

## Leontina Arditi With Friends



This is a photo of me and my friends in the Jewish neighborhood in Sofia playing violin. The boy from left in the photo is Niso [Nisim] Benbasat, my first love. My father Samuil Moisey Arditi brought me up well. He taught me not to get dead set against anybody and anything. One of his major gestures towards me was that he sold his wedding-ring in order to buy me a violin. He felt I had an ear for music; I was only four then. The neighbors reproached him for this, because 'a musician can't make a living for a family', especially if the musician is a girl. My violin teacher was uncle Kamen, the famous violinist Kamen Popdimitrov, my father's friend from his years in France. Well, when we were to be interned, in my third year in the junior high school, I had a final poor mark [2, that means failed] in geometry. Everybody graduated and I had to sit for a make-up exam. We set off for the province. We were first allocated to Haskovo, but I was summoned to the police for some verses I had written. Then they sent us to Dupnitsa, where I wasn't accepted to enroll in the high school, because I didn't have a diploma for the junior high school. They wanted at least some document stating that I had studied up to the third class of the previous level. Then mum wrote a letter to uncle Kamen. As a response he sent me a grade book for a completed 3rd class of the junior high school. My maths teacher, Mrs. Yankova, had been my nightmare; she used to give me only poor marks; I had wanted to suffocate her? And now we read that there are two good marks [4 out of 5] in the certificate for completed third class - one in geometry and one in maths. What had this man done? In which way had he spoken with Mrs. Yankova? What could he

have said to her? I don't know, but this cruel woman for me became a saint, despite the fact that I wasn't accepted in the high school but in the business school. Never mind! What does this mean? It means that two Bulgarians had tried to give a blunt-witted Jewish child as best as they could, a chance to continue her studies.