

My Older Brother Davit And His Wife Luiza



We can see my brother Davit and his wife Luiza at the wedding of a family member.

My mother and father's first son Davit was born in Kuzguncuk in 1915. My family moved to Ortakoy around the 1920's. He received his first education at the Alliance Israelite in the neighborhood. Because he was my father's first love, they sent him to the Italian Highschool in Beyoglu (1927) even though they were not wealthy. He would take the tram from Kuzguncuk to Tunel and from there go up to Beyoglu (one of the touristic centers on the European side which is a

shopping and entertainment destination) with the subway and then walk to his school. At the time Turkey had taken part in World War I and its economy was in bad shape. All the citizens of the nations that were part of the Alliance lived in Istanbul. Of course, my father's business wasn't doing well due to this situation.

My older brother, after studying for two years in this school, said to my father: " My dear father, you are making a very big sacrifice so I can go to this school. I am grown up now, and I am aware of a lot, it is very clear that the economy of the nation is not in good shape. Today when I was on my way to school I saw an "apprentice required" sign on an office building (there was an office building whose name I cannot remember in the place of today's Richmond Hotel). If you permit, let me go there to talk tomorrow, let's see what kind of work it is. What do you think?"

My father replied "Truly, my son, what can I say; I wish we could have you continue studying, I cannot manage any better than this. May it be beneficial for you".

In this way my older brother had to quit school in 1930. The next morning my brother went to this business early in the morning. There was the "Sanovitch Glove Factory" in an office building in Beyoglu. Davit talked with the manager and started working rightaway. He worked there for long years, his bosses liked Davit a lot. He also learned the business well in time, he would stich leather gloves on the machine beautifully. At a time when I cannot remember the exact year, around the time when my father was stressed about the business, the government passed a law that stated that in places with more than 4 employees, a "Processing Tax" was going to be implemented. My brother's boss, in order to avoid paying this tax that was quite a large sum, sent the material and machines to the homes of the employees he trusted so they could work at home. The gloves that were manufactured at home would be delivered and the employees paid accordingly. My brother Davit was such a hardworking person who took his work seriously that he would start working at 7 every morning. He would finish the gloves that his boss said could probably be finished in a week, within a day. Such as it was, David brought a proposition to my father: "My dear father, you can see that I am finishing one week's worth of work within a day, and I waste the rest of the time by playing around. If you open up a store next to the Ortakoy Synagogue, I can manage it".

My father was a well-known person in the community, likewise they rented a small store right next to the synagogue to my father for a very low price. The location of this store was very close to my father's store. This store was at a corner on the main street. My father said: "Let's see Davidiko (little Davit), the store is at your service, but what will you fill it up with? What are you thinking of selling? How will you manage this place"? "Very simple, it will be like a small grocery store. I will sell refreshments, chewing gum, chocolates etc. in front of the store, and I will stich gloves in the back. You will see, all will go well".

The store opened up for business. But because the refreshments that were sold were warm, the business wasn't going as Davit wanted. Davit said to my father "My dear father, we have to buy a refrigerator urgently in order to get the return we wish from the store". When the Kelvinator brand refrigerator came and the refreshments were sold ice-cold, the business started going seriously well. Everything worked in order.

After separating from his brothers, my father managed to pay off the interest on the loan he took out, working for a very long time while continuing in the hardware business. One day, while I was

still in 2nd or 3rd grade, my father said to me: "Oh! Thank G-d Lazariko (little Lazar), I paid off my last debt, now I am at peace!". My older brother also managed the grocery store. However, unexpectedly, "Processing Tax" was repealed and when my brother Davit had to return to the workplace, the grocery store became my father's responsibility also.

My father asked my mother: "Marika what will we do now? What shall we do with this store? Can we manage both places?" My mother replied: "Nesimiko, what can I say? Let's think, we will certainly come up with a solution, something is bound to come up".

As far as I can remember, there was a wine factory named "Lavrentoglu" belonging to a Greek citizen in Tophane (A neighborhood on the European side). This gentleman approached my father with a proposition one day: "Sir, a good day to you, I have a proposition for you. Your store is on a very busy street, you can sell a lot of wine in this store". My father "How can that be, sir? It is a subject I know nothing about, forget about us" replied; but he continued: "Look Mr. Nesim, I will take care of all the arrangements, just hand me the store. We will establish a system. I will deliver the wine to you, and I will refill the barrels as they empty. You will sell wine by the glass. You will hand me the cost of the wine you sold, and keep the profit. What do you say? Think about it for a few days, and let's talk again?"

My father came home that night and recounted Lavrentoglu's proposition to us excitedly. He thought about it for a few days, and said to himself: "I have nothing to lose here, because I don't need to invest, let me say yes to this venture". In this way 6 wine barrels with a tab in front were placed in that tiny store, and two big barrels in the back. Wine was going to be produced in the barrels in the back and carried to the ones in the front and my father would sell wine by the kilo.

When my father started this business I was around 8 or 9 years old and my older brother Kemal around 10 or 11. We were attending the Turkish elementary school in Ortakoy. My father would go to the hardware store in the morning, and we would open up the wine store when we got out of school, at 5 in the afternoon, we would sweep and clean the place, and my mother would come later to help. We would serve wine to the clients, my mother would take the money. My father, on the other hand, would close the hardware store around 7 in the evening, and when he came to the wine store, we would return home and do our homework. Some of the clients came here with their own bottles, and my father would ask questions like:

"Welcome. What color wine would you like? Do you want it strong, or mold?". Some of the clients came with a glass, they would ask for a second after they finished the first. In this way we became familiar with wines, but the business did not go as well as we wished.

One day, my mother said to my father: "Nesim, how much do we make from this store? What are we aiming for?" In the old times, my father says x amount of money, and my mother suggests: "Look, if we take out the 6 barrels in the store, and in their place put a few small tables and chairs, this place is known as a wine place anyways, I will make a few appetizers, and we will have more business, I think. What do you say?" It took a while for my father to warm to this idea, and when he found it logical, went to meet Lavrentoglu, but he did not approve of it of course and took back the barrels rightaway.

Next to our store there was a restaurant owner Barbayanni who was a Greek citizen, he also convinced my father and said that if this store became a bar, it would do tremendous business. We bought tables and chairs for our store, my mother would give me the list of all the necessary supplies like liver which was not "kosher" that was going to be cooked in the store the next day. I would do the shopping immediately after school, open up the store, clean it up, then wash the tomatoes and cucumbers, cut up the liver in little squares the way my mother taught me, so it would be easy for her to cook them. My mother would bring the appetizers that she prepared at home like fried eggplant, or navy bean salad. Barbayanni also supported us, we started selling uzo along with wine, our wine store became a bar. Generally men came to the store, we did not have too many lady clients, therefore after my father arrived to the store, we would return home because my mother did not want to stay among so many men.

Across my father's bar was a big tea house, you could hear music coming from it all day long, the ones who came drank tea and played backgammon. Next to the tea house, pastrami and soujouk (two types of spiced beef) would be sold in a tiny store. To the right of my father's hardware store was a barber, and right next to his own store, a competing hardware merchant with the nickname "Hoja" (teacher), to the left, a bread bakery. Further from the big synagogue (the main one) on the main street were two more stores belonging to the community but I do not remember what was sold there.

Meanwhile Davit (like the rest of my family) had a very good ear and voice, he was a very good tenor. He developed an interest in playing Spanish guitar and learned it, one way or another. He had a large group of friends playing all kinds of instruments. At first they would play music among themselves, later on formed a group named "The Amateurs of Mandolins" and started earning money performing in concerts in various places. Sometimes all of these friends would come home to practice, our home would liven up because of them, after rehearsal they would tell jokes, chat amongst themselves. Among this 10-12 person group, there was Sabetay Farsi who played Hawaiian guitar and who later became my older sister Fortune's husband and his cousin Pepo, who played the mandolin. The concerts that were in public houses or Galatasaray Highschool in general would be very pleasant. These friends had such a good time themselves, that with the positive energy they radiated to the audience,, everyone would sing and dance together. All the members of this group were Jewish, everyone's brothers or cousins would come to listen to them, and become friends with them. My brother Davit is introduced to Luiza, the cousin of one the group members, Yashar Kalvo, and starts dating her.

I cannot remember the exact year but I think Davit and Luiza married probably in the 1940's, in the Zulfaris Synagogue, if I am not wrong. My brother's earnings were very modest, therefore they had to watch their budget. They became boarders in a pretty large room around Galata. They both loved each other and respected each other, they got along with their neighbors in the apartment very well, they became close to them. They would sleep in this room, cook their food, eat it on their table which was considerably big, and go to bed in this same room. Their life was very lively. Their friends who played with them came to visit often, sometimes they played together, sometimes they just talked. Sometimes they would celebrate Selihot in this house, they would pray the same prayer sung in the synagogue, in my brother's room. We sometimes went to Davit's place on Saturday mornings for breakfast as a family.

My brother Davit stitched gloves very well. For a while he became partners with someone who had experience with gloves, named Albert (I forgot his last name) and started producing and selling gloves. In the 1960's he became partners in the china shop that we opened up with my other older brother [Information about this store will follow]. When their financial situation improved a little, they left their flat in Shishane and if I remember correctly, became renters in a duplex flat in Tozkoparan. In this house their daughter Meri was born in 1947, and their younger daughter Perla in 1951. After living in this house for a few years, they rented a perfect flat in Kurtulush. A few years later they moved to one of the flats in the apartments next to the Shishli mosque. Almost all of the houses my older brother lived in had heating stoves. As I said before, my brother had a musician group of friends, in time his friends from the orchestra also married and had families and they each played music within their own family.

After this period, my older brother obtained new friends and on the weekends, 6-8 couples would meet in the afternoons around 4 p.m., the men and the women would play poker among themselves, they would eat all together, chat and have a good time. My brother Davit, like my father, was a big guy, he liked the good life, he knew how to enjoy life, he would tell jokes, and sing songs because he had a very good voice. The only bad quality of my older brother Davit was that he did not have a head for commerce other than his career of manufacturing gloves and that he was a little lazier than my other older brothers and sisters.

Their daughter Meri finished the French junior high Sainte Pulcherie and worked as a cashier in a ready-to-wear clothing store named Neyir. She married Hayati Zakuto who owned a fabric store named Rekor in Beyoglu (I do not know his education level) in 1966 in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the wedding evening in the Tarabya Hotel, eating and dancing all together as a family. Their only daughter Eser was born in 1970 from this marriage. Eser is a graduate of Business Administration from the Istanbul University. She married the lawyer Niso Hakim in 1996 in Neve Shalom. After marrying her daughter, my niece Meri terminated her marriage that had been on the rocks for a long time, and divorced her husband Hayati. Their daughter Eser's son Aksel was born in 2000, and their second son in 2004.

My older brother's younger daughter Perla graduated from Nishantashi Women's Institute and worked as a cashier in a sundries and notions store. She married Davit Katar who worked in the shirt business in 1973, in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated in a club called Rouge et Noir in the evening. Perla's only son Korel was born in 1980. Korel is a graduate of 7-Hills Economy Faculty. Perla's marriage is progressing quite well. Unfortunately my sister-in-law Luiza died in 1990 in the hospital where she was taken from an illness I do not know despite the fact that she was very well taken care of. After the death of my sister-in-law, my brother lived with his daughters, he was even a guest in our house for a few weeks a short while before his death. We lost my brother Davit in 1990, a short 6 or 7 months after the death of my sister-in-law. They are both interned in the Ulus Jewish cemetery.