

Adela Hinkova's Family



This is a photo of my family in Vidin in the 1930s. My parents Matilda Illel, nee Mitrani and Leon Illel are sitting in the first row, and my brother Santo Illel and I are behind them. My mother, my father's second wife, arrived in Bulgaria from Greece with her parents, probably in 1912 or 1913. Their son Solomon and their daughter with her husband Bentsion remained in Greece, while they came to Bulgaria with my mother, who was already 25 years old. They married her to my father, who was 25 years older than her. She arrived with one chest. We had that chest for many years at home. She kept her most valuable things there and a dress called 'bindali,' an ancient Jewish national velvet dress sewn with gold threads. I don't know if she came with that dress or if my father gave it to her as a present when she gave birth to my brother Santo. There was a tradition to give nice presents to women who had given birth to boys. I remember my father with very little hair. He had a short haircut. His hair was a bit grayish. Even when he died at 72 years of age, he did not have white hair. He didn't have a hair prosthesis. He said it bothered him. He wore a suit. He always wore a suit; I don't remember if he had any cardigans. He wore pants, a shirt and a jacket. In the summer I don't remember seeing him without his jacket, wearing a shirt only. He also wore a bowler hat. When it got cold, he wore a fur-lined short coat. In the winter he wore overshoes, because there was a lot of mud around. I had to wash them, but the water in the bucket would freeze during the night. In the morning, he would take a wooden log and hit the ice in the bucket to crush it. And he said, 'Come now, wash yourself!' The ground in Vidin is kind of sticky, not crumbling. It stuck to the overshoes and you can't image how hard it was to wash two pairs of overshoes with freezing hands. My mother made me work a lot. She didn't take 'I can't do it' for an answer. She worked a lot and made me work, too. But I also had to go to school, to see my friends so I sometimes avoided it. In 1927, when I was ten years old, they made a water pump at home. She made me save the water in a barrel for irrigation and I filled the barrel with a bucket. I filled it in and she would do the irrigation. Gradually I took up all the household chores, because my parents went down ill. I went out to buy medications, I had to go shopping, light the stove, and go to school and because of all the work to be done, I had to repeat my grade at school. My mother made me work, but my brother was exempted from that. And so, I didn't have a strong connection with my mother. My father was calmer and told me some warm words sometimes. All those years

were very oppressive for me. There's no photo from my childhood where I'm smiling, I'm always serious. Life in general was very hard.