

# Lazar Abuaf

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Istanbul,

Turkey

Interviewer: Meri Schild

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*I interviewed this family in a neighborhood on the Asian side of Istanbul, close to the sea border. Mr. Lazar and his wife Mrs. Fani have been living on the fifth floor of a 6-storey modern building for the last 30 years. At the entrance to the flat, to the left of the spacious hall is the modern kitchen and adjacent to that, a remarkably large balcony with a view of the sea, like all the other balconies of the house. They watch the sunset from the balcony of the spacious living and dining rooms which are to the left of the kitchen and decorated with classical style furniture. Mr. Lazar and his family especially enjoy having a drink and appetizers on this balcony when their daughters and grandchildren come to visit.*



*Following the entrance hall is a hallway with two bedrooms, one guestroom, one large and one small bathroom. Since the balcony of their bedroom faces north, it is the preferred spot for hot summer days. Even though the building is old, Mr. Lazar and his wife Mrs. Fani meticulously paint and repair their home and protect it. Mr. Lazar has an athletic build despite being 79 years old, is a little portly, has sparse grey hair, keeps his family and his wife under his wings, dotes on his wife, is cordial, is a person who takes the older people in the Old People's Home out once or twice a month to a fish restaurant to make them happy, despite his age. His wife Mrs. Fani, like her husband, is infinitely generous towards her family and husband, exerts every effort to keep her spouse happy, is cordial and loving and is a lady who carries the effects of long years on her.*

*When we had this chat, Mr. Lazar underwent first a surgery, then started chemotherapy for the "Prostate Cancer" that was diagnosed in 2005. They went through a 6 month period of hardship as a family. Maybe the fact that Mr. Lazar and his wife hang on so tightly to life, always think optimistically, never fail to have a smile on their faces, caused the surgery and therapy to respond quickly to the illness. From now on he has regular check-ups every 3 months. Evidently, the conversation with a family going through such a period took a long time to conclude. The Abuaf couple, taking advantage of the summer season, had a one-two week vacation on the borders of the Aegean Sea. Unfortunately, when they thought everything was in order, they were given 30 sessions of radiotherapy when the illness reappeared. Finally, the therapy is over and a 1,5 month waiting period has started. After this period, the preventive measures to be taken will be reassessed according to the check-ups. Meanwhile, due to the ill-effects of the therapy on his body, he had cataract surgery on one eye, and the therapy following the surgery is slow to respond. Despite everything, I believe Mr. Lazar will overcome these difficulties with his faith in G-d and his*

*positive nature.*

My maternal grandmother “Gramama Roza Eskenazi” was born in 1870 (unfortunately I do not know her maiden name, I know it was Eskenazi after marrying my grandfather), I know that she emigrated from Bulgaria to Istanbul while she was a child, that she never had an opportunity to go to school, and that she was a pious lady. It was to such an extent that even I did not know the color of her hair, because underneath the scarf that she wore even inside the house would invariably be another headscarf. I regret that I do not have much information about her. My maternal grandmother mourned her daughter all of her life since she lost her young daughter Sara at a very young age due to a factor that I do not know. Because of her grief, she never even looked at a mirror. What I remember about her is that she was a cheerful, benevolent and radiant lady who cherished life. She died in 1938, we buried her in the Ortakoy Jewish cemetery in the family tomb.

My maternal grandfather’s name was Nesim Yusef Eskenazi, that I know. Unfortunately I do not know how and under what conditions my maternal grandmother and grandfather met or married, nor what his occupation was. After the marriage of my grandmother and grandfather, they had two daughters named Mari, who became my mother, and Verjini.

I do not know where my paternal grandfather Davit Abuaf was born unfortunately. I only know that he emigrated from Salonika with his family (unfortunately I do not know the year), and that my paternal grandmother’s name was Mazalto, and that she had come from Moscow. I do not know how my paternal grandfather and grandmother met or married, I think it was never told to us or I forgot. As you can see, I have almost no information on my grandparents. From the marriage of my grandfather Davit and his wife Mazalto, my father Nesim, Rafael, Izak and my aunt Suzan were born. They were all born and raised in Kuzguncuk, Daghamam and attended the Jewish school in their neighborhood, they spoke Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish (I do not have more information about their education).

This couple settled in the neighborhood of Daghamam in Uskudar, which is on the Asian side and along with my father Nesim, had three sons and one daughter. The names of my uncles were Rafael and Izak, and my aunt’s, Suzan, all the siblings went to the schools in their neighborhood. I do not have detailed information about the level of their education. Only during that period, partly due to the limited financial situation of our family and partly due to the fact that education wasn’t considered as important then, there were very few educated people.

My uncle Izak married his wife Mrs. Rashel (unfortunately I do not remember the birth or death dates of my uncle, his education, how or when he met and married, or the maiden name of my aunt Rashel). They had a son named Rafael from this marriage. I do not know what my uncle Izak’s job was during the period they lived in Kuzguncuk. For as long as I’ve known, my uncle produced trunks of various sizes on the basement floor of a house on Yazici Sokak [street], next to the Italian Synagogue [a neighborhood where Jews lived on the European side in the town of Shishane]. The merchants delivered all kinds of goods to Anatolia in these trunks.

Their son Rafael, who was born in 1928, was educated in the Turkish schools in their neighborhood. He received his Talmud Torah lessons in Sishane [A neighborhood on the European side where Jews lived] at the Apollon Synagogue [1](#) from Nisim Behar [2](#). With this education, and the fact that he had a special voice and vast religious knowledge, he was appointed the only cantor in the Sisli synagogue [3](#).

My cousin Rafael married Klara, who was the cousin of his teacher Nisim Behar and who was the daughter of a rabbi around 1947 (unfortunately I do not have information about the family of Klara, I don't remember). (I cannot remember when or where they were married either). They had two daughters from this marriage. Rafael opened a small store selling supplies for tailors in Pangalti named "Inci" (Pearl) during the hours he had when he wasn't working as a cantor [A neighborhood on the European side that is part of Sisli].

During the events of Sept 6-7, 1955 [4](#), he ran from his home to his store to protect it and started sitting at the door. The looters were destroying everywhere. Rafael thought that his long beard, long black coat and black top-hat would be enough to protect him. He nevertheless had to show his circumcision to the looters who came to his store. In this way he saved both himself and his store.

Following this event, my cousin Rafael immigrated to Israel along with his mom and dad, his wife and daughters. They settled in Tel Aviv, in Yesof Hamala. They had another daughter and two sons in Israel. He continued to live as one of the most famous cantors in Israel, became an official at the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. He became responsible for the religious ceremonies in all of the official government events. In addition to this duty, he produced programs on the TV and the radio. In time, they built him a special Sephardic synagogue in Tel Aviv. Because the whole family was very religious, the daughters married orthodox sons-in-laws. Since the daughters gradually moved to Beneberak after marrying, Rafael also moved to Beneberak to be close to his daughters. Consequently he left his synagogue in Tel Aviv. Afterwards, he was appointed to be the chief cantor of the Ashkenazi Synagogue in Tel Aviv. Nowadays all the children are married and if I am not wrong he has about 60 to 70 grandchildren, of course now these grandchildren also started getting married. Unfortunately, my cousin Rafael had a defective heart valve from birth and he never wanted to undergo an operation. Because of this infirmity, he was unable to perform as a cantor after the age of 65. Regrettably, he died as a result of a heart attack he suffered due to the loud noise of a Scud missile that landed in Tel Aviv during the 1990 Gulf War. He was interned in Beneberak, in the cemetery where his mother and father are. His wife Klara is still alive, and lives with her children.

My uncle Rafael (I do not know his birthdate) was married to a lady named *Ester* (I have no information about either this lady or when or where they were married). They had sons Lazar, Eliya and a daughter Rebeka from this marriage. Unfortunately my uncle Rafael and his wife Ester died at a very young age (I do not know the cause of their deaths). They were both interned at the Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

Their daughter, my cousin Rebeka, born in 1924, (unfortunately I do not know her level of education) married a gentleman named Israel (I do not know his last name) and started living with her mom and dad. However, after her family's death, they immigrated to Israel around 1953. I know they had 3 or 4 children from this marriage (I do not know their names). Now, all the children are married and are parents, we communicate with her, even if it isn't too often, during holidays, and see each other when we go to Israel.

Their son, *Lazar*, born in 1926, lived in Istanbul all of his life (I do not know his education level) and worked in the Eminonu market [a neighborhood on the European side which is the heart of commerce] in a workplace called "Modern Mefrushat" [Modern Furnishings]. After completing his military duties (I do not know where and how long his military service was), he married a lady

named *Suzan* from Bursa (unfortunately I do not have information about this lady or her family). Their daughter Ester and son Rifat were born from this marriage. Unfortunately we lost my cousin Lazar who was a diabetic, before he reached 55 years of age and interned him in the Ulus Jewish cemetery.

Their son Rifat, who was born in 1950, is married to Beki. (I do not have information about Rifat's education, development, or his spouse Beki). Rifat sells wholesale supplies for tailors. In time his business grew a lot. They have a married son and a daughter who is still single from this marriage. (I have no information about the education of these children). These children work with their father.

Their daughter Ester, born in 1953, is married to Marsel Ipekci who is from Bursa. (I do not have any information about Ester's education, development, or her husband Marsel). Marsel sells wholesale supplies for tailors in Sisli. [A neighborhood on the European side, for a while Jews resided there after Kuledibi, then it progressed into a commercial neighborhood]. They had a daughter Leyla and son Moris from this marriage. Leyla married one of our rabbis, Naftali Haleva, in Neve Shalom Synagogue [5](#) after graduating from university. (I unfortunately do not remember where the evening reception took place). For now they have two sons. Ester's son got married in August of 2006 in Neve Shalom Synagogue (I do not have any information about the girl he married unfortunately).

My aunt Suzan who became a widow at a young age unfortunately lived with her children for long years. She became a diabetic like her spouse, the children took care of their mother who was paralyzed at home for long years. But after March of 2006, the children had to place their mother whose condition was worsening at the Or-Ahayim Hospital [6](#). Even though she was very well taken care of there, we lost Suzan in July of 2006, and interned her next to her husband at the Ulus Jewish cemetery.

I unfortunately do not remember the education level or business of Eliya who was born in 1930. I only know that he married a lady named Klara Zavaro and that they did not have children. I am sorry to say that Eliya was a diabetic and had cardiac problems, we lost him at a very young age and interned him in the Arnavutkoy cemetery. A very short while later, his wife Klara also passed away from congestive heart failure, we buried her next to her spouse (unfortunately I do not know the years of their deaths).

My aunt Suzan attended only one or two years of school. Because at that time girls had to help their mothers at home. When the family was large, the daughter was always the mother's biggest helper. When she reached a certain age, they married her to a gentleman whose name I do not know. However during the war (World War I), because he was afraid of fighting, my uncle left the country and disappeared. I do not know how long they stayed married, but my aunt became widowed and childless at a very young age. Because she had no education either, she started working as a live-in housekeeper. The one day of the week she had off, she would spend in our house. My aunt was a very generous and kind person, we were like her own children, she was exceptionally attached to us, we loved her very, very much. After remaining a widow for a long time, she married a gentleman named *Robert Bensason* who worked in the market (selling fabrics, scarves, towels etc. in bundles) and lived in Ortakoy [A neighborhood by the Bosphorus on the European side of Istanbul]. After a while, first Robert, then my aunt died (unfortunately I do not know the years of their deaths). We interned Robert in the Ortakoy Jewish cemetery, and my aunt

in the family tomb at Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

My father Salom Nesim Abuaf who was born in 1895, was born and raised in Kuzguncuk like his other siblings [A neighborhood on the Asian side where Jews settled]. Like all other Jewish families of the time, my grandfather provided my father's education, along with his other children, in the neighborhood Jewish school. (Unfortunately I do not know what grade level he attended). Even though my father was a very successful student, the financial difficulties faced by his father caused him to start working at a very young age. My father was proficient in Hebrew due to the education he received in school. He learned Judeo-Spanish at home since his family spoke this language in the house. In addition, my father spoke Turkish very well because of the environment he was in.

My father Nesim, first learned how to make a "fez" [7](#) around the 1910's, by becoming an apprentice to a tailor. My father was very competent, outgoing and shrewd. In 1914, during the first World War, he started producing, selling and repairing fez's in a store he managed on his own in Kuzguncuk, Daghamam [A part of a neighborhood on the Asian side]. (I do not know if he had employees or partners working with him).

My father was big and burly, portly, and he was slightly cross-eyed. Both my mother and father had white hair. He was a fabulous father and spouse. In 1953, a stone the size of a dove's egg appeared in his kidney. The doctors we took him to all said "No problem, this is a very easy operation. We will alleviate your problem and make you feel better in no time". My brother-in-law, who was a soldier in Van, came immediately upon hearing the news and even though he said "my dear father, don't you dare listen to these men, you are too portly and big, you would not be able to tolerate this operation," he had to return to Van because of his duties.

The pain my father endured became so strong that he had no choice but to surrender himself to medicine, and unfortunately we lost him in 1953, 3 or 4 days after the surgery. We interned him in the Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

The ones who lived in Daghamam were usually members of the Jewish community. Because it was a small neighborhood, everyone knew each other, all the young people chatted, played, and interacted with each other. Their biggest event was attending the ceremony in the synagogue on the Sabbath, sing in the choir, and then congregate at the "Dezayuno" (breakfast) that took place after the services and sing together. One of these families, the family of Roza and Yusef Eskenazi had children named Verjini, Sara, Mishel and Mari Eskenazi, born in 1890 (who later became my mother), who studied in the same neighborhood Jewish school for a few grades (I do not know till which grade, she could read and write in Hebrew).

Mari Eskenazi also sang in the temple choir. My mother's voice was beautiful in addition to being physically beautiful. So my father and mother met during choir practices that took place on Saturdays. My father was attracted to my mother immediately, and opened up to her a short while later, however my mother rejected him for a while, but could not resist my father who was so kind and well-known in our community and if I am not wrong, they were married in 1912. I never asked if there was a reception after the wedding, I do not know. My father made his living manufacturing and selling "fez"s, and they moved to their own place to prove to their families that they could manage on their own, and they were very happy.



Even though my mother was modern and loved to dress up, she would cover her head when she went out since she was religious like her own mother, but she uncovered her head at home, when she was with us. My mother was a typical Jewish woman, that means, both her kitchen and herself were kosher, when she prepared food in her kitchen, her head was always covered. She would go to the hamam in Ortakoy every Saturday. My father was as religious as my mother. He also observed his religion meticulously, he would daven every morning, observe the Sabbath, celebrate the holidays without exception, and teach them to us.

Both my mother and father liked discipline, and were courageous, humane and cheerful people.

During the years, my family left their neighborhood Daghamam [on the Asian side, in the Uskudar district] because of a few fires that broke out, and immediately moved to Ortakoy which is on the European side where mostly Jews resided, when they found a house within their means. My uncle's family and my aunt did not move from their old neighborhood for a while longer.

My father was sharp and enterprising. In those times a lot of fires broke out due to the fact that the buildings were made of wood. Brick houses would be built in place of the burned ones. My father was convinced that in this situation, building supplies like cement, nails etc. would be in demand in this sector. Borrowing from friends with interest, he rented a small store within a short time and filled it up with supplies. In this way my father took a step in the second career of his life which was hardware dealership. He also sold oil-based paints in his store in addition to these supplies. My father had this distinction; he could create any color imaginable by the client other than the standard ones in circulation. These paints were water resistant and were protected for long years after brushing; they were like the "satin paints" of today. As you can see, my father became a chemical engineer almost. His business went well, he took care of all of us comfortably. He never had extra money because he would always spend what he earned and pay the interest on the loans he took out.

On the other hand, my uncle's family who continued living in Daghamam were struggling financially. When one day my uncle Izak came and said to my father: "Nesimiko [little Nesim], look, if we, three brothers, worked together, we would all be stronger, what do you think?", my father was in deep thought but of course could not say no to his older brothers. My uncle's family also moved out of Daghamam and settled in Yazici Street in Kuledibi [on the European side, a neighborhood where Jews preferred living all together]. The neighborhood where they lived was called "Stairs of Stone", I think this neighborhood still exists. Both of my uncles lived close to each other.

The municipality of Ortakoy used to extract sand from the sea, and sell it in sacks, before he partnered with my uncles, my father had those sacks brought to the store one way or another, with the help of porters. When my uncles came, a horse-carriage was rented along with a stableman. The expenses sky-rocketed. This is how; other than the livelihood of three families, there was the salary of the stableman along with the feeding and care of the horse, the store was trying to keep up with all of these necessities. My father not only had to work more than he used to, he also was struggling to pay the debt he owed from the loan. Intolerance and jealousy fits started amongst the wives of my uncles. As a result of the continuous nagging in the family, and the fact that there wasn't enough income coming out of the store for three families, my father said to his older brothers:

“Unfortunately guys, this is not going to work, we tried to go over our heads, we have to part our ways”, and removed his older brothers from the business. Each brother worked in a business suited for himself. Despite everything, their unity remained intact.

After separating from his brothers, my father worked at the hardware business, and managed to pay off the interest on the loan he took out by working for long years. One day when I was either in second or third grade, my father said to me:

“Oh! Thank G-d Lazariko (little Lazar), I paid off my last debt, now I am at peace.”

#### *My older brother Davit*

My mother and father's first son Davit was born in Kuzguncuk in 1915. My family moved to Ortakoy around the 1920's. He received his first education at the Alliance Israelite [8](#) in the neighborhood. Because he was my father's first love, they sent him to the Italian high school in Beyoglu (1927) even though they were not wealthy. He would take the tram from Kuzguncuk to Tunel and from there go up to Beyoglu [one of the touristic centers on the European side which is a shopping and entertainment destination] with the subway and then walk to his school. At the time Turkey had taken part in World War I and its economy was in bad shape. All the citizens of the nations that were part of the Alliance lived in Istanbul. Of course, my father's business wasn't doing well due to this situation.

My older brother, after studying for two years in this school, said to my father: “My dear father, you are making a very big sacrifice so I can go to this school. I am grown up now, and I am aware of a lot, it is very clear that the economy of the nation is not in good shape. Today when I was on my way to school I saw an “apprentice required” sign on an office building (there was an office building whose name I cannot remember in the place of today's Richmond Hotel). If you allow me to, let me go there to talk tomorrow, let's see what kind of work it is. What do you think?”

My father replied “Truly, my son, what can I say; I wish we could have you continue studying, I cannot manage any better than this. May it be beneficial for you.”

In this way my older brother had to quit school in 1930. The next morning my brother went to this business early in the morning. It was the “Sanovitch Glove Factory” in an office building in Beyoglu. Davit talked with the manager and started working right away. He worked there for long years, his bosses liked Davit a lot. He also learned the business well in time; he would stitch leather gloves on the machine beautifully. At a time when I cannot remember the exact year, around the time when my father was stressed about the business, the government passed a law that stated that in places with more than 4 employees, a “Processing Tax” was going to be implemented. My brother's boss, in order to avoid paying this tax that was quite a large sum, sent the material and machines to the homes of the employees he trusted so they could work at home. The gloves that were manufactured at home would be delivered and the employees paid accordingly. My brother Davit was such a hardworking person who took his work seriously that he would start working at 7 every morning. He would finish the gloves that his boss said could probably be finished in a week, within a day. Such as it was, David brought a proposition to my father: “My dear father, you can see that I am finishing one week's worth of work within a day, and I waste the rest of the time by playing around. If you open up a store next to the Ortakoy Synagogue, I can manage it.”

My father was a well-known person in the community, likewise they rented a small store right next to the synagogue to my father for a very low price. The location of this store was very close to my father's store. This store was at a corner on the main street. My father said: "Let's see Davidiko (little Davit), the store is at your service, but what will you fill it up with? What are you thinking of selling? How will you manage this place?" "Very simple, it will be like a small grocery store. I will sell refreshments, chewing gum, chocolates etc. in front of the store, and I will stitch gloves in the back. You will see, all will go well."

The store opened up for business. But because the refreshments that were sold were warm, the business wasn't going as Davit wanted. Davit said to my father "My dear father, we have to buy a refrigerator urgently in order to get the return we wish from the store." When the Kelvinator brand refrigerator came and the refreshments were sold ice-cold, the business started going seriously well. Everything was going fine.

After separating from his brothers, my father managed to pay off the interest on the loan he took out, working for a very long time while continuing in the hardware business. One day, while I was still in 2nd or 3rd grade, my father said to me: "Oh! Thank G-d Lazariko (little Lazar), I paid off my last debt, now I am at peace!" My older brother also managed the grocery store. However, unexpectedly, the "Processing Tax" was repealed and when my brother Davit had to return to the workplace, the grocery store became my father's responsibility also.

My father asked my mother: "Marika what will we do now? What shall we do with this store? Can we manage both places?" My mother replied: "Nesimiko, what can I say? Let's think, we will certainly come up with a solution, something is bound to come up."

As far as I can remember, there was a wine factory named "Lavrentoglu" belonging to a Greek citizen in Tophane [A neighborhood on the European side]. This gentleman approached my father with a proposition one day: "Sir, a good day to you, I have a proposition for you. Your store is on a very busy street, you can sell a lot of wine in this store." My father said, "How can that be, sir? It is a subject I know nothing about, forget about us"; but the man continued: "Look Mr. Nesim, I will take care of all the arrangements, just hand me the store. We will establish a system. I will deliver the wine to you, and I will refill the barrels as they empty. You will sell wine by the glass. You will hand me the cost of the wine you sold, and keep the profit. What do you say? Think about it for a few days, and let's talk again?"

My father came home that night and recounted Lavrentoglu's proposition to us excitedly. He thought about it for a few days, and said to himself: "I have nothing to lose here, because I don't need to invest, let me say yes to this venture." In this way 6 wine barrels with a tap in front were placed in that tiny store, and two big barrels in the back. Wine was going to be produced in the barrels in the back and carried to the ones in the front and my father would sell wine by the kilo.

When my father started this business I was around 8 or 9 years old and my older brother Kemal around 10 or 11. We were attending the Turkish elementary school in Ortakoy. My father would go to the hardware store in the morning, and we would open up the wine store when we got out of school, at 5 in the afternoon, we would sweep and clean the place, and my mother would come later to help. We would serve wine to the clients, my mother would take the money. My father, on the other hand, would close the hardware store around 7 in the evening, and when he came to the wine store, we would return home and do our homework. Some of the clients came here with their



own bottles, and my father would ask questions like:

“Welcome. What color wine would you like? Do you want it strong, or mold?” Some of the clients came with a glass, they would ask for a second after they finished the first. In this way we became familiar with wines, but the business did not go as well as we wished.

One day, my mother said to my father: “Nesim, how much do we make from this store? What are we aiming for?” In the old times, my father says x amount of money, and my mother suggests: “Look, if we take out the 6 barrels in the store, and in their place put a few small tables and chairs, this place is known as a wine place anyways, I will make a few appetizers, and we will have more business, I think. What do you say?” It took a while for my father to warm to this idea, and when he found it logical, went to meet Lavrentoglu, but he did not approve of it of course and took back the barrels right away.

Next to our store there was a restaurant owner Barbayanni who was a Greek citizen, he also convinced my father and said that if this store became a bar, it would do tremendous business. We bought tables and chairs for our store, my mother would give me the list of all the necessary supplies like liver which was not “kosher” that was going to be cooked in the store the next day. I would do the shopping immediately after school, open up the store, clean it up, then wash the tomatoes and cucumbers, cut up the liver in little squares the way my mother taught me, so it would be easy for her to cook them. My mother would bring the appetizers that she prepared at home like fried eggplant, or navy bean salad. Barbayanni also supported us, we started selling uzo along with wine, our wine store became a bar. Generally men came to the store, we did not have too many lady clients, therefore after my father arrived to the store, we would return home because my mother did not want to stay among so many men.

Across my father’s bar was a big tea house, you could hear music coming from it all day long, the ones who came drank tea and played backgammon. Next to the tea house, pastrami and soujouk (two types of spiced beef) would be sold in a tiny store. To the right of my father’s hardware store was a barber, and right next to his own store, a competing hardware merchant with the nickname “Hodja” (teacher), to the left, a bread bakery. Further from the big synagogue (the main one) on the main street were two more stores belonging to the community but I do not remember what was sold there.

Meanwhile Davit (like the rest of my family) had a very good ear and voice, he was a very good tenor. He developed an interest in playing Spanish guitar and learned it somehow. He had a large group of friends playing all kinds of instruments. At first they would play music among themselves, later on formed a group named “The Amateurs of Mandolins” and started earning money performing in concerts in various places. Sometimes all of these friends would come home to practice, our home would liven up because of them, after rehearsal they would tell jokes, chat amongst themselves. Among this 10-12 person group, there was *Sabetay Farsi* who played Hawaiian guitar and who later became my older sister Fortune’s husband and his cousin Pepo, who played the mandolin. The concerts that were in public houses or Galatasaray High School in general would be very pleasant. These friends had such a good time themselves, that with the positive energy they radiated to the audience, everyone would sing and dance together. All the members of this group were Jewish, everyone’s brothers or cousins would come to listen to them, and become friends with them. My brother Davit was introduced to Luiza, the cousin of one the

group members, Yashar Kalvo, and started dating her.

My brother Davit took my older sister *Fortune* everywhere he went, in this way she fell in love with a member of the group, *Sabetay Farsi*. Sabetay, even though he felt close to my sister, considered her only a friend because she was the sibling of a group member. In the meantime, a family from Ortakoy asked permission from my mother to match a young man to my sister, however my sister did not even want to meet this young man, she was seriously in love with Sabetay. This situation continued for a while as a one-sided crush, finally my sister's mood, her lack of appetite, her lack of interest in everything, started to upset my mother and father. They said to my sister: "My dear daughter, what is it? We notice you are more down and sad every day? Let us take you to the doctor, so he can examine you well, what do you think?"

My brother Davit understood the problem since he knew my sister so well and went to Sabetay and said, "Look, my dear Sabetay, my sister Fortune likes you a lot, yet you pretend like she doesn't exist. Do you find her so repulsive that you do not approach her?" Sabetay: "How is that possible? I like her too but because she is your sister, I could not approach her and open up the way I wanted to. Of course I would like to get to know Fortune better." When everything was out in the open, my sister dated Sabetay who was a typesetter in a small printing house for a while. (Unfortunately I do not know his education level). My family accepted Sabetay immediately, because he was a very good, honest, humble and pleasant person. When I say dating, don't think about the dating that goes on today, there was no such thing. Only once a week, in general on Sundays, there was a gathering place called "Hemla" in Balat [a Jewish neighborhood on the European side] that the community owned. My older brother would play there every Sunday with his friends, dance, chat and eat and drink the cakes and lemonade that were offered. The young couple got to know each other this way.

My brother Davit and Sabetay were of the same age, they were called to the military together. Before they went to the service, my brother was promised or maybe engaged (I don't remember the details) to Luiza, who was born and raised on the Marmara island, later moved to Galata in Istanbul and who spent her days at home helping her mother, with the help of a friend, and Sabetay to my older sister. It must have been around 1935-36, it was the World War II era, even though our country did not enter the war, it had to be ready, therefore they needed roads, an airport. Even if the "military" is learning about the art of war, the concept stayed merely as an adjective. It was a period where antisemitism was prevalent as it was in the whole world, I did not hear about any non-Muslim being tortured in the army. They put the non-Muslims to do the hard work, they made them carry loads, break stones. My older brother Davit was assigned to Civril village in Izmir [third largest city in Turkey, on the Aegean coast]. He worked in the construction of an airport there. My brother-in-law Sabetay, on the other hand, served in Kutahya [a city in Anatolia], if I remember correctly. Sabetay worked in the construction of roads, they worked a total of 45 months in these hard jobs. While they were in the military, my sister-in-law Luiza would come to our home on Sabbath evenings, and my sister Fortune would go to my brother-in-law's house, in this way you stayed connected to family, you did not drift apart. At the conclusion of the military service, David returned to the glove factory and Sabetay to the printhouse.

I cannot remember the exact year but I think Davit and Luiza married probably in the 1940's, at the Zulfaris Synagogue [9](#), if I am not wrong. My brother's earnings were very modest, therefore they had to watch their budget. They became boarders in a pretty large room around Galata. They both

loved each other and respected each other, they got along with their neighbors in the apartment very well, they became close to them. They would sleep in this room, cook their food, eat it on their table which was considerably big, and go to bed in this same room. Their life was very lively. Their friends who played (cards) with them came to visit often, sometimes they played together, sometimes they just talked. Sometimes they would celebrate Selihot in this house, they would pray the same prayer sung in the synagogue, in my brother's room. We sometimes went to Davit's place on Saturday mornings for breakfast as a family.

My brother Davit stitched gloves very well. For a while he became partners with someone who had experience with gloves, named Albert (I forgot his last name) and started producing and selling gloves. In the 1960's he became partners in the china shop that we opened up with my other older brother [Information about this store will follow]. When their financial situation improved a little, they left their flat in Sishane and if I remember correctly, became renters in a duplex flat in Tozkoparan. In this house their daughter Meri was born in 1947, and their younger daughter Perla in 1951. After living in this house for a few years, they rented a perfect flat in Kurtulus. A few years later they moved to one of the flats in the apartments next to the Sisli mosque. Almost all of the houses my older brother lived in had heating stoves. As I said before, my brother had a musician group of friends, in time his friends from the orchestra also married and had families and they each played music within their own family.

After this period, my older brother made new friends and on the weekends, 6-8 couples would meet in the afternoons around 4 p.m., the men and the women would play poker among themselves, they would eat all together, chat and have a good time. My brother Davit, like my father, was a big guy, he liked the good life, he knew how to enjoy life, he would tell jokes, and sing songs because he had a very good voice. The only bad quality of my older brother Davit was that he did not have a head for commerce other than his career of manufacturing gloves and that he was a little lazier than my other older brothers and sisters.

Their daughter *Meri* finished the French junior high Sainte Pulcherie and worked as a cashier in a ready-to-wear clothing store named Neyir. She married Hayati Zakuto who owned a fabric store named Rekor in Beyoglu (I do not know his education level) in 1966 in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the wedding evening in the Tarabya Hotel, eating and dancing all together as a family. Their only daughter Eser was born in 1970 from this marriage. Eser is a graduate of Business Administration from the Istanbul University. She married the lawyer Niso Hakim in 1996 in Neve Salom. After marrying her daughter, my niece Meri terminated her marriage that had been on the rocks for a long time, and divorced her husband Hayati. Their daughter Eser's son Aksel was born in 2000, and their second son in 2004.

My older brother's younger daughter *Perla* graduated from Nisantasi Women's Institute and worked as a cashier in a sundries and notions store. She married Davit Katar who worked in the shirt business in 1973, in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated in a club called Rouge et Noir in the evening. Perla's only son Korel was born in 1980. Korel is a graduate of Yeditepe University, Economy Faculty. Perla's marriage is progressing quite well. Unfortunately my sister-in-law Luiza died in 1990 in the hospital to which she was taken for an illness I do not know despite the fact that she was very well taken care of. After the death of my sister-in-law, my brother lived with his daughters, he was even a guest in our house for a few weeks a short while before his death. We lost my brother Davit in 1990, a short 6 or 7 months after the death of my sister-in-law. They are

both interned in the Ulus Jewish cemetery.

My older sister Fortune who was born in 1917 in Kuzguncuk, finished elementary school and because my father was a visionary, became apprenticed to a tailor along with my sister Sara, and they both became tailors. In this way both my older sisters were able to financially help their spouses for a long time. With time, the small sewing jobs that my older sister started in Ortakoy developed into a large clientele, so that one of the rooms of the house became a workshop. In this workshop, along with a few young ladies, the biggest helper of my sister was her sister Sara. Every Monday, new orders would come in, Friday before noon, the last ironing would be applied to the orders and hung on a rope that was stretched from one wall to the other in the room and delivered to the customers. The room would be cleaned up for the Sabbath, at the end of Sabbath, it would be converted back to a workshop.

As I mentioned before, my sister Fortune was engaged to Sabetay, who was in a typesetting job in a printhouse before my brother-in-law went to the military; on his return, they opened up their own printshop with his older brother on Kumbaraci Yokusu (Piggybank Maker Hill) [A neighborhood on the European side]. They would print invitations, cards, signs and bulletin boards in this printhouse.

My older sister Fortune married Sabetay in the Zulfaris Synagogue probably around 1942, even if I cannot remember the exact year. My sister worked as a tailor for long years in Galata [A neighborhood on the European side where Jews lived together], since my brother-in-law did not earn too much money from this printhouse, that is how they managed to raise their children. As you can see, my sister's family barely made ends meet but despite everything the spouses adored each other, they protected each other throughout their lives and always treated each other with respect. My brother-in-law Sabetay was a very easy person to get along with, he was optimistic and pleasant and yet he always took his family under his wings. My brother-in-law Sabetay unfortunately developed cancer and died in 1977, and my sister Fortune in 1991 due to a heart attack. We interned both in Ulus.

My sister Fortune had Beki in 1944, Meri in 1947, and because they always wanted to have a boy, their son Niso was born after a long period in between, in 1965. My sister had her daughters at home with the help of a midwife, and her son in the hospital.

Their older daughter Beki attended elementary school in "Alliance Israelite" and then went to Saint Benoit [French Catholic high school]; after graduating from junior high married Sami Hakim who was 15-17 years older than her in 1962 at the Zulfaris Synagogue. Beki had two sons; Ariel in 1964, and Sabi in 1967. These young people are now married and have two children each. My niece Beki always gathered the whole family on the Sabbath or during holidays. Because her daughters-in-law both worked, Beki helped raise their children as much as she could but unfortunately we lost Beki in 1995 due to a heart attack when she was only 52 years old. We buried Beki in Ulus, next to her mother and father.

Her husband Sami showed us his ring finger after the death of his wife and said to us: "Look, I put a ring on this finger only once, I will never put another one on it again." Truthfully, he has never dated or married anyone since then, he is still a widower. In winters he takes care of his life, and he spends the summers with his younger son Sabi.

Their daughter Meri finished elementary school in Alliance Israelite and quit Ataturk High School for Girls before graduation. Meri was always a very active girl. After meeting Sadik Pishan whose mother was Jewish, father Persian, and who later became her husband, the young people married in 1970 at the Hilton Hotel with a wedding fit for royalty even though the families were opposed. The Pishan family is a seriously wealthy family. They had their son Onur in 1972, their son Ugur in 1976 and their daughter Sibel in 1978, from their marriage. All three of the children completed their education abroad and returned to Istanbul. Now all three of their children are married. They even have a grandchild around a year old from their son Ugur, and the wife of Onur is 5 months pregnant. Their daughter Sibel is newly married (August of 2006).

Their son *Niso* was born as a result of an accident. But he has brought so much joy and love to the family, I cannot put into words. Just as they say he became “*Ijiko de vejes*” (child of old age) for my older sister. He became a more hardworking, capable and studious child compared to his older sisters. After graduating from Sankt Georges Austrian High School, he finished Istanbul University, Faculty of Economy successfully. While he was attending high school, unfortunately he lost his father and started thinking about earning a living both for himself and his mother. He was attending school on the one hand and looking for job opportunities on the other hand, and he started working as soon as he graduated. What a pity that his mother passed away in 1991. Exactly 9 months and 10 days after his mother’s death, during a period where he was able to take care of himself, he checked himself into the hospital because he was not feeling well and we learned from the test results that the cancer that had originated from his testicles had infiltrated his whole body. How sad it is that the cancer had spread to his whole body and there was nothing to do. In fact, he died the day after he entered the hospital. Unfortunately we buried Niso next to his mother, father and older sister.

My older sister *Sara* who was born in 1919 in Kuzguncuk, finished elementary school (at the time, girls helped their mothers at home and were married at very young ages) and upon my father’s advice, became apprentices of a tailor along with my oldest sister Fortune and after mastering the skills, they started sewing dresses, skirts, blouses for the ladies in our neighborhood; in this way, they earned their pocket money and they contributed to the budget of the family. (They used their profession all through their married lives to help with their families’ expenses).

*Izak Saylag*, who was Sara’s spouse, has a very sad life story. Izak’s father Albert Baruh Saylag was a very famous French teacher. From his marriage to a lady named Viktorya (I do not know her maiden name) they had one girl, Fortune, and two boys, Izak and Mordo. This gentleman was so influential in spreading the French culture in the country that he was rewarded with the “Legion D’honneur” honor. Ataturk [10](#) took advantage of the vast knowledge of Mr. Albert and proposed opening a French school in Samsun [a city in the northeastern part of Turkey] and this school was opened there. After the birth of the republic, he opened a French school in Istanbul, Besiktas, with the encouragement and financial support of Ataturk. But regretfully the relationship between husband and wife was not good due to the philandering of Mr. Albert. When the mother saw that her husband was in a relationship with another lady named Klara, even though it is pretty unbelievable for the times, she only took her youngest son Mordo with her and went to Venezuela, leaving the other children (probably it was fashionable to immigrate there then) in Istanbul. Their father on the other hand, never took care of the children. Such was the situation that when Izak was 12-13 years old, they were alone with his sister Fortune who was 2 years older. The father



settled them in an empty room over the workplace of a tailor, where there wasn't even electricity. From then on, Izak had to struggle on his own. What illuminated the house was the street lamp, he would do his homework with this light. If I am not wrong, Izak was attending the Kabatas High School in Ortakoy; (Ortaköy was such a place that everyone knew each other, and helped each other). Izak was hardworking and very mathematically inclined. After school he started tutoring kids in younger grades on any subject they were struggling in and started earning money. Later he became a boarder for a widowed Jewish lady in Ortakoy.

A couple of years later, when one of our neighbors mentioned Izak to my father (my father was so humane and compassionate), he immediately took him into our home for an insignificant amount for rent. In this way, we rented the top flat of our house to Izak Saylag (I do not remember his birth date) who later became my older sister Sara's spouse (at the time he was a very young boy still in highschool). That flat belonged to him, we were never involved in anything, there was no laundry, or cooking or cleaning his room in our agreement; he took care of all of these on his own, yet Izak was so well-behaved, so down-to-earth and level-headed that we warmed up to him as a family, and in this way my mother started doing Izak's chores from time to time and inviting him to our dinner table.

Izak was continuing attending school, but at the same time, he started making a name for himself as a tutor, and his students increased. There were students that he tutored one-on-one and he was also able to teach 4-5 students from the same grade level the same lesson. In the meantime he was growing closer to our family. After graduating from high school, Izak completed his education at the Istanbul Medical Faculty, passed his residency exams and graduated from the Department of Gynaecology.

In the meantime my older sister Sara was very good friends with the daughter of a family named Katalan who were our close neighbors, one day this girl said to my sister: "Would you like to meet my older brother?" My sister accepted the proposal and after a while, they were promised before this young man went to the military. Izak on the other hand, while continuing attending school and tutoring, liked my older sister Sara, but could not open up. Even though she was promised, he approached my sister and stole her heart and my sister broke up with her fiance and decided to marry Izak. As I mentioned before, my sister had become a good tailor and she had a good clientele, she was able to help Izak in every way. My brother-in-law finished medical school and served his military duties in Istanbul Balmumcu barracks since there was no place in the specialty he wanted. In the meantime, his father came to look for his son Albert at our house for the very first time. When my sister who went to visit Izak in the barracks told him, Izak immediately gets permission to come home and says to his father: "We will come to visit you, you will not come to this house again."

My older sister Sara and Izak married in 1948 upon his return from the military. Even though my brother-in-law wanted to become a gynaecologist, he wrote to his mother that he could not find an opening, and the young married couple decided to start their life in Venezuela upon an invitation that they received from his mother. Izak could not find an opening in the Gynaecology department over there either, so he did an internship on cancer research and returned as an "Early cancer diagnosis" specialist back to our house. He did his military service in Van [a city in the eastern part of Anatolia, close to the Iranian border], even though I do not know the exact length, it probably lasted around two years. On his return, again due to a lack of opening in the obstetrics-

gynaecology department, he went to Ankara [capital city of Turkey] to fulfill his obligatory service for 3 years and became a Pathology specialist there. During this time, my sister was with us along with her children. Finally, he started his gynaecology residency as they wished to do, upon finding an opening, in the meantime their daughter Viki was born in 1953, and son Albert in 1955. My older sister Sara started raising her children in my father's home, working as a tailor. After my brother-in-law graduated successfully, he started working as the official surgical gynaecologist of the Ankara Public Railroads with the help of his father's acquaintances and only then did he bring his family to be with him in Ankara.

My sister Sara became a housewife in Ankara, she could not work as a tailor which was her profession since she did not know anyone in Ankara. My brother-in-law's older sister Fortune helped them a lot in Ankara, she took my sister under her wings. After working there for a few years, my brother-in-law was appointed to Yakacik [a neighborhood in Istanbul] and when they returned they settled their home in Moda [on the Asian side] to be close to work. The financial situation of my older sister Sara's family was always moderate. My brother-in-law would do his official duties on the one hand, and accept patients at his home in the afternoons. They converted a small room in their house to an examination room. My sister would take care of both the house and the children, and work as an assistant and nurse with my brother-in-law too. For example, when patients arrived, she would do the pre-consultation, and then take them into the room. I think the difficult youth that my brother-in-law had had, made him more cautious than necessary, almost cowardly. In reality my brother-in-law Izak was a very good doctor. He was very knowledgeable about infertility, which very few gynaecologists knew about. He had a lot of infertile patients. My brother-in-law would cure them and help them conceive. He even had patients all the way from Bursa. However, since he was a government employee, he could only get to his clinic around 3 p.m., if he could only be brave enough to cut ties with government departments, his financial situation could have been brighter. He worked in his clinic full-time after retiring from Public Railroads.

My brother-in-law's father Albert goes to Ankara taking his daughter Fortune with him. After settling Fortune in school in Ankara, he, himself returns to Istanbul, marries Mrs. Klara and has 5 children. Meanwhile Fortune becomes an employee of Public Railroads with the help of her father's acquaintances since she is a very smart and capable girl. In time she met and married Rafael Vitas in Ankara who was a car mechanic. They did not have any children. After working for long years, Fortune retires from this department. Using the savings they collected throughout the years, they bought a house around Moda and came to Istanbul in the 1973's. Later they moved to a house they bought in Fenerbahçe (still on the Asian side). Unfortunately they did not have any children from this marriage, yet the husband and wife loved and respected each other. During these years, Albert lived with Klara for approximately 20 years, then Klara could not tolerate his misbehaviors and kicked him out of the house and continued her life in Haskoy in a room alone. He received a salary from the French consulate monthly because of his "L'égion d'honneur" and got along. Unfortunately Rafael passed away in 2003, he was interned in Kuzguncuk cemetery in Istanbul Nakkashtepe. Fortune is still alive today, her nephew Albert watches out for her.

My brother-in-law Izak became aware of the tumor in his brain too late even though he was a doctor and unfortunately passed away in 1991, he was interned in Istanbul, Kuzguncuk cemetery. My older sister Sara left her flat in Moda as it was after Izak's death and spent the winter months

(until June) in Israel, with her daughter Viki. She took advantage of the rights given by the Israeli government to the elderly. Of course she had some infirmities due to her age. They checked her up very well in Israel, they provided her with the necessary care and medications. My sister was very happy there, that is why, she would come to Istanbul two months a year, see us, go to the south or the Aegean coast for vacations. She passed away in 2003 in Israel. Transporting her body to Istanbul was a hardship for us economically, so she was interned there. I try to visit her as much as I can, once a year.

My older sister Sara's daughter Viki graduated from Istanbul University School of Business Administration, and her son Albert from Pharmacological Faculty. Viki married Israel Yanar in 1969 at the Haydarpasha Hemdat Israel Synagogue. After the wedding, we celebrated by dining and having fun at a local place, but unfortunately I cannot remember where. Viki is a very hardworking and giving person like her mother, my sister Sara. Her husband Israel was an employee at a private firm, and Viki worked as an accountant in a private firm for long years so as not to be a burden to her husband. Their daughter Beti was born in 1974.

Even though Viki did not work for a while after this birth, she returned to work again as an accountant at a different firm when her girls grew up a little. In 1980, they entered a search because Viki's husband Israel was unhappy where he worked, and because he observed religion more than usual. As a result of the decision they made, first Viki's husband went to Israel. When he was able to stand on his own two feet, that is to say, he prepared an environment where they could manage without his wife Viki having to work. He found a suitable job in one of the branches of Discount Bank in Bat-Yam, bought their house, furnished it. After this, Viki and their daughter Beti who was around 10-12 years old, went to Israel, and they started a new life happily as a family. During the time they lived there, Israel who was already excessively religious became completely orthodox and they had two more daughters there, Sarit in 1981, and Suzi in 1988. For the oldest daughter in the house, Beti, who had immigrated from Istanbul, the education and social environment she experienced in Istanbul became one of the factors in the delay for her adaptation to the new arrangement. Because of this reason, along with the fact that it took Beti a long time to adapt to her new surroundings, it caused her to pass her puberty years as a rebellious young person. Beti did her military service after high school. She did not want to attend university upon her return; she preferred earning her living by working at different jobs. Today, Beti is a down-to-earth single young woman going on her thirties, her troubles with her family finally over.

Even though her husband Israel did not want Viki to work, Viki read to the elderly, took them around, took neighbors' children to and back from school with her car in order to help out with the family budget while raising her daughters, since the salary of her spouse was not sufficient for the livelihood of her family.

The other daughters Sarit and Suzi were raised in ultra-religious schools and became "Datia"s (ultra-orthodox). The middle daughter, Sarit, married an orthodox young man in 2001 before she turned 20, and had three children, she probably will have more. Sarit earns her living working as a preschool teacher, her husband who spends his life in the Yeshiva, only helps out with the government subsidy he receives.

Their youngest daughter Suzi is still a high school student.

My older sister Sara's son *Albert*, who is a pharmacist, married Tuna Coyas in 1977 at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the evening at the Tarabya Hotel as a family. Since my nephew was raised in Moda, and his spouse Tuna in Kuzguncuk, they preferred to settle in Caddebostan after getting married (neighborhoods on the Asian side). Albert did not work in his profession, he became a manager in a private firm and is still working at the same job. Tuna also has a university degree but did not work, yet she has been working as a volunteer since 2003 at the Shalom [11](#). She became the editor for the arts page. In 1980, their older daughter Selin, and in 1984 their younger daughter Lisya were born. Both of the girls are very hardworking, ambitious and smart. Selin graduated from the Technical University, Faculty of Architecture in 2001 as valedictorian of both the Faculty and the department. She returned to Istanbul after a 6-month internship in France. She worked in very well-known architectural firms while pursuing her master's degree in her school. Their younger daughter is also as capable as her older sister. She now finished the third grade in the Faculty of Chemistry at the Technical University successfully. Albert's daughters worked as "madrihas" (Hebrew word for counselor) after receiving their education in Talmud Torah since their home was very close to the Caddebostan Synagogue. Both served as youth group presidents at the Goztepe Cultural Home (on the Asian side, founded by our community, where our youth receives Jewish education in many forms), they took youth groups to Israel for a couple of sessions, their younger daughter is still currently in the folkloric group. The girls are currently single.

My older brother *Kemal (Yomtov)* was born in 1925. He attended Kabatash High School, unfortunately dropped out of school in 8th grade because the prospect of earning money was more appealing. A friend of ours from Ortakoy named Sami Katalan arranged work for my older brother in a coal factory as "garçon de bureau" [French for "office worker"] Here he learned typing with 10 fingers and some commercial business deals. He did his military service in Ankara at the Defense Ministry. It lasted for 36 months as a transcriber. On his return from the military, he worked as a salesperson at the Ankara Hosiery Store in Beyoglu [on the European side, the street where currently retail shopping is done, and where coffee houses and restaurants are].

My older brother met Selma Aygun Behar who worked in the glove manufacturing workshop where Davit worked (unfortunately I do not remember much about Selma's family). They dated for a while and married in 1954 at the Zulfaris Synagogue. I cannot remember the evening reception unfortunately. Meri was born in 1956, and their younger daughter Suzi in 1959.

*Meri* met a young man named Moris Salti who she loved very much while she was studying in the Nisantasi Girls' High School and married in 1971 at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. The evening reception took place at the Galata Tower. The young couple had daughters named Sibel in 1973 and Selma in 1977. Both of the children attended the B'nai Brith school [Jewish lycée]. They entered the workplace after graduating from high school. Sibel became a professional in the logistics department in a firm and married Kemal Kuzir in 1995 in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the evening in the Surmeli Hotel [a hotel of the European side] (unfortunately I do not have too much information about Kemal). Sibel has two daughters ages 6 and 2.

Selma on the other hand worked at the rabbinate in the accounting department after finishing high school. She married Mordo Salinas in 1999 at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the evening all together at the Surmeli Hotel (unfortunately I do not have too much information about Mordo). Selma left work after giving birth to her son in 2002, she has not returned to work yet.

Unfortunately my niece Meri became a diabetic at a very young age. Aside from the fact that she never learned to take care of herself, her addiction to cigarettes also caused us to lose her in June of 2006. We interned Meri in Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

My older brother Kemal's younger daughter Suzi on the other hand, graduated from the private Sisli High School. After a brief experience with working, she married a young man named Jeffi Bardavit (unfortunately I do not have much information about Jeffi) in 1979 at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We held the wedding celebration at Palet 2 [one of the restaurants on the shores of the Bosphorus on the European side]. They had a son they named Semih in 1980. Semih graduated from the Marmara University Faculty of Business Administration after finishing Nisantasi Anadolu High School. Suzi never got along with her husband and unfortunately they divorced in 1995. Suzi started working at the Chief Rabbinate as soon as she was separated, currently she works there, she manages her life. Her son Semih works in a private import export firm. Jeffi immigrated to Israel in 2005.

We lost my older brother Kemal, who was the one I enjoyed spending time with most among all my siblings, who I shared everything with and who was a friend and pal for me, unfortunately, in 1982 from pancreatic cancer; we interned him next to my father in Haskoy Jewish cemetery. His wife Selma died from congestive heart failure in 1986, we interned my deceased sister-in-law in Haskoy Jewish cemetery next to my brother.

I, *Lazar*, was born on Nov. 6th, 1927. We would hear about antisemitic events, even if it wasn't often, during the time I grew up. Since the government declared the "Citizen, speak Turkish" [12](#) law that mandated the public to speak only Turkish, our family always spoke to us in Turkish and sent us to Turkish schools. As I said before, these events were only on the annoying level. For example, when we spoke Ladino (Judeo-Espanyol) in the street, there were people who were against it and would say "Pis Yahudi" [Turkish for "dirty Jew"] or "Chifit" [Turkish for "Jewish Gypsy"]. The Jewish school in our neighborhood was closed, reason unknown to me. I started my education in a public school "23rd Elementary School" (without tuition). My father enrolled me at the Art School in Sultanahmet after elementary school since I was artistically talented. I would go to school with the tram from my home. I learned ironworking there, that is to say, to manufacture tools and machine parts from iron.

While I was in that school, I became an apprentice to the "Zangochian Stove" factory where our neighbor Izak Gaon worked, during the summers. I learned how to make stoves, stove pipes and the piggybanks that Is Bank [one of the first Turkish banks after the republic was founded] produced for the first time. I earned three liras a week from this job.

One day the principal of the school said: "Lazar, tell your father to come see me." My poor daddy, that day Istanbul was under snow, but if the principal calls you, of course you can't not go, he came to Sultanahmet all the way from Ortakoy. The principal asked my father: "Are you going to kill this child?" "My goodness, my principal, what do you mean? He is the apple of our eye, why would you think such a thing?" replied my father. He said: "Can't you see how thin he is, he is almost debilitated, aren't you aware of it?" After the admonition of the principal, my father bought 20 kg. tins of molasses and tahini, he would mix all of this in the mornings, he would prepare my tea, my cheese, I became seriously stronger.



We were about 1,400-1,500 students in this school, my ID number was 1453, there were no non-Muslims other than me and Izi (I don't remember his last name). Our school would manufacture the orders it received from the outside and earn money this way. We, who worked in this department in the school were considered laborers and we would be fed a full and satisfying lunch at noon. However, one day when we went to the cafeteria, they did not allow us in. When we asked the reason, the janitor at the door said: "From now on, there won't be food for you, I don't know the reason." We decided with Izi not to tell anything to our families for a while. We bought a sandwich or a "simit" [crisp, ring-shaped savory roll covered in sesame seeds] as lunch. This situation continued for a while.

Then one day, our math teacher gives an oral quiz, I studied very well, I know everything inside out, but for whatever reason, he does not call on me for the oral; I raised my hand and said "My teacher, you forgot about me." He said to me: "Aren't you Lazar? You passed, it is o.k." "My teacher, how come? You did not ask me anything yet." "For Pete's sake, aren't you Jewish? This is enough for you" is what he says. I went directly to the principal, told him about the situation, he said: "What can I do, it is out of my hands, your teacher knows better than me."

Another day, when our history teacher was lecturing to the class he said "These Jews latched on to our necks like parasites, Jews are like this, like that," I felt devastated. During recess, I ran out of the school, went to my father and said: "my dear father, I will not attend school any more." "My goodness, my child, why? What happened? You are a very good student, what happened to cause you to come to this decision?" When he learned everything from the beginning, he agreed with me and my school life came to an end in this way.

While I was still in this school, the government of that period passed a new law named "Wealth Tax" [13](#) to improve the economy. They produced a number for every tax recipient, (but especially the non-Muslims), at their discretion and forced the individuals to pay it. This event was the cause of a lot of families' downfall. Since my father had two stores they asked for a very high tax, of course my father could not pay it and one day the civil workers from the ministry of finance came to our stores and our home and confiscated everything against this debt. There were only mattresses left in our house, my father had a huge belly, and because I was very handy with everything, my father said: "Come on Lazariko, build us a bedframe" and I collected all the lumber I could find from the neighbors and the garden, and built a bed frame with 6 legs, spread the coiled mattress on top of it and put my father at ease.

My father became completely unemployed in this situation, and my cousin Rafael Abuaf (we met him on page 3) who was still a child then, had quit school so as not to be a burden to his family and started working in Marputcular [on the European side, where usually all kinds of wholesale commerce is done], in a large sundries and notions store. He had a proposition for my father: "My dear uncle, look, there is everything in this market, whatever you can think of, for example blades, hosiery etc., let's buy these, fill up a bag, and if you take it to coffeehouses and sell them very cheap, you can earn a few pennies".

My father and I tried to sell the merchandise that he filled in his bag on Sundays in Eminonu [on the European side, the area where all kinds of wholesale commerce is done] at the corner of the street where today the Turkish Coffee Seller Mehmet Efendi stands. Because I was still a child, my father would let me free at 4.00 p.m., he would take care of the rest himself, and I would board a tram

and go to Ortakoy to play with my neighborhood friends.

Meanwhile Mr. Robert (we met him on page 2) who my aunt Suzan lived with and who worked in the market, that is to say sold fabrics, scarves, towels etc. out of bundles had a different proposition for my father: "Look Nesim, you are experienced in stitching, your daughters know how to sew, let me buy you fabrics, you sew up trousers and let me sell them. Let's see if I am successful in the sale, and we can expand the business. What do you think?" My father thought for a while and accepted the offer and they bought 20 meters of black fabric, my father stitched 8-10 pairs of slack from this. Robert gave my father an insignificant sum for my father's expenses and labor. He gave only 20 liras for 10 pairs of pants. That is to say, it was exactly "komer por no murir" [Ladino for "eating just enough to survive, meaning earning very little money"], my father accepted this resignedly since he did not have any other means.

Approximately a year after the Wealth Tax, my father was able to reopen the bar but not the hardware store (page 4). Everything was in shortage in our country during this period. The government stamped the backs of our identification cards with ration cards and in this way tried to prevent stocking up on food items and ensure equal distribution of basic necessities. We could buy anything you could think of by showing this ration card. Normally  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a loaf of bread was given to each person, flour, oil, sugar was all distributed like this at a minimum. I was studying to become an ironworker in the Art School at the time (I could produce anything from iron using an iron file), because the products we manufactured in school were sold in the market, we were treated as laborers. I had a "hardworking laborer" ration card. The laborers had a right to  $\frac{1}{2}$  loaf of bread a day. Our family was large, my father was close friends with the baker who was our neighbor, and he liked and respected my father a lot, bless him, the baker would one way or another give my father extra breads.

One day there was a large bonito [a kind of fish] surge on to the beach, I gathered 6 of them that had beached themselves on the shore because of the winds and immediately brought them to my mother, we made fabulous lakerda [bonito preserved in salt] with these and ate them at every opportunity. We all developed scabies due to this salty fish and also because of the shortage of sugar at the time. Following this we had louse, and I contracted typhus on top of all of this. We overcame these days even if it was difficult. My family struggled to observe the Sabbath, the holidays as much as we could when everything was so hard, we tried to follow our religious obligations with the foods we prepared whether it was a little or a lot.

The Tax Assessors who read the sign outside my father's older brother, my uncle Izak's store that was in Sisane, as "Izak Abuaf Shirts" instead of "Izak Abuaf Pottery" [in Turkish the words for shirts and pottery are spelled the same way except for one different consonant, gomlek and comlek], came up with an impossibly high debt for my uncle who was a manufacturer of trunks. Because my uncle could not pay off this debt, he was deported to Ashkale along with the other non-Muslims who were not able to pay. People usually were made to work in building roads there, my uncle who was handy with everything and who was street-smart told the official there that he could cook very well and became the cook for the camp. In this way he handled this period without being as challenged as the others. When he returned from Ashkale, he continued his work where he left off.

After surviving the Wealth Tax period, and bringing my education to an end, my mother said to me: "Lazariko [little Lazar], if you had finished your education, you could have manufactured some

hand tools, simple machines, but this work remained unfinished. I will introduce you to some friends and help you become a merchant." She did what she said and introduced me to her friend Ner and in this way I started my first job as an apprentice in a shirt manufacturing place where Davit Ner was the manager, and Nesim Franci the manufacturer, in Marputcular [An area on the European side where wholesale commerce is done] at the age of 14 or 15. I worked for a weekly salary in this workplace. Meanwhile World War II was shaking up the whole world and affecting our country too. Poplin fabrics became hard to find at our work, only a heavy type of cotton was available. Because of this, the manufacturing of our shirts was disrupted. One day a fabric merchant who was a Jew from Istanbul but who lived in London came to our store and Franci who saw the British merchandise in his hands, accepted his offer and we restarted the manufacturing. This gentleman started coming to Istanbul very often, he started giving me 5 liras every time he came to the store, I mean, I almost got as much in tips as my weekly paycheck. I started saving these 5 liras.

One day, unfortunately, this man said to Franci: "I will bring you this amount of merchandise, give me this amount of money." Franci's trust in this person was already in place and he gave him the money he asked for before receiving the merchandise, of course this gentleman never showed up, he swindled Franci in a bad way. I worked in this place for exactly 15 years and I learned all the ins and outs of the business. Meanwhile I was saving the money I put aside in my dresser drawers inside my book named "Berlitz." My parents were aware of this. When my father realized that the crisis of the Wealth Tax was going to be averted, one day he said to me: "Lazariko, look, now this tax burden is lifted; I will open a wine store again investing your savings (2,500 Turkish Liras). I will pay you my debt as soon as possible. [page 13]. After this, my father's business improved again.

I continue working with Franci, we meet with friends after work, on the weekends we used to go to Lido between 3-7 p.m. in Ortakoy [an important touristic entertainment area on the European side] at times, and to the movies or a picnic etc. at other times with our group of boys and girls. Friendships were even very different then, so that the girl friends that we took dancing were not the girlfriends that we were dating, every girl had her own place. As you can understand I had a very good youth. We shared everything with the younger one of my older brothers, Kemal, he was my best friend, my pal, he reached the age and went to military service.

Even though the military law stated: "In a family with more than one son, only one will be drafted to the army, the second son will be drafted after the first returns to the homestead," while Kemal was still in the military, when I reached the age of drafting, I told my father: "My dear father, let me finish this military obligation so I can start my life properly." As you know the mantra in the military is "learning the art of war." The length of the service was 3-4 years then. My family did not reject my offer, and I applied to the military. In this way, we both became soldiers in the same period, I was a soldier for exactly 36 months (1947-1950). When my older brother Kemal started his military service in Ankara, he worked in granaries for a long time, then his commander who learned that he could type very well, transferred my brother to the offices of the Defense Ministry and made him a transcriber, after this he had a comfortable military experience.

I, on the other hand, drew Alemdag, here in Istanbul, out of the lottery. When I became a soldier, there were a few minor changes in military laws, such as: At the military headquarters they gave us our weapon, our rifle in our hands; my brother Kemal, on the other hand, never held a gun in his hand. The commander of our regiment examined each soldier and learned about his talents. When

it was my turn, my commander asked: "Private, what do you know, what do you do?" "Sir, I can do carpentry, and ironworking, I can even sew if necessary, I am very handy," I replied. In this manner, they put me to work in the workshop at the Art House. 5-10 people, along with me, gained the right to work in the workshop. When our work in the shop was finished, we also went through the military drills, we learned how to hold a gun and shoot, we took part in the manoeuvre. Our main duty was the workshop. 15-20 days later, I had the "home papers." Every Friday, I would leave the barracks at 5 p.m., and would go home, I would take off on Sundays at 6 p.m., and return to my troops around 8 p.m. Life went on this way, because I was working in the workshop, it would be a lie to say I did a military service.

One day, my colonel said to me: "Lazar, look, there are a lot of boxes made of sheet iron here. The heavier rifles have their own boxes to cool down in, these are filled with water. These boxes deteriorate with time, crack and leak the water. Let's return these to a useful state." "With pleasure, sir, let me take 5 or 6, and examine them, and figure out a way to repair them. I will let you know of the results", I said and took my leave. There was another tinsmith, a Jewish fellow countryman in the regiment named Moiz (I can't remember his last name). Unfortunately he could not come to the workshop. I immediately found Moiz, showed him the material and said: "Look Moiz, there is a room full of these, we will disassemble them and rebuild them. What do you think? Can we do it?" "Of course we can do it." "How will we do it?" I asked. "Really, we can only do this if we set up a workbench in our homes. You have a garden at your house, we will set up a counter there. We will melt these with a chemical solvent, produce tin and bond them," he replied. "Can it be done like this?" When Moiz said with certainty "Of course it can be done," I went to the colonel and explained the situation. "Sir, here I have a friend named Moiz who is an expert on this subject, he said that we could only make these boxes in a workshop that we would set up in the garden of our house. What do you think?"

The colonel excused both of us. We took 6 of these boxes, and on our way back, bought the chemical solvent and the tin with our own money and arrived home. Of course the time it took for us to build the boxes was considered part of our military service. We set up our workbench right away, melted the boxes with the heat of the solvent, removed the dye, and tinned it to give the box its new shape. When we completed all of them, we went straight to our colonel: "Sir, what do you think? Are they done?" I asked. "Of course, my dear Lazar, and they turned out very well, I congratulate you." We could now do the rest. The colonel wrote, signed and stamped our permission slips with red ink (I don't know why). We carried the material to my home with a truck. Of course, with the excitement of a 21-year old, we went in our civil clothes to meet our friends in Dereboyu to make plans for the weekend. A military policeman who was passing through there came and wanted to see our permission slip, I could not convince the orderly because it was written in red ink. I said to him

"Come, let me take you home so you can see the boxes etc." Finally he relented and said: "I will show this permission slip to my commander." In this way they took me to the police station in Ortakoy, my friends followed me to the station. After that, they took me to the Military Police Station in Besiktas. I recounted the situation there once again: "Sir, my commander deemed it fit to write with this pen, can I tell him, "Sir, what are you doing? Write with a black pen?" Isn't the important part the fact that this paper shows I have 15 days' permission? I came to manufacture these boxes again," and I tried to explain in detail the work that I do.

Just when I started thinking everything was going to be resolved, they started searching my clothes, a lot of pictures and letters came out of my pockets. They started examining everything one by one. The letter that my older brother Kemal had typed was among these. Of course they read all of it closely. In the letter he says: "Look my dear Lazar, now I tore a page out of the calendar, on the back is a beautiful saying from Ataturk that goes like this: *"Struggle to work and to succeed, work hard"*. O.K. then, what are we doing? We work very hard too, who do we work for?" The officer underlines this sentence from my brother with red pen and what do you know, he says "Whoever wrote this is a communist." "For G-d's sake, officer, why should it be a communist? What is it that puts you in doubt? My older brother only attributed to a sentence that Ataturk used. He says we work for our country too, he does not have any hidden agenda, you can be sure of that," I said. The officer said: "No, this isn't as easy as this. There is undoubtedly something behind these words. Put this person in jail." They put me in jail for observation. As if this wasn't enough punishment, whoever came by started beating me and cussing me. I was crying from the pain and in the meantime I am saying "My G-d, what was my sin that you treat me like this? I am working here and I am working for my country nevertheless" but they were blind with rage and didn't even hear me. Finally I think I passed out, and I slept a little, in the morning before dawn (it was still 6 a.m.), they woke me up and said "Get up, you will sweep and clean the building thoroughly." Of course I had to do it, I did not have a choice.

It was a Sabbath day and my family was waiting for me outside and they were crying. The next day they transferred me to Harbiye [The military barracks on the European side]. I had to stay in that jail with a lot of heavy moustached communists. We had to lie down on bunks next to each other, without mattresses. One more day passed, Monday came, in the meantime I had a heart-to-heart talk with a sensible person and he asked "What is your problem? Why are you here?" I told him the situation. "Don't worry, they absolutely cannot charge you, tell them what happened during the investigation as sincerely as you can. Don't worry at all," he said and made me feel better. My investigation started, after the usual questions, when they saw the letter from my colonel, the investigating officer said: "I cannot believe it, how can a colonel write like this?" I recounted what happened to the officer. Then it was my older brother's letter's turn. "Who wrote this? Where is he?" "My older brother wrote it, he is a transcriber in Ankara, in the Ministry of Defense. What he wrote to me about is a saying by our Ata. We also work for our country," I said.

Unfortunately they held me for another 3,5 days and transferred me to Selimiye (on the Asian side) with gendarmes. From there they delivered me to the commander of the regiment in Alemdag exactly 15 days later. My commander said "You couldn't find another person to retain?" and took charge of me and my permission slip. The colonel, when he saw me in this state, exhausted with unruly hair and beard, said "Look, my dear Lazar, we are soldiers, here everything I have (on my desk, in my closets) is out in the open, the brigadier general comes, sits at my desk, cannot find anything on it. You rip and throw away everything you read, what business do you have to keep it in your pockets? Look, a letter written two years ago caused so much grief for you. Come on, go to your division now, clean up well, cut your hair and shave. Afterwards I will give you 15 days' permission." After this event, I was always under suspicion. "This is a suspicious man, he should not be given weapons" they said, and took me to court. Whereas my offense was to put on civilian clothes on my off day and to carry my brother's letter in my pocket. Even though it sounds easy talking about those days now, living through them was very difficult. I had a captain who I transcribed for, after this event, one day he came up to me and said: "My dear Lazar, I am



removing you from this job." Despite my saying "But, captain, what are you afraid of?" I was removed from that job. After a while, because my handwriting was neat and because I was very meticulous about the work I did, I became the battalion's transcriber. In this way, I started overseeing all the business of the battalion. On a day when I was off, my commander let me out early in the morning so I could distribute the salaries of the soldiers in our battalion who were on duty here and there. When my major saw me going on a bus at 10 in the morning, he called the closest military police station and denounced me saying "the soldier named Lazar Abuaf is out in the streets, detain him immediately."

The major had not investigated the situation properly, I had the written document from my commander in my hand and because I was unaware of all of this, I distributed the money to the soldiers with a complete peace of mind and came home around 2 p.m., having finished my work. I took my bath immediately, and chatted with my family and had a good time. The next morning I returned to my duties early, the guard at the door of the military police said (at the entrance door): "For G-d's sake, don't let the major see you." "Why? What did I do?" "In reality, he saw you going on the bus at 10 in the morning and he has been raging ever since. He called everywhere to get you detained."

I could have hidden in the warehouse, but I thought how long can I run away and I did not have a reason to run away. I had gone on this duty with the permission of my division's commander. I went into the cafeteria to eat my lunch, of course the major was there and called me next to him and asked: "Lazar, come here right now. How dare you leave the division at 10 a.m.? Even I can only go out at 5 p.m., how can you get on a bus outside at this hour?" I explained the situation to him with all the tact I could. "Why am I not aware of this?" "I am very sorry, major, I did not think about it," I said. He said to the sergeant next to me: "Look, you will tell the division commander that as of today, Lazar will only be able to leave at 5 p.m. for any outside duties and return the next day at 9 a.m." After that day, my commander was very meticulous about my off-duty hours and I finished my military service in peace after that.

*My cousin Fani Levi* who was the youngest daughter of my *aunt Verjini*, who was herself born in 1893, later became my wife. My aunt was married to Salvator Levi who was very cultured, who spoke French, German and Hebrew and who was an antiques dealer. However the family lost this angel of a father at a very young age as a result of a feverish disease. My aunt Verjini became a widow with her children at a very young age. Because these children had to earn money at a very young age, they couldn't finish even elementary school.

Fani's mother, that is to say my aunt, was really like an angel. She suffered through a lot of poverty but never made a concession on her pride. Her children and herself were always dressed clean and with a smiling face. They lived in Ortakoy for a long while too, we saw each other very often as a family since we were close to each other. I felt very comfortable with my cousins, we grew up all together. First my father's brother uncle Rafael, then uncle Izak and then my aunt left Ortakoy and settled around Galata Tower [on the European side, one of the neighborhoods where Jews preferred to live at the beginning of the 20th century].

*Roza*, Fani's older sister, who was born in 1925, worked in the glove factory like my older brother Davit, she stitched ladies' gloves. On her way to and from work, Roza met Izak Bener who was a drover, and they married after dating for long years. They were married in 1948 at the Zulfaris

Synagogue. Because Izak was a drover, he would leave very early in the morning for work and return home early in the afternoon. He loved cooking and feeding people. They lived in Pangalti in winters and in Heybeliada (third one of the Princess Islands on the Marmara Sea, south of Istanbul) in rentals. Their daughter Rika was born in 1950, and their son Salvo in 1956. Unfortunately both of her children did not like studying.

Rika started working as a cashier with me (in Lazar's store) when she was only 15 or 16 years old. Like a lot of other girls at the time, Rika married a young man named Leon Birisi in 1968 when she was only 18 years old at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. Rika had to live with her mother and father-in-law and her brother-in-law for long years. Their son Alper was born within the same year. A few years after that, their daughter Inci was born in 1971. When it became difficult to live and get along with her husband's family, the young couple started having problems. This situation forced them to move out of the house, only after this did peaceful days reign among the two of them. The political crises in Turkey during the 1978's, led Rika and family to immigrate to Israel this time. Even though they struggled seriously for 4 years there as a family, they could not keep up with the lifestyle there. They returned to Istanbul again in 1981 and settled down in their new environment. The children also struggled hard to get used to Istanbul. Now both Alper and Inci are married and are parents.

Their son Salvo on the other hand married Lizet (unfortunately I do not remember her last name) in 1978 at the Neve Shalom. From their union, Rozi was born in 1980, and Seli in 1986. Unfortunately they did not get along during their marriage and divorced in 1995. The courts gave custody of the children to their mother Lizet naturally. Lizet married again a short while later with a divorced gentleman with two sons. In 2001, Salvo married for a second time with a lady named Ester who works in the Ashkenazi community.

Salvo's older daughter finished the University of Istanbul, Faculty of Business Administration after graduating from the Ulus Jewish high school. She always tutored while she was a student. When she graduated she worked at a firm. She got married at the Neve Shalom Synagogue in 2003 and had a son in July of 2006 (I have no information about her spouse). Salvo's younger daughter Seli is also a graduate of the Ulus Jewish high school. Currently she attends the University of Istanbul (I do not know what she is studying).

We lost Izak in 1995 unfortunately from lung cancer, we interned him in the Haskoy cemetery. Roza lived in her home for a while after losing her husband, but she had to adapt to what life brought her. Now she lives at the Old People's Home. Even though being there saddens her a little, she consoles herself saying it is better to be around people her age than being alone at home at times. Her daughter Rika picks her up for holidays, for the Sabbath, or on special occasions and hosts her at her home for a few days or weeks.

Fani's second older sister Sara, born in 1926 was, like my younger sister Sara was for a short while, a repairer of pantyhose (at the time when silk stockings had a run, they would be repaired with a special machine and stitched, of course it was a very difficult and demanding job on the eyes). During this period the cousins saw each other a lot partly because they were colleagues and partly for the Sabbath or holidays as a family. Sara married Anri Muraben in Haydarpasa Yeldeğirmeni Synagogue in 1949. (I do not have information about Anri's education etc.). Unfortunately they did not have any children. They bought a tiny flat in Cihangir, which is a fashionable neighborhood

today also [on the European side, usually where artists and foreigners prefer to live] and they spent their whole life there. They spent their summer months in Heybeliada in a house they rented. Anri worked as a janitor in Ankara Hosiery Store [on the European side, the store was situated on Istiklal Street in Beyoglu, at the corner exactly across Galatasaray High School], they were never very wealthy.

Sara was like an angel. She always considered her siblings' children her own and has always been there for her siblings. Unfortunately we lost Sara in 1998 due to a stroke, we buried her in Kadikoy Acibadem Jewish cemetery. Her husband Anri lived as a widower for a short while, then remarried a lady who was a widow like himself (I have no information about the lady he married). Anri died in 2000 due to a heart attack, one morning when he had finished breakfast, in the armchair he sat down to watch television. We buried Anri at Kadikoy Acibadem Jewish cemetery too, next to his first wife Sara. A few months after his passing, his second wife also died (I do not know where her family buried her).

My cousin Rafael who went on to become a very famous cantor in Israel later on, was a salesperson in "Nelson", a store where they sold needles, threads and fabrics, next door to the store where I worked as a shirt-seller. Rafael was my neighbor during the day, and Fani's neighbor during the evenings, so he matched the two of us. He first disclosed his idea to my father. My father loved Fani very much. When my mother approached me with the offer: "My goodness, mom, what are you saying, we are cousins," I said. My father said: "What difference does it make, she is a very capable and respectful girl who we know very well and appreciate. I say think about it, you cannot find a girl like this all the time." "Fani is a very hardworking, open-minded girl who earns very well. There are no drawbacks according to the Torah either," he said.

My wife Fani's start at the workplace was a little tragic. Fani fell in the street when she was about 10 or 11 years old, and caught an infection from her wounds. There was no penicillin at the time, the infection spread to her ankles. She had various surgeries in Or Ahayim and had to stay in the hospital for a long time. She stayed for such a long time there that she became very friendly with the nurses and learned a lot. She made a vow to herself: "the day when I am able to stand up, I will volunteer in this hospital and help the patients as much as I can."

In time Fani became a very good nurse who was in demand. When she had clients outside the hospital too, she started earning money. She provided the livelihood of her house after that day. We started looking at each other differently after that day. We started going out together and getting to know each other and were promised to each other with a small ceremony among the family. Fani started coming to our house on Sabbath evenings. As I said before my father was quite big and burly. He would just about fit in the armchair he sat in. He loved Fani so much that he would try squeezing in the armchair where he barely fit and say "Come next to me Fanika." My mother and father had Fani sleep next to them because it was hard for us to go back at night. When we were engaged, Kemal was still a bachelor and a ladies' man, when he returned home late from parties, because my father was very conservative, he would immediately stomp on the floor with his cane "Chafteyava el patin" [Ladino for he hit the floor] so that he would go up to his room without delay, because both Fani and my older brother Davit's fiancée Luiza were at home.

In 1950, on my return from military service, instead of working in the commerce of shirts which I was very familiar with, I opened a different style store in Beyoglu. I always say, life is full of

coincidences, my changing careers happened like this. At the time, my older brother Kemal was a janitor in a handbag store named "Yildiz" [turkish for Star]. I returned to my old boss Franci after I was discharged. 2-3 months after this, my older brother said to me: "I received a very good offer from the lady I work with. Would you like to be partners in this store?" "O.K. Kemal, how will we do this work?", I asked. "You have a credit history in the market, you can bring various merchandise here, we will fill the store, we will build a new showcase. I am sure that this store will work like clockwork because of you." I thought for a while, and because I am a little fearless, I accepted the offer. I went and explained the situation to my boss. "I regret to inform you that I will quit. Because I became partners in a store and I was promised to Fani Levi." I cannot describe to you how sad my boss was. "My goodness, I loved you so much and I wanted to marry you to my daughter Leyla" he says. "Whatever, I hope everything is for the best. I will give you the shirts, pijamas and men's underwear that you need for your store. And you will do good business," he said.

After this, I became investment partners with the lady Ester Civre who was the owner of Yildiz store and who sold handbags at the age of 23 or 24 only and we agreed to share the profits 50/50. The store was on Istiklal Street [on the European side, between Taksim and Tunel, the street that is closed to traffic today where in addition to shopping, you can find bars, movie theaters and entertainment centers], close to Tunel, next to the Swedish embassy, at the entrance of the apartment no. 397. The lady Ester was also married and had children, but unfortunately when I met them, her husband had declared bankruptcy.

With the help of my old boss, I added shirts, underwear, pijamas, along with ties and belts to the store, I rearranged the showcase and we held the opening of the store. However, for a certain while, this business did not go as I wished it would. So I changed the things I sold, I removed these and instead I bought women's pantyhose, scarves, my older brother Davit was one of the best glove merchants of the market, I got different assertive colored gloves from him, I got many various colored handbags, I even placed practical hats and fantasy jewelry. I placed purple colored gloves and a voile purple scarf next to it in the showcase, and next to that, a pink pair of gloves and same colored voile scarf, and I tagged them with a price of 5 liras. Whoever saw the showcase, came in, looked at it and came in. In this way we increased the sales of Yildiz store.

Meanwhile, after staying engaged with Fani for a few months, we married in August of 1951, at the Zulfaris Synagogue while we both were 23 years old. My cousin Rafael Abuaf who was their cantor, met us and my wife Fani outside the synagogue and brought us all the way till Ehal Hakodesh. Thanks to him, the memory of our wedding is special still. After the synagogue, we went to Bomonti Beer Gardens with all our friends and family; we had a few appetizers, drank beer from barrels, we sang and danced with my older brother and his friends' band. After we left there, we listened to music and danced at the Park Hotel with our closest friends. We spent that night in that hotel in a room overlooking the sea. The next morning, after breakfast, we went to Yalova Thermal Hotel [on the south border of Marmara Sea, close to the city of Bursa] to spend our week of honeymoon. While we were there it rained so much that we cut our honeymoon short after three days, and I came to the store to check up, Fani's older sister Sara was in charge while we were away.

Our marriage progressed without any problems, only despite our fervent wishes, Fani could not get pregnant. We investigated the cause. The doctor said: "This lady needs a change of air, she doesn't need anything else. She should get some fresh air, she should change locations." My older sister

Fortune was at Heybeliada to spend the summer. We went to stay with them. You wouldn't believe, whatever magic or miracle it was, my lady was immediately pregnant and our daughter Verjel, who was born in June of 1953, brought us a lot of luck. After her birth, everything worked out for the better. Until that day, because we did not have much money, we shared a house with Fani's older sister Sara, her husband Anri and my mother-in-law. A short while before her birth, business in the store started to work like clockwork, a specific clientele was formed, and I took the plunge and bought a tiny flat at Sisane [on the European side, where Jews lived together] to live with Fani alone and moved in. This flat was neighbors with my older sister Fortune. During the period when we did not have a refrigerator, we would put our daughter's formula and meat in my sister's fridge. In the evenings, returning from work, we would dine all together, have coffee, we had very pleasant days and nights, we were happy, we had no complaints.

My aunt Verjini, who was of course my mother-in-law Verjini since her daughter's marriage, always lived with her girls. She was such a quiet and helpful person, that everyone wished that she stayed with them. Our daughters loved to be with her. Such a hardworking person probably will not exist again. Let me tell you something. When my grandchild (Lazar's grandchild), that is to say the second younger grandchild was born in 1980, she was 78 years old and went to help her grandchild (my daughter Meri) for a month, even my son-in-law loved her. She was never idle, she either rocked the baby, or folded the dry laundry, or helped my daughter cook. Unfortunately, that summer, one evening in the house of Sara in Heybeliada, after dinner, she went to the playground across the street from them, to give the bones of the fish they had eaten to the cats, as soon as she leaned down to place the bones on the floor, she collapsed and died immediately due to a heart attack still holding the bag of bones that she could not give to the cats. We interned her in Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

In September of 1955, I designed a new showcase because of change of seasons, I filled the store with new merchandise and for the first time, I did not owe anyone anything and I had a certain sum at the bank. I only owed 2,500 liras to Vakko on a voucher. That evening, I mean the evening of September 6, 1955, [14](#) I closed up the store around 7 p.m., we were supposed to meet with my older brother Kemal who worked in a store named Bakara, right across my store; we saw a tremendous crowd in the street. We tried to understand what was happening but could not pinpoint anything. A lot of looters were walking with sticks in their hands, shouting "Raise the Turkish flag."

I separated from Kemal at Taksim, and walked toward Tunel to get to my house. The looters were breaking the windows of stores with sticks, and emptying the contents of the stores into the streets. They first broke the windows of my store that I doted on, they scattered the goods I had inside, they broke the huge crystal full-length mirror at the entrance. I witnessed these events and could not do anything, these people were blind with rage. I stood and watched quietly and bawled. When the bums went away, I entered the store, pulled down the shutters and raised the flag. I entered the house crying. The disaster continued all night. That night I decided to leave Istanbul and settle in Israel. I had 3,000 liras in the bank, I gave half of this to my partner and decided to immigrate with my family. All through the night, we saw refrigerators thrown from windows, washing machines, radios, record players, mounds of fabric that were squeezed between cars and pulled and torn, the streets were full of knee-high fabrics. The events continued till 3 or 4 in the morning, and the military took charge of the situation, placed a curfew and things calmed down.



At 6 in the morning, I walked from Shishane towards Eminonu to better understand the destruction all around. All the stores were destroyed, the streets where the fabric stores were filled with heaps of rags, hundreds of broken appliances covering the streets. The three-story “Kadikoy Bonmarshesi” (Superstore of Kadikoy), that was considered the first giant store of its kind was gone. Of course most of the stores that were destroyed were ones that belonged to non-Muslims. Even though what I saw was scary, it was proof that it wasn’t just me that was targeted. I retraced my steps toward Tunel, the soldier there said “Sir, you cannot proceed from here, there is a ban.” When I said “My store is a little further down, it is destroyed, how can I not go and see, please use your conscience,” he let me. Even though I entered the street, there was nothing in place of my store, I could not locate it. Even though I finally found the place with difficulty, they had even tried to bring down the walls with axes. All my merchandise, my gloves, my scarves, the handbags made from genuine alligator skin, whatever I had, they tore with knives, and they stole a lot of my merchandise too. I found the cash register of the store, 50 meters away, next to the building that is Karaca Theater today. I calculated, my losses were exactly 70 thousand liras. The same day, the prime minister of the period, Adnan Menderes [15](#) and the mayor of Istanbul (unfortunately I do not remember his name), addressed the people from an open car and said “My dear citizens, may you all recover soon. We will determine your losses, please take in the merchandise that is undamaged and we will establish your losses”.

I gathered my merchandise, put the ones that were relatively in good condition inside a safe, and sat and cried and cried, and then went home. My decision to immigrate to Israel was strengthened. I started to only think about how I would manage this. The next day I found a note placed under my shutters. This was a note written by Vitali Hakko (The owner of Vakko. He did not have a place in Beyoglu then, he only had a place in Eminonu where he manufactured and sold scarves) “My dear Lazar, may you recover soon, I am waiting for you in my store, come urgently to me.” I immediately ran to him. We hugged and he asked “What are you going to do?” “I will immigrate to Israel right away, however I can,” I said. “Are you crazy? Go immediately, put your store in order and open it to business. You will see, you will have great work,” he said.

Because Mr. Vitali had good foresight, his visions and with the motivation he gave me I hired a carpenter and went to my store, went to the glass maker and ordered glasses for the showcase. I reordered all of the merchandise again and we reopened the stores, except for the mirrors and started selling. Just as Mr. Vitali said, business started to take off. I received only 14 thousand liras from the Chamber of Commerce to replace my loss of 70 thousand liras. I recuperated the 70 thousand liras that I lost at the end of the same year.

I managed this store till the end of 1958.

Later on, right across from my store, between Galatasary and Tunel, two stores down from where Pashabahce store is located today, Kemalettin Serbetci who rented the store “Bakara” that was very large in area, and my brother Kemal who was partners with Mr. Kemalettin by renting a department of that store, said to me one day “My dear Lazar, do you know? Mr. Kemalettin is going to liquidate this store.” “What is Mr. Kemalettin going to do with this store? What are his thoughts?” “He will rent it to someone, come on, let us take this place. When we are together we can manage business well. What do you think?” “You probably lost your mind, what kind of money can provide the goodwill money for this store? What money will we use to fill it up? My capital in the Yildiz store was only 35 thousand liras.” “Look, my dear Lazar, if you have 35 thousand liras, we are well

known in the market, they will give us credit, we will fill the store. We will renovate the store, make a new showcase. I think we can pull this off," he said.

These discussions lasted a few months. Kemal refrained from talking to Mr. Serbetci before we were sure of our intentions. Finally I warm up to the idea after 5 months and we negotiated with Mr. Kemalettin under hard terms. In this way we became renters of the Bakara store. I transferred the Yildiz store to my brother-in-law (my older sister Fortune's husband) Sabetay Farsi in exchange for my capital of 5 thousand liras. Sabetay unfortunately could not manage the Yildiz store for a long time, transferred it to another merchant and came to work with us at Bakara store. Starting that day, my brother-in-law Sabetay always worked with me.

We focused on the new store only from then on. We redecorated the store and the showcase, and reopened the store Bakara with a brand new appearance on September 20th, 1958. Because our store was very large and deep, we put whatever merchandise you can think of. Nothing was missing. Our store consisted of 4 departments. In one department, women's apparel, accessories, shoes, in the second, men's pants, underwear, accessories. (Because I was very familiar with the business of handbags, I personally went to Kazlicheshme [on the European side where leather industry has proliferated] and chose various colored leathers according to my taste, and take them to the workshop, I even designed the models). We reserved the third department to electronics. In 1960, we attended the Izmir [third largest city in Turkey, on the Aegean sea coast] Fair to buy various appliances (these were imported merchandise when we first started). The first ones we sold were "Amcor" brand, made in Israel. Later on we started selling Arcelik [Turkish brand]), we ordered electronics and started selling those too. Among the electronics were "Webcor" brand record players. We started selling records naturally, where you find record players. The fourth department of the store we rented to Samuel Saman who sold ready-to-wear children's and men's apparel. We created such an enterprise, I did the accounting and the tracking of merchandise, Kemal looked for goods in the market, searched the new items. Approximately 20 people worked with us.

I always keep on to the money, keep my expenses limited, I think of tomorrow, my deceased older brother Kemal on the other hand, wasted the money, he never thought of tomorrow.

Meanwhile our older brother Davit was still in the glove business. Kemal said to me: "Lazariko (little Lazar), couldn't our older brother join us so we manage this place all together?" May G-d grant a long life, I have a conscience too, but in certain conditions, I am objective. "Look, my dear Kemal, of course, I have the utmost respect for my older brother, he is always welcome with me, there is no limit to the sacrifices I would do for my older brother. But he knows nothing about the business we are in, he is only an expert about gloves. He is happy where he is. If he joins us, we will have problems. He doesn't even have a capital. Under what conditions can he become partners with us?" I said. I said but I could not deal with stubborn Kemal. We took in my older brother Davit too. I would finish up my usual work and go out to sales immediately, Kemal usually was on the lookout for new merchandise in the market anyways, Davit on the other hand, just watched, regretfully that was all he was capable of, he could not manage anything else. When Kemal understood the situation it was too late. The deceased went through depressions himself but excuse me, I do not want to talk about this affliction, this is something that upsets me tremendously. I supported my older brother Davit all my life.

In 1961, Kemal went to Israel for therapy for 15-20 days. As I said before, our store was very large in area, the very corner part was on the street. A store that was at this corner went bankrupt. I took advantage of the absence of Kemal, put Kemalettin Serbetci as a go-between immediately and rented that place in the name of Yomtov [Kemal's Jewish name] Lazar Abuaf Partnership. I renovated this corner until Kemal returned, and filled it with housewares so Kemal could sell them. On Kemal's return we did the opening of this new section of the store.

In 1963, I do not like counting revenues on Saturdays due to the values I received from my family, in principle. Kemal put pressure on me about this subject, I did it because I could not offend him, but I was very upset. This subject created a conflict between me and Kemal and I left the housewares department as a whole to Kemal, to protect him. I managed the sundries and notions department until 1965. Our older brother continued being the watchdog. When I separated from my older brother he was a good and successful merchant, yet he tripped himself with the wrong decisions he took and the merchandise he bought. He filled his whole store with the French brand jars "Le Parfait" that were very famous then. When I told him "my dear Kemal, what are you doing? How can you liquidate so many jars," he said "mind your business, I know what I am doing." Of course it was very difficult to sell so many jars.

In 1965, the traffic flow in Beyoglu changed, the tram and the buses were abolished. People stopped coming to the section between Galatasaray and Tunel for shopping. Therefore there was a serious drop in our business. The store could not maintain us, three brothers. I decided that we needed to move to a location between Galatasaray and Taksim. The business in the housewares department was going quite well, the warehouse, everything was complete. I said to my brother Davit: "My dear Davit, look, the three of us cannot make enough money here anymore. The famous "Japanese Toy Store" of the time [on the European side, on Beyoglu street, between Galatasaray and Taksim, where shopping is easier] is renting its location. I would like to apply. What do you think? Let's go and talk, if the conditions are suitable, we will leave this place to Kemal, and move there." We called it a deal with my older brother Kemal and made amends, we paid what we owed each other. After that day, Kemal managed the housewares department at the front of the store. Mr. Kemalettin sold furniture in the rest of the store.

Davit and I came to an agreement with our landlord. We got our contract with 10 years' exclusive lease. Bless him, our landlord behaved like a gentleman and did not take the first three month's rent. Our rent was 17 thousand liras a month, at the time one dollar was 9 Turkish liras, and one Republic gold coin was 94 liras and 80 pennies. The equivalent of the rent for today was 25,326 Turkish liras. As you can see, we undertook a serious burden.

Well then, we took all the risks with Davit and we renovated our 4-story new store, built the showcases. We arranged two floors of the store for sales, and the other two as warehouse, accounting and other necessities. At ground level we placed everything you can think of for housewares, and on the top floor clothing for everyone, men, women and children from the age of 7 to 77, and accessories. We had a grand opening for our store in September of 1965, with the slogan "Evin, the store that brings Europe to your doorstep" and with a lot of advertising. For exactly 10 years, 60-65 people worked with me. In addition to this, I supported my brother Davit who really had no real use to me, the deceased worked much less than I did but took out much more money.

When our contract was ending, our accountant warned me and said "Lood, Mr. Lazar, with the increase in rent that you will get in your new agreement, and the large expenses you have from your cash registers, this store will go bankrupt in a very short period, if you want talk to your brother, you have to change the situation to your advantage, otherwise, this business will end up badly."

I told my older brother Davit "Look, my dear Davit, you know that I raised our partnership that was 20% and 80% when we first opened the store all the way to 30% after a while. Yet, with the expenses you had, your capital is down to zero, I am afraid that if we continue like this, you will pull me down to the bottom of the well as well and bring me to zero. We will not be able to both make a living out of this store. If we do, we will not progress. You know me, I work 24 hours a day, day and night, to prepare my future, I think about the future of my children. The ten years of our contract is about to expire, of course the new contract we will draw will be tougher than before, we will have to work harder and maintain the business stronger to be able to pay this. If you say I can manage this store, I will pull back. If you say, I cannot manage this place, I am tired already, only you can take care of this place, let me give you your compensation, and let's part our ways cordially. Whenever you want, come and give us your blessing, on days like New Year's Eve or Mother's Day when the store is exceptionally crowded, come and keep an eye to prevent theft" and we came to an agreement, I paid everything Davit wanted and terminated our partnership.

My family and I became enemies because of my sister-in-law Luiza who, until that day, loved me and would do anything for me. We did not speak to each other for years. I did not understand the reason because I had paid my older brother more than I owed him physically or spiritually. I even said "My dear Davit, why are you creating a situation that upsets each other? Please, let's not offend each other." But unfortunately my sister-in-law Luiza never saw the truth, she alienated both my brother and my nieces from us.

I have to confess to you, I always prioritized my business even before my family. I would be at the store at 7.30 in the morning, my leaving was never at a set time, usually I would leave the store around 8 p.m., and return to my home exhausted. I did not witness how my children grew up, bless her heart, my wife Fani bore that burden always. She would almost never reflect the problems of the house to me. There was no country in the world that Davit and his wife Luiza did not visit while I worked like a madman like this. People who saw me would ask "Isn't the boss of this store Davit?" And I would respond "There is only one boss in the world, and that is G-d." Three brothers, until that day, we never had any conflicts, we were always on good terms. So much that we would always tell each other "May G-d protect us from the evil eye."

Of course this does not mean that you have to share the soup you are eating too, commerce does not forgive some things. The wrong decision that my older brother Kemal took brought us to these days.

After this separation, I signed a new contract for the store for 5 years. 2 years before the end of my contract, I suffered a serious stroke in 1979. I recuperated with difficulty, bless him, Kemal took care of the business. When the contract of the store ended, we took a decision among the family and liquidated all the merchandise in the store and started living our life with my wife. Bless them, my children said to us: "My dear father, life is short, you worked very hard until you were worn out. Now live your life one day at a time with your wife. Go to places that you wish to see in the world."

Enjoy your retirement while you are still young”.

May G-d bless them, we traveled quite a bit. I worked actively as a volunteer in the Old People's Home [16](#), I still go as my health permits. I take out the seniors who are able to walk and who have their faculties intact once or twice a month to go out or to eat fish as long as I can find sponsors (I have always found one until now). In addition to that, I watch the repairs for the building closely, the most difficult part of my job is the last duty I offer to the seniors. That is to say, the procedure after their death (burial, the dirt, the tombstone etc.), I also am quite ill now and I am 80 years old, even though I tell my young volunteer friends, come and learn this job and take over, none of them want to.

The first house I lived in was in Ortakoy, in the neighborhood called 18 Akaretler. (The name of the street was because of 18 wall-to-wall houses). This brick house where we rented for a nominal price was 4 floors. When I arrived to this house, I was about 4 or 5 years old and lived there until I was 14 or 15. We had electricity and running water in our home, the tap water was drinkable and we used it for cooking too.

When you entered the door of this house, you would go down 4 steps and enter the main room of the house which was quite large and where we spent most of our lives. This room was our living room, dining room, the room where we chatted in the evenings, where we lit the brazier on cold winter months to warm up, and where we took our baths since it was the only room of the house that had heating. Across this room was our large and always cool kitchen, since we did not have a refrigerator, we would keep the cooked food etc. in the wire closet that was in the kitchen, there was a large cistern filled with rain water underneath the room we used for storage next to our kitchen. We used this water for all our necessities, of course we had abundant running water from our taps. My father used to buy all the necessities of the house from Eminonu since it was fresher and at a better price, and liked to buy everything with enough to spare for example potatoes and onions in bags, dry goods in 5 kg. packages, soaps in packages of 12. These would come to Ortakoy dock in boats, and carried home with the help of porters. I still currently shop like this, I can never buy a kg. of salt or sugar, it has to be 3 kg.s, I think that I always have some to spare in my home. Anyways our bathroom and our kitchen were next to each other.

On the second floor which you reached with a staircase there were two bedrooms and a bathroom, likewise on the third floor two bedrooms and a living room that we used very seldomly, and two rooms on the fourth floor. The fourth floor was the attic, and with time we rented those rooms out to boarders. My mom and dad slept in one of the rooms on the second floor, and my older sister Sara in the other. My older brother Kemal and I slept in one of the rooms on the third floor. My maternal grandmother slept in the hallway of the same floor. We had large built-in cupboards in the rooms where my father and we slept. These cupboards had large doors, and the mirrors on them were full-length mirrors in the house. There were two or three deep drawers under the cupboards, my mother kept our underwear, our linens etc. in these. The head and feet of my father's bed were completely brass, the bedspring under his mattress was coiled. The bedsprings under the mattresses we slept on were not coiled.

It was almost impossible to heat this house in winters, the beds were close to the windows, when it snowed, the snow that came through the borders would accumulate, of course we felt cold: my parents solved this problem by covering us with a rug. The living room that was on the floor we



slept was only opened on very special days even though it was cleaned regularly (when all my uncles or other guests came for a holiday or a celebration) because this room was almost never heated. The winters then were colder than now, so much that they say that the Bosphorus froze one year (I don't remember). When the weather warmed up, such as in spring or summer, we would sit and eat there. When we lived in this house my older brother Davit and my older sister Fortune were married already and had moved to other houses; but they came to our house every Friday evening and on holidays.

Before Passover arrived, the ladies in our house would clean our house and our kitchen together the way our religion dictates. We had special flatware and dishes that we used only for this holiday called "Loksa"(Judeo-Espagnol term). The pots, dishes, glasses etc. that were necessary for the holiday would be washed and put in their place. However, my mother had developed a system to kosher some of the pots that she needed. She would put water in these pots along with a few nails, a piece of iron, and a few other things that I can not remember and put it to boil. After rinsing the pots that were put to boil like this with lots of cold water, now we could use it for the holiday with peace of mind. During this period, we would eat our meals in our living room that was on the top floor, or in the garden if weather permitted, on the ground floor there should not have been pieces of bread on the floor anymore, likewise the night before Passover we would look for crumbs of bread at every corner of the house and in this way our house would be ready completely. Even though my family paid the necessary attention to our religion, we never had separate plates and flatware for meat and dairy dishes, or two sinks in our kitchen.

In winter we took our baths in our room that was heated by a large brazier made of copper. We took our baths especially on the Sabbath day, that day we would remove the rug of our living room to a corner, my mother would bathe us first since we were little, then my older sisters would bathe, and herself last. This was the system: We would carry the water that we heated up in large pots in the kitchen to the pan we had in our living room and cooled it down with the addition of a little cold water, (we would either sit in this pan or stand up), the rest of the cooled water we would keep in another pan next to us, as we soaped down, we would use a cup to rinse ourselves with this water, after the supplies were gathered, the floor would be dried and the rug replaced. My mother would finish the housework with the help of my older sisters, prepare the food for the Sabbath, set the table and light our Sabbath candles. Then we would be ready to greet the Sabbath and we would wait for the hour of my father's return from work (even though he was very religious, after he opened the winestore, he could only get home at 8:30). We would pull the table to one corner so my father could bathe, remove the rug again, pour the hot water in the pan, of course because it was the only warm room in the house, we would be in the room too. We would chat while my father bathed in his underwear, when he said to us "Ari ari arsh", we would turn our backs to him, in this way he would finish his bath, put his towel around himself and dry up, we would wait until he dressed up in a corner and said "Ari ari arsh" to us and us boys would put the rug, table and chairs back to their places, and my older sisters would bring our food. Of course it saddened my father a lot to greet the Sabbath late like this, what a pity that he could not manage otherwise, he could not close up his store earlier, he had developed a certain clientele and he had to respond to them. Because my father missed the prayer in the synagogue being late from work, he would recite the evening service after he finished his bath, we would listen to him, following him taking his seat at the head of the table, we would recite the Kiddush, and eat our meal. When my father had only one hardware store, everything was more in order, for example on Fridays we would take our baths,

wear our clean beautiful clothes and go to the synagogue with my father, on our return, my mother would have prepared our table, we would bless the Sabbath with songs and eat our meal. On Sabbath evenings, before we went to bed, we would call in any neighbor passing by who was not Jewish and ask him to turn off our lights.

On Saturday mornings, we would wear our clean, beautiful clothes again and go to the synagogue with my father. Leaving the synagogue, my father would invite his closest friends home, and we would eat our meal all together. My mother would have prepared things like borekitas [similar to empanadas, crescents of cheese or eggplant filled dough], boyikos [baked round cheese pastries], bulemikas [curled phyllo dough pastries filled with cheese and vegetables], there was no need to warm them up, we would not light a fire that day anyway. After the breakfast, accompanying people who played the lute (because all my family had beautiful voices and because they knew how to enjoy life) we would sing either religious Hebrew songs or songs from Turkish Art music.

With the weather warming up, we would spend our time in our garden that was in front of our kitchen, of course we would celebrate our Sabbath evenings and our holidays in our living room on the third floor. There was a table, sofas and a buffet where I call our living room, of course these furniture were made of wood, we did not own anything expensive. We warmed ourselves with a brazier where we used wood coal for a long time. Later on there was coke coal, when my father learned how and where to use this coal, it was much easier to light this coke coal. We used a device similar to a brazier to heat up this coke coal. When we had the coal of the brazier red hot in the garden, we would take it inside the house, when the fire started to die down, we would go out to the garden again, stir up the coal and fire it up. We could heat up a large copper pot full of water on top of the brazier in a very short while.

Whether on Sabbath evenings or holiday evenings, we would be with my maternal grandmother and my widowed aunt Suzan at our table. Of course in time, first when my older brother Davit got married, my sister-in-law Luiza, then the wife of my older brother Kemal who married later, my brother-in-law Izak when my older sister Sara got married, my brother-in-law Sabetay when my older sister Fortune got married, were always at our table, gradually we had become a large family. Our meals were always pleasant and a lot of fun, we had good voices as a family, usually we would chat after the meal, laugh at the jokes my brothers and brothers-in-law told, sing songs and lighten up our nights.

We had a vegetable garden on both sides of our house. We would buy every kind of vegetable or fruit without hormones, completely fresh, and eat them. My mother would say "Come on Lazariko, go to the vegetable garden to get a few romaine lettuces to eat with salted and dried mackerels [one of the customs among the Istanbul Sephardim is eating the salted and dried mackerel which is a small fish].

I would go running immediately, as I shopped in the vegetable garden, I would also, with the permission of the gardener, pick a few fruits from the trees or a few cucumbers and eat them.

We had a garden on the front side of our house too. At the very center of our garden we had a big pine tree, and quince and plum trees. At the far end corner of our garden we had a small room, we used it as a laundry room. Here there were big pots where dirty laundry would be boiled, the stove under the pot was lit by logs and warmed up, the laundry would be rubbed and rinsed in the laundry bucket that was on the side. Above this room was a balcony that we reached with a

staircase, this balcony was covered with zinc sheets on top. We would hang our laundry in this balcony to dry.

At the same time, we would build our sukkah here during Sukkot. We would place all kinds of grapes, fruits and greenery to the wooden lattice work on top of our sukkah. All of our neighbors were Jewish more or less and we would celebrate especially this holiday all together under our sukkah. My mother would offer our guests bread and grapes. (I am sure she offered other stuff too, but these stayed in my mind). Since no one was afraid of theft at that time, everyone's doors were open, we had wonderful relationships with our neighbors. Everyone shared in each others' problems as well as happinesses.

At the time Ortakoy was a real village (the name Ortakoy means Middle Village in Turkish) and it was densely populated with Jewish families. At the location where the synagogue stands now, there were three interspaced synagogues, one midrash (a smaller synagoge) and a beautiful big synagogue (where the breakfasts after Saturday mornings take place today). This synagogue was opened on Saturdays and holidays. We used the midrash during the week, in one of the interspaced ones, psalms would be recited. In today's location, on the administrative section of the synagogue, oil would be burned then, on a Yom Kippur night, these candles caught fire and caused a large fire. As a result of the fire, this beautiful section of the synagogue completely burned down. My voice was very beautiful with the talent I had in my family's genes and I was part of the synagogue's chorus. I could recite the tones that our cantor Leon Levi did exactly, so much that even though all of us in the chorus (15-20 children) had black gowns and hats, my hat was the same as the grand rabbi's gown. We could not continue with this chorus after the fire. Additionally we had a synagogue and two yeshivas in the neighborhood we called "the Armenian neighborhood." These place would be filled every Saturday and on holidays.

The importance that my mother and father attached to the Sabbath and the holidays enables us to grow up as people strongly affiliated to our religion; even though we are not orthodox, we try to carry out all of the traditions of our religion.

We, the children would go to each others' houses sometimes through the door, sometimes through the gardens. We played the exact same games among girls and boys that you played when you were children. The games we preferred most were games like soccer, marbles, hide-and-seek, and leapfrog. I loved the sea from a very young age and I learned to swim as well as teaching it to all of my older brothers, sisters, and brothers and sisters-in-law. My mother and father were not used to going into the sea, they did not know how to swim, therefore did not come to the water with us much.

A boatsman who we paid 100 pennies would take me and my friends from the shores of Ortakoy to a place a little more north than Ortakoy mosque called "Turkish Nature" where we could not reach by land because it was a tobacco warehouse, and return us around 5 in the evenings. We would swim throughout the day, jump in the sea, joke around, laugh, sing songs and have a picnic. Sometimes we would lower a watermelon that we bought from the greengrocer into the sea in a mesh bag, lift it up, cut and eat it when we were hungry; the watermelon would be so icy cold that I cannot tell you, we could not eat enough of it. Sometimes we would eat the 20 cms-wide flatbreads that we bought for a penny, sometimes liver sandwiches that we bought again for a penny. (This place was a foreign enterprise until the declaration of the republic, after the declaration was turned

over to the government like all foreign businesses). Because we went to this place for a whole day, our girl friends would not come, their families would not allow them to stay away from home for so long a time. When we wanted to swim with girls, we would go into the sea from the open beach that was right in front of the tea house that was to the right of Ortakoy boat dock. One time we went to this beach on a boat with two of my girl friends. While they were pulling the oars, I dove into the sea, as I was swimming against a current that I did not think could be so strong, I yelled out so much with the pain of a cramp in my leg that bless them the girls saved me, truthfully if not for them I don't know what I would do. (Unfortunately even though I remember the last names of some of my friends that were with me then, a lot of them immigrated and settled in Israel years ago, I don't know how they are doing now). I was 17 or 18 years old then, one of the days when we were swimming at Turkish Nature, when I dove into the water and returned home with a bucketful of mussels, my mom is stunned and says "Lazariko what are you doing? What are these mussels?" When I said "My dear mother, I know it is forbidden in our religion but we will clean them in the garden with my friends and cook them in a tin that we will place on top of the brazier, drink a little beer and enjoy ourselves. What do you think?" of course she did not say anything, I don't know if you would believe me but I can still taste those mussels. We did not have a refrigerator in our house then but we had a well in our garden, the beers that we placed in a bucket and lowered into the well were ice-cold after a while. We were eating and sipping our ice-cold beers while I played the harmonica and we were dancing with our girl friends.

One day our house was up for sale. My older brother pleaded, "My dear father, look, what wonderful days were spent in this house. Let us buy this house," he said. But of course we did not have that kind of money and there could not be a question of our buying this house.

After we sold this house, we always lived in Ortakoy. When Fani and I married we moved to Sisane to share a house with her older sister. It wasn't until a short while before Verjel's birth that we were able to move into a house on our own, again in Shishane.

Our older daughter Verjel attended 2. Coeducational Jewish elementary school, a Turkish middle school and completed her education in Turkish High School. She worked in the accounting department of my store for a while. We married her in 1971 at the age of 18, to attorney Selim Isman who was an acquaintance of a friend of ours, at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the evening of the wedding in a place in Tarabya as a family [a neighborhood on the shores of the Bosphorus].

Verjel's family lived in Sisli like us. Their son Eytan was born in 1973. After finishing Robert College, he graduated from Marmara University, Faculty of Business Administration. Eytan who settled in Izmir in the year 2001 to work for the firm named Koroza, married Sibel Almelek in 2003 in Sisli Etz Ahayim Synagogue. The newlyweds currently live in Izmir. Sibel studied art history in London and graduated. She is pursuing her master's degree at this time and teaching at September 9 University at the same time. Our daughter Verjel had another son they named Koray in 1985. Koray graduated from Ulus Jewish High School in 2006. He is studying Business Administration at Koc University [17](#) at the moment. Verjel and her family have been living in Yenikoy since 1998 [one of the neighborhoods on the Bosphorus].

In 1957, our younger daughter Meri was born. In the meantime, the landlord of our flat, our neighbor downstairs started ruining our tranquility. We in turn sold our tiny house for 35 thousand

liras and moved to a 220 meter square flat in Sisli that was one of the modern neighborhoods then as renters. We preordered the furniture in this house to a carpenter in Harbiye. My wife Fani wanted my daughters to play the piano, I then imported a “Bluthner” brand piano in 1963 and started our daughters with the piano with Sahan Arzuni. The girls liked this teacher a lot and gave a concert within a very short time like a year, with all the students of Mr. Shahan. We moved to another apartment in Sisli in 1965.

Meri finished Saint Michel [French Catholic high school], and even though she had won entrance to Istanbul University, French Philology department, she could not go to school for more than a few weeks, the anarchy was at such a scary level, that I could not permit my daughter to go to school. Meri also worked in my store, sometimes in accounting, sometimes in other internal departments. She married Robert Schild in 1978 in the Ashkenazi Synagogue. We celebrated the wedding in Divan Hotel as a family.

In 1980, Verjini who was my mother-in-law as well as my aunt, went out to the street after having dinner at her daughter Sara’s house in Heybeliada to give the bones of the fish they had eaten, to the stray cats. She had a heart attack when she leaned down to give the bag to the cats and died on the spot. We buried her in Haskoy Jewish cemetery.

They had sons named Percy in 1980, and Larry in 1984. Percy finished the German high school, and studied International Business in Reutlingen in Germany. From there he went to the United States and did his master’s. He returned to Istanbul in 2001 and started work in Siemens in the treasury department. We are going to marry Percy who is now working in the Consulting department, to architect Rivka Geron in March of 2007.

Larry who is a graduate of Austrian High School on the other hand went to Israel in 2005, he lived in Haifa in a kibbutz for a year and learned Hebrew. He started studying business in Herzlia University starting in September of 2006.

After closing up our store we went on a worldwide tour for about one month. There was almost no place that we did not see. May G-d bless my children, we toured and saw a lot. Until this year that we are in, during summer, the months of June, July, August and September, we go to the Aegean or the Mediterranean with my wife for a week each.

We lived in Sisli until 1977. The Bosphorus bridge was built in those years, crossing from Europe to Asia had become very easy. We decided with my wife Fani to live in a house on the Asian side overlooking the sea from now on. We have been living in this house we are in now since that day.

When our children were young, we would go to places close to Istanbul that were on the sea shore with our friends in summer months during weekends, we would swim in the sea, and have picnics. Sometimes we would take a week off in a place like Marmara island or Avsha. My older brothers and my older sister Fortune would rent houses in Buyukada for summer and lived there for 3-3,5 months [the largest one of the Princess Islands, on the sea of Marmara, south of Istanbul]. Since it took about an hour to reach Istanbul from the islands by boat, businessmen could easily go to and from work every day. We would also go to my brothers’ on some Sundays and swim in the sea.

We became islanders too in 1967. When we were all together as a family, of course our pleasure and delight increased. We would have heart-to-heart talks, joke and enjoy our day every morning



and evening while we came and went on the same boats. When I came home around 8 in the evening, first thing we would do was dive into the sea with my daughter Meri from the shore right next to our house, shed the exhaustion of the day, take my shower and eat our meal as a family, and chat. Once in a while during the weekdays, as we would do on the weekends too, we would go to an open-house movie theater and have fun, one of the musts of the children was to eat the dried white garbanzo beans that they threw into soda bottles. On nights with full moon, all the siblings and children would do the tour of the island with 5-6 horse-carriages, sing songs while watching the view and the stars (we would ask the driver to open the top to be able to see the stars better). The drivers of the horse-carriages would enjoy themselves so much with us that the tour that would normally take one hour would last 2- 2,5 hours with us. On Sunday mornings I would tour the island with my daughter on bicycles, swim in the sea in 5 or 6 different places and return home. After having our breakfast as a family, we would spend our day with our friends in Seferoglu which is a club on the shores of the sea, with our friends (we joined this club that works on a membership basis when all our friends became members). During the week, the ladies met generally in the afternoons and chat and play card games. Obviously this game was only to pass the time pleasantly among friends, no one played with big amounts. After the game, sometimes they would come to greet us who were returning from work at the boats. As you can understand, they were good days. When we moved to Suadiye, our island adventure came to an end, because the sea was beautiful in this region too until the 1982's more or less, it wasn't worth the trouble of going to the island.

I worked actively in the Old People's Home as a volunteer after retiring, I still go as my health permits. I take the elders that are able to walk, and that are sensible, on outings and to eat fish once or twice a month as long as I can find sponsors, which I have always found until now. In addition to that, I supervise the repair work of the building, the most difficult part of my work is the last duty I perform for the elders. What I mean is the procedure after their death (burial, the dirt, the tombstone etc.). I am approaching 80 too, almost. The therapies that were given because of my illness exhausted me already. Even though I tell the young volunteer friends in the Old People's Home, come and learn this job and take it from me, none of them want to undertake this duty. I will try to perform this duty as long as G-d gives me strength.

## GLOSSARY

**1 Knesset (Apollon) Synagogue:** When the Zulfaris Synagogue in Karakoy was inadequate for the Jewish population of Galata, the Chief Rabbi of the time Hayim Becerano opened this synagogue in 1923 by renting the building that used to be the Apollon Cinema. It served the community until 1982, when it was closed due to the decline in the Jewish population in the area. For many years, this was the synagogue where the maftirim choirs practised and performed.

**2 Behar, Nisim Rav (1912-1990) Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, Nisim Behar was one of the most important religious teachers of all times for the Turkish Jewish community**

His religious writings were published in Turkish and Judeo-Spanish and are still referred to as exemplary educational books on the Jewish religion. He emigrated to Israel in 1969 and died there in 1990.

### **3 Sisli Beth-Israel Synagogue**

Istanbul synagogue, founded in the 1920s after restoring the premises of the garage of a thread factory. It was rebuilt and extended in 1952. It came under a suicide-terrorist attack in 2003 and was partially destroyed during the attack. It was then restored and opened for services in 2004.

### **4 Events of 6th-7th September 1955**

Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of immigration occurred after these events and Istanbul was cleansed of its Greek population.

### **5 Neve Shalom Synagogue**

Situated near the Galata Tower, it is the largest synagogue of Istanbul. Although the present building was erected only in 1952, a synagogue bearing the same name had been standing there as early as the 15th century.

### **6 Or Ahayim Hospital**

Istanbul Jewish hospital, established in 1898 with the decree of Sultan Abdulhamit II and the help of idealistic doctors and philanthropists. As a result of various fundraising activities the initially small clinic was expanded in 1900. Today, the hospital is still operating serving both Jewish and non-Jewish patients with the latest technologies and qualified staff.

### **7 Fez**

Ottoman headgear. As a part of the Imperial Prescript of Gulhane (a westernizing campaign) of Sultan Mahmud II (1839-1876) the traditional Ottoman dressing code was abolished in 1839. The fez, resembling the hat of the Europeans at the time, was introduced and widely used by the Ottoman population, regardless of religious affiliation. In the Turkish Republic it was considered backward and outlawed in 1925 by the Head Law. In the Balkan countries the fez was regarded an Ottoman (Turkish) symbol and was dropped after gaining independence.

**8 Alliance Israelite Universelle:** founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum; nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865,

then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople in 1867, Shumla (Shumen) in 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those that had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

## **9 Zulfaris Synagogue/Museum of Turkish Jews**

This synagogue, recorded in the Chief Rabbinate archives as Kal Kadosh Galata, is commonly known as Zulfaris Synagogue. The word is derived from the former name of the street in which it is located: Zulf-u arus, which means Bride's Long Lock. Today the street is called Perchemli Sokak which means Fringe Street. There is evidence that this synagogue preexisted in 1671, when Haim Kamhi was Chief Rabbi, as the foundations date from the early 15th century Genovese period. However, the actual building was re-erected over its original foundation, presumably in the early 19th century. In the 1890s, repair work was carried out with the financial assistance of the Camondo family and in 1904 restoration work was conducted by the Jewish community of Galata, presided over by Jak Bey de Leon. (Source: [www.muze500.com](http://www.muze500.com))

## **10 Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)**

Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

## **11 Shalom**

Istanbul Jewish weekly, founded by Avram Leyon in 1948. During Leyon's ownership, the paper was entirely in Ladino. Upon the death of its founder in 1985, the newspaper passed into the hands of the Jewish community owned company Gozlem Gazetecilik. It then started to be published in Turkish with one or two pages in Ladino. It is presently distributed to 4,000 subscribers.

## **12 Citizen, speak Turkish policy**

In the 1930s-1940s, the rise of Turkish nationalism affected the Jewish community as well. The

Salonican Jew Moise Cohen (1883-1961), who had been in close contact with the young Turks in his home town in the years preceding the restoration of the Constitution, took the old Turkish name Tekinalp. He led a campaign among his fellow Jews to encourage them to speak only Turkish to integrate them fully into Turkish life, declaring that 'Turkey is your home, so you should speak Turkish.' In the major culture however, the policy of 'Citizen, speak Turkish' was seen as pressure put on minorities to speak Turkish in public places. There was a lot of criticism and verbal attacks and jeers on those who did not comply with this social rule.

### **13 Wealth Tax**

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

### **14 Events of 6th-7th September 1955**

Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of immigration occurred after these events and Istanbul was cleansed of its Greek population.

### **15 Menderes, Adnan (1899-1961)**

Turkish prime minister and martyr. He became one of the leaders of the new Democratic Party, the only opposition party in Turkey in 1945, and prime minister after the elections in 1950. He was re-elected in 1954 and 1957 and deposed in 1960 by a military coup, lead by General Cemal Gursel. He was put on trial on the charge of violating the constitution and was executed.

### **16 Old People's Home in Haskoy**

Known as 'Moshav Zekinim' in Hebrew and 'Ihtiyarlara Yardim Dernegi' (Organization to Help the Old) in Turkish. It was opened in 1972 by the initiation of the Ashkenazi leadership in the building that formerly housed an Alliance Israelite Universelle school and a rabbinical seminary. Some 65 elderly members of the Jewish community currently reside in the home.

### **17 Koc University**

Koç University was founded in 1993 with the mission "to produce the most capable graduates by providing a world class education, to advance the frontiers of knowledge and to contribute to the

benefit of Turkey and humanity at large" by the Koc family. Koç University started its education 1993, with 233 students and 35 faculty members in two Colleges (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Administrative Sciences) and one graduate school (Graduate School of Business). Today, the University has 2500 students and 240 faculty members in 4 colleges (with addition of College of Engineering and Law School), one School of Health Sciences and three graduate schools ( with addition of Graduate School of Sciences and Engineering and Graduate School of Social Sciences). Koc University is a private university.