the kilims in exhibitions she organized in places like New York, Washington, San Francisco, London, Milan, and even Tokyo. She still does this; I, on the other hand, had to stop when my parents became too old and I had to move in with them.

The truth is that I never earned anything from the weaving business, because I felt that the workers were not paid enough, and kept raising their wages. I had, nevertheless, a wonderful time during those eight years, thanks to all those beautiful exhibitions, and meeting all those interesting collectors.

In 1988, my son Orhan graduated from the Mechanical Engineering Department of the Bogazici University and went to the University of California at Berkeley for his master's degree. When he was about to start on his doctorate, he changed subjects and studied Linguistics instead.

In 1993, he married Sharon Inkelas, a linguist like himself, and they had two sons, Jem in 1995, and Eli in 1998. Unfortunately they were divorced, though amicably, in 2006. The boys live with their mother, but my son takes them a couple of days a week, when they spend some time together.

In 1989, my daughter Gün graduated from the English Language and Literature Department of the Bogazici University. She went for her master's degree to the University of Edinburgh, and then for her doctor's degree to the University of Glasgow. In 1994, she married Stewart Carruth, a housing expert. They had a son, Jamie, in 2000, and a daughter, Lisha, in 2003.

After closing the business and the poultry farm, we rented out our office space and have been living off the income. We also have our retirement salaries. We still have the property in Polonezköy and spend eight months of the year there and only the four winter months in Cengelköy.

Every year, we visit our children in the USA and Scotland; they, in turn, often come to visit us in Turkey. Sometimes we all get together at my daughter's home in Scotland.

Jem and Eli, our American grandchildren, go to an elementary school which teaches half day in English and half day in Spanish. In 2002, I saw an ad of the Cervantes Institute about a course of Modern Spanish for Sephardi, and I immediately enrolled in it. Thanks to that decision, I can now speak Spanish with my grandchildren.

That course had another interesting outcome: It helped me remember the Ladino language I had heard and understood, but never spoke as a child. In that course, we started to prepare a dictionary in Ladino-Spanish-English-Turkish, which, in time, Antonio Ruiz Tinoco, who is a Professor of Spanish in Japan, installed on the Internet.

One day, I visited the offices of the Shalom periodical in order to buy a book in Ladino called 'En Tierras Ajenas Yo Me Vo Murir.' Gila Erbes, who was in charge of the bookstore, proposed that I should write a piece in Ladino. I wrote a couple of pieces in my free time, and thus met Karen Gerson Sarhon there. Karen was at that time organizing the Ottoman-Turkish Sephardic Culture Research Center. She asked me to talk about our Internet Dictionary at the opening reunion. This was the beginning of a deep friendship and fruitful collaboration.

Now, since 2004, we are publishing El Amaneser, which is a monthly supplement in Ladino of the Shalom Newspaper. Karen is the editor-in-chief of the publication, and I am the co-editor and coordinator. We receive by electronic mail articles from the whole world, largely from people who have not forgotten the language, and we publish them. Those people who see their pieces published become incredibly emotional and happy.

I am very pleased to be doing such a sentimental job at this stage of my life. My mother loved the Judeo-Spanish language very much. Although we always spoke French at home, she went back to speaking Ladino in the last two years of her life. And I feel that, with this activity, I do something that would have pleased her a lot.

## Glossary

### **1 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.

### **2 El Amaneser**

Istanbul Jewish monthly supplement to the Shalom newspaper. Founded as part of the activities of the Ottoman-Turkish Sephardic Culture Research Center in March 2005, it is published wholly in Ladino with subscribers and writers from all over the world. It is presently distributed to all Shalom subscribers plus an additional 250 who have subscribed only to El Amaneser.

### **3 Ladino**

Also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th-century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews

who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitreo. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

#### **4 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.

#### **5 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.

#### **6 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 Atatürk); 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.

## **7 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.

## **8 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.

## **9 Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922)**

After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Ataturk) 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 (August 1920). He was able to regain much of the lost provinces; stopped the advancing Greek troops only 8 km from Ankara and was able to finally expel them from Anatolia (August 1922). He gained important victories in diplomacy too: he managed to have both the French and the Italian withdrawn from Anatolia by October 1921 and Soviet Russia recognize the country and establish the Russian-Turkish boundary. Signing a British-proposed armistice in Thrace he managed to have the Greeks withdrawn beyond the Meric (Maritsa) River and accepted a continuous Entente presence in the straits and Istanbul. In November 1922 the Grand National Assembly abolished the Sultanate (retained the Caliphate though) by which act the Ottoman Empire 'de jure' ceased to exist. Sultan Mohammed VI fled to Malta and his cousin, Abdulmejid, was named the Caliph. Turkey was the only defeated country able to negotiate with the Entente as equal and influence the terms of the peace treaty. At the Lausanne conference (November 1922- July 1923) the Entente recognized the present day borders of Turkey, including the areas acquired through warfare after the signing of the Treaty in Sevres.

## **10 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.

## **11 Or Ahayim Hospital**

Istanbul Jewish hospital, established in 1898 with the decree of Sultan Abdulhamit II and the help of idealistic doctors and philanthropists. As a result of various fundraising activities the initially small



clinic was expanded in 1900. Today, the hospital is still operating, serving both Jewish and non-Jewish patients with the latest technologies and qualified staff.

## **12 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.

## **13 Alliance Israelite Universelle**

An international Jewish organization based in France. It was founded in Paris in 1860 by Adolphe Gremieux, as a response to the Damascus Affair, with the goal to protect human rights of Jews as citizens of the countries where they live. The organization was created to combine the ideals of self defense and self sufficiency through education and professional development among Jews around the world. In addition, the organization operated a number of Jewish day schools and has done a lot to standardize the Ladino language. The Alliance schools were organized in 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. The Alliance Israelite Universelle ideology consisted in teaching the local language to Jews so they could be integrated to their country's culture. This was part of the modernization of the Jews. Most Ottoman Jews, however, did not take up the Turkish language (because it was optional), and as a result a new generation of Ottoman Jews grew up that was more familiar with France and the West than with the 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 1870s. In 1870, Carl Netter of the AIU received a tract of land from the Ottoman Empire as a gift and started an agricultural school, Mikveh Israel, the first modern Jewish agricultural settlement in the Land of Israel. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late 19th-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.

## **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 Journal d'Orient**

The main newspaper of the French-speaking Sephardi Jews in Turkey, it was published between 1917 and 1971 by Albert Karasu, his wife Angele Loreley and Jean de Peyrat idi. It consisted of four pages of daily news. The paper ceased publication on 25th August 1971, when Albert Karasu retired.

### **16 English High School for Girls**

It was established by Lady Redcliffe, the wife of the British Ambassador, in 1849 on Bursa Street, Beyoglu, Istanbul. In 1979 Great Britain stopped subsidizing the school and the Turkish government took it over; it was renamed English Secondary. In 1980 new classes were introduced and it was renamed again and called Beyoglu Anatolian High School.

### **17 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.

### **18 Betar**

Brith Trumpedor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpedor Society; right- wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpedor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

### **19 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies

of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

## **20 Kizba**

(Hebrew for 'taxation') Turkish Jewish community organization, which collects annual taxes from community members.

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

Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumor that Atatürk'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.

## **22 Robert College**

The oldest and most prestigious English language school in Istanbul since the mid-19th century, providing education to the elite of Turkey as well as other countries in the region. Robert College was born in 1863 in the village of Bebek by the Bosphorus, when Christopher Robert approached Cyrus Hamlin with his desires and found a receptive audience. Hamlin, an American schoolmaster, had been running a school, a bakery and a laundry in Bebek at the time. Robert was a wealthy American industrialist desiring to establish in Turkey a modern university along American lines with instruction in English. These two men, an educator and a philanthropist, successfully collaborated to found Robert College. Until 1971, it included two campuses: the actual Robert College exclusively for boys and the American College for Girls. In 1971, the American College for Girls and the Robert College boys' school united and co-education started under the name of Robert College at the previous American College for Girls campus. At the same time the Turkish government took over the boys' campus, which became Bogazici University (Bosphorus University). Robert College and today's Bogazici University were and still are the best schools in Turkey. Through the years, these schools have had graduates occupying top positions in Turkey's business, political, academic and art sectors.

## **23 Crimean war**

1853-1856, in many respects the first modern war in History. The Russian Empire with aspirations concerning the Balkans occupied the Ottoman principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in July 1853. The great powers fearing from a Russian advance in the region and wanting to preserve the European equilibrium sided with the Ottoman Empire in the conflict: Great Britain and France declared war on Russia in March 1854. Although the Habsburg Empire remained neutral its threats to enter the war forced the Russians to evacuate the two Ottoman principalities and they were occupied by the Austrians. In September 1854 allied troops landed on the Crimea in order to capture Sevastopol, the major Russian Black Sea port. The Russians defended the city heroically for

11 months under the command of V. Kornilov and P. Nakhimov. Allied commanders were Lord Raglan for the British and Marshal Saint-Arnaud, succeeded later by Marshal Canrobert, for the French. Military operations, which were marked on both sides by great stubbornness, gallantry, and disregard for casualties, remained localized. Famous episodes were the battles of Balaklava and Inkerman (1854) and the allied capture (1855) of Malakhov and Redan, which preceded the fall of Sevastopol. The accession (1855) of Tsar Alexander II and the capture of Sevastopol led to peace negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Paris (February 1856). The Crimean war stopped Russian aspirations towards the Balkans and the Straits for another 22 years and rescued the position of the Ottoman Empire as a great power. It also resulted in spoiling the previously very good Habsburg-Russian relation.

## **24 Bogazici University**

Successor of Robert College, the old and prestigious American school, founded in Istanbul in 1863. With the consent of the administration of Robert College it was founded jointly with the Turkish state in 1971. Since then the university has expanded both physically and academically and today it is growing in popularity.