

Matilda Israel



This is a photo of me when I was in high school. The photo was taken on the street in Karnobat in 1939. My happy and easygoing childhood ended on the day when my father died. He had developed diabetes and after a long and painful battle with it, died of a shock to his brain. I was very close to him and mourned his death deeply. I was only 15 years old and I was left without the man who always protected me. Then my brother Sabetay took up that role. He wanted to send me to a tailoring school. There was no high school in Karnobat then and I had to go to study in Bourgas or in Sliven or in Kotel. However, I stood up against my brother's decision to become a seamstress. I applied to the high school in Bourgas, but all the classes were already full and I had to go to a high school in Kotel. I gathered my luggage and went there. I was very scared and disappointed when I saw my classmates, because they were children expelled from other schools in Bulgaria and

I soon found out that I wouldn't be able to learn much. I wanted to go home very much. Fortunately, soon after that I learned that a high school had been opened in Karnobat and without any hesitation I returned to my hometown. I was the only Jew in the class, but I became friends with the other children very quickly. We wore uniforms, black overalls, white collars or black skirts and white shirts and berets. We also had a number on the sleeve. Even nowadays I keep in touch with some of my high school friends. We were a very united class. My favorite classes were Bulgarian and French. I had problems only in zoology, or to be more precise, with the zoology teacher. Apparently, he didn't like Jews, because he often insulted me and gave me bad grades. My homeroom teacher advised me to request to be examined in zoology by a commission at the end of the year. In this way I got an excellent grade. The other teachers were very nice and we felt very close to them. Until some years ago one of my teachers was still alive and we telephoned each other from time to time. Even nowadays my friend Vaska and I keep in touch through letters.