

With My Older Brothers And Brothers-In-Law On My Wedding Day



In the picture, starting on the left, my older brother Kemal in the very front, Davit, my brother-in-law Sabetay (my older sister Fortune's husband) and I, Lazar can be seen.

I, Lazar, 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" 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 Espagnol) in the street, they people who were against it would say "Pis Yahudi" (dirty Jew) or "Chifit" (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.

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 Israelite⁴ in the neighborhood. Because he was my father's first love, they sent him to the Italian Highschool 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 permit, 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. There was the "Sanovitch Glove Factory" in an office building in Beyoglu. Davit talked with the manager and started working rightaway. He worked there for long years, his bosses liked Davit a lot. He also learned the business well in time, he would stich leather gloves on the machine beautifully.

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, one way or another. 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 Highschool 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 is introduced to Luiza, the cousin of one the group members, Yashar Kalvo, and starts 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 should 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 Chivril 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.

My older brother Kemal (Yomtov) was born in 1925. He attended Kabatash Highschool, 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" (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 where retail shopping is done, and where coffeehouses 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 in the Zulfaris Synagogue.