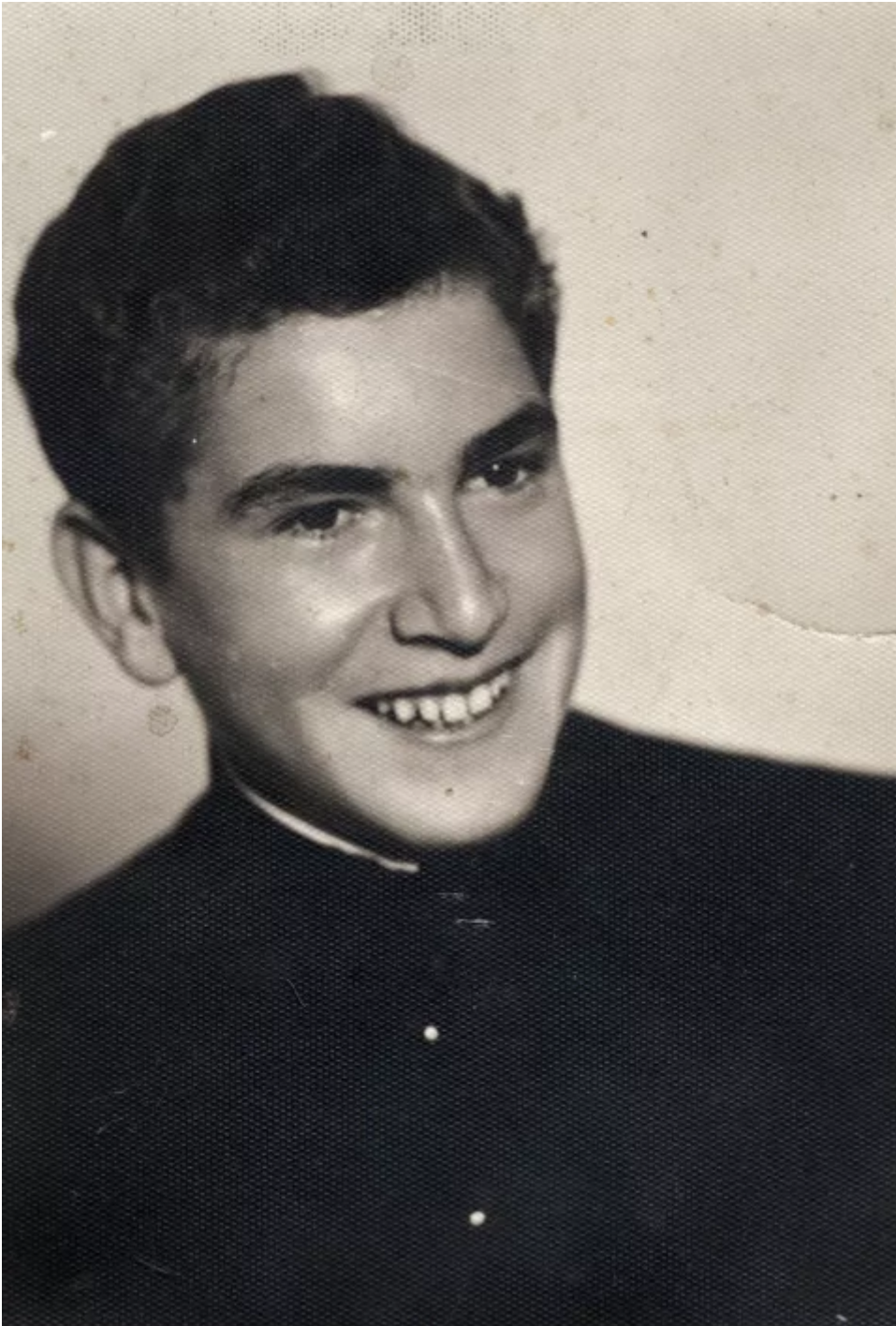


Mayer Rafael Alhalel



At this time I was a student in the third grade at a junior high-school, which is equivalent to present-day eighth grade, i.e, I have passed four elementary school grades and three junior high school grades. I was 15 years old. The photo was taken in Vidin in 1938. I remember that in the Jewish school we were taught Ivrit by Haim Levi from Vidin. At first we read fairy tales in Ivrit and then we learned both Ivrit and the Torah at the same time: we learnt how Ivrit was used in the Torah. I loved mathematics, history, geography and literature. I was a great fan of Meyne Reid, Jack London, Jules Verne, Gorky and Marxist literature. I also loved classical music, especially the Italian and Russian composers: Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Khachiturian, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev. We were five Jews and 20 Bulgarians in our class. But we were very united. This was

probably because most of us were UYW members and we shared the same ideology. There were some Legionaries in our class, but they were isolated from the rest. At that time we had to choose a class board. I was usually elected the chairman of the board: probably because I was an active UYW member. I remember an anti-Semitic case from my school. I had a friend, a Bulgarian, his name was Tsanko Urmanov and his family was rich. He had a Jewish girlfriend. One evening, I went out with him and my best friend Haim Paparo for a walk. Haim's grandfather was a rabbi in our synagogue. Haim and I were neighbors and we often went for a walk together. That evening a Legionnaire approached Haim and I, and ordered us to make the sign of the cross. Tsanko defended us and they started a fight. In the end the Legionnaire ran away, because Tsanko was a big boy. The next evening the three of us went for a walk again and Tsanko opened his coat and said, 'Look at what I bought today!' And he showed us a dagger. He said, 'If someone tries to threaten you again, I'll kill him, I won't think twice!'