

Nina At The BallNina At The Ball



My wife Nina Siltan used to go to balls with her brother before she married me. At the time, attending balls was quite an important event. In particular, the balls arranged by Or-Ahayaim Hastanesi(hospital) were attended by the top people of the community. A long gown and black suit was obligatory. My wife, Nina Siltan, was born in Beyoglu in 1932. She graduated from the St. Benoit Lycee. She has a brother and a sister. Her older brother, Salamon Siltan was born in 1928. He and his wife, Luna Barokas, have two children named Robert and Nora, who both live in Israel. My wife's sister, Selma Siltan, was born in 1940. She has two children named Davit and Sila. She lives in Istanbul. I met my wife at a restaurant in Yesilkoy [a county close to the Ataturk Airport. It is a luxury neighborhood known for its greenery and one-story houses] through one of my cousins. My cousin had seen my wife making home-made tomato sauce. He said it was very good tomato sauce [Back then, during the summer, people used to make lots of tomato sauce in preparation for the winter. Tomatoes were scarce during wintertime. One was considered to be a very good housewife if she knew how to cook tomato sauce, because this was a very rough task, and one had to know the ropes if she were to prepare it well]. My cousin believed that my wife could be a very good housewife, and so he wanted to arrange a proposition meeting between me and her [proposition stands for the arranging of a meeting between a woman and a man by a third party for the sole purpose of marriage. Back then, women and men, who had met by proposition, generally ended up marrying each other shortly after]. After my wife and I went out a couple of times, we decided to take our relationship to the next step, and began discussing our engagement. This, of course, marked the beginning of the dowry discussions between our families. [At this point, Mr. Arditi's wife, Nina, begins to reiterate those discussions.] At first, our families could not find a

compromise. My brother wanted to cancel the engagement. We had a summer house in Yesilkoy, and we used to go there a lot. Just as we were leaving for Yesilkoy, Albert's mother called. She asked my mother if she would accept the following terms for our marriage: Albert's family would agree to the dowry, but my family would first have to agree on what was called a 'mezafranka' [the term is used for a son-in-law, who lives with the family of his wife after the couple gets married. The duration of the stay is predetermined before marriage takes place. During this period, the wife's parents support the newly married couple financially. In this way, the couple gets a chance to save money. This process often became a subject of discussion during dowry talks]. Other dowry items (las kamas) such as bedding and pillow sets were to be provided by the bride's family. My mother accepted these terms, but she did not initially tell my father about the mezafranka and the bedding sets, etc. when he came home from work. That night, Albert and his family came over to our house. During this entire process, nobody asked what I had thought about marrying Albert. I actually had not made a final decision yet. I was not sure. I ended up being the silent party - if you will - in all this. That week, there was a bar-mitzvah at the Haydarpasa Synagogue. My parents sent me there as Albert's date; they thought it would be good for me to go. After all, he was *ijiko cudyo es* [Ladino term for "Jewish boy"]. All the guests at the bar-mitzvah thought I was Albert's fiancé. I remember one more thing. When I used to go to the summer cottage in Yesilkoy with my family, Albert would come, visit me there. I would expect to go and meet him at the train station, but he would ride a cab. When I asked him why he did not take the train, he would say to me "I could not wait for the train. There were 10 minutes left for departure." Albert never did like to wait for anything for too long; he has always been a quick-to-act type of person. When he visited me, he would tell me that he wanted to be the one to take me out and show me around. This, of course, flattered my pride tremendously. In short, I "*me topi espozada*" [Ladino term for "I found myself engaged"] to Albert, and "*no me demandaron*" [Ladino term for "they did not ask me"] - nobody asked me anything. In the end, my mother did tell my father about the mezafranka, and she took care of the other dowry items herself, using the money she had saved up. Our witness at the wedding was Dr. Garti, who at the time was the president of the Jewish Community and a Mathematics professor. My family is really big; we had so many relatives that we did not want to cause any trouble in the family by choosing one relative as our witness. By choosing Dr. Garti, we had the opportunity to avoid breaking anyone's heart, and to show our respects for the man.