

Mario Modiano And Family



This photo was taken at the stairway leading to our house on Alexandrias Street in Salonica in the 1930s. I, Mario Modiano, am in the center of the photo with the school cap and the glasses. The other little boy in the picture is my cousin Maurice Modiano with an old school cap that I had and which he really loved. On the left corner is my grandfather Eliaou Modiano. Next to him is my father's sister Leal Modiano. My mother, Nella Tchenio, is the one standing by the door with her hand up. Next to her, is the wife of my uncle Joe Modiano, Aline Nahmia, the mother of Maurice.

Grandfather Eliaou, who was born in 1865, married Allegra Cohen. They had three children, my father Sam, Lily or Leal and Joseph. As my grandfather was not doing too well in Salonica, he moved to Alexandria to be near his eldest brother Moise. However, he seems to have lost all his money in the cotton exchange. So he brought the family back to Salonica again.

I remember that my grandparents lived in the center of Salonica in a complex of several two- and three-floor houses that surrounded a courtyard. There, in the middle of the courtyard, was a small synagogue that was known as the 'synagogue of the rabbis.' That is where my father would take me on major holidays and we would join Grandfather who lived practically next door. I would mainly play in the courtyard rather than sit in at the service.

My mother was very sweet and very pretty. She was a gentle person and had a lot of understanding. She wasn't a mother that was smothering her children; she would see to it that we grew up to be human beings. She would put pepper in our mouths if we said a dirty word. She wasn't a pushy Jewish mother, not at all. Mother was running our household as well as the whole family, since Father was so busy.

My aunt Leal was born in 1897 and had married twice but had no children. She was taken by the Germans in Salonica, lost in the Shoah in 1943.

Uncle Joe was born in 1901. Before the war he lived in Kavalla and was in the tobacco business. When he married Aunt Aline in a Salonica hotel, I was a page. Throughout my childhood people kept reminding me how I had dropped the bride's train and ran to collect the 'koufeta,' the sugar-coated almonds that are traditionally showered over the bride and groom. Uncle Joe, Aunt Aline and their son, my cousin Maurice, would visit us frequently in Salonica. Our home was quite small, so they would stay in a hotel.