Leon Yako Anzhel

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Larry always moves around with his wife Roza. They have been married for 62 years and have known each other for 68 years. Now, probably because of their advancing age, too, Roza is his second half, his connection with life and the world of the young people. He always insists on her presence and still feels pleasure when she touches him.
Because of his age, he has difficulties in collecting his thoughts but the recollections for his love for Roza illuminate not only his face, but his thoughts as well. When he's talking about this period of his life his story becomes interesting, absorbing and behind it you can see Larry from the past times, Larry who was the engine of the parties of the workers from the Union of the Young Workers [UYW] 1 and later, after 9th September 1944, the organizer, the worker who kept in touch with so many people.

Family background

My name is Leon Yako Anzhel but I go by Larry. I was born in Yambol [South-East Bulgaria, 261km from Sofia] on 24th September 1921. I have three older brothers from my father's first wife, whose name was Yafa. Their names are Isak, Hiskia and Marko. My mother was my father's second wife and her name was Yafa, too. I've been married for 62 years to Roza Bitush Varsano.

I don't have any recollections about my grandparents or distant relatives. I know that we are Ladino 2 Jews 3 both on my mother's and father's sides. When I was born my parents were already middle-aged. My father was 50 and my mother 37 or 38 years old.

My father, Yako Nisim Anzhel, was born in Aytos [South-East Bulgaria, 321km from Sofia] in 1870. He had elementary education and his main occupation was in the sphere of commerce. He had two brothers: Nisim and Yosif, and one sister: Niema. They were born in Aytos and dealt with commerce as well. From his first marriage he had three sons: Isak, Hiskia and Marko. This woman, his first wife, died in 1918 or 1919 and he remained alone. My mother Yafa was a cousin and had the same name as his first wife, Yafa. My mother's relatives convinced him and arranged everything in such a way that he agreed to marry her. She had neither dowry, nor a wedding chemise. I don't know any details about their wedding. [Editor's note: Here the interviewee refers to the tradition in Jewish families, which is to look for a person from the same family after the death of one of the spouses in order to marry again. And he mentions the dowry typical for the Jewish girl, 'ashougar,'

which consists of six sets of bed sheets decorated with hand-made embroidery, two counter-panes: one for the summer and the other for the winter, clothes for the bride, among them special garments for Sabbath as well as a special chemise for the first nuptial night, clothes for the baby, counter-pane for the bed of a woman who has given birth and so on].

My father was of medium height. My first memories of him are when his hair had already gone white. He was a very kind, soft and talkative person. He never told me off or hit me; I can't even remember him making remarks; I will explain this later. I remember one such case. One evening he came home later than usual. He was in a very jovial mood. My mother told him off for coming home so late and accused him of drinking but he only laughed, made jokes, caressed and kissed us. It wasn't true that he was drunk; this is what I thought then and still do so today.

He had a good reputation both among the Jews and Bulgarians in Yambol. They called him Uncle Yako. He used to have a grocery store in the center of town but he was also a representative of a gas company. Later because of the unfair competition, he went bankrupt. He was forced to sell the grocery store and afterwards, because of that, fell ill in 1930. In the next two years he often went to Sofia for medical treatment. In spite of the fact that the best doctors at the time in Sofia were taking care of him, he died in 1932 in Sofia.

My mother, Yafa Juda Anzhel [nee Moskona], was born in Pazardzhik [South-Central Bulgaria, 99km from Sofia] in 1884 and died in 1961 in Sofia. She had two brothers and two sisters: Bohor, Roben, Matilda and Naumi. She was the only one from all the children to finish a French school: Alliance Francaise 4. Apart from Ladino and Bulgarian, she also spoke French fluently. She married at the age of 38 in Yambol. My mother told me that she was from a poor family and didn't even have dowry or wedding chemise. That was the reason why she hadn't married the boy who she had loved before my father. His parents simply didn't agree to give their blessings under these conditions. This is why she got married so late, to my father.

When I was born, my oldest brother Isak had already left for his studies abroad, I don't know where. Hiskia [Harry] didn't live with us either, I don't know why, probably he was studying or working, too. Only the third son, Marko, was living with the family. He was born in 1906, which means he was fifteen when I was born. My mother treated us the same.

Our entire family lived in Yambol until my father's death. My mother was a cultivated woman; she read and was interested in many things, literature in particular. She was extremely devoted to her brother Roben and his wife Rebecca and, especially after my father's death, she looked for support from their family and felt safer when they lived somewhere around. And here I can share a small detail: Rebecca, Roben's wife, was my father's first wife's sister.

My mother was of medium height and, no matter that she had lived with my father for only fourteen years, she was very devoted to him. When my father died she had the chance to marry, for the second time, a man with a good financial situation. I remember that my aunts, Matilda and Naumi, for a long time tried to talk her into it because the suitor, whose name I can't remember, had two houses and a shop. Nonetheless he was much older than her. And so, she didn't agree. The reasons for that were on the one hand, she couldn't forget my father, and, on the other, the suitor was much older than her. And the third reason, may be the most important one, was that I, after hearing this conversation between my aunts and her, started crying and said that I would

never live in that man's house. It seems to me that she refused because of me as well. She didn't want to hurt me. At that time, after my father's death, I was eleven. My mother, like my father, was always very considerate of me.

I lived in Yambol until 1932. At that time it was a peaceful, provincial town. Only the central streets were paved with something resembling cobbles. The electricity lit the town in 1924 or 1925. I remember that there used to be cafes, garment shops, cosmetic shops, and the cinema was nearby. The 'Tundzha' textile mills existed at the time.

In winter you could buy 'salep' in the street. It was a very nice drink. The vendors would pour the drink into little cups, and in the evenings some Albanian guys with cans used to deliver boza 5 to the houses. In the summer they sold syrup. In the streets people sold different things: pumpkin seeds, 'kebapcheta' [oblong rissoles]. In the morning villagers would come on little carts and shout, 'The milkman! The milkman!' and we used to buy milk, or the villagers would simply fill the containers left by the doors of the people, who hadn't woken up yet. I recall that a lot of villagers from the nearby villages used to come to supply goods. I have dim memories of the market place.

On the outskirts of Yambol, near the Tundzha River, there were the so-called 'bahchi.' The 'bahchi' are vegetable or fruit orchards, which are rented and taken care of by gardeners, Bulgarians, who had acquired their skills in Hungary and Central Europe. They had come from some place near Veliko Turnovo [North-Central Bulgaria, 195km from Sofia]. Very often in spring and summer the women would go to those gardens with their children, and went for walks there because it was cool under the branches of the trees by the river. Their main aim was to buy fresh vegetables but they often remained there longer because of the coolness. They used to take food along so the walk was actually an outing. The children used to play; the women would knit and talk to each other.

The Jewish quarter was near Rakovski Street, which was the main street, the so-called promenade in Yambol. At that time the Jewish community in Yambol was pretty big. For example, my father had both Jewish and Bulgarian friends but most of his friends were Bulgarians. Jews used to inhabit other parts of Yambol, too, they didn't live in the Jewish quarter only, like the Bulgarians, some of whom had houses in the Jewish quarter.

In the Jewish quarter there used to be a Jewish public bathhouse and school, which was next to the synagogue. My father wasn't a religious person but I remember that they organized a bar mitzvah for me. I can't say anything about the circumstances at this ritual. I don't remember anything.

Growing up

At first we had a house in a Bulgarian quarter, opposite the high school. I was born there but have very dim memories of the place. After some time my father sold it and he, with his own efforts, built a two-storey house in the Jewish quarter. The house was surrounded by a small yard, which we had cemented. On one side it was fenced off by grain silos. There were other houses around. Opposite the street there used to live one or two Bulgarian families with whom we were friends. I can even tell you a story here: Some time ago a man called me on the phone. He had tracked me down, his name was Vulchanov. We used to live in one of the adjacent houses. He had become a professor in Biology. He visited us and it was such a nice meeting, after so many years.

We let out the upper floor of the house. There used to live a family from the White Guards 6 who had fled the Soviet Union. We used to live on the ground floor, two stairs below, and had a room, a little corridor and kitchenette. I used to sleep in the corridor. I remember that my brother Marko lived with us, while the other brothers, Isak and Hiskia, had already left for Sofia. The toilet and sink were outside. The furniture was modest. I remember that in the kitchen we had a table, a cooker on wood, and beds.

I used to be a very poor eater as a child; I usually didn't finish my meals. No matter whether I wanted to eat or not, the family would gather for dinner every evening around the table. I recall that once I was late for that ritual. My mother had cooked rice with tomatoes and I hated that dish, but she pulled me aside and told me that I had to eat it all so that my father wouldn't be angry.

I remember another story. My father liked to eat garlic with walnuts and salt. One evening on returning home he asked my mother to give him walnuts, garlic and salt. He invited me to join him but I refused, of course. But he was eating with such appetite that I changed my mind and wanted to take a bite. I liked it so much that my appetite whetted and it seems to me that afterwards I wasn't such a poor eater any more.

This was the way my parents brought me up: they didn't tell me what to do; they gave me an example with their actions. Due to the fact that I was very choosy in my childhood, I don't remember much about the dishes that my mother prepared. I have memories about her dishes from a later period when I had already married Roza and my mother was living with us. I remember that while Roza was at work she would prepare a very nice 'agristada:' a sauce with flour as the main ingredient, with brains or fish, 'inchusa di lechi,' pasty with milk, 'apiyu,' an appetizer from celery, 'kizadikas,' and aubergine with cheese. Every Friday a pastry was prepared: pastry with meat.

We spoke Bulgarian at home but when my parents quarreled or shared secret bits of information they used Ladino. My parents were friends with some families. They gathered and visited each other. They were Jews but there were some Bulgarians among them who would invite us for roast lamb. My mother had some Bulgarian lady friends with whom she met but I don't know anything more about their meetings. We kept the Jewish holidays mainly at school but sometimes we celebrated at home as well. I can't remember any particular celebration.

I was friends mainly with Jews from the Jewish school but had some Bulgarian contacts as well, mainly from our neighborhood. At that time, after World War I 7, and after the establishment of fascism in Italy at the time of Mussolini 8, there existed an organization called 'Homeland Protection' 9 and in that organization there were some fascist ideas. It was the predecessor of the organizations Brannik 10 and Otets Paisii 11. It existed until 1934 after the coup on 19th May 12 and after that it wasn't on the agenda. I can't say what happened to it. I remember we had a neighbor who was its member. They used to wear black shirts and were under the strong influence of Mussolini. Their slogan was 'Bulgaria, Liberate Yourself!'

I received my elementary education at a Jewish school. We studied different subjects and Hebrew. I used to love Mathematics and Geography. I recall two of my teachers: Leo Cohen and Miss Rashel. After the fourth grade there came a commission from the Ministry of Education and they tested our knowledge. There was a sports organization as well called Maccabi 13 and I was a member. I remember the exercises we did and the pyramids we built by stepping on each other's shoulders. I

can’t remember anything else. The only other thing I can recall is that there was one more organization: Hashomer Hatzair 14, but I can’t say exactly what it was about.

We kept the Jewish high holidays at school and synagogue. Very often specialists from Sofia would come here to deliver speeches and read lectures. And every Friday my mother and father met with one or two other Jewish families. Neither my mother nor father was religious but the whole family gathered for some of the traditional holidays and kept some of the rituals.

We used to go hiking. There are nice places around Yambol, which I visited with my parents. One of them was Bakadjik from which you could see as far as the White Sea [Bakadjitsi – from the Turkish bakmak: to watch. These are a line of hills in the Tundzha undulating district. They are separated into three groups: Golyam [Big] Bakadjik, Maluk [Small] Bakadjik and Voynishki [Soldier’s] Bakadjik. From a geological point of view they belong to the region of Sredna Gora Mountain. And they are rich in copper-polymetal ores. The Bakadjitsi are twelve kilometers long and ten kilometers wide. The highest points in these hills are Mount Asanbair: 515 meters, and Mount Sveti Spas: 500 meters].

My father died in 1932 and was buried in Sofia when I was eleven years old. I didn’t attend the funeral. The ritual was conducted by my mother and her brothers. I remember that my mother spent seven days in Sofia. After that she came back to Yambol. After my father’s death our family became very poor and we decided to move to Sofia. The capital was a quiet and peaceful town at that time; there wasn’t much traffic and somehow you could feel safe. The children used to play in the streets untroubled. It wasn’t possible for them to be run over by a car, for example. Later, our house in Yambol was sold, probably by my brothers. I don’t have information about that. On several occasions, but much later, I visited Yambol with Roza. I know that nothing has remained from the house, it doesn’t exist any more. There are apartments in its place.

My two brothers, Isak and Hiskia, had already settled here. We rented the attic rooms of a massive house on 21 Kiril i Metodii Street, between Bratya Miladinovi and Hristo Botev Streets. In the house and on the street lived more Bulgarian families. The house still exists today. After that we moved to another house on the same street, afterwards we lived on Pirotska Street and later on Bacho Kiro Street.

When we arrived, my mother was fifty years old. She was a housewife, and had never worked before and it remained like that despite our difficult financial situation. It was too late for her to start working and to change from then on.

My two brothers were already working. They had their own deli shop and a little later they bought a winery. They covered some of our expenses but that was insufficient and I was forced to work after school. At first I worked in a little bookshop for five levs per day and studied at Konstantin Fotinov School on Hristo Botev Street. When I was at school in the morning I worked in the afternoon and vice versa.

During the holidays I worked as an apprentice at a mirror workshop and used to take the mirrors in a wheelbarrow around the streets of Sofia for seven levs per day. I had to leave them on Trapezitza Square and then walked back. Only for comparison: a loaf of bread was about five levs and a kilo of cheese was seven levs.

After finishing school in 1935 I immediately enrolled at an evening high school and at the same time I worked in a bookstore until 1943, although I was sent to labor camps 15 several times. There my salary was gradually rising. I started with 400 levs and reached 3,000.

My everyday life wasn't rich in events. In the morning I would go to school, and in the afternoon I was in the bookshop. There I studied and prepared my lessons for the next day. I finished my homework in the evening at home. My brother Marko used to live with us, too, until 1942 or 1943, until the internment [of Jews in Bulgaria] 16 during the Holocaust. We used to live very modestly. The rooms we inhabited were very small, in the attic. We had a room, kitchen and corridor furnished with a table, bed, and chairs. We didn't even have a wardrobe or cupboard. The people who were closest to my mother were her sisters Matilda and Naumi. Matilda lived on 54 Stamboliiski Street and Naumi on Osogovo Street. Matilda was a young widow with two sons: Leon and Albert, and because of that she was forced to work as an insurance agent.

Naumi worked: she had a stall in the marketplace, because her husband Isak Alkali was unable to work. He went deaf and blind too early. They had two children: Leon and Rebecca. Although my aunts were too busy working, they found the time to meet my mother every day. And, in general, they used to spend a lot of time together. My mother was a sociable woman, in due time she made some Bulgarian friends but continued meeting with her sisters every day. Sometimes she and her sisters, or her Bulgarian friends, would go for a cup of coffee in a confectionery and there they usually served the coffee with a glass of water. There was one such confectionery on Hristo Botev Street, on the corner with Stamboliiski Street. There's an office of Mobiltel Communication Company there now.

We moved house several times and, as I have already told you, wherever we lived, near us were always my mother's brother Roben and his wife Rebecca. When we lived on Kiril i Metodii Street, they lived on Exarch Yosif Street; when we were on Pirotska, they came to live somewhere near us on Simeon Street and when we were on Bacho Kiro Street, they lived a block away on Tetevenska, nowadays called Budapeshta Street. Their financial situation was better than ours because their two sons, Hiskia and Sason, worked and their salaries were good. They often helped us with money. [The streets mentioned above are in the central part of Sofia. The situation was as follows: at the time of the Liberation of Sofia from Ottoman Rule and its selection for the capital of Bulgaria on 4th January 1878, there were about 20,000 inhabitants of the town who lived in about ten quarters and the number of the Jewish inhabitants amounted to about 1,800 households. Normally, these households used to be exactly on these streets: in the square between the synagogue, the women's marketplace, Sveti Nikola Passage and Sharen [multi-colored] Bridge].

The financial situation of the family of my other brother, Isak, was better than ours, too. They had their own apartment on Stefan Karadzha Street, today opposite the Satire Theater and at that time it was opposite the Italian School. They used to live on the last floor. I remember that they had a built-in fireplace in their apartment. His wife's name was Kler. There was an air of softness about her and she always had a smile on her face. They had two children, Yafa and Isak, who, when I wasn't at work, for example on Sunday, I would take to the cinema. Isak also used to help my family: me, my mother and Marko, with small sums.

The perimeter of my movement was very limited: from home to school, afterwards to work and the same on the following day and that's why I don't have a lot of recollections about the city and its

life. I couldn't play a lot in the street because I didn't have the time but I remember that the children kicked rag-balls in some of the yards.

I didn't feel any expressions of anti-Semitism; I didn't feel different in elementary or high school. I worked in the bookstore with two other boys of my age but, maybe because I was small-sized; nobody picked on me or behaved rudely with me.

The anti-Semitic unrest began later: in 1938 or 1939. Then I became a member of the Union of the Young Workers [UYW]. I remember that in the Jewish Chitalishte 17 which didn't have a name at the time and was known simply like that, a lot of us, young Jewish people used to gather there, but some gangs used to come, they threw objects at us, and shouted slogans against us. In 1939 there were assaults against the Jewish shops. They broke the shop windows and chased and bullied the Jewish shop assistants. Later we put on the badges 18 and a curfew was introduced. We couldn't afford any willfulness.

During the war

In October 1942 a decree was published which limited the access of Jews. Jews were supposed to live on the left side of Hristo Botev Street and the direction was towards the Central Railway Station. All their property: factories, shops, were confiscated.

I was lucky. They didn't sack me from work and even more, the owner of the bookstore gave me permission not to wear my badge. He just came and told me one day that he felt it wasn't obligatory for me to wear the badge. They called me Lalyo in the bookstore anyway. His name was Radoslav Liskov and he was rolling in wealth. His bookstore was a big company at the time: the Ivan Liskov joint-stock company. He supported me financially very often. He helped some of my poorer colleagues as well. He gave them sheets of paper free of charge and they sold them, because they were communists, too.

I became a member of UYW in 1939. I got involved in the organization without realizing it at first. I was friends with Izidor Benbasat, Isak Talvi, Aaron Meshulam and we frequently met in the Chitalishte. The others who were older than us were already members of the Party. An entertainment party was organized every Sunday in the Jewish organization. We visited each other and organized dance parties at our places, too. Everyone would sit wherever possible. We would play the gramophone. The Comparsita tango was popular at the time: Asparuh Leshnikov 19 and Albert Pinkas. We used to dance tango, foxtrot, waltz, 'horsey' – a dance which involved standing in a line and lifting our feet, something similar to letkiss. During the breaks between the different records there were some lectures, we read poems, made some issues clearer and tried to attract the disoriented youngsters who we called 'boulevard youngsters.'

As a matter of fact, beside these general enlightening activities, a lot of communist and socialist ideas about social equality were put through and these ideas actually made us join the UYW movement with our older friends who were already members. Everything was illegal and took place in secret. In that way, with some of my closest friends, we created several UYW groups. On completing such activities I made some friends. One of my friends, Aaron Galvi, became my brother-in-law when he married Stella, my future wife Roza's sister, and the other one, Yosif Galvi, became a partisan and died afterwards.

With our dance parties and meetings in the evenings we carried out a lot of activities because it was a great achievement to attract two or three of the abstract minded, disoriented people from the Jewish youth. We acted very actively and were increasing the number of the UYW groups all the time. Beside that we wrote appeals and slogans, usually on the houses. We wrote 'Death to Fascism' on the slogans and 'Out the Fascists from Bulgaria.' We distributed them mainly among the inhabitants of Iuchbunar 20. We wrote on the walls, and left appeals under the doors. Usually we moved around in groups of two: one of us would look out for trouble-makers or policemen and the other would spread the appeals. We had a variety of musical signals. In case of danger we whistled.

I remember an incident with my friend Izidor Benbasat. We usually distributed the appeals at dusk. One evening, on Tundzha Street, Izidor was distributing the appeals and I was supposed to watch out and whistle the signals. But I simply hadn't noticed that a policeman had been following us and had been hiding on top of that. Izi saw him at the last moment and at the same time I started giving out the signal but he was already running. The signal froze on my lips but I succeeded in overcoming my fear and, pretending that everything was okay, went to talk to the policeman about insignificant things. I don't remember exactly what we talked about.

I remember that we went to the houses in Iuchbunar to whip up support for the Sobolev's Action 21 , for Bulgaria's detachment from the military union and for declaring its independence. We were collecting signatures.

We used to go hiking to the Starcheski Polyani [Old Men's Fields], for example, or the Kremikovtsi Monastery [situated not far from Sofia, near the village of Kremikovtsi, one of the most noteworthy Bulgarian monasteries from the 14th century with unique murals]. We used to meet there to have enlightening lectures. Very often on these excursions there were trouble-makers and that prevented us from starting an immediate open communist propaganda, but among ourselves and in narrow circles we used to conduct our propaganda activities.

We also used to meet often in the Jewish Chitalishte, which was on Stamboliiski and Opalchenska. There I met my future wife Roza. It was a regular activity to organize lectures and other events, speeches, and so on. Again, we were organizing meetings in order to create an assisting organization, to collect money, clothes, food for the partisans, outlaws and political prisoners. And here, in the Jewish Chitalishte we were again making attempts to attract and organize, how shall I put it, abstract-minded youngsters, not oriented. This Chitalishte often organized outings to Vitosha. Then there weren't trams, there were no buses. We used to go on foot.

We walked like that: a group of boys, my friends and I, and a group of girls, Roza and some of her friends. She kept her distance. We talked a lot and that was how the excursion finished. In the Chitalishte there were often discussions about love. What is, and what should be love? There were several theories on that topic. There was a theory which belonged to the Soviet ambassador to Sweden, Elena Kolonty, through which she presented her views about free love. There was another theory: 'Running Water.' For example, you go to a dormitory for boys and girls, men and women, and you are thirsty, so you knock on the door, 'Give me a glass of water, please.' If they give you water, you drink. If you are sent away, you go to another room and ask for water again. In other words, no matter whether you are married or not, if you want to sleep with somebody, you should feel free to go to bed with her, if the woman agrees and doesn't mind. That would be entirely

natural and is called free love.

At that time the Soviet Union was already developing a broad discussion on that topic but, on the other hand, there were a lot of people who were of the opposite opinion and didn't think that was the right kind of behavior: that the boy should be trusted, women should be trustworthy as women, men should be trustworthy as men, they shouldn't be treated as sheep or cattle and it's wrong to fall into such biological passions. And Roza and I met on several occasions in the Chitalishte, we talked about different things and we, of course, talked about love as well.

One day, it was in September 1939, while we were walking and talking about love again, I told her, 'Do you want us to become comrades?' Yes, yes, that was the question. She blushed, of course, and said, 'I'll think about it, I'll see.' I was nervous for several days. We met again and became comrades in that way. That was in September 1939.

I liked Roza very much. There were other girls around me but they seemed very frivolous, naive, etc, whereas Roza was mature and she was thinking in the right way. She wasn't that talkative, she was quieter, shy. She was very sensible and hadn't turned fifteen yet, I was nineteen, and hadn't turned twenty. She seemed very serious to me. She appealed to me the most. It wasn't because of her beauty, or appearance, but because of her soul, cordiality, carefulness, joviality. She could walk, jump, sing, have fun, and laugh in a happy manner. This is the way our friendship began, and how we used to meet. We would walk somewhere in Borisova Gradina Park [Boris's Garden] and at some point, at the end of the walk; I would allow myself to barely touch her hand. And that was all. And that was how it continued, we didn't allow ourselves any kisses, caresses.

We even walked one day down Graf Ignatiev Street towards Slaveykov Square. And suddenly we saw one of her aunts, Sarina, the wife of Roza's uncle, walking directly towards us and she saw us hand in hand and went to Granny Olga [her mother] to brag, 'Olga, I saw your daughter, the modest one, as you say, with a boy.' 'So what?' 'Well, they were walking hand in hand.' Roza got home from work. At that time she used to work as a seamstress in Mrs. Zvuncharova's workshop and in the evening she studied at ORT 22: a Jewish vocational school. So scandals began, thrashing began.

Granny Olga didn't let Roza go away with anything. Granny Olga was even trying to find her suitors. But she wanted suitors with proper jobs, money, and social status. Not someone like me, who worked hard and was a hired laborer like her, and nobody knew who I was and why I was like that. That was what I heard from friends. That was the way our relationship began.

Before Roza met me, Granny Olga was extremely strict with her. She didn't let her out. There was even one case on 22nd June 23 when World War II was beginning. It was Sunday and I had an arrangement with her to go and see a friend who had been called to the Jewish labor groups in 1941 along the Iskar River. His name was Zhak Benbasat. We had to meet at the corner, in front of her place. I was waiting for her to come, but she didn't show up. Suddenly her sister came out. She said, 'Larry, she can't, mum will not let her out, go alone.' I went alone, took the train to Svoge [South-West Bulgaria, 32km from Sofia] or some other place, to Bov Station and they announced on the radio that the German forces had invaded the Soviet Union. And that was one reason why they didn't allow her to come. It was as early as 1941.

Her mother insisted on my introducing myself to her with my mother and in that way declaring my serious intentions. On the other hand, I was wondering how to tell my mother about my relationship. At that time I had two friends: Aaron Galvi, the future husband of Roza's sister Stella, and Yosif Galvi. They both accompanied me to my mother because I was a little scared. They started convincing her that she should give her consent and that she should go to Roza's house, to meet her mother Olga but it turned out that she was already aware of our relationship and had nothing against it. So my friends, my mother and I went to Granny Olga. Roza's brother Isak was getting married the following day. It was January 1943. So, to summarize it all, I met Roza in 1939 and in 1943 our relationship became official. We got married in March 1944. We had been friends and comrades for five years before the official wedding. From the moment her mother gave her blessing Roza officially became 'my girl.'

We were aware that we were Jews and the official attitude towards us was different because of the Tsar's Decree, State Decrees and Regulations of the Ministry of the Interior then but it wasn't stated in the documents that the men should be sent to camps and their families interned. [The interviewee is talking about the restrictions imposed by the Law for the Protection of the Nation 24 in 1941, Regulations for its application, Decree for the creation of a Commissariat on the Jewish Issues in 1942 as well as all the other laws and decrees published by the government of Bogdan Filov which were created to restrict the rights of the Jews. The next phase from the development of the Jewish issue in Bulgaria was in 1943 when Alexander Belev and Theodore Daneker signed the agreement for the internment of Jews abroad.]

The first mobilization of Jews took place in 1941 along the Iskar River from Kurilo to Lukatnik. They were building the railway tracks. At every railway station there were Jewish groups, they were given labor uniforms, and military officers were appointed. And in every labor group there were one or two Bulgarian military officers. Another labor group was created that same year. They weren't a military group; they were like us and worked in a place called Trunska Klisura.

I left in 1942. Before that I was called upon to appear before a military commission to decide whether I was fit for military service. And when they decided that you were fit for military service, you received a call-up order and they mobilized you. You took only the most necessary clothes.

I was in the labor camps from 1942 until 1944. I received four call-up orders. I was in the village of Rudnik [North-East Bulgaria, 364km from Sofia], the village of Chuchuligovo near our border with Greece, Belitsa, Vratsa [North-Western Bulgaria, 112km north of Sofia], Svishtov [North-Central Bulgaria, 195km from Sofia]. We were working during the summer; in November they would let us go home for the winter period and in January would mobilize us again. We would sleep in tents and cabins. We worked hard everywhere. We mainly built roads and railroad tracks. In Varna district our group was taking out and crashing rocks in a quarry in the forest. We loaded the stones on a cart drawn by oxen. The mobilized Bulgarians would take the cart to the road Varna – Burgas. The other laborers from other groups covered the road with the broken stones.

In Chuchuligovo near our border with Greece, we were also building a road: Gorna Dzhumaya – Kulata. There were a lot of groups from Simitli at the border. We worked on the railway tracks, too. In Chuchuliogovo we were accommodated in the building of the police department: in one half of it. We were mainly given beans and lentils; the soup was very thin and smelled foul. Often we found different small animals floating on top. Since then I haven't been able to eat lentils. We were also

entitled to half a loaf of bread for 24 hours. On rare occasions we were given a dessert: rice with water and that was something we accepted as luxury.

We worked for ten or twelve hours a day and everybody had a quota but if you finished the quota it didn't mean you had finished for the day. They very often found something else for you to do. We had a day off on Sunday but that, too, wasn't always the case. Very often we worked on Sundays. Our superiors would often beat the people who didn't obey the discipline and did something wrong in one way or another. For my entire service in the labor camps I was slapped only once because I talked during the retreat but it was such a slap that I saw stars in broad daylight.

When we were on the bank of the Struma River, 98 percent of us got sick from different kinds of malaria. Instead of giving us quinine they treated us with some German medicines that were ersatz. The Bulgarian population in the different places remained indifferent to us perhaps because we didn't have the chance to be in contact with the locals. I heard later from my friends that in some places the Bulgarians helped with food and clothes.

Life was extremely difficult. There seemed to be no escape from the situation but we, the UYW members, pulled our weight together. We exchanged information; we were giving each other courage and created a variety on our own.

In another labor camp, five kilometers away, worked Roza's brother Isak. Bentsion Eliezer was in his group. We used to call him Bitsko. He played the accordion wonderfully. Later he became a professor at the Conservatory. We used to meet: we'd sing, play musical instruments, laugh, etc. We made our own theater in which we performed different arias from operas and operettas. I took part in it as well as Etienne Levy's father: Hertsel Levy. Some of the boys played the violin, others, like me, would sing, but the inspirer, the main organizer was Bitsko. He used to sing the arias in all languages: he danced and made us feel calm. Our audience was the rest of the laborers. We would usually present our performance on Sundays, during the day. And we used to forget about the quarries and rocks, and the enormous flies that bit us till we were bleeding. That was a breath of fresh air, a breath of life, which gave us the certainty that we were still alive and there was still something good in life.

When we were in Chuchuligovo near the border with Greece we worked near the railway tracks. The trains to Kulata and Greece and back went there. We saw trains with Greek Jews passing. Those were tiny open carriages. They were overcrowded with men, women, and children; old and young people. On both sides of the carriages there was a policeman and military man with rifles to guard them.

They were passing in the evening in order to keep them unnoticed and not to be very conspicuous. They reached Dupnitsa [South-West Bulgaria, 49km from Sofia] and afterwards were sent further on. First, they were led to some barracks and later on, sent to Germany and Poland.

We, the young members of UYW, pulled our weight and started collecting food from the things they gave us for breakfast. We put everything in packets and gave them to the people secretly. And when they passed they would shout 'Pensense' [Calmness].

I don't know if they realized where they were being taken. I didn't have the chance to talk to them. We didn't know where they were being sent either. We found out much later.

While I was in the camps, I kept regular correspondence with Roza, my friends and my mother. I hadn’t received a letter for ten days, neither from her, nor my mother, or friends. Then a friend of mine came to see me in Chuchuligovo. His name was Sasho. At the railway station he told me that Roza had been arrested. He gave me a letter from my friend Aaron Galvi which explained the whole situation. Roza had been a member of UYW, like me, since 1939. When we, the men, were sent to labor camps, she became a sub-sector person in charge of UYW, which meant a leader of four autonomous UYW groups. The members of one group didn't know the members of the others; neither did they have any idea about their activities. Roza was the connection between the four groups and was supposed to monitor and coordinate their activities. From the letter I found out that there was a trouble-maker in one of the groups who betrayed the members of the whole group.

The leader of the group didn’t know anyone else, so he betrayed only Roza. The policemen arrested her and took her to the Police Directorate where she was kept for a whole month. I was very worried about Roza and additionally, because she had letters from me, and it was possible for her to give in during the torture and give out information about our UYW activities. But I knew that if she happened to betray me it would have been because I had written those letters to her. I was edgy and started wondering what to do, whether to escape or become a partisan. There were some hills around but without a secret meeting place and people to help you it was very difficult. You can’t walk on the mountain just like that. I was on the edge all the time.

Some of us became partisans although the chances for that were slim. And I was looking for some way to save myself. One of our people who was in the same camp was a student. They gave him a leave of absence to go to Sofia for three days and I told him what the situation was but he didn’t come back for ten days. I still didn’t get any letters and kept wondering what to do. I sought advice from two of my friends. One of them told me to wait. The other one wanted us to escape but where to, we didn't know.

Several days passed and I got a whole heap of overdue letters from my mother and friends who had written that Roza had been arrested and kept in custody, but there had been no failure and my student friend, who was in Sofia, came back and told me that Roza had betrayed no one, that there had been a trial at which she was acquitted because of the fact that she hadn’t betrayed anyone and there was no evidence for her activities. We used to have a code and instead of writing that she had been arrested, we wrote that she was ill or something else. We used to say, ‘She’s in hospital, Roza’s ill, she’s in hospital.’ It was enough to make it clear that she was arrested. The date was 19th February 1943. And after that I was calm that there would be no problems.

In winter 1942, when we were usually released from the camps to go home for the winter, I introduced myself to Roza’s mother. In May 1943 Roza’s entire family, without her brother Isak and her father, who were sent to labor camps too, were interned to Vratsa. My mother was interned to Lom [North-West Bulgaria, 128km from Sofia].

In July 1943 they let everybody from the labor camp in Chuchuligovo leave the camp for six days, to go and visit our already interned families, and as a matter of fact their main goal was for us not to return to the camps but to leave with our families for the concentration camps. We found that out much, much later.

I went to Vratsa, saw Roza, passed through Lom to see my mother, then returned to Vratsa again and from there went back to the labor camp.

A little later Roza and her family made a lot of efforts to receive permission for my mother to move from Lom to Vratsa so that she wouldn't be alone. They had found lodgings for her just opposite theirs on the premises of the Turkish Public Bath. My mother's moving from Lom wasn't difficult because Lom and Vratsa were in one administrative unit.

Until November 1943 I was in a labor camp and after November I returned to Vratsa. I spent some time in Vratsa. Roza lived in a tiny room, in a basement with five relatives. Roza worked secretly as a seamstress. They had taken the sewing machine from Sofia and her, and her sisters, who helped her, cut out and sewed clothes for people from the Vratsa elite. When we returned, her brother, and father were there; there were even more people in the tiny room in the basement. She used to come to our place; to me and my mother, to sleep every evening. During the day we all ate together, my family and hers, in their lodgings. My mother would take some food in a pot so that we would have something to eat for dinner in our lodgings. And before the curfew Roza, my mother and I would go to our place. Roza used to share a bed with my mother. Before marriage there wasn't supposed to be any intimacy between Roza and me. On the other morning, very early, her mother would come, allegedly to take the pot but indeed her aim was to see where her daughter was sleeping, in my bed or my mother's.

In January 1944 a bombing took place and we were mobilized again in Vratsa to clear up the debris and dig graves for the deceased Bulgarians. We didn't sleep in our houses but in the building of one school and we were allowed to go home from time to time. At such a moment, in March 1944, in the hardest time, we got married. We told the rabbi in Vratsa, and set the date. We had the wedding between eight and ten o'clock because in these hours we could move about freely. Otherwise there was a ban on the movement of Jews. A lot of young people came to our house. Roza's mother, Olga, had prepared some sweets with jam and some simple dishes so that we would have something to put in our mouths at the wedding. Her father, Bitush, was released from the camp. He had returned. Otherwise what kind of a wedding would we have had?

It was 16th March 1944, the bombing before our wedding continued during our first nuptial night. The alarm was sounded twice. The first time we ran away because that was a bombing after all, but the second time we remained home: three people in the bed. My mother lay on one side of the bed. The woman was scared. We all survived after 9th September 25.

I married Roza because she was extremely laborious; she was providing for her entire family, and helped her brother and father.

In May or June we were mobilized from Vratsa to Svishtov. The year was 1944. There we worked on the dike which was against floods. There were some things, which they told us, that there were some changes coming and we saw the direction in which things were changing. A lot of ships from the USSR would float on the river and on 23rd August 1944 26 the victory over fascism in Romania was a fact.

There was one more interesting fact. Our labor group was put up in the building of a Turkish school outside the territory of the town and in the town itself there was another labor group. They were soldiers from the advanced detachments: Bulgarians, communists, outlaws. They were sent there,

not to the army. Their commanding officers were very strict and bullied them a lot. They wouldn't let us communicate with them. But at that time they became more liberal. All the time we got information that someone had escaped from the camp. Every night about three people on average would escape. Roza's brother, Isak, escaped, too. We felt the changes and that gave us the courage to organize our own escape. I had three or four friends in the labor group and we decided to leave the camp at the end of August.

During our escape we traveled by train and whenever we saw a policeman at the stops we would get off the train and after that secretly, while the train was almost moving, got back on it. That's how we reached Vratsa.

In September a telegram was received in Vratsa. All the runaways had to be returned under escort to their units. Our unit then was military headed by a captain and an NCO to beat the people. My friend Shaoul Perets, whose relatives were interned to Vratsa, too, and I decided to go somewhere in order not to be returned. We decided to leave for Pazardzhik. My aunt Naumi and cousin Leon Alkali were interned there. Let me remind you that my mother's sister and my mother were born in Pazardzhik. They weren't interned there by chance, so we left for Pazardzhik but I didn't have any money on me. I had a pair of overshoes, sold them and got 100 levs. So we traveled from Vratsa through Sofia to Pazardzhik. We arrived in Sofia and while we were waiting for the train to go to Southern Bulgaria there was some unrest because one or two German soldiers were arrested and escorted by Bulgarian soldiers but two other German soldiers tried to give the arrested something to eat and drink.

At the station immediately other people started protesting because they were bullied and chased by them as soldiers. A fight began. On 8th September 1944, my friend and I arrived in Pazardzhik. We got off the train and saw that there, too, was some unrest in progress. We found out that the partisans would be in Pazardzhik any minute now. My aunt and cousin who were waiting for us were worried because they didn't know what was to come. And moreover, the Germans who were leaving the country set everything behind them on fire.

With Shaoul Perets we went back to Vratsa via Sofia. I met some of my comrades in Sofia. We arrived in Vratsa with him and remained there until 25th September 1944 with my mother, Roza and her family.

We waited for the Soviet army to come and every day we stood as if on duty at the station to meet them but there wasn't such a welcome as there was in Sofia. We just greeted the partisans who came back from the mountains. On 25th September 1944 we returned to Sofia.

Post-war

After returning to Sofia, we were put up by one of Roza's aunts. Afterwards we lived in an apartment on Rakovski Street, then in Zaharna Fabrika quarter where we still live. My mother lived with us until her death in 1961. My mother and her daughter-in-law lived with great understanding. They never quarreled or had loud disputes. While Roza was working hard at the Ministry of the Interior immediately after 9th September, my mother, who was living with us, was taking care of the house and the upbringing of the children. My son, Zhak, was even unable to recognize his mother when he was young. He was so used to being with his grandmother. My mother was getting on very well with Roza's mother Olga, too. Granny Olga lived near us. The two of them saw each

other every day, did the shopping together, and organized all kinds of activities.

My first child Yafa, who was named after my mother, was born on 2nd June 1945 in Sofia. We call her Zhanni. She finished high school and got a university degree in engineering. She worked as an engineer-designer. Now she is a pensioner. She married Yozhi in 1968. She has two children: Isak and Roza. The family spent two years in Cuba because of Yozhi's work. Their son Isak Behara has a daughter Zhanni. My granddaughter Rozzi also has a son, who is my great-grandson. His name is Yulian.

My son Zhak was born on 23rd April 1949 in Sofia. He has a secondary education of technology and is an electricity-technician in the trade system. He has been married to Emilia Dimitrova, a Bulgarian, since 1975. He has a son: Leon. I have a great-grandson [Leon's son]. His name is Zhak.

We brought up our children in Jewish self-awareness. We kept the Jewish high holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, Purim but we didn't always observe all the ritual details. For example, at Purim we didn't disguise, we didn't fast at Yom Kippur. We attended the synagogue but rarely. The most important thing was that we were together with the entire family on holidays, and it was always fun. We don't have Bulgarians in the family with the exception of my daughter-in-law, Emilia Dimitrova, and that's why we remained indifferent to Christmas and Easter.

Very often for all the holidays the whole big family gathered here: 25 or 26 people in the dining or living room. We wanted to turn that into a tradition for the younger people as well but it's difficult to fulfill.

Roza was an excellent housewife, hard-working, organized and meticulous. She used to cook very nice dishes, but not kosher. I started work at the Ministry of the Interior as a policeman but for a short period of time. At that time my brother Isak had already obtained a winery in which I worked for a while but the work was very hard, on coming back home I smelled of alcohol without having drunk. After that I started work in 'Voroshilov' works as a technologist and afterwards I worked for the trade unions as an organizer. Roza, too, started work in the Ministry as a telephone operator and after that became a head controller in 'Voroshilov' works where she retired. Although we were very busy at work we went on holiday to the seaside or mountain during the children's vacations and our leaves of absence.

I didn't have any problems with my Jewish origins at any of my places of work, but there was a more reserved attitude. For example, I never received any punishment but when a person was to be promoted in the hierarchy it was never I; nonetheless I was never punished or reprimanded.

Our neighbors in Zaharna Fabrika quarter were Bulgarians. We were close friends with three Bulgarian families. Roza's relatives lived opposite us as well. Most of my colleagues and friends at work were Bulgarian, too; of course, we have had a lot of Jewish family friends and mixed marriages, too. I have never treated people differently depending on whether they are Bulgarians or Jews.

At that time, 1948 – 1949, all my brothers went to live in Israel. One day I came back from work and was having a nap. My wife's relatives lived opposite us: her parents and the whole family. And that evening I overheard a conversation of the two in-laws: my mother and Granny Olga. I was in bed and they thought I was asleep. So they were talking: Granny Olga said, 'Dear neighbor, what

are we going to do? We have to think. If you intend to go to Israel soon, what are we going to do? From our family nobody wants to go to Israel. What will you decide?' I heard this and laughed to myself. And my mother answered, 'It's up to them to decide what to do.'

I didn't have any intentions to leave the country. I had discussed that issue with Roza. We felt so exhausted from all the suffering and had already made our home, we had work and had simply got used to the way of living we had achieved with so much effort. We had decided that we wouldn't go, at least for the time being and at that time the emigration wave was rather serious. We knew that travel was ahead, that nothing would be arranged and so on. My mother was ready to stay and, apart from that, she had become very devoted to our new family and Olga's relatives. My brothers had had their own lives for a long time; their paths were different from ours. I even discontinued my relations with my brothers in Israel because the authorities made us, as communists, put a stop to our relations with our kin abroad because they were believed to be Zionists, chauvinists and so on, in Israel.

Once I got from my brother Isak a little case with oranges, even without a letter. My brother Marko disappeared. Afterwards, in the 1970s, we started writing to each other and he invited us to Israel. He had married his wife Dora, they had a son, Nisim, and had their own grocery store. We invited him to Bulgaria. So, despite the official government policy, which wasn't friendly, we left for Israel, because at that time there was certain warming in the diplomatic relations between the two states.

We didn't have any connection with my other brother, Hiskia, even before his internment, and hadn't seen each other. After 9th September [1944] I visited him one time, and saw his wife and children, and that was it. I lost his traces completely and we didn't keep in touch at all. Much later I found out when exactly Isak and his wife, Marko and Hiskia died.

I haven't thought very much about the problem of the creation of the state of Israel and whether it was a completely just and correct cause but I have always had a reserved attitude towards the official policy of Bulgaria towards Israel. On one or two occasions I even made a mistake. On one of them we were in a meeting in 'Voroshilov' works against the invasion of Israeli forces in Egypt. I was a party secretary then. The people from two or three shops were together. And I, not deliberately, appealed, 'The people who agree with the policy of the Jewish state, please vote.' And they immediately started reprimanding me, 'Hey, what do you think you are doing?' Because I was supposed to ask only for votes 'against,' not 'for.'

The second case was here in the neighborhood. I was party secretary then. We had a party meeting once and while we were talking about the Zionists, that they were chauvinists, conquerors, Zionists, there sounded the conclusion 'That filthy Jewry.' The hall was full. And I interrupted, 'The comrade lecturer doesn't talk about the problems in a correct way. How could he say filthy Jewry? He can criticize the Zionists but to say filthy Jewry, to insult the whole Jewish people like that, I don't agree.' And the most interesting thing was that the hall applauded me, which means that the Bulgarians agreed with me. Afterwards I was even praised for finding the courage to say that.

I don't completely agree with the changes that happened after 1989 27. I can see how the facts are distorted; everything is being turned upside down. Too much emphasis is being placed on the things that were bad whereas the positive things, which were achieved, aren't displayed publicly. This can be confirmed by anyone who lived before 10th November.

Our life didn’t change that radically after 1989 due to financial reasons, and we were already pensioners at that time. In the past we used to live in poverty, under incessant restrictions. Our wedding took place during the Holocaust in 1944. It was quite an improvisation although it was in compliance with the tradition. Roza and I decided to celebrate our Golden Anniversary in 2004 in the way young people celebrate today: in a restaurant, with a lot of guests and grandeur.

I’m in contact with the Jewish community all the time. We have been visiting it regularly for seven years and I keep on thinking that if it wasn’t for the things these people have done, if it wasn’t for the rehabilitation center 28, we wouldn’t be among the living because there are only the two of us at home. This is boring and leads to quarrels over insignificant things. Our children don’t live here and they are very busy, they go to work. It has never been such a desert in this house before in our entire life. There were always a lot of people and life was very intense around us. We were rather nervous. Our big walk was to go from here to the market place and come back. Well, we went to the synagogue on holidays.

But it’s a good thing that this rehabilitation center was opened and we started going there. In the health club we exercise, we sing in the choir, you saw the pictures, didn’t you; we dance some national dances in the dance group. Life became more varied in general. And no matter what the weather is, it may be very cold or too hot, we are always there. And additionally, I got some financial compensation which greatly improved our way of living and I’m grateful for that.

Glossary:

1 UYW

The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'etat in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.
2 Ladino: Also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th-century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish.

For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitreo. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.
3 Sephardi Jewry: (Hebrew for 'Spanish') Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.
4 Alliance Francaise: A cultural and educational association founded in 1904 in Sofia as a branch of the French cultural and educational association Alliance Francaise in Paris. Its goal is to popularize French language and culture in Bulgaria.
5 Boza: A sweet wheat-based mildly alcoholic drink popular in Bulgaria, Turkey and other places in the Balkans.
6 White Guards: A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.
7 Bulgaria in World War I: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).
8 'Homeland Protection': A non-state military organization founded in 1923. Its goal was to fight the expanding revolutionary movement. At its head were generals from the reserve led by Ivan Shkoynov. Its basic organizational units were combat sections, spread throughout the country. The members of the organization used to have a uniform and insignia. In 1930 part of the members of 'Homeland Protection' separated from the organization and established the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. 'Homeland Protection' was disbanded after the coup on 19th May 1934, re-established in 1935 and existed until the beginning of 1936.
9 Mussolini, Benito (1883-1945): Italian political and state activist, leader (duce) of the Italian fascist party and of the Italian government from October 1922 until June 1943. After 1943 he was the head of a puppet government in the part of Italy that was occupied by the Germans. He was captured and executed by Italian partisans.
10 Brannik: Pro-fascist youth organization. It started operating after the Law for the Protection of

the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

11 Otets Paisii All-Bulgarian Union: Named after Otets (Father) Paisii Hilendarski, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival, the union was established in 1927 in Sofia and existed until 9th September 1944, the communist takeover in Bulgaria. A pro-fascist organization, it advocated the return to national values in a revenge-seeking and chauvinistic way.

12 19th May 1934 coup: A coup d'etat, carried out with the participation of the political circle 'Zveno', a military circle. After the coup of 19th May, a government was formed, led by Kimon Georgiev. The internal policy of that government was formed by the idea of above-all-parties authority and rule of the elite. The Turnovo Constitution was repealed for that purpose, and the National Assembly was dismissed. In its foreign affairs policy the government was striving to have warmer relationships with Yugoslavia and France, the relations with the USSR were restored. The government of Kimon Georgiev was in office until 22nd January 1935.

13 Maccabi World Union: International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

14 Hashomer Hatzair: ('The Young Watchman') Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettoes and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

15 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria: Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

16 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria: Although Jews living in Bulgaria where not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from the Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

17 Chitalishte: Literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment

carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc. The first such organizations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival (18th and 19th century) and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

18 Yellow star in Bulgaria: According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

19 Leshnikov, Asparuh (Ari) (1898-1978): Bulgarian musician. Ari Leshnikov was a man of extreme fate, stretching from world fame to complete oblivion. He studied at the Berlin Conservatory and in 1927 he became the first tenor of the Comedian Harmonists, the sextet which later gained international recognition. When Hitler came to power, the sextet had to disband because of its three Jewish members. Leshnikov returned to Bulgaria, but in his native country no one trusted a singer who had performed in Germany. He was once again publicly acknowledged on his 70th anniversary in 1968. This belated recognition was due mainly to the political situation rather than to the lack of respect from his colleagues or audience.

20 Iuchbunar: The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means 'the three wells.'

21 Sobolev's action: An all-nation movement organized in 1940 - 1941 .It was called Sobolev's in connection with the visit of the Soviet diplomat, the first secretary of the People's Secretariat of the Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Arkadiy Sobolev, who came to Bulgaria with a proposal for the Bulgarian government for the signing of a contract between Bulgaria and the USSR for friendship and mutual support. According to this proposal, the USSR would be obliged to support Bulgaria in any possible way in case Bulgaria was endangered in any way. The government of Bogdan Filov rejected the Soviet proposal, which led to two-month demonstrations and meetings throughout the country led by the Bulgarian Workers' Party.

22 ORT: (Abbreviation for Russ. Obshchestvo Rasprostraneniya Truda sredi Yevreyev, originally meaning "Society for Manual [and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]," and later-from 1921-"Society for Spreading [Artisan and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]") It was founded in 1880 in St. Petersburg (Russia) and originally designed to help Russian Jews. One of the problems which ORT tackled was to help the working Jewish youth and craftsmen to integrate into the industrialization. This especially had an impact on the Eastern European countries after World War I. ORT expanded during World War II, when it became a world organization with branches in France, Germany, England, America and elsewhere, in addition to former Russian territories like Poland, Lithuania and Bessarabia. There was also an ORT network in Romania. With the aim to provide "help through work", ORT operated employment bureaus, organizes trade schools, provided tools, machinery and materials, set up special courses for apprentices, and maintained farm schools as well as cooperative agricultural colonies and workshops.

23 Great Patriotic War: On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The

German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

24 Law for the Protection of the Nation: A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

25 9th September 1944: The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

26 23rd August 1944: On that day the Romanian Army switched sides and changed its World War II alliances, which resulted in the state of war against the German Third Reich. The Royal head of the Romanian state, King Michael I, arrested the head of government, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was unwilling to accept an unconditional surrender to the Allies.

27 10th November 1989: After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

28 Bet Am: The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.