

Matilda Israel



This is a photo of me as a child taken in Karnobat in 1926. I remember that they took me to a photo studio in Karnobat for this photo. I was born on the 20th October 1921 in the town of Karnobat, where I grew up. It was a small town in southeastern Bulgaria then, a cattle-breeding center with around ten thousand citizens. All the Jewish families - around fifty - lived in the same neighborhood. Now there are no longer Jews living there. We formed this neighborhood ourselves, based on our own initiative and will. It was on the outskirts of town but at the same time it was near the center. We were all very united and perhaps the years of my childhood were the happiest in my life. The yards of our houses were not surrounded by tall fences and we could pass from one part of the

neighborhood to the other by crossing the backyards instead of walking along the streets. The whole Jewish community was very united and we all helped the poorer families among us. I remember that when I was a child, I played all day from morning until late in the evening, when I went home for dinner, as my father insisted that the whole family should eat together. All of my friends then were Jews; the older and the younger children all played together. Every evening we visited some family or they came to visit us. We didn't arrange the visits beforehand, we just decided to visit someone and went there. We ate cooked corn, popcorn, fruit; the children gathered in one of the rooms and the parents in the other. And we did this every evening! Even when there was a curfew, we could pass through the yards and no one would know that we were not at home. All children from the Jewish neighborhood played together and got sick together. We quite often passed various viruses to each other - measles, tonsillitis, mumps. We went through all the children's diseases. If a child went down with an infectious illness, all the other children also caught it and our mothers treated us together. When I was young, a Turkish girl, Mirem, looked after me. I learned Turkish from her, which I spoke very well, but I later forgot it and she learned Ladino from us - the language in which we spoke at home. My father had sheltered her, because she was an orphan and in return she looked after me, although she was only 10 years old. She was like a sister to me and we were together the whole day long.