

Yosif, Vintoura And Isak Sabitay Levi



In this picture you can see (from left to right) my father Yosif, my grandmother Vintoura and my grandfather Isak Sabitay Levi. This is a family picture of the Levis before my father's wedding in Sofia, taken in 1920. There is neither a stamp of a photo studio or any other inscription.

The family of my father, Yosif Isak Levi, used to live in Sofia. He also was born in the capital. I can't say where his father, my grandfather Isak, was from. My grandmother Vintoura used to tell me that at the time of the Liberation [Russian-Turkish Liberation War in 1877-1878] she was only six years old. At that time they settled in Sofia after they had run away from the town of Ferdinand (then Koutlovitsa).

My father finished the Jewish school and junior high school in Sofia. He was a goldsmith by profession, this was his main occupation. He used to work in Sofia but when he was still quite young he got the well-known vibration disease. This is a disease of the peripheral nervous system. It is typical for people making the same moves all the time in their job, like the goldsmiths. It causes hand-tingling which makes working impossible. Of course in those days there were no professional disease clinics so the vibration disease was practically incurable. The easiest thing my father could do was to change his occupation. So he became a medical goods dealer. He started providing pharmacies with finished and semi-finished medicines. So he was supposed to have certain knowledge which he had gathered during the Second Balkan War [1913] when he was a health-officer. He served under the leadership of professor Racho Angelov – the first Bulgarian Minister of Health after 9th September 1944 [The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government.]. What he had learned there was of great help in his job.

My father didn't have his own home in Sofia. He married my mother by matchmaking. One of my aunts (Soultana – my mother's sister) used to live in Sofia introduced my mother to my father and they married in 1926.

When my father joined the family he paid off the shares to the other inheritors from her family. My father started living in my mother's house with his mother – my grandmother Vintoura. I can't imagine how much ethics the family had in order to let the two mothers, the in-laws, live under the same roof. I mean my maternal grandmother who owned the house and my paternal grandmother who came to live in the house later. I used to joke with my father that he brought his mother – granny Ventoura, in the house as a dowry.