

Simon Alvo



This is a picture of my father, Simon Alvo. He was born in 1889 in Thessaloniki.

He went to the Turkish school first; he knew Turkish very well. He also went to the Jewish school. Later, he went to the Alliance school. He finished the Alliance school and went straight to work.

The business of our father was founded in 1913, a year after Thessaloniki was liberated from the Turks. It was called "Afoi Alvo" -Alvo Brothers. It was difficult for him to create a business, but the

circumstances helped him.

The war and the fire helped him a lot. People were left in great need and there was no production in Greece. Everything came from abroad. He knew many languages and this was his advantage, because he could communicate when he went abroad.

This was what upset mother most. He would leave at least four or five times every year to travel for business. Not for a very long time, for ten or fifteen days. He would make a deal there and then.

Initially, my father had a shop at Fraggon Street. After the Great Fire of 1917, the Greek government started giving landed property to everyone as a compensation.

Thus, in 1922 they built the shop at Ionos Dragoumi street, that was then called Alexander the Great Street, at number 22 where Eurobank stands today. It was a multi-storey building with four or five floors.

This shop was in the style of Galleries Lafayette, because my father had visited Paris many times and he had liked the Galleries Lafayette.

The ground floor, as well as the other four floors, were open in the middle and no matter how warm it would get, as soon as the door opened the heat would go away. They would never get warm.

My father later built a factory to produce barbed wire, chains, hinges, nails, but mainly barbed wire. He started the factory around 1932-1933. He was an honest man of trade.

He was very careful with his work. He didn't take many risks. I think that the factory he built was a risk at the time that he did it, because it was quite a big business.

The main characteristic of our company, which I really tried hard to keep, was the good name of the business. We had a very good name in the market and were considered as very consistent and fair merchants. We were very consistent in the quality of our goods. They were always class A, very good quality at reasonable prices. And everyone used to say, "let's go to Alvo's to shop. We might pay a little more, but we will get top quality".

My father loved literature and flowers. He imported flowers from Belgium and the Netherlands. He would bring bulbs from the Netherlands and rose bushes and Dahlias from Belgium. He read all kinds of literature. He read quite a lot, always in French.

Even though he was working so much, he didn't go out much either. He would buy magazines like "L'Illustration" which was a great magazine with really nice pictures. He would buy the "Candide", which was probably right winged. He wasn't buying it because it was rightist, but for the information, to keep up to date.

As a newspaper he used to buy Modiano's "Le Progres". He would either buy "Le Progres" or "L'Independant". They read the papers mainly on the tram. He didn't buy any Judeo Spanish newspapers. My father was a member of the Association des Anciens Eleves de l' Alliance Israelite Universelle. He was also member of the B'nei B'rith.

My father was of very low profile. He didn't like to stand out so much. He had a hearing problem. He had lost his hearing since he was quite young. From around forty years old he couldn't hear well so he didn't enjoy socializing much.

He was too proud and he didn't want the others to know that he had a hearing problem. This was one of the reasons that he wasn't very sociable and wouldn't go out much.