

Larry and Rosa Anzhel “Married twice in a lifetime”

<p>Leon: My name is Leon Jaco Anzhel. They call me Larry. Here's a picture of my mother, Yafa Moskona, around 1900. She came from Pazardzhik. When she met my father and they married she was quite old - 38 years old.</p> <p>My father, Yako Nisim Anzhel, was from Aytos but we lived in Yambol. After his first wife died, he married mom.</p> <p>Here I am - with my mother and her sisters in our house in Yambol.</p> <p>I spent my childhood there: at that time Yambol had narrow cobbled streets, and I remember that when I was a child they brought electricity to town.</p> <p>This was the time when milkmen carried us fresh milk early in the morning, and Albanian vendors walked the streets selling Salep (an Oriental drink made from orchid roots and milk). In the summer we would roast sunflower seeds, which we bought from the farmers.</p> <p>Life had its own organic pace back then.</p> <p>At first I went to a Catholic kindergarten with other Jewish and Bulgarian children.</p> <p>Later on we, all Jewish children in our community, went to our Jewish school.</p> <p>In the own we had a rather big Jewish community then—at least it was to me.</p> <p>And here I am at a Purim play [second from left top].</p> <p>In 1932 my father died. We moved to Sofia.</p> <p>We were strikingly poor then but when an older man proposed marriage to my mother, she saw how unhappy I was, and turned him down. I was 11 years old. My elder brothers helped pay the bills. Soon I started to work after school too.</p> <p>And then in 1939, I met a young girl by the name of Rosa Varsano!</p>
<p>Rosa: Our family is from Sofia, and like Larry, we grew up very poor</p> <p>This is my mother, who was strict when it came to us studying hard in school. That's because she never learned to read as a child, and she wouldn't accept such a fate for us.</p> <p>In fact, when she was quite old, one of her granddaughters gave her a wonderful gift —she taught her to read.</p> <p>Here's my father, Bitush Isak Varsano. He worked had all is life, often as a laborer</p> <p>We all lived crowded in a tiny flat. Here are my sister Rebeka and my brother Isak. The only entertainment we could afford was to sing together, all our family, and mom and dad loved to sing Ladino songs.</p> <p>Thus singing, we would forget for a while how poor we were, how cold it was in winter.</p> <p>In fact, everyone in our neighborhood was really poor—no matter Jews or Bulgarians. We all lived in harmony, and that's why there just wasn't any anti-Semitism then.</p> <p>I loved going to the Beith Am. And I met this very nice young man there —well, I was 15 and he was much older than me – he was 19, but he was very nice. His name was Larry, and we would meet and discuss lectures and books.</p> <p>Larry: It was September 1939. We were walking and I asked her: “Do you want to be my comrade?”</p> <p>She blushed and said: “I'll think it over...”</p> <p>A few days later met her again: “Well, do you want to be my comrade?” – I asked.</p> <p>Rosa was such a nice young girl. She was thoughtful and a little shy. But we had wonderful conversations</p>

And I remember us two going for walks, and I would just let my hand brush against hers.
Rosa: But my mother had other ideas for me. She had her eye out on other boys, but when she invited them home, I wouldn't show up.
Larry: That's right, Rosa's mother was looking at boys with connections, with jobs, with status.
Rosa: So one day, I just couldn't take it any more, told her I had a boyfriend, and presented Larry to him.
Larry: Surprisingly, her mother liked me!
And he asked me one day.
Rosa: well, it wasn't so easy, you know. We had already been sent out of Sofia and our family was interned in Vratsa —and I guess we should speak about this horrible times too
They had sent us out of Sofia by train—the first time I'd ever been on one—well, it was a horribly overcrowded cattle car.
In Vratsa we were all living in a cellar. My father was sent off to forced labor and the women had to make do ourselves—pay rent, earn money to eat.
My sisters, mother and I would sew dresses—and we sewed by candle light all day and late into the night, until we couldn't even see.
We were allowed outside between eight and ten o'clock at morning. Otherwise, we weren't even allowed to put our faces to the window.
Leon: I was in forced labor. We built roads, we crushed rock, we laid railroad tracks.
And the overseers would really beat anyone they felt wasn't working hard enough.
In late February 1943, they moved us to the border near Greece. We were building a road there, close to the railway.
It was in March, when I saw it— a long train, horribly overcrowded with men and women and children —the very young and the very old.
On both ends of each car stood uniformed men to guard them and make sure no one escaped.
I was aware then that these were the Jews from Greece . Later I found out nearly every one of them had been murdered in the Nazi death camps.
But as awful as times were, our guards let us put on plays and sing. We even staged an operetta.
It was only this that made us feel that our life still had something in it.
Rosa: So we were in Vratsa and Larry was in a camp near my brother Isak.
There was a rabbi interned in the city too and he agreed to marry us.
My mother even managed somehow to make some cookies for the wedding.
And my father Bitush persuaded the guards in his labor camp to let him out for the day.
My little sister Rebeka and my brother Isak were also present.
Larry: 16 March 1944.
After the war, my other sister Ester got married too.
First I worked in the interior ministry – as a telephone operator.
We did volunteer work in the weekends . Here we are picking maize near Sofia.
We had two children – Yafa and Zhak.
Here's a picture frioom Yafa's wedding – and now Yafa is already retired too!
So now we have grandchildren – even great grandchildren.

Larry: The world since 10 November 1989 is a very different one to us.
Now our house is quiet. Our children and grandchildren have lives of their own.
And being together with so little to do, the best part of our day was just walking to the market and back.
Rosa: Then we started going to Beit Am again – just like we did when we were young. In fact, it's where we met so long ago.
Larry: And since Rosa and I have been through so much together, I had this idea,
And on our sixtieth anniversary, in 2004, we decided to get married all over again.
You know, just like the young people do
Although I'm glad no one has to go through what we went through when we first fell in love.