

Arditi At School



This photograph dates back to my years in St. Joseph. It is a picture taken in 10th grade. The memories of St. Joseph constitute a very important part of my life. I wanted to attend the St. Jozef Lycee after elementary school. In other words, my parents wanted me to attend St. Jozef because the brother of one his Greek business partners was a bishop at the school, and so could provide us with a significant discount in school tuition. The catch was that I had to take an exam and pass with a successful grade. I began taking private lessons from Mr. Kohen. For some reason, I was not successful in my efforts to convince my parents that my Math and French were sufficient. After a couple of tutoring sessions, I took the responsibility upon myself, and discontinued the lessons. I was quite successful in the exam. Based on my marks, I was given the opportunity to directly begin the sixth grade - without going through the preparatory year for middle school. When I got to the eighth grade, the school board wanted me to restart the seventh grade because they feared a government inspection during which officials could discover I was too young to be in eighth grade. They were not successful in their efforts though. When I think about my time at St. Jozef, one of the first things that comes to my mind is the passing away of Ataturk. Everyone knew that he was very sick. I remember staring at the flags in the school with everyone. If one of the flags was ever hauled down, we would know that he had passed. The time came. We were all in the school yard. Our principal announced "Ataturk has passed away." Everyone began staring at each other. I remember our English teacher asking us to all go back to our classrooms. He said "Please take out your books and notebooks, and continue to study. This is what Ataturk would have wanted from you." I remember going to the Dolmabahce Palace. The Palace was extremely crowded. People were crying, moaning and staring with a blank expression on their faces. Our house had a view of the sea; I remember watching the people carrying Ataturk's coffin. They carried the coffin by sea, and passed through Izmit on their way to Ankara. Ships from several different nationalities followed the one which was carrying his coffin. On the landside, people were walking in the streets in the hopes of glancing at the great man's coffin one last time. I graduated from St. Jozef with the highest honors (Prix d'honneur). In the 1940s, the government required Math teachers to attend the military, so our French teacher began to teach us Math. He was given two books. One

contained the questions, and the other, called 'livre de maitre,' contained the answers to those questions. He would ask us a question, and give us a grade by comparing the student's answer to the answer key. I remember what happened when it was my turn to answer a question. I solved the problem, and found the correct answer, but my solution did not follow what was in the answer key. Our teacher first did not know what to do, but he ended up giving me the full points for the question. I also have fond memories about my Literature classes. We studied Divan Literature [there is an important movement within the Turkish Literature called the Divan Literature. The Sultan and other respected, elite persons in the Ottoman Empire placed significant importance on this type of literature, which was influenced by Arabic and Farsi. It is written using constant lines of poetry and form]. At the same time, I started learning Hebrew. When I received an extremely good grade from one of our Divan Literature exams (the language of the Divan Literature and Hebrew were very similar), my teacher was surprised. He summoned me to his office, and asked "How come even the best students in your class did not receive a grade close to what you received? How did you do this?" I told him that I was also learning Hebrew, and he was convinced. He gave me the highest grade that had ever been awarded to a student till that point. When I was a senior in high school, World War II erupted. It was from that point on that I started observing signs of anti-Semitism. Back then, every senior had to take a 'graduation exam' [this exam was one that every student had to pass right after graduation from the high school. It was not administered by the school, but rather by the government. Even if a student graduated successfully from his/her high school, it was not possible to be considered a high school graduate without passing this exam]. This exam covered subjects such as Turkish, Mathematics, Science and Philosophy. I liked all of those subjects. My Philosophy teacher had graduated from Sorbonne University. I remember that I was taking a Philosophy exam once; all of my friends had cheated from me. Realizing this, my Philosophy teacher had failed me... ... Every student also had to take what was called the university exams after graduation in order to be able to attend a university. Students who failed this exam had to enlist in the military. I wanted to attend ITU [Istanbul Technical University- it is the best engineering school in the country]. ITU accepted its students after only one test, but only the elite or really successful students, who came first, second or third in their class, generally made the cut. Because of the graduation exam, I forgot about ITU and began studying for this test. I received 8 out of 10, and finally graduated from high school.