

## Nissim Kohen And Some Classmates On A Visit To Their Teacher Sofi Danon



In 1970 in Sofia I and a group of my classmates visited a teacher of ours in geography and history. Her name was Sofi Danon. She had a sister - Franka Danon. She taught in the primary classes and Sofi taught history and geography in the junior high school grades. There are a few people on the photo. I am next to the teacher down on the first row and next to me is David Solomonov. He is a former TV and radio journalist. Behind the teacher from left to right is Yako Kohen, Rashel Beraha, Isak Ninyo, Sofka Mashiah and Asher Valadgi, who also worked in the radio. Our teacher lived in Sofia on Sofroniy Vrachanski Str.

I studied in the Luchbunar school. I also went to nursery school. We started studying Ivrit in the nursery school. We learned songs and fairy tales in Ivrit. In the first grade we had a teacher who taught us reading, writing and maths in Ivrit. We also studied Bulgarian. Until the fourth primary grade we studied all subjects, such as reading, writing, botanics, mathematics etc. in Ivrit. We studied in the mornings and the afternoons. The classes were mixed. Our classes were from 8 to 12 and from 14 to 17. We also had physical education. After the fourth primary grade, in the junior high school grades, all subjects, except the Jewish ones, were in Bulgarian. The Jewish subjects were learning the Torah, Jewish history and Jewish literature. We had both Bulgarian and Jewish teachers. We also had teachers from abroad. Those who taught Ivrit were mostly from Poland and Russia. Our teachers were very good, but they were not well paid. I remember that they were on strike once for not receiving their salaries. The salaries were provided by the Jewish municipality.

From first to fourth grade our Ivrit teacher was Ashrieli and our maths teacher - David Pilosof. Then, in the higher grades I remember Mr. Dembovich, teaching Ivrit, Torah and Jewish history, Benmair - in literature and grammar, Mr. Temkin - in Torah and Jewish history. Mr. Temkin also taught in the central Jewish school.

Jewish schools were the so-called 'private schools' and that is why after the third junior high school grade [present-day seventh grade] we had to sit for an exam in front of a commission formed by the Education Ministry. For a couple of months we had to revise and learn well everything we had learned in Ivrit from first to fourth primary grade so that we would be able to talk about it in Bulgarian in front of the commission. We were very well prepared in Bulgarian language and in maths. In our class 19 of the 30 students received excellent marks. I remember that even the newspapers wrote about our success. It was thanks to our teachers and to the fact that there was a natural selection among the students through the years. What was typical about Jewish schools was that in the first grade we were three or four classes and until the last junior high school grade only one remained. There were many reasons for that. Firstly, it was hard to study in the Jewish school because of the language. Secondly, education was all the day. All the other schools studied until one o'clock in the afternoon but we studied in the mornings and in the afternoons. Thirdly, many of the people in the Jewish neighborhood were poor and wanted their children to start working from an early age in order to help the family. So, some of them were sent to Bulgarian schools, and others were sent to work.

We were together in Hashomer Hatzair and in the UYW [The Union of Young Workers, also called Revolutionary Youth Union, a communist youth organization]. Now we still keep in touch. I still keep in touch with my UYW friends. About 90% of my friends now are Jews. I also had Bulgarian friends. Now I mostly meet with the people from the Bet Am.