

The Bidjarano Family



This is a photo of the Bidjarano family. It was taken in the yard of my grandfather's house in 1915. From left to right is my aunt Oro, her husband, their daughter Rezhina, my uncle Yakov, my grandmother Beya, Yakov's wife Zhana, my mother Sara Katalan, nee Bidjarano, my uncle Buko, my grandfather David and my uncle Raphael. At the time of the picture my mother was at about ten years old - almost the same age as her sister's daughter, Rezhina. My grandfather was a shopkeeper and he had an old house in the center of Kazanlak on the Jewish Street. It had two floors - there was a kitchen with a fountain and a stone sink downstairs. Upstairs there were two rooms with couches by the windows and a coal brazier, where they boiled coffee - they drank a lot of coffee. In this room there was a big ancient mirror as well as a wide bed where my grandpa lay and was dying slowly for almost two years. I could still hear him calling my grandmother to give him some water or medicine. He always wore a black suit, his shoes were always shining and he had a bowler hat - I don't remember him ever being careless or untidy. We never visited them without being given something - my grandmother would open a cupboard and offer us some dried morellos or other delicacies. In front of their house there was a vine trellis with splendid white grapes. We almost didn't talk to grandma - she seemed to us terribly old yet she was very kind and loved us very much. My grandfather was very religious, he read in Hebrew and attended the synagogue regularly. He almost didn't leave home except when they went to the synagogue or visited some relatives. David and Beya conversed in Ladino - we called it Judeo-Espanol. They hardly knew Bulgarian - David more or less managed, he was a shopkeeper after all. But my poor grandmother knew just a few words in Bulgarian. My mother Sara was the youngest child in her family - she had three brothers and one sister. The eldest brother, Buko, left for Plovdiv where he was a bank officer. Her second brother Raphael graduated with a degree in medicine in Vienna and he came back to work as a physician in Kazanlak. Her third brother Yakov was a naive and good-hearted man who couldn't finish whatever he was doing. My mother's sister, Oro [Ladino: gold] was a very beautiful woman; she fell in love with a young Bulgarian from Kazanlak. At that time this was considered setting a terrible precedent, almost a scandal for the Jewish community and her relatives; they renounced her and they didn't want to see or to hear anything of this beautiful woman. Later she married a wealthy Bulgarian in Plovdiv - he had some business in the oil and gas

industry. They had two daughters, Beti and Rezhina. Later on they forgave her the mistake and she could come and visit us in Kazanlak - during these visits I was fascinated with her beauty. Afterwards they divorced, her husband left for Egypt with one of their daughters and she left for Paris with the other one in 1935 or 1936. She survived the German occupation in France, her friends and neighbors hid her.