

Yako Yakov And His Friends



A Jewish group from Ruse. The photo was taken in 1940 in Ruse. We are all twenty years of age here. We were very good friends. Most of them left for Israel with the Mass Aliyah in 1949. Some of them have already died. I am the first from left to right, dressed in a light striped suit. In the middle is Albert Yulzari, who has already died. The third from right to left is Marsel Asael. He became a distinguished professor psychiatrist and he has already died, too. The second from right to left is the famous Israeli conductor Haim (Ziko) Gratsiani, who died in 2003. He loved jazz as early as high school. He played the mouth organ first, and then the trumpet. He was one of the active members of the David musical association and one of the leaders of the first jazz orchestra in the country before 1944. In 1941 Ziko Gratsiani and I were in the same labor camp - Kara Tepe. I was a trumpeter. Once I decided to escape and gave the trumpet to Ziko Gratsiani - to sound when it is time for lunch, otherwise they would notice that I was not there. So, he took the trumpet. Thus he became the camp's trumpeter. He immigrated to Israel in 1949. The first from right to left is Aron Alfandari, who is deceased. On my right side or the second from left to right is Jako Pinkas. We are the only two men still alive of all people in the picture. The year after this photo was taken, in May 1941, we were all sent to labor camps. At the end of February a ship passed through Bulgaria, going to Israel and gathering Bulgarian Jews aboard. They were from the whole country, most of them girls, because the boys who had not done their military service were not allowed to leave the country. That is why I, Miko Yulzari, Tinka Djain, who later died in a shooting, and a boy from Varna, whose name I do not remember, decided to leave illegally for Israel. We had to talk to Anton Prutkin to get us aboard his ship on 1st March. He agreed. The day before 1st March we got on the ship and waited for it to get dark for the ship to leave. The ship had to leave us at a port in Turkey or Cyprus. But the next day he came and said, 'Go away, we won't be able to do it.' 'Why?', we asked. 'Because the German army occupied Bulgaria, the port of Varna is surrounded and we can't leave the port.' So, our escape to Israel failed. By the way, Anton Prutkin was a very interesting personality. He was a commander in Sofia at the time of Alexander Stamboliiski. Then he worked in Varna as a spy for the Soviet intelligence. He was caught and was hanged in 1943.