

## Baby Arditi



This photograph belongs to my infant days. The most important aspect of it is that it was taken in Servan, the most famous photography studio of the time. In addition, the frame surrounding it is in the art nouveau style. I, Albert Arditi was born in 1923, in Kadıköy Yeldeğirmen'i. My father's name was Nesim Bensiyon Arditi. He became an orphan at a very young age. It is interesting; back then, his mother's other children got sick after birth and passed away, or she miscarried. No one really knew why this happened. In those years, no one sought to investigate the cause. When my father was born, they named him Nesim ('Nes' in Hebrew), which stands for 'miracle.' A tradition that follows a similar situation was called Marko Merkada. Whenever a child recovered from a very serious illness, he was symbolically sold to another family. In this way, the child became 'sold' or 'merkada.' It was thought that this symbolic process would change the child's destiny. Yet another tradition was name altering (called 'mesallayim' in old Hebrew). According to this tradition, if a person survived an epidemic disease that would normally result in death, that person's name was changed in the hopes that his destiny also would. The person was usually given a new name from the Torah Nesim Arditi was born in Balat in 1898. He lived in Ortakoy for a while, and then he moved to the Kadikoy area. He studied at an Alliance School [4](#). Since he was an orphan, his aunts took care of him, and supported his educational and other needs. He did not want to be too much of a burden to them, so he joined the military by misrepresenting his age. He served in the military for a long time. First, he actively took part in an operation to free the Suez Canal from English occupation. This was in 1915. Sometimes by walking barefoot in the cold and sometimes using the rail, his platoon arrived at the Syrian border. Passing Jerusalem, the men arrived at the Suez Canal.

Cemal Pasa was the commander of the Turkish army. My father was a corporal at the time. The Turkish military lost the fight, and was forced to surrender. This was a very difficult time for all the men as living conditions were very poor, and the lack of proper clothing and adequate food only made the situation harder. The Arabs had rebelled against the Ottoman Empire. While the army was going to Sivas [a city in Anatolia] through Aleppo, my father froze from the dead-cold in Kangal [a town near Sivas. The name was later given to a breed of dog]. His corporal just left him there to die. One of the villagers pitied him and said to my father "Look, you are at a deadlock and you have only one option to survive. We will bury you in a pile of fertilizer. Otherwise, your legs will become gangrenous and you will die. With the fertilizer method, the freezing will slowly disappear, but there is a risk. Your veins can burst. The choice is yours." Deciding that each option was as dangerous and deadly as the other one, my father had no choice but to accept the villager's offer. His legs healed in time, and he went on the road again. This time, he caught measles, and then typhoid. When he finally arrived in Istanbul, he was very tired and beaten. When the war was over in 1922, his military unit dissolved. Later on, during the 1940s, he was called on to serve in the 20 military classes. <sup>5</sup> In this respect, I can say that my father took active duty in both World Wars. My father was a respected man. He was not very talkative. He always dressed in suits, and Bossalino hats [an Italian trademark hat company]. Whenever he traveled abroad, he always brought back these hats as presents for his friends and relatives. My dad owned a store called the Kooperatif. Before he became the owner, he had worked there as a regular employee for a long time. The store was in Moda; a modern county back then on the Asian side of Istanbul in which many residents spoke both English and French. My father was considered one of the good, successful workers there because he spoke French [this store was one of the oldest within the Kadikoy area. It was located across from the Armenian Church, and was founded in 1892 by a number of Englishmen. Its ownership was transferred later on]. The store was owned by Englishmen prior to 1924. It provided customers with a variety of products ranging from everyday needs to souvenirs. In 1924, a number of new laws were established by Ataturk <sup>6</sup> in order to protect domestic investment, and so it was no longer possible for the English to own the store. They summoned my father, told him he was an honest man and asked him to take over the ownership in return for a small pay-out fee. They also told him not to damage the reputation of their brand and their store. My father accepted these terms, and took over the ownership of the store with a number of Greek-Turk associates. Back then, Moda County was home to a number of elite Levantine and English families. <sup>7</sup> As such, the stores had to provide luxury goods. The goods sold in this area were of the highest quality. When Inonu <sup>8</sup> became the President of the Turkish Republic, for example, he once visited his sister in Moda, and had the opportunity to taste some cheese from our store. He liked it so much that he wanted to find out where he could find more of this cheese. From that point on, kilos of cheese began to be transported to Cankaya [the name of the presidential palace where Presidents of the Turkish Republic reside throughout their term] by rail. Being the son of the store's owner, my father began giving me the responsibility - since I was 16 - of managing all food preparation for the parties we attended. My mother Fortune Saranga was a serious and trustworthy woman. She managed our home affairs, and was our family's permanent counsel. She was the first person whose advice everyone in the family requested. Not only did she observe events with an objective perspective, but she also had the ability to reconcile people's differences with her compromising tone. She could always get others to do what she wanted, and she was the one who got the family together. During holiday celebrations, we had many visitors in our house. My mother was a very elegant woman; she went grocery shopping in elegant shoes and clothing. She had her clothes tailor-made. These tailors generally happened to be non-Muslims. My mother had her hair cut when

she was a teenager, but after a certain age, I never remember her with short hair. She would always wear her hair in a bun. She had a beautiful collection of jewelry. Back then, Russian merchants sold Russian-style jewelry, and my father bought these for my mother. She later on gave her jewelry to my sister as a gift. My mother went grocery shopping every morning, because my father ate lunch at home. Lunch was considered the most important meal in our family. My mother had a very good eye for meat and poultry because of her father; who had owned a butcher shop. I remember going to the butcher's with my mother once to buy some meat. The butcher placed a piece of meat on the counter, but immediately rescinded after seeing the look on my mother's face. My mother was a helper, but she did this confidentially. I remember going to a government office once after she died. One of the ladies who worked there asked me if I knew my mother. I responded "Of course, I do." But, she said "Not only you, but people like us who received so much support from her know your mother too, and we will always remember her." I never found out what kind of support my mother had provided to this lady. Although she had a tranquil-natured personality, my mother was still a 'Saranga.' Like every Saranga, she occasionally flared up in anger. But, she never yelled at her children. In any case, my sister, Viki, was the mascot or the princess of our house. My mother usually directed her anger at my father because he did not always take the best care of his health. The religious holidays were also a problematic subject between them. Since my mother was the elder of her family, she usually invited everyone else over. However, she would drive herself to exhaustion during the first night of the Holidays because she did not have support staff that helped her with grocery shopping or cooking. We would always tell her that we did not want this much food and in this variety, and that all we wanted was to see her at the dinner table on the first night of the celebrations. She would not understand though. Holidays meant food, and that equaled my mother being sick - and, of course, crowded dinner tables.