

# Albert Ozlevi

ALBERT OZLEVI

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Albert Bey (Mr. Albert) and his wife Lusi Hanim (Mrs. Lusi) live in a beautiful flat in Gayrettepe along with their housekeeper. When I went to visit them for this interview, they were very hospitable. They are both very warm, pleasant and talkative people. Albert Bey is 70 years old, he stands out with his silver white hair and smiling face. Despite his age, he is very active and has an energetic personality. If Albert Bey is present in a gathering, that means that they are having a lively conversation. In the present, he is recuperating from surgery for a kidney problem, I wish him a speedy recovery and a long and healthy life.

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## My family background

I do not know where any of my great greatgrandfathers came from. What kind of a business they had to earn money, how they lived, what languages they spoke, I cannot know, because I have never been told anything about them.

My paternal grandfather, Sabetay Ozlevi was born in Edirne and lived there all his life. I do not know his birth and death dates. Our last name was really Levi. When the surname law [1](#) was passed, there were a lot of Levi's in Edirne. Some of them were given the surnames Delevi, some of them Allevi, and we were given Ozlevi.

I do not know their education level, I am guessing elementary school. Their mother tongue was Turkish and Judeo-Spanish. He was fairly religious. He was a quiet, inoffensive and a very serious man. The languages he spoke were Turkish and Judeo-Spanish.

My paternal grandfather dressed well, he dressed like a gentleman. He would wear a suit and vest, and a felt hat. He was always shaved, he did not have a moustache or beard.

His occupation was the making of stoves and tin materials. In his later years, he left his business to my father. The business of stoves and tins has been passed to my father from his father.

Apparently he said: "I am leaving my son a golden bracelet [meaning a lucrative career], I am retiring, from now on my son will take care of me" at the age of 55. In reality, he stayed with us until the day he died, sometimes he stayed with my uncle too, he lived there too.

My grandfather did not have specific political views. He wasn't a member of any political organization or party, neither was he a member of any social or cultural club.

I think he died at the age of 55. As far as I know, my grandfather did not have siblings.

My paternal grandmother Bohora Janti Ozlevi was born in Edirne. Because she was the firstborn they called her Bohora. I do not know her maiden name. She was a housewife. Her mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish and she talked a flawed Turkish. She always lived in Edirne. She died in Edirne in 1954.

I know she had about 8-9 siblings but I do not have any information about them. The only thing I know is that they all emigrated to Israel in 1948 as a group. When my grandfather married my grandmother, these siblings did not have a dad. Of course the subject of dowry was very important then. As a result, my grandfather married off his sisters-in-law to whomever wanted them. Because their financial situation was not very good, in 1948 when Israel was founded, all the siblings emigrated together.

My maternal grandfather Bohor Avram Rodrik was born in Dimetoka in Greece. I don't know the date. Afterwards he came and settled in Edirne. I don't know how he came or why he came. My maternal grandfather dressed more simply, he didn't take that much care. He did not have a moustache or beard, he was always shaved. He normally had a shirt inside his suit and in winters a short embroidered jacket over his shirt because he was out in the streets all day. He also wore a cap. He knew Turkish and Judeo-Spanish. They spoke Judeo-Spanish amongst themselves.

My grandfather did his military service in Syria, I do not know during which years. My mother used to tell that when she was around 5, her father went to the military to fight in the war, there probably was a war then, he stayed in the military for 4-5 years. When he returned disheveled with long hair and beard, my mother started crying from fear, not knowing who this man was. This is your father they told her and my mother did not believe them, my father cannot look like this, she said. Later on, he took care of himself, cut his hair and shaved his beard, looked like himself again. My maternal grandfather used to carry flour to the bakeries with a horse and carriage for as long as I remember. His financial situation was quite good. He even carried his merchandise himself, to earn more money.

My maternal grandfather had a fickle personality, at times he was very cranky, they even called him "Bohoraci el Kufur" [Ladino for the firstborn curser]. It means cranky as far as I can understand. At times he behaved in a very tolerant manner especially towards us. When my brother Yasar was born, they used to live in the neighborhood just north of us, we used to live somewhere called Kaleici, he would come to see my mother every Saturday morning after temple, at the time my father would also be home because the store would not be opened on Saturdays and my father never opened his store on a Saturday until the day he died, my mother would sit and complain to her father like all Jewish women do. My grandfather, I remember it so well, would not utter a word, he would only look at Yasar, caress him, would eat a sweet or borek (pastry) or a leftover from Friday night, and then leave without saying anything.

I do not know if my grandfather had any specific political views. He was not a member of any political organization or party, he wasn't a member of a social or cultural club either.

When the nation of Israel was founded in 1948, he went there to be with his middle son Izak Rodrik and he died there.

My maternal grandmother Rahel Rodrik was born in Palestine, I do not know when she was born or how she came to Edirne. I know she was a housewife and quite religious. She emigrated to Israel with my grandfather and she died in Israel.

Neither my maternal grandmother nor my paternal grandmother wore wigs like orthodox ladies. They did not wear scarves either. They both wore dresses called "fostan" during the day, made of printed cloth in summer and a woollen velvet fabric in winter. When they went out, my paternal grandmother would dress better despite her financial situation. They both had gold chains. My maternal grandmother had a long ring, it was very valuable.

My father's side of the family lived in a neighborhood at the beginning of the hill of Kurtulus okulu (school), I don't remember the name now, they lived there in a 3-room, one story house. The neighborhood where they lived was a good neighborhood. The life of my father's side of the family, and us 4 siblings was more limited. They had electricity in the house, I don't remember if they had running water or a well. They had a wood stove for heating, they would light that. They did not have nannies or women helpers in the house. They followed religion in a normal manner. They observed kashrut and the Shabbat. They would not light candles on Fridays in the afternoon after 4 p.m., since the Shabbat started. They occasionally went to the synagogue, not every Saturday. The Jewish holidays were always celebrated.

My mother's side of the family lived again in a 3-room house on a side street about 150 south of them. It was a one-story house on a big empty lot with a barn. At the time, the houses in Edirne were one-story and had bay windows. The furniture was better on my mother's side of the family. Their life style was also better. They had electricity in the house. I don't remember if they had running water. What I remember is that there was a well in the garden of the house. They would pull water out of the well especially on Fridays. They had something called reso to warm their house. It was a metal stove with 4 openings. It was European, all stoves were European anyways. There were no nannies or female helpers on my mother's side of the family also.

My mother's side of the family observed religion more. They observed kashrut, the Sabbath. On Saturdays the lights would not be turned on, candles were not lit. When they had to warm food, there was a woman called "deli [crazy] Ayse" in the neighborhood, she would walk the Jewish neighborhoods from one end to the other and light everyone's stoves. And they paid her something. When deli Ayse came, she would light the stove, the food would be placed on top, warmed up, and to turn it off, again Ayse would come. My grandfather would even be angry at my grandmother when the food was warmed and she took them down. My mother's side of the family would go to the synagogue every Sabbath and the holidays. My maternal grandfather was an usher in the synagogue. He was an usher in a synagogue in Tahtakale, I can't remember the name. There even was a kosher butcher there, I remember, they called him "Davit el shochet". When they had to cut chickens, it was done in that synagogue.

The Jewish holidays were always celebrated at home.

All their neighbors were Jewish. As a matter of fact it was a Jewish neighborhood there, I don't

remember the name. It was a Jewish neighborhood from one end to the other. It was adjacent to a highschool's lot. It was a long neighborhood from one end to the other. Their relationship with their neighbors was at a very good level.

My father Yasef Ozlevi was born in 1907 in Edirne, 1323 in the old calendar [Muslim calendar]. His mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish and Turkish, he also spoke French well. He dropped out the last year of Alliance 2 school, that is to say the first year [class numbers went from higher numbers to smaller ones, so grade 1 was the senior year]. If he hadn't dropped out of Alliance, they were about to send him to Paris, so he could study there and have an occupation. But my grandfather said: "why should I send him there, I will give him a gold bracelet" and took him under his wing.

Later on my father worked with my grandfather until my grandfather reached the age of 55 and decided to retire. Following that my father took over the business. His job was about stoves and tin materials.

My father went to the military twice, once when he was drafted and once for his normal military service. I do not remember the dates at all. I don't know about his regular military service, the second one he did in Sarikamis. He was drafted a second time because there was a war, during 1940-41. This was a military service just in case. I don't know what he did over there. My father was a very cultured and understanding person who did not show it. He was a little introverted, he was a very good person. He was a person loved by everyone. All his friends' financial situation was good, for example his friend Pepo Sarfati was a grocer, Bohor Bakis dealt in paper, another one of his friends was a seller of sundries and notions. They earned well. My father, on the other hand, was a small-scale retailer and had a family with 4 children and did not earn enough. According to the conditions of the time, artistry was an important career but did not pay well. I think that is why he was closed up, he felt oppressed. My mother also was more dominant than my father. I don't know to call it shrewdness or willpower, maybe that is why he was introverted. My mother's authority was more prominent on us. My father was more tolerant.

My father would go to the dairy barn at midnight, around 3 or 4 in the morning on summer nights to glue the cheese tins. He would come home in the afternoon around 4 or 5. This would go on from May till September. After September he would work on stoves. He would leave at 7 in the morning and return at 4 in the evening.

When they got together with friends, they would converse and play a card game called kumkam. He would go to the synagogue on Saturday mornings and nap in the afternoons. In the evenings, he would go to Gazi parki (garden) in summer, and to the movies in winter.

My mother Sultana Ozlevi (nee Rodrik) was born in Edirne, I do not know the date. Her mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish, and she had a flawed Turkish. As far as education is concerned, she dropped out of the 2.nd grade of the school of Alliance, therefore spoke French well. Her family placed her with a tailor so she could learn how to sew as soon as she left Alliance. My mother and father spoke Judeo-Spanish among themselves because my mother did not know Turkish well. My father would write her letters when he was in the military, "Dahling Pepo", her Turkish was so flawed that instead of darling she would say dahling. "I bought two loads wood, G-d willing we'll burn together in winter". Her Turkish was that bad. My mother was very smart, very talkative, very tough, like a dictator who never made concessions. She was the one in charge of the house.

This is how my mother and father met.

My father was between my uncles Izak Rodrik and Selomo Rodrik in age. He was friends with my younger uncle Izak. My older uncle considered himself older than them, he didn't pay attention to them. My younger uncle and father were friends in a group and my mother would tag along with this group and they knew each other from there. They were friends with the same group, the same people. From what my mother and father tell me, they liked each other since that time. My father liked my mother, and my mother was inclined towards my father. One day my father tells my uncle that he likes his sister and wants to marry her. My uncle relates this to his father, that is to say, my grandfather. My grandfather considers this positive, he is a good kid, he says. They give my father a very good dowry relative to that time but I do not know the exact numbers. My mother used to say every once in a while: "la dota ke tomates"(the dowry that you got), and my father said "i yo te tomi ke teniyas korason i todo"(and I married you even though you had heart problems and all). My mother always denied it but my father always said that my mother had cardiac problems before she got married. My mother and father would have sweet arguments sometimes. I believe my father in this regard. My father used to say "you had heart problems before we got engaged, my mother and father even said, don't marry this girl, she has cardiac problems, I married you despite everything". I think my mother had rheumatic fever when she was young, they used to hang laundry in the balconies under the conditions of the time, she did not pay attention to her clothing in the cold, caught a cold with the wind, and had rheumatic fever I suppose, I do not exactly know. My father married my mother despite everything. They got married in this way.

They married in 1932, in the synagogue in Edirne, they had a civil marriage before. My older brother was born in 1934. I am not sure exactly, I think they wanted a child rightaway but couldn't have one for one year. My mother was a very modern woman. She took care with her clothing. I remember, I was around 13 years of age, we had bought some kind of British fabric for a coat for 29 liras and my mother had it made. It was a coat that sparkled like snowflakes. My mother liked dressing my father up too. My father would leave the house with his tie and vest, like a count, on Saturdays.

My family's financial situation got much better when I turned 15. It wasn't very good before. When my brother won a store in the lotto and started selling draperies and haberdasheries, our situation started to improve. At the time the stores were given out by lotto, but they paid attention to their clothing. They would say, let it be one but let it be mine.

I think I was around 5 or 6 when we lived together with Madam Luna Bakis. When I was around 9-10, we moved to Kaleici. It was a 2-story, beautiful house. It had a yard next to it with big walls. There were 3 rooms, if I remember correctly, there was a kitchen, bathroom, there was something called pastera [Ladino for large basin] to bathe in, we took baths in it, there was no bathtub. I slept in the same bedroom as my older brother.

There was either 1 m. or 45 cm. height between the ground and the window in our room on the ground floor. There was a cushion in that room. One would sit on the cushion and watch the people coming and going. If you wanted to look at someone, you could lean down and look from the back.

We had running water from the taps, and we had a well. At first, we did not have a servant or a maid. After a few years, a woman started to come, a gypsy woman. She came every day, did not stay the night. The gypsy who came to our house was either 35 or 45 years old, she had no teeth in her mouth. Our parents and their friends, 3-5 people, would arrange for card game nights, "there

will be guests at night, Atiye, stay here” they would say. She would reply: “Noo, Sultana, I cannot stay, when it is nighttime I have to be in my husband’s arms”. She would never stay. When it was late we would take her to her home in the gypsy neighborhood in a horse-carriage.

We had books about religion at home, the novels that my mother read, and also comics like Tommix and Texas. We didn’t really follow the newspapers. There was no habit like going to the library. My parents were fairly religious. That is to say they were not overly religious. They observed the Sabbath and kashrut.

In my family it was my father who went to the bazaar. Because my mother had cardiac problems she did not go out much. They did not have specific merchants or sellers that they bought from.

Among the Jewish traditions, they observed the holidays, they observed kashrut a long time ago, I don’t know why we neglected it with time. They would go to the synagogue every Sabbath and every holiday.

There would be holiday celebrations at home. My mother tried to gather all the relatives especially during Passover. My aunt also would want to have all her family. There was a matriarchy in our house. They had the same matriarchy in my uncle’s home. My uncle was also a very good person, a quiet person, they had wonderful personalities. They probably did not want to quarrel with women so they were matriarchal too. My aunt would say I want my family. On the one hand, the family is very large, it will be too many people. As a result we did not celebrate with the family of my uncle, we celebrated with my grandfather’s family. At first we would go to my grandfather’s to celebrate the holidays. After they emigrated to Israel in 1948 my mother started gathering all the relatives.

Their friends, their neighbors were all Jewish. Anyways they were all from the same neighborhood, from Kaleici. For example, Luna Bakis was my parents’ friend for as long as I remember, and they stayed friends till their demise. There was Pepo Sarfati, the grocer Pepo Sarfati; we had a friend named Deyzi, her mother and father. There was a person they called “Pepo el Sobaci” [Ladino for Pepo the stoveman]. They were friends with 5-6 people like this. My parents did not go on vacations, there was no such thing as going on vacation then anyways.

Again during those times they did not know what a restaurant was. When I say they did not know I mean they didn’t go. Or maybe they did not want to go, I cannot know, after I turned 18, our family’s financial situation improved slowly slowly until it got to be quite well. I say our family because each one of us worked for the whole and the whole for each one of us. My older brother and I worked, my siblings were studying. When the one younger than me was in highschool, the second youngest was in elementary school. Even though there is 5 years difference between me and my younger lawyer brother, he has not suffered any of the pain I suffered.

My parents did not have active duties in the community. They did not participate in any political, social or cultural organization.

My mother’s funeral took place in Edirne in 1969, she had a heart attack. There were barely 10 people at her funeral. There were very few Jews left then. My father’s happened in Istanbul. He was buried here in Ulus cemetery. They were both buried with a religious ceremony in the presence of a rabbi. Of course I said kaddish for them. We bought 2 plots then. Following the burial of my father,

a few years later, we buried my mother also in Istanbul Ulus cemetery. One day we also had our undershirt cut for krya, according to the religion. We observe their meldados [Ladino for yahrtzheits] every year on the anniversary of their death.

My father had two siblings named Salvator Ozlevi and Rebeka (Krespi) Ozlevi. Salvator Ozlevi was born in Edirne, he sold dry goods and notions. He married Berta Ozlevi. They had a son, they named him Hayim Ozlevi. In reality they had several children, because they all died, they named their last child Hayim.

His sister Rebeka was born in Edirne also. She married Izak Krespi. They had two daughters. Rika Krespi (Franko) married Rifat Franko. The other daughter Inez Krespi (Reytan), married Moiz Reytan. When Rebeka married Izak Krespi, they had a store selling dry goods and their business did quite well. I do not know the reason, after a while they closed the store and settled in Cuba. After they lived there for a while they returned and settled in Ortakoy.

My mother had two older brothers named Salamon and Izak Rodrik.

The only thing I know about Salamon Rodrik is that he ran away to Cuba before 1936. He felt embarrassed because my grandfather would carry flour to bakeries with his horse-carriage. He himself, had finished the Alliance. He did not think this profession worthy of his father. However, my grandfather said this is how I earn my living. I do not feel embarrassment, he would say. He had a horse-carriage and his financial situation was very, very good. The barn was far away from the house. My uncle had finished the Alliance. My uncle said to his father, you either remove the horses from here or I leave. My grandfather said do whatever you wish. So he left for Cuba.

He lived as a bachelor, he never got married. I think he was a follower of Castro. At the time no one knew what he was doing. Apparently he was in jail. In a place called Isla Pipinos. In fact, he died in jail. He was a follower of Castro, but he got caught before Castro came into power and became a political prisoner. He died in jail before Castro ascended to power. I don't know how long he stayed in prison, but apparently quite a few years. He would write such letters to my mom, "The day will come, the grass will grow green and I will bring you here, you will have a very good life" he would write.

Her other older brother Izak Rodrik also left for the same reasons, he crossed the border with Syria, traveled over the Golan heights and went to Palestine. This is what my mother tells me. I do not know the dates at all.

My younger uncle had 3 children, two girls, one boy. The boy, Avram Rodrik died in a traffic accident at 13 years of age. The oldest one Zelda Sides lives in Israel.

The other one Henda, her husband is Ashkenazi, I do not remember their last name.

## **Growing up**

I, Albert Ozlevi, was born on May 3rd, 1936 in Edirne. We did not have nannies, babysitters in the house, I did not go to preschool at all. My mother raised me. We have 20 months between my older brother and me, we grew up together. Because I grew up with my older brother I grew up as someone older than my age. Because we were always together with my brother.

I don't remember what we used to do before school, of course we went to school when it was time.

I started school a year early. My grandfather used to carry flour to bakeries at the time. The principal of the elementary school was either the friend or best customer of the place where he delivered flour. As a result, due to his request, I enrolled into Gazi elementary school right below the the religious school that was below Selimiye Camii (mosque). My older brother attended Kurtulus Ilkokulu (elementary school) a little further down. These were public schools. My older brother and I are 20 months apart but because I started early, we were only one grade apart.

My favorite subject in school was math. I was interested in mathematics. I didn't like subjects like history that required reading constantly. Even then they used to call people who studied these subjects a nerd, they would say, are you behaving like a nerd.

My elementary school teacher Behice ogretmen (teacher Behice) was my favorite teacher. I had a friend named Cemil, we were very unruly. He was a year older than me, and he had an older brother, Zeki, due to his repeating grades, all three of us were in the same class. There would be special prayers for the dead in Selimiye camii (mosque) on Fridays. When there were prayers, there would be hard candy and Turkish delight underneath. The candy and Turkish delights would clink together in cones made of paper bags. We would get other papers beforehand and put the candy in it so it wouldn't make noise. First we would all go to the prayers together. I worshipped with everyone else. I would do whatever they were doing. With time these stayed in my mind. I studied a lot about Islam too, I was interested. Selimiye Camii (mosque) had 4-5 doors. The prayers would end, we would get out one door and get a cone. We would empty the candy in the cone into the paper we brought, otherwise they would clink in their original container. We would reenter from the same door, we would go out again from another door and get another cone from there too. We would get a few cones and go to school. There was the principal, Ihsan bey (Mr. Ihsan), he would wait for us at the door, twist our ears and say I will fail you in your class, because we ditched school and went to the mosque.

Behice ogretmen (teacher) was single and lived with her older sister. Even after I got married, I would go to kiss her hand on every holiday. We were unruly students but we were successful at the same time. We only did not like history. But we put in effort in the other classes. And she approved of us and liked us. She would protect us a lot at the time. Sometimes we ditched school, we would go jogging at a place called Tabya. Behice ogretmen(teacher) would protect jus, would not inform the principal's office.

One teacher I didn't like, there was a Turkish teacher in junior high, Tarik bey (Mr. Tarik). We were very mischievous, we would chat during class, we would act juvenile, for example we would make paper planes and throw them. Then the teacher would come, make a fist with his hand, extend his middle finger and bam, hit our heads. When he hit, it would come down like a sledgehammer. It was that powerful. Of course no matter how big the mosque is, the imam (prayer leader) would still do what he always does, he would hit, an hour later or the next day, we would repeat the same things.

I finished Gazi ilkokulu (elementary school) thanks to Behice ogretmen (teacher). I went to Ismet Pasha [3](#) elementary school in Kaleici before. On the very first day, in the morning, I had a fight with our next-door neighbor Niso Hazday, before we entered the classroom; they enrolled me in another school again in Kaleici, I did not last 2 days there either, at last they put me in Gazi okulu (school)



in Behice ogretmen's class, I was able to get an education there, I was very mischievous. I never felt any antisemitism among my teachers or friends.

I started working at nights making paper bags at the age of 11 or 12 in Edirne, after I quit junior high. I learned this career from my father's friend, Bohor Bakis, he was in stationary and I said I would do this job. I worked in a haberdashery store during the days.

I helped my family under the conditions of the time till I reached 15 years of age by producing paper bags during nights. Evidently, at the time, the bread you earned wasn't in the lion's mouth, it was in his stomach. As a result my older brother and I decided to undertake this job. Together, starting at 7:30 we would make paper bags at night. Waking up was at 6 a.m., a 12-year old boy, with a tote bag weighing 15-16 kg.s, wearing rough woollen, worn-out short pants, my whole legs would be raw from chafing in that cold. My pants were made of a hairy woollen fabric. But under the conditions of those days, that was indispensable. As a result, we would sell those paper bags in the farmer's market. Starting at 6.30, it would stretch from the place called farmer's market all the way to the mosque with 3 balconies around its minarets. And those paper bags, 10 kg.s of paper would be bought altogether, newspaper, there was a place called İkinci Köprü [Second Bridge], there some kind of glue called "paspal" would be manufactured with the residue of flour. The residue of flour is called paspal. You put flour in a pot, add water and and mix it well and make a paste out of it and this was used as a glue in the making of paper bags. By smearing this paspal on the sides of the paper bag, 6-6.5 kg.s would be gathered. As a result we would make a profit of 15 Liras with those days' money. We would also get 15 Liras salary weekly from the apprenticeship in haberdashery. We would both manufacture paper bags and sell them and work as apprentices in haberdashery. We would start work around 8-8:30 a.m. in the mornings. At the time the relationship between boss and apprentice wasn't like today, it was the concept of don't spare the rod. Consequently, you had to be at the store around 8-8:30 in the morning. The store had to be opened, the stove lit, the floors mopped, everything wiped down, so that at 8:30 the boss would come, drink his coffee. The store we worked at was a haberdashery but it was upscale haberdashery. There was Saraclar caddesi (street of leather goods), that was where our business was. The paper bag job, we did at night at home. Our work would go till midnight around 12-12:30. Because we were children then, around 11:30-12, my head would start to nod onto the counter with the paper bags both from exhaustion and my age, and my face would be covered in glue. I would be so sleepy that around that time, when it was later than 12.00, my mother and father would say: "ade ijo dela madre, presto vate a la kama" (come on, my son, immediately go to bed) and I would go to bed. My mother would wipe and clean my face with a wet towel. It was difficult getting up early in the mornings. But the desire and force to earn money continually pushed us.

There were a lot of horse-carriages where I lived in my childhood. Most of the main streets were paved stones. That means they were floored with stones. But they were done in an orderly manner. When they made these stones, they would get plumb lines, they would make them with plumb lines. Plumb lines are ropes with a weight on the end to measure the straightness of a wall. First they would do the center of the road from one end to the other, then the sides with a slight slope. The streets were very wide based on the times. Afterwards, years later when I took my children there to show our houses and where we lived, then it looked very small to me.

99% of our neighborhood was Jewish, but I don't know the exact number. The Jewish community was in the hands of one person only, I regret to say. Yuda Romano. Yuda Romano was the head of

Edirne community. There was Dr. Sarih Araz in the community, there was Moiz Kohen, there was Hayim Derazon. These were leaders and supposedly concerned people in the Jewish community. But Yuda Romano never allowed them to act, never gave them any responsibilities. Everything was in his hands. In a community there should be a directors' board, this or that, but there was no such thing here. They were like puppets. Whenever they dissented a little, Yuda Romano immediately would say "I am not here, take the keys". I consider this person as the cause of certain things based on my experiences. He would act without ever getting the board of directors' approval. He was like a dictator. For example when I was 13, I was going to mahaziketora <sup>4</sup>. There was a teacher called Mosyo (Mr.) Hason. He was a very polite, very self-assured, very knowledgeable person. One day Natan Eskenazi, Avram Mitrani and I, 3 friends, we went to the temple. We sat in the 2nd or 3rd row. Yuda Romano yelled "get up rightaway, rightaway, go to the back seats", he yelled a lot. We are obviously children, how dare he yell at us, we said we won't go to the temple again. I did not go to mahaziketora again after I was 13, we were 26 in the mahaziketora, my older brother and a friend of his were 1st and 2nd in the mahaziketora and I was 3rd. And I really liked it then. After that day, until I turned 33 when my father died and then 49 days later when my mother died, I did not set foot in the temple. There was also someone named Pinto, he later became the chief rabbi in the Istanbul sisli synagogue, even he clashed with Yuda Romano about some subjects, subjects I don't know about, and was obliged to come to Istanbul. There was someone else, a friend named Azuz, he served as cantor. What I am talking about is happening around the 1970's. He was teaching religion to the kids at the age of mahaziketora so well. The guy was saying, I can play poker if I want to have fun, I can sing and play, he had a very nice voice because he was a cantor, I am a cantor, he was saying, I will have fun as I see fit. Yuda Romano said, no, you have to be serious, and they couldn't get along and Azuz took off and left for Israel. All of this caused the community to slowly leave for Israel and Istanbul.

As far as I remember, there was a synagogue at a place called Kaleici, I don't remember the name, there was one in Tahtakale where my grandfather was the usher, there was one big temple, there was one mahaziketora, and there was one right across Cumhuriyet sinemasi (movie theater) on the top floor, in the 2nd room. There were 5 in total, I don't remember the names of any of them. There were religious members like rabbis, cantors ushers in these synagogues, but I don't remember the numbers.

I don't remember if there was a mikvah, Talmud Tora, or a yeshiva either.

All the Jewish traditions that are practiced now were applied in our home during my childhood, I can even say that they were carried out more strictly. For example, on a Passover evening when Alahmanya(Hebrew prayer) started, it would be read in Hebrew, and then repeated in Spanish.

I went to the synagogue every Saturday until I turned 13. After 13 years of age, because of the obvious incident, I did not go to the synagogue except for weddings or funerals until I turned 33. At the age of 33, when my mother and father died within 49 days of each other, obviously going to the synagogue is a must. My mother was a cardiac patient, she died from heart failure, 49 days later, my father has bleeding in his stomach even though he is a healthy man, he had hardening in his arteries genetically. Due to the hardening in the arteries, he experienced blockage. He was healthy as a horse, however. For example he would wrestle with us, 4 siblings on the upper floor in Edirne. My mother would yell from downstairs: "ya mestaj yikteyando la kaza"(you are bringing down the house). My father would say, don't worry, enjoy yourselves. He liked wrestling with us,

having conversations with us. My father would connect with us even though he was his own man.

The holiday I enjoy the most is Kippur. Normally, if I don't have breakfast in the morning, I get a headache, feel bad, I don't know why. On a kippur day even though we start fasting starting at 6 in the evening, the next day, I neither have a headache nor feel bad. I don't know if it is psychological or not. I go to the temple in the morning and I leave when kippur ends.

The Jews lived in two specific areas, one of them was called Kurtulus bayiri(hill), and the other a place called Kaleici. There were few people in Kaleici. The high society of the day, I can say. There was a big gap financially between the high society of the day and the other group of working people.

The Jews there had different jobs. There was more or less every kind of job, most were sellers of dry goods and notions. There were grocers, stove and tin merchants, greengrocers, butchers. The father of my uncle's spouse was a butcher. I do not remember the name.

We had electricity and running water in our homes. There was a rabbi in our neighborhood and we visited often. In my childhood, at first I used to go with my mother, then later I went with my father occasionally. Later on I went every evening. When I was very young, I remember my mother would take me to the hamam for women. All the ladies would be covered with towels up to above their breasts. The only thing I remember, they would say "serrate serrate" [Ladino for close up, close up] to each other, "serrate serrate ay kreaturas" [Ladino for close up, close up, there are children]. We would go to the hamam on Fridays, there were times when we went during the week too. After I grew up, there were times when I went every day.

When I was around 33 or 34, my mother was a very meticulous woman, she died from her fastidiousness anyways. We had an upper floor. One day she was going to clean up for Passover, the weather was very cold, there were tables called gypsy tables, she died of cardiac arrest while pulling them. I was in Istanbul then, we had just moved from Edirne, they called by phone.

We had to change underwear Tuesday morning, Thursday morning, and Friday evening, this was the law. Around 23-24 years of age, we went around with friends a lot, we drank, we would go to the hamam and lie on the marble all night to get rid of our toxins. We would get up around 5-6 in the morning because we had to go to work around 7-7:30. If we were late, we made fun among friends or merchants saying even the mayor went to work. We would leave the hamam, stop by the house and then go to work. We would lie down in the hamam all night. We would drink a little. We would lie down in our towels on top of the marble so the toxins would be eliminated.

When we were children there was no kind of antisemitism around here.

When I was young, there were military parades, special celebrations, or independence days in our city. At the time my only hobby was to play Mi bemol [E flat] clarinet in the band. I was an amateur bandmember starting at age 13. When I was in the band we went to practice every evening, after I turned 15, after this paper bag business was done. There were 7-8 people working in the band. For example, there was someone named Misel Ovadya, he learned trumpet there. My older brother played an instrument resembling the French horn, it was a blowing instrument but he didn't want to continue. We practiced in the old public building. Every evening, we went there to

practice. We learned the musical notes, we had learned the national anthem, the anthem of Izmir and such without knowing the first thing about music. I was an apprentice then. They would give us outfits for Liberation day, Independence day, or holidays like May 19th, or April 23rd [5](#), and we would play. Especially on Edirne Liberation day, they would put an arch for the liberation of Edirne, we, the bandmembers would be right across it. We would play anthems for official parades. At the end of the parade, there would be a bargaining about a cow between 2 peasants, most of whom were gypsies. It had become a tradition for every Liberation day, which was November 25th. A new mayor or a new public official would choke with laughter when they saw the bargaining. At first there would be a discussion of I will give the cow or I won't give the cow for about 15-20 min. When they were right in front of the arch, next to the mayor, they would be fighting about "what kind of a man are you, I sold it, no, I didn't sell it", one of them would come up short for money, who is going to vouch for him, they would turn toward the mayor and say: "Mr. Mayor, are you going to vouch for him?" The mayor would be stunned. Not knowing what to do, he would say, "I'll vouch, I'll vouch". Everyone would laugh, it was very pleasant. They would do this every year to a new civil officer.

I used to work on Saturdays. Starting when I was 13, the Jews began to open their stores on Saturdays. People wanted to do more business, I guess. I became an apprentice to Ilya Aziz on the street, he was our neighbor. He had an upscale haberdashery store. I worked there till I was 18. I had a very pleasant apprenticeship there.

We did not do much on Sundays until I was 15. That's because we worked on Sundays too, we made paper bags. We started going out at his age, our paper bag business was finished by then. We would go to the nightingale park on Sunday mornings, and Tugay park to dance with girls on Saturday evenings. This happens in summer of course. In winters we would read newspapers, magazines or periodicals, or play poker or backgammon at the city club.

In the old times there were 2 big clubs, Mericspor and Edirnespor and other small clubs. We would go to a game every Sunday, to watch it. We supported Mericspor because our Turkish friends played in it. There was rivalry between Mericspor and Edirnespor just like between Fenerbahce and Galatasaray [the two major soccer teams of Turkey]. We went to a game every Sunday, other than the game there was a park named Gazi parki, we would go there.

In our youth we loved to dance. We had parties at homes. This type of lifestyle happened after I turned 15. We couldn't even buy a gramophone then, or it wasn't bought for us. We would sing the songs ourselves "here is a tango for you, this is my last memory for you" and so on and we danced. Later on we bought a gramophone that was part of a huge furniture. But it was difficult to transport to houses, from here to there, the furniture was very heavy. My older brother was good at solving these type of dilemmas. Whatever he did, he separated it from its furniture and it became easy to transport it from house to house. We had great times. We had 3-4 groups of friends then. First of all, I don't remember the names now, we were 3 girls, 6 boys. The girls first moved to Istanbul, then to Israel. Others replaced them, we formed a new circle of friends.

I do not remember anything from the Thrace events [6](#), I know what I heard from my mother and father. During the Thrace events, our families moved to Istanbul. They all came to Istanbul because Jews were being kicked out. My parents are newly married, in one night, they sold all their furniture

and moved to Istanbul. They were afraid probably. My mother's father said I will not go anywhere and stayed there. My family stayed in Istanbul for 15 days or maybe a month and returned to Edirne. This time, Inonu gave a speech at the public house, gave reassurance to the Jewish citizens, saying things like "don't believe rumors".

My older brother Sabetay Ozlevi, he is 20 months older, he was born in Edirne in 1934, the one younger than me, Selim was born in 1941, and Yasar was born in 1949.

Because we were born close together with Sabetay, we started working together and were always together until we moved from Edirne to Istanbul on Jan. 1st, 1969. Even though we were 20 months apart, we grew up together, I tried to adapt to his age. Even our friends were together, anyways our friends were usually from my age group. He studied in Edirne highschool till 3rd grade in junior high. In 1964, he married Neli Nahmias who lived in Istanbul but was originally from Bursa. They lived in Edirne. He had two children named Yusuf and Hayati.

Selim, on the other hand finished highschool in Edirne, after highschool he studied at the law school in Istanbul, became a lawyer and started his career in Istanbul. When he was in university, he only came to Edirne in summers for vacation. He married Ida Barha. He had two sons named Yosi and Erol.

As for Yasar, he lived in Edirne too. He went to military service at 18 years of age. He returned to Edirne again after the military. In 1971 he moved to Istanbul with the whole family. He married a lady named Suzi, he had two daughters named Lora and Jale.

I was very young at the time of the Holocaust in Europe, I do not remember much of anything pertaining to that time. In 1940 we were in Karaagac. The European trains came to Karaagac, after Karaagac, it would go through Greece until it got to Uzunkopru then, now it is changed, and then it would go towards the direction of Istanbul. I remember very well, I don't know if it was German customs agents or policemen, they would get down from the European train with their sharp pointed helmets on their heads, walk around and reboard when the train was starting. The train was a passenger train actually, they must have been on duty. I remember this well.

There are things I remember my mother talking to my grandfather about, at the time my father was in the military.

There was a French newspaper named Parrot, I don't know if it is published in Istanbul or Europe. They called it "Jurnal Papagayo". The Germans came to Edirne until the Greek border and stayed there. I remember them telling this. During that time we went to Istanbul, to Ortakoy with my father's side of the family. We would sit at the edge of the water in front of the Ortakoy mosque and dangle our feet into the water with my older brother then. We would carry water to the house in pitchers from a fountain there on our way home. There was a Jewish grocer there, he would give us a hard candy each when we passed by.

I do not remember much of anything pertaining to the Wealth Tax [7](#) imposed during wartime but there was an anecdote that my father-in-law always told. My father-in-law's family was in Balat, he was around 12 or 13 then. When the Wealth Tax happened they called his father who was a grocer. His father was very ill at that time, he was in his deathbed, they took him to the police station with a lot of difficulty. The police chief took a look at his father being in such poor health, "take this man away quickly from here, neither I saw him, nor you saw me" he said. At any rate, he dead a very

short while later.

I remember the events of 6-7 September 1955 [8](#). We used to close up our store between 7:30-8:30 every evening. On our way home, there was the residence of the mayor on Cumhuriyet caddesi (Independence Street), we would pass in front of it. This place used to be illuminated with lightbulbs outside on holidays. When we were returning home on the night of September 6-7, we saw that the lights were on at the residence and we were surprised “my goodness, there is no holiday or anything, who knows who came or went that they decorated like this” we said. That evening we came home, there was no television then of course, we only listened to music on the radio so we were unaware of the events. The next morning we learned about the incidents against the Greeks, of course it rubbed on the Jewish citizens too, unwittingly. From what I heard, all the fabrics in Beyoglu were thrown to the streets, people with knives in their hands cutting up the fabrics, people looting and so on. Later we opened our store, a civilian officer named Bahri came to our store then “Albert my son, look someone might come, try to break the glass, who knows what he tries to do, you will run away immediately, you will yell for help. We are behind the wall of Is Bank, you yell help and we will immediately come, do not try anything” he said. They knew me, if it is a fight, fight I will. Like me, all the citizens in Edirne were told this. But Edirne is a very modern, very good place, nothing happened. I always say, my country is worth sacrificing for every stone, every piece of dirt. My best years were spent here. I still love it a lot.

I came from Edirne to Istanbul after I turned 33, I could never get used to Istanbul. Because they call a cross-eyed person superior in a country of blinds. We were people that were loved and respected there. Here on the other hand, you get lost, this is a big city.

### **My wife Lusi**

My wife Lusi Civre was born in Istanbul in 1949. Her mother tongue is Judeo-Spanish and Turkish. She got her education in Notre Dame de Lour, she dropped out in 3rd grade. She never worked. Women didn't really work in those days. We used to say what do you mean working, what do you mean studying.

Her father Kemal Civre had a business of shirts in Riza Pasa, he was a manufacturer and wholesaler. Her mother's name is Eliza Civre.

I met her through my father-in-law's uncle, Marko Civre, in Edirne, by matchmaking as was befitting the times. Being the man myself, we came to Istanbul one Saturday. My father-in-law's store was in Riza Pasa then. The people who arranged our union, Mesulam Telvi and Marko Razon, who were my father-in-law's neighbors, knew me well. They were originally from Edirne too. Marko Razon was in haberdashery, we were in haberdashery. When my older brother went to the military, I would take care of the haberdashery store in Edirne, in Alipasa, they knew me. Marko Civre, Marko Razon and Mesulam Telvi, all introduced me to them with the understanding that I am a really good kid. We left there, together with my current wife Lusi and our families, we went to Asiyen all together. We had tea all together. Later, they said “go on, take a stroll”. I was 27 then. We strolled together. In the evening, there was a place called Club 12, I took my wife there. The next day we met at noon again, there was a show at the sports arena, I can't recall what show it was, we went there. Before when we were walking, she said “ah, what a beautiful t-shirt” admiring a man's shirt when we were passing in front of a store. I immediately went in and bought it. I took off my shirt next to the sport arena in the open and put on the t-shirt. She liked this a lot.

I came to Istanbul every weekend for 3 weeks more or less, we went out together. In reality, my business wasn't that accommodating. Because we dealt in luxury haberdashery, Saturdays were our busiest days. There would be a lot of business because government employees were off. Edirne was a city of schools, there was no school Wednesday afternoons, there would be a lot of work, very good business transactions. After going to Istanbul 3 weekends in a row, we came to a decision and said "let's get engaged". My father and mother absolutely wanted me to get engaged. I was more interested in Muslim Turkish girls then. That is why they wanted me to get engaged rightaway. No one ever thought of assimilation then. We decided to get engaged at the end of 3 weeks. But my father-in-law had a condition, "my daughter is still young, you will marry in 2 years". I said fine. She was 14 then. They wanted her to continue school for two years. I did not accept that. "She will be with me, what school" I said. She should finish school they said. "No, her school is being next to me" I said and objected. As a result, while she was studying in Notre Dame De Lour, they had to remove her from school.

I came to Istanbul to buy merchandise every week, I even came twice a week at times. I would take her to Edirne during these trips and she would stay 2, 3 months with us. She would stay in Istanbul for a week or 10 days, then I would bring her to Edirne again. 2 years passed like this. My father-in-law had a second condition, "I want the wedding at Neve Shalom [9](#), I have a very large circle of friends" he said. We said o.k., and had the wedding at Neve Shalom. My father-in-law was much younger than my mother and father. They invited my parents to their home, they stayed there and slept there. A groom cannot stay in the house of the bride before the wedding, so I had to stay in a hotel in Sishane where the Jews from Edirne stay with my older brother. My sister-in-law had just given birth during those days.

The day of the wedding, we need to get lunch, so we eat navy beans etc. at a restaurant there, then we went to the hotel with my brother, got dressed and met my parents at the temple and went in. Later on my wife came, the wedding took place. My father-in-law had a pretty large circle of friends then, and together with people who had moved from Edirne to Istanbul who knew our family, it was a fairly crowded wedding. From there we went to Osmanbey, to the photographer Tanju, pictures were taken. Afterwords, my father-in-law invited us home, an afternoon meal was served. The evening took place in Ortakoy Lido. We wanted a covered place because it was September 12th, 1965. But because they reserved the inside for other people, there was an Armenian engagement party, they seated us outside in the open. We objected but could not convince them. But thank G-d, it was outside, the weather was so nice, we had a much better time. Besides, the people attending the engagement party in the closed place felt the need to go outside and came to our wedding. It was a pleasant wedding evening, we were about 90-100 people and we had a lot of fun. We spent the night in Bebek hotel.

On Tuesday, we had the circumcision of my nephew, the oldest son of my older brother, at 11. When we were strolling around on Monday morning, we decided to go to Bursa Cekirge, on an impulse. I immediately went to Karakoy. There, there was a baggage checkroom called Emanetci Sultana, we left the luggage there and went to Yalova by boat and from there to Bursa. We walked around in a park, went dancing, spent the night at the Gonluferah hotel. We had to get up early in the morning and make it to the circumcision by 11. In the meantime, we got our luggage from the baggage checkroom and barely made it to the circumcision. The circumcision was done at the Guzelbahce clinic. Circumcisions were done in hospitals then. After that we came to Edirne. We

rented a house there. We moved in with a Jewish person named Madam (Mrs.) Ameli. Our upper floor was the landlord. It was a house in ruins. There were gaps 2 cms wide in the windows, snow and the cold would seep in. Because we were on the first floor, the floor was linoleum then. Since there were gaps in the bottom, on very windy days the linoleum would sway slightly. We bought a coal stove for that place. There was so much cold coming in from the bottom that I would hold the thermometer at waist level, it would show 8 degrees, I would lift it, 33 degrees. There was so much difference in heat. We put a stove in the bedroom also. We lived there either a year or less. We moved to an apartment flat that was being newly constructed. We found our comfort there, all the rooms were heated with one gas stove. Until we came to Istanbul, we continued our life here.

## Family life

In the meantime, my son Yusuf was born on July 1st, 1966. He was born in Istanbul, but we still lived in Edirne. We had his b'rit mila at the hospital where he was born, Guzel bahce klinigi (clinic) in Istanbul. My mother had suffered a stroke, therefore one of her legs and one of her arms was not functional. My mother-in-law and I helped her carry the baby, which she did with great difficulty, afraid that she might drop the child. The circumcision took place. I remember this from that day. We used to tease my father. We used to say "dad, look, you have one grandson, his name is Yusuf, this grandson is also Yusuf. Too many Yusufs, instead let's give him the name Kemal (my father-in-law's name). Otherwise I would never think of such a thing. My father would only say one thing: "I will give everything I have, but even if I had 100 more children, I would name them all Yusuf. You can name him Ahmet, or Mehmet, the only thing that interests me is that during the b'rit, while he is being cut, they will call him Yasef Yusuf Ozlevi, that is the only thing that counts for me, I will give everything but I will not give this up.

My son Yusuf, started preschool in Sisli Terakki lisesi at the age of 3. Then he attended elementary school, junior high and highschool. We had his bar-mitzvah while he was in junior high.

We stopped by the grand-rabbinat for his bar-mitzvah. The grand-rabbinat said, o.k., we give you permission but first you will pay the kizba [10](#). I responded, look, I give my kizba every year in september or october, what do you mean. If you don't pay up now, we will not do the bar-mitzvah, they said. I paid every year whatever they asked, regardless if my financial situation permitted it or not. Why do you ask for this money now, I always give it in October every year, I scolded. I argued quite a bit with the people there. I said, I will definitely not pay it, don't do the bar-mitzvah. Get me Hayati Zakuto on the phone, I said. Hayati Zakuto was the person who determined my kizba, knew commerce well, and someone I loved like a brother. He was in charge of kizba coordination. They connected me to Hayati Zakuto. If I may be excused, I swore a little and told him what they were doing, that they were asking for this money from me. When he saw how upset I was, he said "Albert, please, be quiet, get me one of the people there on the phone now". After this talk, they said, sir, you can leave. I left muttering and complaining. This was like catching the sick man in his bed. I was paying my kizba every year, this rubbed me the wrong way. Such an event happened to me then.

Of course the ceremony, the bar-mitzvah took place on Saturday morning in the Sisli synagogue. There was the usher Niyego then. There was one other bar-mitzvah there that day, my son's best friend's bar-mitzvah. At the time you bought 3 of what we called mitzvahs at a bar-mitzvah. We bought these. My older brother had just gone through stomach surgery. They gave two of them to us, but they did not want to give the third. There were three mitzvahs, opening of the arc, adama



and I cannot remember the name, opening and closing. These services cost this much. In reality, there should be one bar-mitzvah in the synagogue at the time. That week there were 2 bar-mitzvahs, this should not have happened, I exploded. Years passed, I still do not greet Niyego, because he did not act ethically. There should have been one single bar-mitzvah. Actually, these are the things that alienate the Jews in Turkey from religion and the community. We invited our guests to Macka oteli(hotel) in the evening. It was a pleasant event, there was music, we had a lot of fun.

My son studied industrial engineering at the Istanbul Technical University after finishing highschool. He graduated in 4,5 years and then went to England to improve his English. He married Emili Ozlevi (Altaras) in 1992. Her father is from Tekirdag originally and is one of the best friends of my brother Yasar. After he returned from England he wanted to go to the military. In the meantime he was with this girl. We told him, you will go to the military, how are we supposed to treat this girl. His mother said "I want to know, if you are going to marry this girl, I will behave accordingly, think about it for a week, and let us know. A week later, he said "Mom, I will marry this girl". When he went to the military, he was assigned to Izmir. We went to see him a few times. We would board the bus with the daughter-in-law and go. These trips were tormenting. Later on he was transferred to Golcuk. We were on the islands then. We left the island, went to Golcuk, I showed my wife where to stay, where to go, after that, my wife went to visit my son along with her daughter-in-law every weekend, I did not because I was tired from work. Afterwards, my son came on leave at times, and completed his military in this way. After the military, they got engaged, the engagement ceremony took place and then they got married. We bought a house for my son, they settled there. They had two children named Alp and Eran.

We decided to move to Istanbul on 1.1.1969 and settled in Istanbul, in Sisli Kocamansur. In the meantime, my wife was pregnant with my daughter Cela. After we moved, my daughter was born on February 9th, 1969 in Istanbul. She studied in Sisli Terakki like my son. She started preschool at age 3, she was in this school through primary school, junior high, until she finished highschool. I did not send my daughter to the university after highschool, I was afraid she would be assimilated. I did not send her with the fear that she would hook up with someone and become assimilated. We made the biggest mistake, her mother and I. To be honest, I wanted it, my wife didn't. I had the power to enroll my daughter in the conservatory. She had a talent for music, her ear and voice were very good. My wife said "kualo calgici levaz azer"(what, you are going to make her an instrumentalist). And the matter rested. While we were telling her to go to special courses, go here, go there, she married her ex-husband Jojo Motola. She had a son named Melih. For various reasons, the marriage did not work and they separated at the end of the 5th year. My grandson Melih Motola stayed with my daughter. Today, they still interact with each other quite well. They do not create problems for the sake of their son, my daughter is now an exporter, she works in textiles, exports dresses and blouses.

We generally spoke Turkish with our children. We spoke Judeo-Spanish at times so they would learn. Today they understand Judeo-Spanish but they cannot bring themselves to speak it.

We tried to raise our kids according to Jewish traditions. We used to celebrate all the Jewish holidays. We did whatever was necessary. We even bought the presents on the holidays. The children know the religion but they do not go to the synagogue much.

While the children were growing up, we would go to the movies, theatre, concerts all together. I especially loved the movies. The movies are still my hobby. I like listening to music in my spare time.

Other than this, we used to go and see friends and families most of the time. We visited with all the relatives. We couldn't go on vacations for a lot of years. Until 1974-1975. After this date we went to Buyukada for the summer for one year. I do not know the reason, it did not sit well with me, we did not go again. After two years we moved to Suadiye during summers. 7 friends, we lived in the same apartment. All were Jews. The landlord in the apartment was our friend too. We went there every summer until the 1980's. We had very pleasant days there. We still recall and miss those days.

The birth of the Israeli nation made us very happy of course.

We thought about doing an aliyah there but we couldn't because when the Israeli nation was founded my mother had a knot inside. Her older brother rotted in Cuba in jail for the sake of an ideology, another brother went to Israel alone for years and years, was burned out and died at a young age. My older brother and I even went on a hunger strike within our means. Consequently, my mother said, I will go with you, I will not leave you alone. This time, we are still working, my mother sells one or two chairs at a time, time passes, she sells an armchair, slowly, she empties the whole house. This lasted 2 years, our passion, desire to go, sizzled completely because in the meantime we had started earning money. Our life had become more comfortable, more leisurely. As a result, this idea was slowly erased all by itself. And my mother was obliged to rearrange the house.

A lot of acquaintances left to settle in Israel. Two of my best friends, Avram Mitrani and Natan Beskenazi settled there. These two left in 1948, they returned a while later for some reason that I do not know, they left again in 1958 before going to the military. During those years, some of the Jews in Edirne left for Israel, some for Istanbul, and some for other countries, and slowly, in time, they all left Edirne. Slowly, there was no longer a community, a rabbi, a rabbi would come to butcher animals twice a week.

Edirne was a modern place, we never had any problems.

Today I am not a member of any special organisation or club. I do not have any activities involving the community, my wife was active in dostluk yurdu dernegi(home of friendship, a Jewish organisation) for close to 20 years.

I carry out everything pertaining to religion today. I go to the synagogue every Saturday without fail.

I do not use the internet or e-mail to communicate with my family.

I did not have any disagreements with my children about raising our grandchildren according to Jewish traditions but I wanted my grandchildren to attend mahaziketora<sup>4</sup>, but one of my kids said, not necessary, the other said we'll see, now there is the internet, they can learn from there when they want to, they did not favor sending them there.

Today my wife still cooks and gathers the family.

Our grandchildren do not attend Jewish schools. For a while, my daughter's son went to the Jewish school for a couple of years, but I think it was not challenging and she transferred him to another school.

In 1986, when the Neve Salom massacre happened [11](#), I had just started opening a factory, rather a workshop, for machine-knit fabrics, that day I was involved in this business, I was very upset when I heard it.

I was in the Sirkeci synagogue the morning of the bombing in November of 2003 [12](#). There was a rumor of a bombing for a while but no one quite understood what happened. Our usher, Yusuf Reyna tried to finish the tefila(prayer), saying nothing happened. I normally keep my phone turned off but that day I forgot to and my phone rang, my son said where are you, I said I am at the temple. How can you still stay there, two synagogues were bombed, he said. We left the tefila halfway and went out. In reality, it was wrong for the usher to try and finish the tefila, something could have happened here too, we should have evacuated rightaway. Of course we were very upset with the events.

We always speak in Turkish with my wife, when we are alone or when we are with friends or our children.

## Glossary

[1] Surname Law: Passed on 21st June 1934, in the early years of the Turkish Republic, requiring every citizen to acquire a surname. Up to then the Muslims, contrary to the Jews and Christians, were mostly called by their father's name beside their own.

## [2](#) Alliance Israelite Universelle

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum; nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865, then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople in 1867, Shumla (Shumen) in 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those that had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

## [3](#) Inonu, Ismet (1884-1973)

Turkish statesman and politician, the second president of the Turkish Republic. Ismet Inonu played a great role in the victory of the Turkish armies during the Turkish War of Independence. He was also the politician who signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, thereby ensuring the territorial integrity of the country as well as the revision of the previous Treaty of Sevres (1920). He also served Turkey as prime minister various times. He was the 'all-time president' of the CHP Republican People's Party. Ismet Inonu was elected president on 11th November 1938, one day after Ataturk's death. He was successful in keeping Turkey out of World War II.

#### **4 Mahaziketora**

Talmud Torah, Sunday school where Judaic religious education was given to Jewish children.

**5** National Sovereignty and Children's Day: National holiday in Turkey. Kemal Ataturk dedicated 23rd April, Sovereignty Day, to the future generation. It was on this day in 1920, during the War of Independence, that the Grand National Assembly met in Ankara and laid the foundations of a new, independent, secular, and modern republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Ever since 'Sovereignty and Children's Day' has been celebrated annually. It is celebrated at schools with performances and the children replace state officials and high ranking bureaucrats in their offices. On this day, the children also replace the parliamentarians in the Grand National Assembly and hold a special session to discuss matters concerning children's issues.

**6** Thrace events: In 1934, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, anti-Semitism was rising in Turkey too. In fear of disloyalty the government was aiming at clearing the border regions of the Jewish population. Thrace (European Turkey, bordering with both Bulgaria and Greece) was densely populated with Jews. As a result of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the rightist press riots broke out, Jewish property was looted and women were raped. This caused most of the Jewish population to leave (mostly without their belongings) first for Istanbul and ultimately for Palestine.

#### **7 Wealth Tax**

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

**8** Events of 6th-7th September 1955: Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries

were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of immigration occurred after these events and Istanbul was cleansed of its Greek population.

**9 Neve Shalom Synagogue:** Situated near the Galata Tower, it is the largest synagogue of Istanbul. Although the present building was erected only in 1952, a synagogue bearing the same name had been standing there as early as the 15th century.

#### **10 Kizba**

(Hebrew for 'taxation') Turkish Jewish community organization, which collects the annual taxes from community members.

#### **11 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue**

In September 1986, Islamist terrorists carried out a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the Neve-Shalom synagogue, killing 23. The Turkish government and people were outraged by the attack. The damage was repaired, except for several bullet holes in a seat-back, left as a reminder.

#### **12 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues**

On 15th November 2003 two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues. The terrorists drove vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside, however, 26 pedestrians on the street were killed; five of them were Jewish. The material loss was also terrible. The terrorists belonged to the Turkish branch of Al Qaida.