# Adela Nissimova Levi

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Adela Nissimova Levi is an energetic 77-year-old woman, who lives alone in a cozily arranged, nice apartment in a block building. Her husband passed away and her daughter, who is married to a Bulgarian, doesn't live with her. Although Adela was very poor when she was a child, she doesn't speak bitterly about her childhood, but rather interestingly. She doesn't complain, and she feels well; she has a rich social life too. One can also say that she doesn't look lonely, but happy in her own two-room apartment. She worked in journalism, so she tells the stories of her life very eloquently and remembers a lot of events very clearly.



**My family history**

My paternal grandfather, Naftali Cohen, lived in Salonika [today Greece] and I don't know what year he came to Bulgaria with my father. I don't know if my ancestors came from Spain [see Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] 1, but I know that they are Sephardi Jews [see Sephardi Jewry] 2, so they must have Spanish blood. I also didn't know my maternal ancestors: only my grandmother Buka [Moshe Alvas] [Editor's note: her real first name was Bohora, but according to the Sephardi tradition the eldest sister was always called Buka in the family regardless of her official name.] She looked very old to me when I was a child. I didn't know my maternal grandfather: he died before I was born. I also didn't know my father's parents and know almost nothing about his kin, I only know that he had three brothers and I knew only one of them. The reason is that my father died when he was 43 years old and I was four years old at that time. I have a vague memory of his death and hardly have any other memories of him.

My grandmother Buka lived in a dilapidated house on Pozitano Street in Sofia with her only son. Now the house doesn't exist, there is a block of apartments in its place. She wore a shamia, a sleeveless jacket and a petticoat. She was a small, but very strong woman and quite strict. She

dressed according to the fashion of those times. I don't know if anyone wore special Jewish attire in Bulgaria at that time. My grandmother moved to Israel in 1947 or 1948. I remember her well though. I even remember a very funny event: when she was told that she would be immigrating, she declared that she didn't want to move, because those who died while traveling weren't buried according to the rituals and they were thrown into the sea.

My grandmother was a rohesa: a woman who prepares the dead bodies in the synagogue. She was the leader of that organization or club [Chevra Kaddisha]. My grandmother even prepared the dress for her funeral: the so-called 'murtazh' [kitel] and when she was about to leave, she grumbled, 'If I die on the road, they wouldn't be able to dress me in it.' She also had a special funeral cushion, she had prepared everything. But the funniest thing was that when she arrived in Israel safe and sound and my uncle wrote, 'We are okay, we have arrived', my husband David Yakov Levi, whom I had just married, said, 'Now, your grandmother can turn her murtazh into a swimming suit!' My grandmother was very religious, and those rituals were observed only by very religious Jews.

My mother was Viza Nissim Cohen, nee Moshe Alvas. My father was Nissim Naftali Cohen. I know nothing about their lives before they got married. I don't know how my parents met, but I guess their wedding was arranged, as was the practice in those times. There were only religious weddings then. My mother died in 1968 at the age of 72 and my father died at the age of 43 in 1931. I remember very well the year he died because my youngest sister [Mazal] was only one year and six days old. She was born on 1st May and he died on 6th May. I think he died of lung cancer, although he never smoked. He was a shoemaker: he made shoes out of leather. They were called 'opintsi' and were worn by the villagers. My mother was a housewife but when my father died she started sewing. They spoke Spanish at home: Spaniolit [Ladino]. We also spoke Bulgarian. I remember that my mother dressed according to the times. We lived very miserably. We warmed the rooms with iron stoves using wood and coal. All the time we paid rent and we moved from house to house. We didn't have gardens or housemaids. We had very few books at home; we didn't have a library and didn't buy newspapers.

## Growing up

I was born in 1927 in Sofia in the Iuchbunar 3 housing estate: a Jewish neighborhood in Sofia. We were a large family: I have five sisters. Between me and my elder sister my mother had a boy, but he died when he was one year old. It seems that my parents really wanted a boy, so they kept trying. As a result, I and my younger sister were born. I am number five. I don't have any brothers, I have only sisters: Ester, Raina, Sofka, Rashel, and Mazal. I don't remember the house where we lived because I was very young, but I remember that there were some stairs leading to one of the rooms. I don't know how many rooms there were, but we all lived together. The water tank was outside as it was like that in the whole neighborhood.

Later, we moved to another house on Shar Planina Street in the same neighborhood, where we lived in a low but long house, which was called ‚The Sixth Regiment' because it resembled barracks. We all lived in one room. There was a small corridor, which was also used as a kitchen. There was electricity, but the water tank again was outside. I remember that once while my sister was carrying a jug of water inside to make pickles, she tumbled over a cobblestone, and broke the jug. The toilet was also in the yard. From that time, I remember my father's death. I was four years

old. After my father's death we moved to another house in the same neighborhood: on Partenii Nishavski Street. We lived in a nicer room with a larger corridor, but we paid rent and the toilet and water were also outside. I was five years old at that time. When I was seven years old, I was sent to an orphanage where I lived until the age of 14.

I can't say how large the Jewish community in Sofia was during my childhood but I think there were a lot of people. There were two synagogues in Sofia at that time, and the other prayer houses, which were smaller, were called midrashi [bet midrash]. There was a rabbi, a shochet and a chazzan. The two synagogues were the Central Synagogue [see Great Synagogue] 4 and the Iuchbunar Synagogue 5. There were two Jewish schools [in Sofia] 6: the central one and the Iuchbunar one. The central one was on Tsar Kaloyan Street where the Rila Hotel is now, or to be more precise, the shop 'Sredets' which is in front of the hotel. I studied at that school, but it was bombed and destroyed during World War II. At seven years of age I was sent to an orphanage, because my father had died and my mother had six daughters and no money. Then she was forced to buy a sewing machine and pay for it by installments. She used to sew some clothes and supported the family in this way. Unfortunately, she couldn't support us all, so firstly she sent my older sister to an orphanage and a few years later, I was sent too. It was a Jewish orphanage 'Tsaritsa [Queen] Yoanna' [Editor's note: actually the interviewee means 'Queen Eleonore' 7 orphanage. There was a school named 'Tsaritsa Yoanna' in Sofia]. It was located opposite Slavia football ground near the Russian monument in Sofia.

I have always felt some kind of anti-Semitism around me. I didn't experience it personally, because I lived mostly in the Jewish neighborhood, but I heard from my elder cousins that they had been called 'chifuti' 8 or other insulting words. While I was in the Jewish orphanage we went on vacation: we went camping to Berkovitsa. Other orphanages were there as well. They were close to ours: one of them was 'Bitolya,' I don't remember the other one, but it was also close. Our orphanage was supported by rich Jews and we were a little bit better off than the others. We went to Berkovitsa, and ate better food. The children from the other orphanages came and beat us if we didn't let them eat our food. And I heard the word 'chifuti' and other words, which I didn't know the meanings of at that time.

Friday was a market day but carts with vegetables and fruit passed through the streets. Since my mother had a lot of work, she waited for someone to pass in order to buy something. She worked at home, and so did my elder sister in order to support us. I remember the people with the carts shouting, 'Tomatoes blue, purple and juicy!' [Editor's note: They are generally referred to as eggplant.] And by the shouting we knew who passed. Then she went out and bought something. There were some merchants whom we knew and who gave us goods on credit. Mostly poor people lived in our neighborhood. They were retailers, craftsmen, etc. My father-in-law was a junk dealer. There were also tailors, cobblers and barbers. There were richer Jews in other residential districts in Sofia, but in our neighborhood they were mostly poor.

My parents weren't very religious. They observed some common rituals. On Friday night my mother would clean the whole house, if you could call our home a house. She always made some kind of cheese pastry, no matter how poor we were, and some soup. We always had that on Friday night, except during the time we were interned. On Saturday, the men went to the synagogue, but my mother didn't. I don't remember if my father went to the synagogue. They didn't have any special role in the Jewish community, nor were they involved in politics. Not all of our neighbors

were Jews, but most of them were. Our relations with them were very good. I remember that after my father's death when we moved to our second house on Shar Planina Street, the landlords there were Jews and we often gathered together under the vines in the yard during the summer.

My parents communicated mostly with Jews, except for my father at his workplace. They usually visited other Jewish families. I remember that when a holiday like Pesach, Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah came, my grandmother Buka was very strict and gathered all the family at her place. I remember a long narrow table arranged with everything the rituals required. We all went there and by the time we were allowed to eat after the prayers, I was already starving. For Jews family is very important. On all holidays the family should gather at the place of the eldest member. And my grandmother observed those traditions strictly. We didn't go on vacations because we couldn't afford it.

My mother's sisters lived in Sofia until we were interned [see Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] 9. She had three sisters. They were all housewives, and she also had one brother. My mother's sisters were Berta, Ameli and the eldest one: Ermana. My mother was second after Ermana, then Ameli was born and Berta is the youngest. Her brother was born between the third and the fourth sister and his name was Avram. They all lived in Sofia in the Jewish neighborhood. My uncle Avram was a tailor. Berta's husband was a barber, Ameli's husband sold some goods on a cart, I don't remember what exactly. Ermana's husband was injured during a war, but still worked as a tailor. They all had many children. I can only tell their numbers, for example Ermana had three sons and one daughter, Ameli had two sons, and Berta had one daughter.

My father had three brothers, but I didn't know them. The eldest one was Shlomo, who was also the richest, but I don't know what he did. I think that for a while he and my father worked together. He had three sons and a daughter. His wife was paralyzed. After my father's death he often visited us and wanted to help my mother. I don't remember my father's sister. My mother's brother, although younger, looked after the whole family. My mother's sisters were also close to her: she didn't keep in touch with other people, because she became a widow at the age of 35, and remained one.

When my father died, I was sent to an asylum. I was four years old then. It was a Jewish one and was located on Osogovo Street. It was like a kindergarten because in the evenings we went back home. I guess that we didn't pay fees, as it was for poor children. I don't remember what time we went there in the morning or what time we went home: usually when it got dark, our parents came to pick us up or we went home by ourselves. We learned songs and poems. I remember the doctor who looked after us there. The other women were also very nice. During weekends we stayed at home and my elder sisters looked after me, mostly my sister Rashel, who was born before me. They even tell me that she loved me so much that when they hid me from her once, she started looking for me everywhere, asking, 'Where is Delche, where is Delcheto?' - she didn't call me Adela, but Delche. And she would start crying and shouting, 'Delche, come to me!'

After the asylum I went to the Jewish orphanage. We lived there all the time. We were sent home only if there was some quarantine. Every two weeks we were also sent home for a couple of hours. There was a headmistress at the school and a teacher who supervised us. We went to study in the central Jewish school but prepared for our lessons in the orphanage. The headmistress was Basad. There was also a very evil teacher named Franka. We called the teacher 'giveret' which means Miss [in Ivrit] and there was also a stoker who was in charge of the local heating. We were around

60-70 children. We were all of different ages, because we studied together from the first to the third grade.

There were two dormitories in the orphanage: a female and a male one. We all slept there. The beds were made of iron and were arranged next to one another. There were also some kinds of bedside tables. We had water and electricity. The toilets were inside. There was also a bathroom in the cellar. There were washing machines and washing women. There was also a small room: we called it the ‘isolator.’ If someone got sick, they were put there so that they wouldn’t infect the others.

## Going to school

We had classrooms with desks in the orphanage. Everyone had a specific place where we prepared for the next day. We also had a dining-room where we ate. The cook was Auntie Totka from Popovo. She was a Bulgarian. The food was good, especially in comparison with the other orphanages. In the evenings, when we prepared for our lessons Mrs. Dimitrova, also a Bulgarian, would help us in all the subjects, except Ivrit. She tested us and the other teacher, whom we called ‘giveret’, prepared us for the subjects in Ivrit. Mrs. Dimitrova carried a ruler and when you said something wrong, she would slap you and say, ‘Go and prepare better next time.’ When you made noise in the classroom, you were punished by standing up for some time. There was even a music teacher in the orphanage: his name was Iliev. He lived very close to the orphanage. He taught us and we had a mandolin band and we performed at some gatherings. I played the mandolin, but I was also an actress. We prepared some performances for the end of the school year or when our sponsors came. I don’t remember the plays, but they were children’s ones i.e. fairy tales, or something improvised related to holidays such as Chanukkah, for example.

The school was full day. We got up at six o’clock, did some gymnastics, had breakfast at the orphanage, polished our shoes, and went to school. We had packed our school bags the night before. At lunch we went back, we had lunch and then went back to school at 2pm. We came back at 5pm. We prepared for our lessons and then had dinner. We were also given some cheese sandwiches to eat at school in the morning.

I loved mathematics. We also studied the Tannakh alongside all subjects obligatory for the Bulgarian schools. The teacher who taught us the Tannakh was called Temkin. We were very cruel to him. He was an old man with glasses and he was all shaky, but he knew Ivrit very well. We made him angry during the classes: we made a lot of noise. Now that I think about it, I think we were very cruel then. I remember him very well.

I also remember our geography teacher: Herskovich. She limped with one leg. She must have been one of the German Jews. There was also another teacher, Petkova, who taught us Bulgarian: she was an excellent teacher. But she was also very strict. There was one motto: ‘A six to God, a five to me, a four to the pupils.’ At that time marks were from 2 to 6. She insisted on us being very well prepared for her classes. I didn’t go to a tutor for private lessons because we had no money and we were prepared very well at the orphanage. I knew Ivrit and French.

My school friends were Jews and I had no friends outside school. When I was at the orphanage, the future famous playwright Dragomir Asenov, whose real name is Jacques Melamed, was also there [Jacques Melamed (1926-1981): writer and playwright. He became known by his pseudonym

Dragomir Asenov]. He was older than me, but he didn't study at the Jewish school, because he had come later to the orphanage and he had already started studying in a Bulgarian school. There were two or three other children, who had also come at a later time and were studying at Bulgarian schools.

We played mostly a game called 'people's ball' at the orphanage. 'People's ball' is played by two teams. There is no fixed number of players. The playing field is divided into two by a line, but no net is placed in the middle. Each team stays in their own part of the field. There are two players of the teams who stay outside the field behind the players. The player who has the ball throws it hard at the player of his team who is outside the field and aims to hit a player from the other team in the process. The player who is hit by the ball leaves the game. If he catches the ball, however, it passes to his team and it is their turn to try to eliminate the players from the other team. The team which has the most players remaining in the field wins the game. This game is played mostly by girls because the boys prefer either football or volleyball. There was a yard where we played and danced even during the winter, when it was cold outside. There was a square corridor in front of the dining hall and we danced to Bulgarian folk songs especially rachenitsas [one kind of Bulgarian folk dance]. When we went back home, our mothers would take us out to some relatives or to the nearest park or prepared us something to eat. We couldn't afford to go to restaurants.

Every Saturday we were taken to the synagogue. We observed the traditions. Our sponsors came on Purim. Holidays, when there was food, were our favorite times. When Pesach approached, the supervisors made us wash and clean everything. Then the rich Jews took us to their homes to spend the holidays. For some years a family, the Weinstocks, took me to their home for the holidays. They were German Jews and lived on Oborishte Street in the center of Sofia. I spent eight days there, but I was always bored, because I felt lonely. The people were so nice and caring. We communicated in Bulgarian: they were German Jews but also Bulgarian citizens and they knew the language. Then I spent the holidays with another family: Haimov, who lived on Bratia Miladinovi Street. Maybe I also went to other homes but I don't remember. On Chanukkah and Purim we were at the orphanage and we had a good time.

During the holidays the orphanage took us to Berkovitsa. We went there every year, but once I was sent to the seaside in Varna, because I was very weak and didn't eat anything. We slept in a school, which was arranged with beds. I spent 20 days there and then I went to Berkovitsa where the other children from the orphanage were. That was the first time I got on a train. It was a great experience for me, although we were put 12-13 children in one compartment, some of them were even put on the places for luggage. I must have been nine years old then. I got into a car for the first time on another occasion.

There was a time when the state lottery winning numbers were drawn by children from orphanages. We were set on a stage, the spheres were placed in front of us and the children rolled them: ones, tens, hundreds, etc. I was elected to do that a number of times and then we got into a car and went to the Army Club or to some kind of hall, maybe the Royal Cinema which is now the 'Bulgarian Army' theater [in Sofia's center]. The children from the orphanage made fun of us, because Dragomir Asenov [Jacques Melamed] and I were sent a number of times together and they said, 'The bride and groom are coming.'

## My sisters

The eldest of my sisters was and remained Ester Cohen, because her second husband was also Cohen. She was born in 1915 and separated from us before the internment, after she married. Before, she helped my mother and they both worked from dawn till dusk. My mother even bought another sewing machine for her. Ester had a son, Jan Kalo, who left for Israel and died in an accident: a post office truck hit him while he was bending to take his mail. He taught semi-conductors at a university in Israel. He had three sons there. Ester died in 1984 in Sofia.

My second sister is Raina [Nissimova Aladjem, nee Cohen]. She was born in 1918 in Sofia and is now 86 year old. She has a son and a daughter in Bulgaria. The daughter is the elder one. She was born in Ruse during the internment in October 1944 and her name is Sonia. Her two daughters live in Israel. Sonia's brother Nissim Aladjem or Niki, as we call him, also lives in Bulgaria. His wife is Ganka. She is from Haskovo region. They have two sons: one of them lives in Israel and the other here. The one here has two university degrees and works in a bank.

My third sister is Sofka [Nissimova Perets, nee Cohen]. She was born in Sofia in 1921. Her husband's family name is Perets. Her husband worked at the Forestry Ministry. He died in 1993 and she left for Israel in 1998 or 1999. She worked at the 'Tehnika' Publishing House. Before the internment in 1943 she also worked at the book-binding company 'Sam Patak.' She has a son and a daughter. They are both in Israel. His name is Heskia and her name is Vivi.

Then came Rashel [Nissimova Levi, nee Cohen]. She was born in 1924. Her husband's name was Izi Levi, who was a doctor. Rashel graduated in Bulgaria and then left with her husband in 1948 to Israel where she finished her education. She was a nurse. She has one daughter and two sons. They are all Israeli citizens. Her elder son is Israel, who graduated in oceanography, the other, Ronen, is in the air force, and the girl, Riva, is a teacher in a kibbutz. Rashel died two years ago and her husband died before her.

After her, my brother was born, then I and my younger sister, who also moved to Israel in 1948. Her name is Mazal or Mimi, as we called her. Her husband Nissim Alsheh studied in the Conservatory here, but graduated in Israel and became director of a conservatory there. They visit me every year. They have a son, Natan, and a daughter, Aviva. My sisters studied in Sofia and Rashel also studied in the orphanage. There was a tradition there: every three to four years the pupil with the highest marks remained at the orphanage until they went to high school. My sister Rashel was a very good pupil and she was enrolled in a medical school. She lived at the orphanage, although I also went there, and only one member of a family was allowed to stay on. She helped me a lot there. My other sisters graduated from Jewish schools. They have elementary education. I studied until our internment: I finished the third grade at a junior high school at the end of 1942.

## During the War

In fall 1942 the political tension could already be felt. I was old enough to leave the orphanage but there were other kids who should have continued staying there. Yet it was closed at the beginning of 1943 when the preparations for war started, although there were no bombings over Sofia yet. I went home and we weren't allowed to communicate with Bulgarians, in accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation 10. We were also given the stars [see Yellow star in Bulgaria] 11, I don't know the exact date but it was at the end of 1942 or the beginning of 1943, when I left the orphanage. They changed our identity cards: they were no longer green, but pink. They changed our names. I was named Ida Nissim Naftali which had nothing in common with my own name [see

Forced name change during Holocaust] 12. I had to be named after my father or grandfather. And since my first name was like a Bulgarian one, all my three names were changed. I had that name during the internment. My other sisters were also renamed, only Ester remained Ester. Raina was named Reina, Sofka was named Simha. Rashel became Rahel and Mazal became Mimi. My mother's name was changed from Viza to Venezia.

We were forced to carry the stars sewn on our clothes without moving them and a curfew was imposed. I don't remember what time it started in the morning, but we weren't allowed to go outside after 7pm. We could walk outside our neighborhood but it wasn't recommended, because when people saw the stars, they didn't treat us nicely. We weren't allowed to go to school and my mother sent me to a seamstress to learn the craft. But that was until 24th May 1943 13 when the demonstration, in which I also participated, took place. At first, we were all told to go in front of the Jewish school in Iuchbunar which was on Osogovo Street. We were told by Jewish organizations, of which we were members: 'Hashomer Hatzair' [in Bulgaria] 14, 'Maccabi' [World Union] 15 and the others.

At that time I was also a member of the Union of Young Workers [see UYW] 16, the youth branch of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which together with the other organizations organized this demonstration against the anti-Jewish law: the Law for the Protection of the Nation, and the deportation of Jews. Students and adults gathered at the yard of the school. Haribi [rabbi] Daniel [Zion] 17 had also come and he spoke first. He said that we had to stand up against the deportation of Jews. Then some young Jews came out of a neighboring building and starting speaking about what our future was and what we had to do.

Then we started walking along the present Stamboliiski Boulevard towards the Palace in order to hand a petition to King Boris III 18. On Opalchenska Street some mounted policemen were waiting for us and started beating the people with their batons in order to disperse us. Many people were arrested, especially the older ones, because they couldn't run fast, and were transported to a school. Those who had been arrested were sent to a camp in Somovit, a town on the Danube coast. I had been beaten badly on the leg, the head, the arms, and wherever else they could, because I was in the second row and we were walking hand in hand. I managed to escape and was returning home along the small streets when suddenly a hand grabbed me and pulled me into a yard. It turned out to be my mother. 'You'll sit here and you won't move!' she said.

All my sisters had taken part in the demonstration. So, my mother was waiting at a place on our way home – it was the only way we could take to return home. And when she found all of us, we went home together. After that day we couldn't go out, because there was a blockade during the night and the next day. Policemen went from house to house and arrested people. It was very scary. My elder sisters were members not only of the UYW, but also of the Bulgarian Communist Party 19. My youngest sister, who was 13 then, wore a scarf with illegal documents hidden under it. She was allowed to pass through the blockades and carried the documents to the address she was told. Most of the materials were against the deportation of Jews. The blockade continued for more than 24 hours: it was very scary. Policemen entered every house, threw everything out of the wardrobes looking for illegal literature, and beat the people. They also came to our house but found nothing. My sister carried out some of the materials and the others were put in a hiding place made by my mother. Our toilet was in the yard and my mother had taken out two of the bricks and put the materials behind them. My mother wasn't a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party but

sympathized with them and looked after us.

When we were allowed to go out of the neighborhood, it was 26th or 27th May and the internment started at the beginning of June. At that time the situation in Iuchbunar became unbearable. Everyone took out their belongings and tried to sell them: cookers, wardrobes, chairs, tables, etc. We weren't told yet when we would be interned and how much luggage we could take but we knew that we wouldn't be allowed to take furniture and most of our belongings. Everyone received orders for different dates, but we all knew that we were going. Then most of the younger Jews joined the partisans. The market on the streets was something incredible as all furniture and goods were sold at absurdly low prices. There were many buyers because everyone could enter Iuchbunar: it wasn't a ghetto. When our internment order came, I don't remember the date, but it must have been in the middle of June, we had two to three bags of clothes, we didn't have many belongings. My mother insisted on taking the sewing machine, because she hoped to earn a living with it.

We were first interned to Stara Zagora. Our gathering point was at the station. We got on the trains which were very dirty, and crowded with people, but we reached Stara Zagora. We were worried for my elder sister who was married and had a child but hadn't received an internment order yet. And we did something, I don't remember what, and she came with us to Stara Zagora. In Stara Zagora we got out of the trains carrying our clothes and were taken to a school. There we were accommodated in the classrooms. The desks had been taken out. My mother had a blanket, as did the other families. She put it on the floor and all of us sat in the middle of it. That was our bedroom, living-room and dining-room. My elder sister and her husband were with us. We spent about a month in the school, then we rented a room owned by a Bulgarian railway man: he was a wonderful man. I don't remember the address, or its location. We were there for about ten days. The yard was very nice and cozy and we all lived in one room. At that time people in Stara Zagora treated Jews very kindly.

Then we were interned again because there were some kinds of military facilities in Stara Zagora or something of the kind. We had to go to the town of Ferdinand [now Montana]. Once again we got on a train and traveled for a long time. We passed through Sofia. Something very dramatic happened here. My sisters Raina and Sofka had some friends: Armenian brothers, who lived near the station. When we reached Sofia, our wagon stopped far away from the station and we didn't know when we would leave for Ferdinand. Both my sisters decided, although the train was guarded, to fool the guards and visit their friends. I can't describe how worried my mother was before they left. She behaved as if she would never see them again. She asked them not to go, she cried, but they left. They had managed to fool the guards. Later, they told us that the mother of the brothers gave them food, because they were hungry. And the people at the station were already telling us that the train was about to leave. But my sisters were nowhere to be seen. My mother was hysterical with worry. And at the last second they appeared! We got on the train and arrived in Ferdinand. There we were once again taken to a school and lived in it for two or three months. We had very little money, which we had saved from the sale of the furniture. But even one loaf of bread was enough for us.

Then we rented a room in the ghetto which they had prepared for us. This was a residential district with specific borders. We weren't allowed to leave it, but the Bulgarians could enter it, because some Bulgarians also lived there. Our landlady was Dafinka, a widow with two sons. One of them

was Mitko and the other, Goshko. Mitko was in the military police and fought against the partisans and terrorists. Goshko hadn't done his military service yet. We lived in the basement: a room with a small corridor. The landlady gave us an iron stove and we used it to warm the room. She was also a poor woman, but helped us with what she could. She even found a bed, although it wasn't big enough for everybody; the others slept on the ground. We paid her some rent just like we did in Stara Zagora.

The Jewish synagogue was also in that neighborhood: it was small and had a small yard. There was a canteen there, where we went to get food: mostly beans without any meat. The beans were just boiled. We went there and took food for six people. It was free of charge. The Jewish municipality didn't have money for anything else. I remember a story, both sad and hilarious. There was an old man, who had a great sense of humor and he would always happen to be in front of us in the queue. When he would come out, everyone asked him what the food was this time. And the old man would answer seriously, 'Kaldiko di poyu,' which means chicken soup [Ladino]. And we all laughed and knew that meant beans again. But the man cheered us up a bit.

Then we ran out of money. We didn't receive rations, everything was rationed then, and we had no more money. That happened in fall 1943. My sister Raina, who was a hairdresser, found a job at a salon. It was on a street on the border between the ghetto and the rest of the city. The border passed along the middle of the street, and the salon was on the other side: outside the ghetto. But she took the risk, because if you were caught, you could be arrested as I had been at least ten times. So, my sister went to work and didn't go out the whole day. She was paid very little, but it was something. The owner of the salon was a Bulgarian, but kept her because she worked very well and a lot of people from Sofia were interned to Ferdinand and they wanted good service.

My other sister, Sofka also found a job, but as a bookbinder. The bookstore she worked for was exactly on the border. The owner of the bookstore was Panaiot: a Bulgarian. It was also a publishing house and issued the newspaper 'Nov Zhivot' [New Life: weekly containing local news and announcements]. He also liked her work and looked after her. One day she told him, 'Listen, Panaiote, I'll keep coming, but I would also like you to employ my sister,' who was me. 'What will she do?' he asked. 'When necessary, she will help me and the rest of time she will be a shop assistant in the bookstore,' she said. The bookstore sold not only notebooks, pencils and books, but also clarinet caps and such small items which were bought by people from the nearby villages. Every Monday the bookstore was crowded with customers, because it was the market day in Ferdinand. Panaiot agreed to employ me.

I had to wear my Jewish star here as well. I always put it on the collar of my shirt so that it could be seen when I put on my apron. But there was an agent of State Security Service – Kosta, who lived a few blocks from the bookstore and had decided to harass me. When a lot of people came into the bookstore, usually on Mondays, when I would bend down to lift something and my star couldn't be seen, I would see Kosta at the door. He would hide and watch me and always appear at such a moment. And since the bookstore was crowded, I couldn't see him. Panaiot would be at the cashier desk and Kosta would ask him loudly, 'Panaiot, who's that over there?' Then I would realize that my star couldn't be seen and put it right. And Kosta would say, 'Spare me your tricks! Why are you hiding your star?' And my boss, who was a noble man, but sickly, would say, 'Kosta, please, let her be, look how crowded it is in here!' Kosta always did it on Mondays when it was full of people. 'No, she'll come with me to the police station,' Kosta would say.

That was the paradox: Kosta was only looking for a reason to arrest me and exercise his authority while also receiving a bribe. So, he would arrest me. And why was I arrested? So that Panaiot would go and pay some money to release me. I was taken to the police station, stayed there for a couple of hours, then Panaiot would come, pay ten levs and take me with him. Kosta did the same thing when I would go to post some letters on the other side of the street because the mailboxes were there. I sent letters to my friends who had been interned to other towns. I don't know if Kosta treated the other Jews the same way, but he always did that to me. He picked on my sister too, although more rarely, because she worked inside the building. But he knew me very well, because I was in the bookstore.

The sons of our landlady treated us very differently. There were very nice boys, although one of them served in the military police as a conscript. He helped me once. Goshko, the younger one, also helped us a lot. We weren't allowed to go to the market and we had no rations. So my mother asked him to buy us at least one bottle of oil from the black market. And when we took the beans soup from the synagogue, she would fry it a bit to make it tastier. The boy helped us: went to the market, found something and bought it for us. In the ghetto we were also allowed to go out of our homes, but for only two hours a day: between 9am and 11am. I would run away and go to work. So, I was also arrested. It was very difficult. We also had to take our food from the synagogue during those two hours. But the people around us helped us as much as they could.

Raina's boyfriend was in a labor camp 20, but he was released and they got married in Ruse, where he had been interned with his parents. None of us attended the wedding because it was far and we had no money. Sofka got married in Vratsa, which was closer and got special permission from the police station to marry her Jewish boyfriend. My mother wasn't allowed to go for her daughter's wedding, nor was anyone else. But I decided to go illegally: that was in spring 1944. I hid my star and went to the train. I had to go to the station first. And as hard as I tried to hide, I saw an agent: Milcho. He was also another civil agent of the State Security Service in the town. Milcho was a group leader, Kosta's boss. They were civil agents, but we knew them, because they always arrested us for stupid things. I saw him and froze, because I thought that he would arrest me now and nobody would know: neither my mother, nor my sisters. At that time, fortunately for me, I saw Mitko at the station. He was coming home on leave. The military police had a bad name because they made a lot of arrests, but he was a very nice boy. He was just conscripted in these forces. I saw him and called him quietly, 'Mitko, Mitko!' He came and asked me what the matter was. I explained to him and said, 'Milcho is here. Tell me, please, which train to get on.' I couldn't go to the platform without knowing which train to catch to Vratsa. He bought me a ticket, gave it to me, took my small suitcase and told me, 'Watch where I'm going. I'll leave your suitcase at the door of your train. And when you hear the announcement that the train to Vratsa is leaving, run for the train.' And so I did.

I saw which wagon he entered, he waved to me, I saw where he stopped and when I heard that the train for Vratsa was leaving in two minutes I ran for the train, entered the wagon and hid there. I saw Milcho walking along the platform near the train. He had spotted me once earlier but had lost me. He didn't know where I was. He got on the same train. And what chaos there was in there! He passed nearby and I entered the toilet. When the train stopped I got off and waited on the platform. At the last minute I got on again and we traveled to Mezdra. He had been looking for me, but he didn't know if I was still on the train. At some point Mitko appeared again: he was in the

same train because he was traveling to Sofia and he said, 'I'll find out where Milcho is going and tell you.'

Fortunately, the agent was traveling to Lom or Vidin and caught another train in Mezdra. So, I could relax a bit. I stayed for five or six days in Varna at my sister's house. The wedding had already taken place, I saw that she was well but I was wondering how to get home. I was afraid of what would happen if I met Milcho again on the train. There would be no one to help me. So I decided that in Mezdra I would go out on the platform and look around for him. When I arrived in Ferdinand, although I hadn't seen him, I was afraid that he would be waiting for me at the station or that he would have sent someone else to wait for me. So when the train slowed down before reaching the station, I threw my suitcase and jumped out of the train.

## After the War

On 9th September 1944 21 the old government was overthrown. Around 20th September we decided to go back to Sofia. We boarded a train and returned. As far as I remember Sofka was the first to return and rented a house for us on 51 Sofronii Street. It had a yard and a couple of stairs which led to the house. It had a small corridor and two rooms. The toilet was outside, but there was a sink inside and a small kitchen, which you entered from the corridor. Sofka lived in one of the rooms and the rest of us lived in the other. We had no belongings. At first we slept on the floor. Someone gave us plank beds. We all slept on one plank bed: my mother and my sisters. When we returned after the internment, we had nothing and we had to find some work. Our identity cards had been changed again and we had our old names back. Since I was a member of the UYW, I was invited to start work at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I worked as a clerk for a short time. We didn't receive money in the first few months, but there was a dining-room where we received food and rations. I carried them home for the others.

My sister Rashel went to work as a babysitter in a Jewish family. The family was rich. Their family name was Arie and they gave her clothes, money or food. She brought everything home. My mother no longer sewed because there were no orders. We lived like that until I started work at the editor's office of the newspaper 'Narodna Mladezh' 22. This happened in 1950. I was the secretary of the editor-in-chief. Then I was office manager. I had started studying in an evening high school so I finished my secondary education before I started work at the newspaper. I worked there until 1959. I was already a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Before the newspaper I worked for a short time in the Committee of Science, Arts and Culture in the personnel department and also in the publishing house 'Medicine and Physical Education.' I also worked for a short time with Radio Sofia as a program dispatcher.

I knew my husband, David Levi, from early on, because he was a famous illegal activist and a lot of people knew who he was. He had been imprisoned for a long time and I knew about him although we had never met. He was born in Sofia and arrested here. He was sent to the Sofia prison, then to the Varna one and then to the Burgas one. He also worked in the Jewish labor camps. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for UYW activities. We met at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We fell passionately in love and got married on 19th January 1947. We had nowhere to live together, so I lived at my mother's and he lived at his parents' house. We met in the parks. David was a great sportsman, a tourist: we went to the Vitosha Mountain and to other mountains as well. From time to time we went to his parents' house; there was a small room there: they slept on some

kind of panel beds, I don't know how they had managed to preserve them. And there was a couch at the foot of the bed where we slept.

We lived like that until 1948 when we were given a room in the big apartment of the Kulevi family. [Editor's note: In the communist regime families of workers were accommodated in the larger apartments of the higher classes. Often a number of families had to share one apartment, each of them occupying one room but sharing the kitchen and bathroom.]

The man in the family had been a producer of enamelware and his wife was German. After 9th September 1944 he had run away and his wife remained here. She was about to leave, but one of the rooms in her apartment had been nationalized and given to us. I remember that we lived there for a very short time, because Kuleva was leaving and someone else wanted the whole apartment for himself. They told me that we had to leave because some prosecutor was going to live here. My husband got so angry that he said, 'I'll not leave this apartment, let them throw my baggage away and if Georgi Dimitrov 23 passes by and asks whose this baggage is, they will have to tell him: it's Dick's baggage outside!' You can see how naive we were at that time. He still worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he was there until 1949. After all we were given two rooms to rent in a bigger apartment on Hristo Botev Street, but this time his parents also came to live there. There were two more rooms where other families lived.

My daughter, Sima Davidova Evtimova [nee Levi], was born in 1949. She graduated in Spanish Philology, lives in Bulgaria, but is unemployed now. She is married to a Bulgarian and has two children: Alexander, who is 28 years old, and Adelina, who is 23. My grandson has a degree in management and works for his father and my granddaughter has a degree in computer graphics and photography. After the Ministry for Internal Affairs my husband started working for the 'Trud' 24 newspaper and then for the magazine 'Balgarski Profsaiuzi' [Bulgarian Trade Unions]. He had a degree from the Higher Party School 25.

In 1959 I went to work for the new newspaper 'Literaturni Novini' 26. I was once again secretary there and I worked there until 1964. Then I went to the publishing house 'Tehnika' ['Technic': specialized in publishing technical and popular scientific literature] where I worked until I retired. At all the places I had worked nobody treated me badly because I was a Jew except when we worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs from which we were fired for that reason. Not because we were Jews, but because we had relatives in a western country. [Regardless of geographical location all non-Soviet Block countries, including Israel, were considered 'Western,' meaning capitalistic, before 1989.]

We lived with my husband's parents. They observed some traditions, but we didn't and neither did our daughter. We observed very few of the rituals. We didn't pray, nor go to the synagogue. We married only before the registrar. We settled in our present home in 1968. My husband's parents lived in one of the rooms, my husband and I in the other and my daughter in the living-room. Six months after we moved, my father-in-law died and when my daughter got married she lived here with her husband. In 1976 my grandson was born and my mother-in-law died in 1978. It was always very crowded at home.

Now I live alone: from time to time my grandchildren visit me but they live in Dragalevtsi [a village near Sofia, at the foot of the Vitosha Mountain]. My husband died on 6th May 1993, but he was very sick for the last twelve years of his life: he was on hemodialysis. I looked after him, there was

no other way. He went to have hemodialysis three times a week, and I took him there and back. My daughter lived here and a year before my husband died we bought a small apartment in the neighboring surroundings. We went to live there and my daughter remained here with the children. But my husband was sick, very sick.

Now I have many friends whom I know and who are very close to me. But I gather mostly with the women. We are around 14. They are colleagues of mine from the places I had worked. From time to time we also invite some of our male colleagues. There are two other Jewish women among us, but all the others are Bulgarians. I get along perfectly well with all of them: we love each other a lot. On Saturdays I go to the Jewish Home [see Bet Am] 27, where I'm a member of the 'Golden Age' club: it's for Jews only. I also have friends there. All of my parents' relatives have passed away. When I went to Israel I visited those who were alive. I went six or seven times to Israel. I still keep in touch with my sisters.

I didn't think about leaving for Israel but my sisters, who were married and whose relatives were leaving, also had to leave. The boyfriend of my younger sister, Mimi, had to leave with his parents; his sister was already there. So, Mimi married him and immigrated. My other sister, Rashel, was already married and since her husband was leaving with his mother and his father had already died, she also immigrated. Now during the second mass aliyah six or seven years ago my sister Sofka also immigrated [see Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel] 28. My husband and I didn't think about immigrating, but we always felt something pull us towards Israel and my husband went there every year. We didn't immigrate because there was nothing we could do there. We didn't expect to find work there.

We weren't particularly well-off after 1950. We lived a normal life and went on holidays to the mountains, to rest homes. So, we weren't rich, but not poor either. I was very scared by the wars in Israel in 1967 [see Six-Day-War] 29 and in 1973 [see Yom Kippur War] 30 and especially when the Six-Day-War started. At that time my mother, mother-in-law and my father-in-law were in Israel on a visit. And they hurriedly came back: they boarded a ship, because there were no planes at that time. My husband and I went to Varna to meet them and they were absolutely exhausted when they arrived. They needed a whole day to recover. We were badly affected by the disconnection of the diplomatic ties with Israel because we had a lot of relatives there whom we visited every year. Especially with my younger sister, who traveled to international youth festivals and always passed via Bulgaria. Her husband was a conductor and took part in choirs and youth festivals. My sister was a singer in a choir and they almost always passed via Bulgaria to visit us.

Otherwise, we had no problems to visit Israel even when the diplomatic relations with Israel were banned. The Netherlands was representing the interests in Israel in Bulgaria and their embassy issued the necessary documents. It wasn't a problem to get a visa for Israel if you could prove that you had relatives there, except if your whole family was leaving with you. The condition in Bulgaria for traveling to the so-called 'capitalist countries' was to leave a member of the family behind: if the child went somewhere, the parents had to stay, and if the parents left, the children had to stay. The aim wasn't to allow families to emigrate. I have been there four or five times. Once I also took my daughter who was 13 or 14 years old. I had a feeling that I had been denied a promotion at work for being a Jew, not only when I worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but later on too. But no one said anything.

I kept in touch with my relatives, we wrote letters to each other and spoke on the phone, which was a luxury then. They called more often. I remember that one of the times my sister and her husband were passing via Bulgaria to go to a Romanian festival, and they called to tell us that they wouldn't pass through Sofia, but through Gorna Oriahovitsa. They asked our mother to go and see them there. My mother was very worried there because she couldn't find them on the platform. They were in a special wagon and weren't allowed to go to Sofia. Those were special festival wagons. They weren't much different from the others, but they were only for the participants in the festival and no other passengers traveled in them. There was some kind of problem and my husband took my mother home. At that time Ivan Bashev was in charge of the Bulgarian representatives in the festival and I was his secretary in 'Narodna Mladezh.' Later, he became Foreign Minister. So we called him and he did everything possible to find my sister in Romania and put her through to my mother so that at least they could speak on the phone.

The democracy in Bulgaria after 1989 [see 10th November 1989] 31 affected me very badly. If it hadn't been so I would have visited Israel more times. Until 1993 I was thinking only about my husband. There were problems with his medicines. After that I went twice to Israel but my relatives paid for my expenses. Now I visit the Jewish community. I'm very happy there because I meet with people. And at that age I need contacts because I live alone. I went only twice to the synagogue: to see it restored and on a holiday to see how they celebrate it. Now I don't receive financial aid. Some time ago we received 10-15 levs [around 10 USD] every month depending on the pension. I think that representatives of Joint 32 visited us. Now such aid is given only to the people with very small pensions. We receive a tranche of 500 dollars or something like that but I don't know from where.

## Glossary

**1 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**
The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

**2 Sephardi Jewry**
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.

**3 Iuchbunar**
The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means ‘the three wells’.

**4 Great Synagogue**
Located in the center of Sofia, it is the third largest synagogue in Europe after the ones in Budapest and Amsterdam; it can house more than 1,300 people. It was designed by Austrian architect Grunander in the Moor style. It was opened on 9th September 1909 in the presence of King Ferdinand and Queen Eleonora.

**5 Iuchbunar synagogue**
Iuchbunar is a housing district in Sofia with a large Jewish population. At the time Sofia was declared capital of the Kingdom of Bulgaria on 3rd April 1878 the town was around 20 000 people, of whom around 1 800 were Jews. That is why, there were around 10 synagogues located in areas with large Jewish population. The synagogue in Iuchbunar existed until 1944. The largest of all Sofia synagogues is the Central [Great] Synagogue built in 1909 by the design of the Austrian architect Grunanger. It is located in the center of Sofia and still exists today.

**6 Jewish schools in Sofia**
In the 19th century gradually the obligatory religious education was replaced with a secular one, which around 1870 in Bulgaria was linked to the organization Alliance Israelite Universelle. The organization was founded by the distinguished French statesman Adolphe Crémieux with the goal of popularizing French language and culture among Jews in the Ottoman Empire (of which Bulgaria was also part until 1878). From 1870 until 1900 Alliance Israelite played a positive role in the process of founding Jewish schools in Bulgaria. According to the bulletin of the organization, statistics about Jewish schools showed the date of the foundation of every Jewish school and its town. Two Jewish schools were founded in Sofia by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in 1887 and 1896. The first one was almost in the center of Sofia between the streets Kaloyan, Lege and Alabin, and in the urban development plan it was noted down as a ‘Jewish school.’ The second one, opened in the Sofia residential estate Iuchbunar, had the unofficial name ‘Iuchbunar Jewish school.’ The synagogue in that estate was called the same way. School affairs were run by the Jewish school boards (Komite Skoler), which were separated from the Jewish municipalities and consisted of Bulgarian citizens, selected by all the Jews by an anonymous vote. The documents on the Jewish municipalities preserved from the beginning of the 20th century emphasize that the school boards were separated from the synagogue ones. A retrospective look at the activity of the Jewish municipalities in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century indicates only that the education of all Jewish boys had to be obligatory and that there was a school at every synagogue. In 1891 the Bulgarian Parliament passed a law on education, according to which all Bulgarian citizens, regardless of religious groups were supposed to receive their education in Bulgarian. The previously existing French language Alliance Israelite Universelle schools were not closed, yet their activities were regulated and they were forced to incorporate the teaching of Bulgarian into their schedule. Currently the only Jewish school in Bulgaria is 134th school ‘Dimcho Debelyanov’ in Sofia. It has the statute of a high school since 2003. It is supported by the Ronald S.

Lauder Foundation and AJJDC. It is among the elite schools in Bulgaria and its students learning Hebrew are both Jews and Bulgarians.

**7 Jewish orphanage 'Queen Eleonore'**
founded in 1915 by Queen Eleonore, the wife of King Ferdinand (1861-1948) for Jewish orphans, whose fathers perished or were seriously wounded in the two Balkan Wars (1912-13), hence the name. Under the Law for the Protection of the Nation a moratorium was imposed in 1941 on the activity of all Jewish trade, cultural, educational and charity associations as well as on those associations founded by Bulgarians but including Jews. The Jewish orphanage 'Queen Eleonora' stopped its activities in 1942. There is no information about it being restored after 1944.

**8 Chifuti**
Derogatory nickname for Jews in Bulgarian.

**9 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 Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

**10 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.

**11 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.

**12 Forced name change during Holocaust**

in accordance with a clause of the Law for the Protection of the Nation voted on 24th December 1940, as well as Decree 192/29th August 1942, all Jewish names ending with -ov, -ev and -ich were changed. According to the requirements first names mostly of Ashkenazi Jews were also changed.

**13 24th May 1943**

Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943. Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

**14 Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria**

‘The Young Watchman’; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in ‘illegal’ immigration to Palestine.

**15 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.

**16 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.

**17 Daniel Zion**
Rabbi in the Sofia synagogue and President of the Israeli Spiritual Council, participant in procession on 24th May 1943.

**18 King Boris III**
The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Many Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

**19 Bulgarian Communist Party**
a new party founded in April 1990 and initially named Party of the Working People. At an internal party referendum in the spring of 1990 the name of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was changed to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The more hard-line Party of the Working People then took over the name Bulgarian Communist Party. The majority of the members are Marxist-oriented old time BCP members.

**20 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.

**21 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.

**22 Narodna Mladezh**
lit. People's Youth, a Bulgarian communist youth newspaper, first published in 1944. Initially it was published by the Central Committee of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union, later by the Fatherland youth and then the Central Committee of the Union of the People's Youth. In 1948 it became a daily, aiming to unite the Bulgarian youth ideologically. After the political changes in

1989 it ceased publication.

**23 Dimitrov, Georgi (1882-1949)**
A Bulgarian revolutionary, who was the head of the Comintern from 1936 through its dissolution in 1943, secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1949, and prime minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949. He rose to international fame as the principal defendant in the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933. Dimitrov put up such a consummate defense that the judicial authorities had to release him.

**24 Trud**
Maining Labor, it is a Bulgarian national daily paper, today published by ‘Media Holding’. Its first publication was in 1946 and until 1990 it was the official organ of the Central Council of the Bulgarian Trade Unions. From 1990 to 1991 due to the democratic changes and the disintegration of the state organizations the newspaper was a body of the Confederation of Independent Syndicates in Bulgaria. In 1994 it began to be published under the name ‘Dneven Trud’ (Daily Labor).

**25 Party Schools**
They were established after the Revolution of 1917 in Russia, in different levels, with the purpose of training communist cadres and activists. Subjects such as ‘scientific socialism’ (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy) and ‘political economics’ besides various other political disciplines were taught there. After World War II such institutions were established throughout the Soviet-dominated Eastern European countries.

**26 Literaturni Novini**
Literarian News, it was a Bulgarian journal first published in Sofia in 1927-28 by the publishing house ‘Iv. G. Ignatov and sons’. It published articles on linguistics, cinema studies, theater, archeology, literature, artists' portraits, documents, fiction (translated and original). In 1941-44 a biweekly was published in Varna by the same name, focusing on literature, art, science and social life. It united a variety of authors, mainly from the countryside. At first it was left-oriented, but after 1942 it became right-oriented. Literarni Novini was also an information weekly published in Sofia from 1961 to 1964 as a body of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It published works by Bulgarian and foreign authors.

**27 Bet Am**
The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

**28 Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel**
After the 1967 Six-Day-War, the Soviet Union cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, under the pretext of Israel being the aggressor and the neighboring Arab states the victims of Israeli imperialism. The Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) conformed to the verdict of the Kremlin and followed the Soviet example. Diplomatic

relations between Israel and the ex-Communist countries resumed after the fall of communism.

**29 Six-Day-War**

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

**30 Yom Kippur War**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

**31 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.

**32 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish aid committees, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported the establishment of cultural meeting places, including libraries, theaters and gardens. It also provided religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from European and Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.