

Avram Bessan With His Family



This is Avram Bessan or, as we used to call him, Beto, photographed with his family in Israel in the 1960s. He left for Israel together with his mother as early as 1948. There he married a Jewish woman from Iraq. Her name is Adasa. He has two children - a girl and a boy. Adasa looks like a true Arab with her black hair.

I remember being present at Beto's bar mitzvah. His father had a shop in the center of Karnobat. They were quite well off. As Beto was the only son, they arranged a big celebration for him. I was also invited as I was his closest friend. School was too hard for him and I used to help him with his

lessons. His mother usually went to the shop and left us alone in their house. And there were always burikitas and buikos left on the cooker, especially prepared for us [these are sweetmeats, filled with nuts, raisins and sugar inside and generously poured with syrup]. Beto was very shy and he didn't want to join the guests at his bar mitzvah. Yet, there was no way to escape it, he went to the synagogue, although after we came back, he hid in the kitchen with me. Tanti Mari attentively told him: "Come on, jiku miu ["my boy" in Ladino], come with me." Thus, kindly and gently persuading him, she took him to see the guests.

There was a table prepared, a lunch, from which I remember the stewed fruit, made as a sweet. The guests were treated to masapan right after the ritual in the synagogue. Beto's father Marko Bassan together with his wife Rebecca Bassan and his brother Haim Bassan were present at the synagogue. On such occasions the whole Jewish community in Karnobat came to the synagogue to watch the ritual. There were no special invitations, people simply gathered in the synagogue, although only the closest relatives were invited to the official lunch. In the synagogue Beto was given a tallit and a kippah to wear and the hakham read the prayer. Beto also read some of the passages, pre-marked for him. He was 13 years old then. By tradition bar mitzvah celebrates the boy's maturity at that age. Our hacham Haribi Haim also used to do brit to the boys from the Jewish neighborhood on the eighth day after their birth. Later, when the war [WWII] started those rituals stopped.