

Leontina Arditi



This is a photo of me as a schoolgirl. The picture was taken in Sofia in the 1940s.

I had a very happy childhood. I learnt how to walk in Dolni Dabnik and began going to school in Mezdra. I studied in a Bulgarian secular school. I hated geometry. And the hateful teacher was Miss Yankova, our maths teacher, of course. I was a poor student. When I received a satisfactory mark [3 out of 5] my mother would make a pudding for me. And she would give the women from the neighborhood a treat. My parents even hired a private teacher for me, but it was fruitless. I liked geography a lot and I loved literature and the Bulgarian language. I knew by heart half of the 'Epopoe of the Forgotten' by Ivan Vazov. I loved my teacher in literature, Mrs. Kateva, and I remember her even now as if she was standing right in front of me.

Once people came to summon students for Brannik in our school. And my classmates put their names down. We had a very stupid boy in our class, Haim, and I often had fights with him. He said: 'I also want to write my name down'. They told him: 'We don't accept Jews.' Some teasing was heard: you the Jews are such and such. Then Mrs. Kateva turned red and said: 'I won't tolerate such things in my class.'

I was small then and I remember vaguely the famous manifestation of 24th May 1943 when the Jews marched to tell the King not to expel them. As a matter of fact 24th May, the day of the Slavic alphabet, as well as of the saint brothers Cyril and Methodius, who created it, was my favorite holiday. I was 14 years old then. I remember I had put on my red blouse. Suddenly the people who participated in the events started running because there was mounted police that scattered them. I was playing in the street; mum came, collected me, brought me home and said: 'Take off this red blouse! You have chosen a bad moment to wear it!' [red as a symbolic color of the communists] It was this day that I first heard of the word 'anti-Semites'. I heard: 'The anti-Semites battered to death the Jews!' I didn't know what it meant; I couldn't even pronounce it. We were six Jewish children, who studied in the Bulgarian school, but nobody bothered us, nobody maltreated us.