

Josef Alvo's Family And Antonis Papahrisanthou



This is a picture of my uncle Joseph (first from right), Antonis Papahrisanthou (standing), Joseph's granddaughter Ziva (third from right), his daughter Julie/Pnena (second from left), and his wife Bella (first from left).

Joseph Alvo first went at school at the Talmud Torah and later on, I think, he also went to the Alliance school. I don't know why he and my father were at the same grade at school, even though Joseph was two years older.

I could never figure this out. Did his parents sent him to school later than the rest? Was he perhaps sickly and they didn't send him straight away?

Joseph was my fathers' partner at work. They started the business together. At the shop, my father was in charge of the supplies and Joseph was at the sales.

One thing I remember (because we used to live in the same house, they lived at the top floor and we lived on the ground floor), was that at noon they would come home from the shop together in a taxi to eat, and then, they would leave separately with the tram.

He was a gentle character, and he would get along really well with my father. They were very close to each other. There hadn't ever been any tension between them. Joseph was at the shop about as much time as my father was, that is everyday. But he was never as active as my father.

My father used to go to the shop a bit earlier every day. I remember my mother complaining about this: "why do you leave earlier every day?", she would say to my father, "and your brother goes only later, why don't you go later too?" But he was very punctual.

Family ties were very close. My father and my uncle lived at the same house. They built it together. Their wives would also see each other very often. And most importantly, when there was a health problem they would always support each other very much.

Joseph didn't participate at all in community or public affairs. I don't know if he was even at B'nai B'rith. Joseph supported the Zionists. His son influenced him to go to Palestine.

Joseph used to go to the synagogue. Not often, but occasionally. During the religious holidays he would often take me with him. He would say to me, "you are coming with me."

At the Rosh Hashanah for example, he would take me with him, while my father would not come. Joseph would go to the synagogue a bit more often than my father. Maybe he was a bit more religious, but not really much more.

Joseph got married to Bella Amarilio. She was from Malta. Here, the Amarilios were well known in the market. They were importing iron, steel, these kinds of things.

They had quite a big company and one of the companies, SIDMA is still in the stock market. It was based in Thessaloniki before the war and in Athens after the war.

Bella was the oldest child. I know that she was slightly older than my mother, four or five years older. If we say that my mother was born around 1901, she must have been born in 1896-1897.

Bella was born in Malta, not in Thessaloniki. Her family was Maltese. She spoke English, because Malta was something like a British colony then. They were British citizens.

Only much later did they come to Greece. They survived the Holocaust because they had left for Israel. Her other siblings though, (who didn't go to Palestine and stayed here and opened a business), when we were at war with the Italians, the British ships came and took them to the Middle East since they had British citizenship.

Joseph had three children. One boy who was seven years older than me, Marcel -the name is from the Hebrew Mazliah- and Renee who had taken her name from Rahil or, more European, Rachel. She was about two years older than me, so she was born around 1920.

He had another child, the youngest one, Julica. Julica was younger than us; she must have been born after 1925, around 1926. Renee had an accident. After she had gone to Palestine, she got married there with a man from Thessaloniki.

When she gave birth in 1941, about a month before the Germans entered Thessaloniki, she got an infection and because there wasn't any penicillin, or any other medication, she died. She gave birth to a daughter. Her parents, Joseph and Bella, brought her up.

Bella was very beautiful and my uncle was madly in love with her. That's what they used to say. With my mother they didn't have any friction between them, even though often sisters in law don't get along well, especially when they live so close to each other and watch each other's life so closely. They got along fine.

Above all, you should have seen the support that they offered to each other when one was ill. When Renee was ill and had to get some medicine and couldn't make it, my mother would go upstairs and give her the medicine. Sometimes when Renee would argue with her mother, she would go upstairs and convince them to make things up.

My mother and Bella had some common chores. They did the shopping together. They would go together and buy fabrics and then go together at the seamstress.

Bella was always asking my mother's advice on how to make a dress. My mother was more elegant than her and since Bella had realised this, she trusted her and always took her advice.

In 1932 Joseph left for Palestine. He wanted his son to avoid doing his military service, but he also left because his son was a Zionist. In fact, he used to say that he will go there and go to the school for agricultural studies.

However, he didn't take agricultural studies there and went to a bank instead. In Palestine, Joseph was working for a bank. I think he was a partner at the Rekanati Bank. He was still interested in the shop in Thessaloniki without being present or working.

My father promised him that his part of the business wouldn't be touched by anybody else. Each one owned half of the company. He would take part of the earnings, as usual.

Up until the Germans came, they would share everything. He would come and visit us in Thessaloniki at least once a year, but father never went. Only Daniel went a couple of times.

Joseph settled in Tel-Aviv. They rented a very beautiful house in a central avenue. They felt very lonely there. They didn't have the circle of people they had here.

They didn't have their friends around or anyone from the family. Joseph wanted to drag with him someone from the family because he felt very lonely there. But he didn't succeed.

Uncle Daniel went and didn't like it at all, especially the water, "what kind of water is that?", he was saying; "this smells like a rotten egg, how do you drink this water?"

In fact my father insisted very much, "what are you doing down there?", he used to tell them, "come back and we will all live together." Luckily, they didn't come back and were saved by pure luck. Joseph died after the war in 1965.