

Leon Lazarov In A Forced Labor Camp



This picture was taken in the forced labor camp between 1940-1944. I am in the front. First I was sent to forced labor camps in 1940. I spent four years of my life there in hard living conditions. Initially I was sent to Tserovo, a village in the district of Sofia. There I spent six months and I remember that it was extremely difficult for us. I remember that we were given uniforms and also that we set up an improvised band with the workers. In Tserovo camp the attitude towards us was very humane. In order to set up the orchestra, we received permission from major Rogozarov, who was a battalion commander. The members of the orchestra were relieved of obligations and therefore, when we decided to form a choir, over 100 volunteers applied. Some of them couldn't sing at all. I chose 20 people from all the candidates. Among the participants in this band there were prominent musicians, who had leading positions in the Musical Theater and in famous orchestras before the war started. Yet, after the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws, they were fired everywhere and after 1940 sent to different forced labor camps all over Bulgaria. That was my destiny, too. During the second year they sent me to the village of Trunska Klisoura [near the Serb border]. We had to walk all the way until we reached the village - about a hundred kilometers. We didn't wear uniforms there. We wore whatever we could find, and in addition we had to wear a yellow piece of cloth on our arms as a distinctive mark. The third year we were somewhere near the town of Krichim - in the village of Vetren. This isn't far from Pazardjik. I remember that no matter where we were, we always succeeded in finding ways to keep ourselves well informed about the front line situation. In the fourth year we were somewhere in Kjustendil district. Upon our arrival there we had no idea where exactly we were located. Nobody told us. The day we arrived at our new destination some villagers passed by and we asked them where we were. They told us that we were close to Bozhitsa. This is a village near Kjustendil, in which my uncle was a civilian doctor. I asked the people whether they knew him and it turned out that they knew him very well because he treated the whole village. Although it seemed to me quite impossible that they would tell him that I was close to the village, I still asked them to inform him and to my greatest surprise, already on the next day my uncle came to see me along with the village teacher. It was a very exciting meeting.