

# Moiz Isman

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Istanbul

Turkey

Interviewer: Meri Schild

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The interview with Moiz Isman took place in his summer house in Burgaz, one of the Princes' Islands, a popular resort in the Sea of Marmara. Moiz Isman has been spending the summer season in his summer home in Burgaz for the last 65 years. He lives on the second floor of an apartment building, which is located in a very well-cared garden. It is quite a large flat, for only summer use. The house has 3 bedrooms, a modernly decorated living room, a very big balcony with a sea view, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Unfortunately, he has been a widow for 16 years, and has chosen to live alone. He's such an orderly person that his house always shines. His lively personality, which spreads positive light all around him, surrounds one immediately. For this reason, speaking with him is very pleasurable. He always listens and gives advice. This is why all the family members are very close to him. He is someone who knows how to be young with youngsters. In spite of his old age, he shaves every morning, and does his daily shopping. He meets with his friends everyday in the summer, and chats. At noon, he always dines at home, and then takes a nap. In the afternoon, he again meets with his friends and plays backgammon.



[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[After Ataturk's death](#)

[My wife Suzan](#)

[Family life](#)

[Glossary](#)

## My family background

I don't have much information or memories about my paternal grandparents. I only know that paternal grandfather's name was Moiz Menase and that he was married to Ester. They had lived in Istanbul but I don't know in which neighborhood they lived in. My father didn't tell me much about them. They died before I was born.

My mother's father, Rafael Adevah, was married to Ventura. Unfortunately, I don't know my grandmother's last name. Educated people were very rare in those times. My grandmother and grandfather spoke Judeo-Spanish amongst themselves like in all the Jewish homes. They only knew this language. The heating of the houses was less than perfect. The only stove would be in the living room, and the rest of the house would be cold. After he came home at night, my grandfather would wear a kind of long robe called "Kurdi". This was a thin coat, with fur lining. He had his own corner in the living room, where he would drink his glass of uziko [raki]. [1](#)

According to what I used to hear from my mother, my grandfather sold glassware items. I don't know where and how he sold them. Did he have a shop? I don't know. Like all Turkish men, my grandfather threw away his fes [2](#), and wore a hat, after the Hat Law was passed. My grandmother used to wear a dress like today's ladies. She didn't have a "sheet" [garment covering a woman, from head to foot, which is what the Moslem women used to wear], nor did she wear a wig like very religious ladies did.

When I became aware of myself and my surroundings, neither my grandfathers nor my grandmothers were alive. They had died young. I really have no idea when. During those times, my grandfathers had no interest in politics. They didn't even know what politics was. They hadn't served in the army. I suppose Sultan Abdulhamid [4](#) was in reign, and non-muslims weren't even drafted. [5](#)

My mother Fortune Adevah, was born in Istanbul, in 1882. My mother had 10 sisters, and one brother. I remember some of their names: Luiza (f), Roza (f), Recina (f), Ester (f). My mother was the most beautiful one amongst the 10 sisters. All of these sisters emigrated to the States and got married there, when I was only about 10 years old. I remember them vaguely. The only memory I have left from them is that sometimes they used to send 10 dollars in an envelope as a present to my mother. I used to exchange these dollars into Turkish liras. At that time, one dollar was 180 kurus. [one lira = 100 kurus]

From my aunts, Esther, went to Cuba from the States. She married someone named Baruh. They had two daughters. (I don't know the name of her husband, nor her daughters' names.)

My aunt Luiza married someone whose surname was Biton in the US, and had a son named Rafael. Rafael Biton was a taxi driver. He came to Istanbul during 1935. He found us and stayed over at our house for a week. We were the same age and had a very nice time together. Later on we lost each other again.

My mother was educated up to primary level. She studied at the school in her neighborhood but I do not remember the name. Unfortunately during those times the literacy rate was very low. [It was the introduction of the Latin script for Turkish (1928) that made literacy more widespread.] Naturally my mother's mother-tongue was Judeo-Spanish, and her Turkish was almost non-existent. Because they didn't have any Turkish speaking circles, there was no reason to force herself to speak Turkish. She was the head dressmaker at the firm called "Stregilo" (sewed shirts and blouses for women) in Beyoglu. She trained [vocational] students there. My mother also spoke very good Italian. (I don't know how or where she learned it.)

My father had two sisters, whose names were Viktorya and Sultana. Sultana, the eldest sister, was born in 1863, Viktorya, on the hand, was born in 1869. During 1889, Viktorya married a gentleman

with the surname “Yerushalmi”. (I don’t remember his first name). Unfortunately, her husband died after they had been married for two or three years. She didn’t get married again. She lived at our house for a long period of time. My aunt Viktorya knew very good English. I suppose that she was a teacher at the High School of the time. <sup>6</sup> She was a very unfortunate lady. When she had something wrong with her eyes, she had to quit her work at the school. She volunteered to work at the ‘La Paix’ Hospital, where she also received treatment for her eyes. (I don’t know what she did there, she probably helped the nurses, etc). She lived as a boarder over there during the last years of her life. (I suppose being there caused her to draw apart from Judaism and to choose Christianity. She had no other chance of staying therefore free). But in spite of everything, after I got married to Suzan, she always visited my aunt Viktorya, and cared for her. Viktorya died between 1978-1980. She had a daughter, named Mari. Mari grew up and got married in Istanbul. Later on she moved to Israel with her husband. She had two sons whose names were David and Daniel. They were both stove fixers/installers and house painters. I don’t know what they did afterwards, I lost track of them.

My aunt Sultana was born in 1863. She probably studied up to the primary level. She married Eliya Guakil, who came to Istanbul for a touristic stay as he had emigrated to Mexico from Istanbul before. (I don’t know much about Eliya). They lived in Istanbul for two years, and then they moved to Mexico. They had two sons whose names were Moiz and Albert. (I don’t remember the dates). There, aunt Sultana’s husband went into the oil business, and they got very rich. We exchanged letters for a long time, but later on we lost contact.

My father Salamon, was born in Haskoy, in 1869. He went to the Jewish primary school. He did his military service in the Dardanelles War in 1914 during the First World War [7 see: Ottoman Empire in World War I]. He didn’t have a job in Istanbul when he was young and in his 20’s. So he left, and went to try his luck in France. He went to Marseilles by ship. He opened up a haberdashery store there. He lived there for 17 years, married a Jewish lady, and had a child. One day there was a fire that started due to an electric short circuit in the store and unfortunately his wife and his child were poisoned by the smoke of the fire. Losing both his wife and his son, was too terrible for him, so he came back to Istanbul when he was around 37-38.

My father experienced some sort of a detective story event when he was in France. My father had a partner there. They used to go to the neighboring villages on horseback to sell goods, with their dog accompanying them. During a trip like this, one night, when it started to get dark, they went to a guesthouse. They ate their dinner and went up to their rooms. Near midnight, the dog started barking constantly. My father and his partner felt as if their beds were being pulled somewhere from below. Thank God, they had their pistols with them, and fired into the air. The gendarmes heard the noise and took control. Apparently, the husband and wife, who were the owners of the guesthouse, used to pull the guests down somehow and kill them, in order to steal their goods. Afterwards, they used to sell the goods, as if they were their own.

My father was 40 years old when he returned to Istanbul. His time to get married had come. His circle of acquaintances introduced my father to a lady named Fortune Adevah, who had been born in Istanbul in 1882. They decided to get married after a while. When they got married during the years of 1911-1912, my mother Fortune was 38 years old. They got married at a ceremony done at the office of the chief rabbi, as there was no civil marriage then. [Civil marriage was introduced in 1923 in the new Turkish Republic] I don’t know whether they had a party after the ceremony.

## Growing up

I Moiz Isman [According to Sephardic traditions, the first boy born in the family was given his father's father's name.] was born from this marriage on the 25th of December in 1913, in Buyuk Hendek, Istanbul. [Jewish district on the European side of Istanbul]

In 1916, my sister Ester was born. [In Sephardic tradition, the first girl born in the family was given her father's mother's name. The second child is named after his maternal grandparents.] Unfortunately, Ester was a handicapped child. She was born with the "Down Syndrome", and she died when she was 9 years old. That was the saddest event in our family.

My mother was a very good housewife and a very gentle mother. As is usual in all the families, my mother managed my father. My father was a very clever, cheerful person who really had a sense of humor. He had a very gentle heart and loved me very much. I grew up in a very peaceful and understanding family. Both my mother and my father shopped for home. They had certain stores, which they shopped from. My mother continued going to her workplace, once a week as a part time job in Beyoglu, [Beyoglu, then called "Pera", the neighborhood of the time where the most fashionable stores, cinemas, cafes and etc... were located] after having gotten married to my father. She received her payments on a daily basis.

The main language spoken at home was Spanish [Ladino]. My father also spoke very good French. I also learned this language, after starting school. My mother only knew Judeo-Spanish. Sometimes salesmen came to our door to sell something. When they spoke Turkish a bit too long, she would call me and say "Ven Moiz; ke me esta embutujando" [Moiz come and see what this man is trying to cheat me with].

My family wasn't very religious, consequently they went to the synagogue only at Roshashana [Rosh Hashanah] and Kipur [Yom Kippur]. All the festivals were celebrated as they were supposed to be. My mother did kol hamira in Pesah [Pesach] [Hebrew for cleaning of the house till no chametz is found] During Pesah [Pesach], besides cleaning the house thoroughly, we used special cutlery for the festival. Twice a year, at the Roshashna and Pesah festivals, new outfits and shoes were always bought for me. We spent Pesah evenings with my mother's sister's family, Rashel Beraha, her husband Robert and their children Ceni, Moris and Rafael. We weren't too many, we would be 7 to 8 people at the table. Sometimes at "Noche de Shabat" [a sephardic term used to designate Friday nights], we would light our candles. We fasted at Kipur [Yom Kippur]. Though we didn't pay attention to "kasherut" [kashrut], kasher [kosher] meat was always bought for our home. My family didn't have any effective roles in the community, they were common members. We were as if in a ghetto, all of our neighborhood, and neighbors were Jewish. We were together during all the festivals and always had long chats at homes.

My interest in the prayers, and the synagogue being closely located to our home, made me go to Tefila [tefillah], Arvit and Minha [mincha] prayers every day when I was a child. My father sometimes came along with me during Shabat [shabbath] nights. Like all "Judyos" [Ladino for Jews], I had my Bar-Mitzva. I did not have any special celebration, just the ceremony at the synagogue.

Upon his return from France to Istanbul, my father, together with a partner, rented the store at the location of Yapi Kredi Bank, across today's Neve Shalom. They used to collect furniture from

houses. They repaired them, increased their value and sold them. In this way he became a furniture dealer. They used to sell also antique furniture. There were also pianos at the store, which were collected from houses. I used to go over to my father's, to have chats with him and to play the piano, everyday after school was over. My father was the breadwinner. Though our financial situation was not very good, we were still better compared to many. We managed to get by. He liked spending for his home and his family when he had money. He had a rich heart and liked spending lavishly.

We didn't have the concept of today's "going on holidays", then. We sometimes went on picnics as a family on Saturdays to Hunkar [a picnic place on the Black Sea]. We would lie on the grass, and swing on the swings. We sometimes went there by boat, sometimes by tram. These vehicles did not take us up to the picnic area, therefore after a certain point we would continue with horse carriages called "Talika". Among the members of our family, we would only meet with my mother's sister, Rashel Beraha, very often. She didn't go to the States like her other siblings, because she had gotten married here. Her daughter, Ceni Benefrayim (after the marriage), is still alive, and though not very often, we meet or exchange calls. Her husband is the owner of the shop, Rubo, selling textiles, in Osmanbey. However, due to the metro constructions going on in that street, their business did not go well and they had to close down the shop.

We lived in a house in Kuledibi, till I was 5-6 years old. [popular neighborhood amongst the Jews, located on the European side] Later on, we moved to Azapkapi. [the lower part of Kuledibi] It was my grandfather's house, we inherited it from him. We stayed at that house, till I was 15 years old. I remember this house of ours very well.

It had a living room which we called the salon, two bedrooms, and also a very small third room. [like today's larder]. We used to put this and that in that room, and whenever it was needed, I would sleep there. The floor was wooden. We had long mattresses, table and chairs, and a "Boron" in our living room. ["Boron", a sephardic term, was a closet with a mirror, which had 4 to 5 drawers. We would keep the sheets and the towels in it]. My father had brought a phonograph home from his shop. Listening to records on the phonograph was very nice. We had a closet with a mirror in our bedroom. If I had been able to save it till today, it would probably be a very valuable antique piece.

There wasn't a bathroom in the houses of that time. We had a traditional "alaturka" toilet, in a separate part of the house. [Old fashioned toilet, before modern water closet got widespread.] My mother washed the laundry by hand, because we didn't have a washing machine. Of course, we also had a small kitchen. We had a wired cupboard, kept outside a window that did not get any sunlight, instead of a refrigerator. Our food was kept there. We had a backyard and a well, too. Besides the fruits we dangled in the well, we also kept my father's Uziko [raki] there, in order to keep it cold. My father also wore Kurdi [a thin coat, with fur lining], like my grandfather.

We first used a big brazier for heating, and of course burned coal. Later on we started coughing continuously. When we investigated why, we found out that we were slowly being poisoned by the fumes that the coal produced while burning. Upon this, my father brought a very nice porcelain stove. We used to cook coffee, quince, and chestnuts on that stove. We were burning wood then. 250 kilos of firewood would cost 125 kurus. It was very easy to light that stove, my mother used to do it. Only the living room was heated with this stove. Of course it was not sufficient enough to

heat our house, which was made up of three rooms and a kitchen.

We had running water, when we started living in that house, but of course there were some houses which had no running water. These households had to carry their water from the fountain in the neighborhood, in barrels. That was very hard.

Generally, Tuesdays and Fridays were our bathing days. If there was a necessity, of course we would take baths on other days. We would place a big washtub in the room with the stove. And we would mix cold water, with the water heated in a large pan, called “gugum”, and take our baths. The floors were wooden. We would remove the rug, and dry the floor after the bathing was completed, then we would put the rug back. Though we were taking baths at home, I would go to the Hamam [Turkish bath] called Abbas Efendi, across my working place in Karakoy, every 10 or 15 days. The women of the families would also go to the hamam, before festivals. On the other hand, my father didn’t go to a hamam much.

Our first means of lighting at homes, was karosene lamps. I studied in candle light, when I came home from school. The electricity at our home was connected either in 1922 or 1923. Our financial situation was just enough to support us, and thus my mother was responsible for all the housework. We never had any maids.

We had a completely white cat, called Pamuk [cotton], like the Ankara Cat [Ankara or Angora Cat, is a breed, known for its long hair, it is often all white, with one eye green, the other eye blue]. I liked Pamuk a lot, but the real responsibility was on my mother. She took care of him. When he aged and died, both my mother and I cried very much.

We didn’t have anything like a bookshelf at home. I liked reading a lot. Sometimes I used to read detective novels, sometimes scientific books. I read Journal d’Orient [8](#) from the daily newspapers. At the time, the concept of a library did not exist. My family wouldn’t know such a place. I would usually rent the books which I read, from school, or sometimes buy them from a bookstore. I read the novels (detective and dueling stories) of the writer called Michel Zevaco [French writer who wrote novels about knights and duelling and chivalry], and was very fond of them. This is why I learned very good French.

I was always interested in electric wiring and devices since my childhood. We would buy supplies with my neighbor Jojo Sosino and make a lot of things together in ‘Selanik Han’ [Salonika office building]. We made a little portable radio together with him. When the first sound recording machines were launched, I had already invented some sort of recording machine. Sometimes it recorded, sometimes not. It worked in the same manner as a radio did. Actually, it was more Jojo’s invention. Though Jojo was 6-7 years younger than me, he was very skillful in such things. After completing his master’s in engineering, and his military service, they emigrated to the States as a family. Jojo started working in NASA and is still working there. His elder brother, Rifat Sosino, on the other hand, became a reformist rabbi in Montevideo. Their father, Albert Sosino, worked as the headmaster of the B’ne Berit school [Bnai Brith] for a while. He had a lot of information about the Tora [Torah], and thus prepared our children’s Bar Mitzva [Bar-Mitzvah] ceremonies’ speeches.

Later on we moved to a house on Bankalar Street [a street in the Jewish district on the European side], across the “Goldschmith” [Ashkenazi school with German and Hebrew as languages of instruction] school. I lived in this house till I met and got engaged to my late wife.



There were neither horse carriages, nor cars, in the neighborhoods I was brought up. Everyone walked to wherever they were going. The streets were cobbled. I suppose we were 40-50 families in the neighborhood. Besides the Knesset Israel [the synagogue in the neighborhood], there were synagogues in Balat and Haskoy [the other Jewish neighborhoods around] (The Sisli Synagogue and the Neve Shalom Synagogue were opened later on). It was a typical Jewish neighborhood. We had two Shohets [shochetim] (unfortunately I don't remember their names). These people also did Berit mila [brith millah] besides doing the shohet [shochet] work. We had Palachi, the hazan [hazzan]. Our chief rabbi was "Rafael Saban" [he was the grandfather of Rifat Saban, who was the president of the Jewish Community in 1998]. We had the "Azara" [azarah] [the place where women sat in the synagogues]. There gathered around 30-40 women at Keila Shabat [keillah shabbath] [the prayers done on Shabat nights]. I've been going to synagogue every Friday and Saturday since I knew myself.

We used to play football and volleyball with the children, who were the same age as us, on the empty field next to the school, in our free time. All of my friends, were either from school or from our neighborhood, thus 98% of my friends were Jewish. We had a football team, called "Etoile" ["star" in French]. I always played in the matches, because I was a good forward player. We played in this team for 5-6 years. I played ball on the island till 10 years ago, but now I only play bezique and backgammon.

During World War I, a British unit used to live in Arapyan Inn, which was behind our neighborhood. The British, who did not have anything to do, used to play football, on the open field near the Inn. One day, when the British were playing football, the ball bounced from the foot of one of them, and flew directly into our house, breaking the window. The British, who did this, apologized a lot. My aunt [father's sister] was living with us then, and her English was perfect. She told the British soldier that he can only get his ball back, after he fixed the window. I remember playing with that ball at home, till the window was fixed.

I started primary school, at the Alliance Israelite Universelle [9](#) at Kuledibi, Yazıcı Sokak. Our friends and teachers were all Jewish. Our language of education, which was French during the first years of our schooling, became Turkish after the foundation of the Republic [1923] There was no French after that in the Jewish schools. There were also Hebrew classes at our school. There were also two Muslims students in our class. These students were free not to attend the Hebrew classes. They were free to stay in the class, if they wanted to learn another language, because the lessons weren't about religion. We also had Turkish teachers at our school, after the foundation of the Republic. I was a very hard-working student, and my head-master always sent congratulations home, which made my father extremely happy. Later on, the yearly fee of the school became 13 liras. 13 liras would meet the expenses of a family of three for 15 days. My father's business wasn't doing very well during that time. At the suggestion and the advice of my head-master, I entered the Jewish High School with a scholarship, and graduated from there. Most of our teachers were Jewish. Miss Pardo came for literature, Mr. Natan for math, Miss Sidi for foreign language, and Mr. Goldenberg for music. I did not differentiate between the lessons, and was interested in all of them, and studied hard.

Before the foundation of the Republic [10](#) our school was closed on Fridays right after noon and was opened again on Sundays. After the foundation of the Republic, our school was closed late in the

afternoons on Fridays. Saturday and Sunday were declared as the official holidays.

We had a Talmud Tora [Talmud Torah] at the schools. It was forbidden to give such information at the synagogues. [The law forbids any kind of religious courses given outside school] It was given secretly. There weren't that many very religious people, and thus the need for a yeshiva [yeshivah] did not arise. During those the times, all the Jews chose to live together. Our community lived around Kuledibi, Haskoy, and Balat. [Districts on the European side]. Later on living in Sisli and Nisantasi became popular. We settled down in those places later on, too.

I wasn't interested in politics. Of course, I would listen to the news, and watch the developments taking place closely. I remember Venizelos [President of Greece] coming to Istanbul to meet Ataturk [11](#), and the public applauding them with small and big flags, as they were passing by through Beyoglu, when I was 12-13 years old. Venizelos had a completely white beard. Both commanders were sitting side by side in a convertible limousine and were waving at the public.

We used to go to Florya for swimming by train at summer time, when we were young and around 18-19 years old. We also went to Moda, Kalamis, Caddebostan, the Princess Islands and Sureyya beaches.

I was always interested in motor vehicles. I used to rent motorcycles during my youth. One winter day, I took the man renting the motorcycles, on the back of my bike and we rode to Kilyos. The weather was so cold that, upon our return to the garage, I lost consciousness for one or two minutes. I took great pleasure in these trips. There was an empty field in Talimhane, where cars and motorcycles were rented. The Talimhane [a neighborhood on the European side] tour by car cost 10 kurus. [kurus = 1/100 of lira]

My father's last name was Menase. But with the Surname Law [see Reforms in the Turkish Republic] that was passed in 1932-1933 [actually in 1934], our surname was changed to Isman. The officer at the registration office told me that the surname Menase had been taken by somebody else. I had to find another surname. My boss at the firm which I was working at then, used to tell me "You are a very good businessman". I was inspired by these words, and had my surname registered as "Isman" ['Is' means business in Turkish, it is attached to the English 'man'].

### **After Ataturk's death**

I remember the day Ataturk died very well. I was around 25 years old. Of course we were all very sad. We went to Dolmabahce, to watch the funeral ceremony, and to pay our respects to him. It was very crowded. Officers on horseback and soldiers were trying hard to establish order to prevent any chaos. Nevertheless, many were run over in the crowd. If we hadn't been able to throw ourselves into a garden-like place near the street, we would also have been run over. Dolmabahce and its vicinity was almost like nowadays. Of course the streets were not asphalted, but cobbled.

The non-muslims did not serve as officers or real soldiers in the army till 1950's. But they started drafting non-muslims as officers in 1950. During those times, even high school graduates could become officers. I was a non-muslim, who had graduated from high school, so they did not take me as an officer. There was an issue of being "unfavorable". [At that time they did not want to make non-Jews officers because they were not trusted. This was especially true for the Greeks and Armenians, but as with other applications which concerned them only, it was applied against the



Jews as well] The ones who were announced as unfavorable, had to do compulsory service for 1.5 years. In 1936, I said that I didn't finish high school, paid 230 liras as compensation and did my military service for 6 months in Sirkeci [inner district of Istanbul]. I was in the quartermaster corps. I was responsible for the depot of military supplies. Whenever new soldiers arrived, we would dress them, provide them with travel money and sent them to their new places. The marches I know from that period [military service] are very few, I only know the Turkish National Anthem [lyrics: Mehmet Akif Ersoy; music: Zeki Ungor] and the Izmir March. I had learned these marches at school actually. [Izmir march is the most popular marching song in Turkey.] This was my first military service.

In September 1939, when World War II started, they collected all the non-muslims in 20 classes [12](#), drafted them again. I was drafted again as reserve and was discharged in 1941. 3-4 months after the war started they drafted the 1911, 1912, 1913 born men as reserves. 6 months after that the war was raging and while we were waiting to be discharged, they drafted all men between 21 and 41 years old as the famous 20 military reserve classes. So, we, the three classes that had been drafted before were discharged after one year reserve duty. I did my duty in Yozgat. We used to do exercises every day. They did not give arms to non-Muslims. They gave tools to construct roads with.

I started my business life at the place of the famous glass merchant of the time, called Ishak Niyego. Our place was in Karakoy. [district on the European side]. We had a warehouse, which we would call a "factory", and a shop at the exit of the "Tunel" [13](#) in Karakoy. The customers' orders were taken at the shop, and then we would prepare them at the warehouse. The glass was processed according to the order or mirrored. I was the technician of the firm, and my assistant was Israel Menase. (later on he became the president of the Jewish Community) I met my late wife Suzan there. She was the secretary of the firm.

We were all together 15-20 people in the shop and were all Jewish. I worked there for 10-12 years, till the Wealth Tax [14](#) was imposed, and ruined our lives. During the Wealth Tax event, our firm was closed, and we became unemployed.

My friend and confidant Izak Altabev (he became a member of the Turkish National Assembly), was the General manager of the Koc Company [one of the oldest companies of Istanbul's most important group of companies dealing with many diverse industries, from the automotive to the electronic.] During one of our conversations we had together, I learned about Vehbi Koc's personality, and his being open to new investments. Thanks to Izak, we went to meet Vehbi Koc himself, owner and biggest shareholder of the company. At the end of the meeting, we came to the conclusion that a separate "glass" branch could be opened within the company's own structure. From then on I had a new job. We imported the glass from various parts of Europe. Hungary, Bulgaria, and Belgium were the countries with which we worked frequently.

There was also the installation, iron, and export divisions, within the structure of Koc. "Glass Division" was the last one that was founded. The profit made by the glass division within the first year of its foundation, constituted for the 62% of the profit made by all of the other companies. We became first in four branches with 62%. 38% was shared by the other three divisions. I continued working there for long years. After a certain period of time, I started receiving bonuses from the profits.

One day in 1971-1972, while I was the general manager of the glass division of the Koc Company, I received an invitation from a firm in Britain, which we imported some goods from. "Pilkington Brothers" was Britain's most famous glass factory, had 40.000 workers, and everything was automatized. My wife Suzan, and I went to Britain to visit the factory upon the invitation we received. They took us around. We went to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark with the overcraft. (the guide who showed us around in Sweden, was Jewish-Swedish) . We went to Austria after this trip. I had to make a decision, as a result of the meetings I had had with one of the division managers over there. We were producing glasswool under the brandname "Izocam", within Koc's divisions. The population of Austria was only 7 million and was consuming 17 tons of this material (Izocam) a day. On the other hand, Turkey had a population of 25 million people, and we were only producing one ton a day. We learned that lack of advertising was the cause of the situation. When we returned, we prepared a feasibility report, and presented it to Koc Holding. We founded a factory, with 4 million liras, and I became a shareholder. We produced 4 tons a day of the material and sold one ton of it. After 6 months of advertisement campaigns, it was not possible to find glasswool on the market any more. The 4 tons we produced daily, was sold immediately. As a result, we enlarged the factory, and increased the production to 11 tons a day. As you can understand "I can say that I'm the creator of Izocam. As you know this is very good material used both in sound and heat isolation. Our expert engineers take part in the installation process, where the material is installed in the places it's needed.

In the same way, I also took part in the foundation of Aygaz [an LPG, liquid petrol fuel company]. We used special lamps at our houses on the Princess Islands. We used to cook our food on them. On one of the trips we made to Israel, I saw Aygaz tanks [liquid fuel tanks], and its smaller sizes. Till then, we didn't have such LPG tanks. Upon my return, I immediately presented a proposal to Koc Holding. We did some research. A Jewish Italian citizen, originally from Egypt, had founded such a factory there. We contacted him and visited his factory. I brought him to Koc Holding. He explained to us about the things that had to be done. The factory was founded with 4 million dollars. This factory today is very rich. Besides its capital of 4 quadrillion, it owns ships, cisterns, and quite a lot of land.

My best friend, partner, and the person from whom I learned about life, Israel Menase, unfortunately died in 1973. I was 60-61 years old then. The glass work, required personnel. When my children said: "Father dear, this is enough, live your life a little bit", I retired from the firm in 1975. After I retired, I did few projects on my own. As you can understand I have had a very stable business life.

Thank God, we always had people who had become prominent figures in our society. Veysit the lawyer, Ventura the architect, [In the 1940s, the synagogues in the Galata Tower region could not meet the demand of the population, especially during the festivals like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So, the architects Elio Ventura and Bernard Motola, newly graduated from Istanbul Technical University presented the community with their new synagogue project, on which they had worked very hard for 6 months. The Neve-Shalom Synagogue was built for the then huge sum of 300 000 liras and opened on 25 March 1951 on the location of the Aragon Synagogue, which had been built by the first Sephardic Jews who arrived from Spain in the 15th century] Prof. Selim Kaneti, the lawyer [Professor of Law at Istanbul University. Prof. Kaneti was very well-liked by his colleagues and his students. He died in 1992, when he was only 59]. Besides them, we also had

very important merchants.

My father wasn't alive when the Wealth Tax Law [see Wealth Tax] was passed. I was a high ranking white-collar laborer. They wanted 750 liras from me. I was able to afford it. But on the other hand, they wanted 350.000 liras from my boss. That was a great fortune. He sold his house, and all of his belongings, but he wasn't able to gather this amount of money. The officers came, and he was sent to Askale. [work camp in Eastern Anatolia]. He stayed there for 5 or 6 months.

The World was witnessing World War II then. Inonu's [15](#) political strategies had saved us from entering the war. However, Britain and the States were putting a lot of pressure on us to enter the war against the Germans. During these negotiations, there arose the topic of the non-Muslims that were sent to Askale. Having them "set free" became a current issue, and thus they were set free. The ones who could return home, did so. Some of them died over there. I don't remember the names of the ones who couldn't return. The businesses and the shops of the ones who went to Askale, were all closed down. They came back, started their lives again with a new strength. Most of them became successful businessman. The Wealth Tax had depressed us a lot, but later on we improved. Nowadays we live comparably more peacefully, as if antisemitism is over!

During World War II, thanks to Ismet Pasha's [Ismet Inonu] correct politics, we didn't enter the war. According to the rumors, ovens had been prepared in Kasimpasa. I did not see them, but there was such a rumor. We were following what was happening in Germany and in other European countries very closely, from the radio, and from the newspapers [we knew about those]. We were very scared. Foreign press newspapers came to Istanbul from Europe, even though there was war. We knew about the Kristallnacht, and the trains on which the Jews were put, and the camps. We were again drafted between 1941 and 1942, as civilians. Within the ones who were drafted, all were non-Muslims. God created a miracle and protected us.

### **My wife Suzan**

My wife, Suzan, is also from Istanbul. Her father Stefanya Akkoen, married Mme. Rebeka in 1905. ( I don't know my mother-in-law's maiden name). They had settled down in Kuzguncuk and had always raised their families there. [Jewish district on the Asian side]

Her father was a hard-working and a very clever man. He was engaged in the customs business. During those times most of the customs officers were non-Muslims [they typically knew trade and languages better]. Later on my father-in-law rented a hall on the Kuzguncuk pier, and ran a club operating as a casino during weekdays, and a cinema on weekends. My father-in-law was also a skilled enough bridge player to become the Bridge Champion of the times. Unfortunately, he was poisoned by something he ate, became sick, and lost his ability to speak. Naturally, we closed down these businesses slowly when he got sick.

Her mother, Rebeka was a very good housewife. They had four children, including my wife Suzan. They educated them very well. My wife had two brothers and a sister.

The eldest brother, Lazar Akkoen, was born in 1909 in Kuzguncuk. He was very religious. He married Sara (her maiden name was Aksiyote) from Kuzguncuk. She was a very good housewife.

They had three children named, Rifka, Medi and Ishak. Lazar was working as a vice president at the Deutsche Bank in Istanbul, when he was raising his family. During World War II, in 1942 all the Jews working at German companies were dismissed from their jobs, on an order that came from Germany. Lazar, who became jobless over a night, got very sad, and emigrated to Israel [Palestine] with all his family. They struggled to survive there for a long time. Finally, Lazar found a job at the Discount Bank, and became the president of the bank in time. They had a very good life. Their children received a very good education and are all working at very good places. They married off all of their children. They have many grandchildren. Now, they even have children from their grandchildren. Unfortunately, Lazar died in 1984 and was buried in Israel.

My wife, Suzan's brother, Moiz Akkoen, was also born in Kuzguncuk. He grew up there. He married Seli Alfandari. They had two sons, named Seyfi and Avi. He worked at an import company called "Porsemay Glassware", in Tahtakale [a neighborhood], Eminonu [commercial district on the European side] for long years. He became a partner of the firm later on. They used to import porcelain dishware, crystal glassware, and crystal chandeliers from abroad, especially from Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Their life was very pleasurable and happy. During the events of 6th and 7th of September in 1955 [16](#), their stores were ruined, all their items were broken and looted. This sad event affected Moiz very much. He emigrated to Israel with his family. He opened up a "Faux Bijouterie" [French for "imitation jewelry"] workshop there. Later on, he also exported this jewelry to Europe. He worked at this job for a long time. He retired and closed down his business later on. He has seven grandchildren from his sons. Though they have aged a lot, they are full of life. Seli has been receiving treatment for osteoporosis, for a long time. Moiz has some slight sicknesses, but they manage.

Their sister Ester Akkoen, was also born in Kuzguncuk, and she grew up there. Ester used to work at a firm owned by a very rich man named Ahmet Diliboz, who had come from Russia. This man brought with him a lot of pearls, when he was escaping from Russia. He sold them here and founded this firm. This is the way he used to tell us. This firm was engaged in export and import business. Ester worked as a secretary in this firm, for a few years. Later on she married Albert Eskenazi. They had three children named, Rifka, Suzi, and Moiz. When their children grew up, they emigrated to Israel. Ester and Albert also emigrated to Israel in 1966, after their children.

Rifka chose to be a housewife after she got married. On the other hand, Suzi worked at one of the branches of the Discount Bank in Tel Aviv for long years. Later on she got married, and had children, but continued working in spite of having had children. She became a Division Manager. She still continues working for this bank. She also had grandchildren. Their son Moiz, on the other hand, became a total vagrant. Unfortunately, he became the black sheep of the family. He usually disappears for a long a time, then comes back. The family becomes very miserable upon each of his returns home. Unfortunately we lost Albert in 2002; he is buried in Israel.

All the siblings, including the very religious Lazar, are all liberals. All the siblings have close ties with each other and love one another. We always liked spending time with each other, and we've always been like siblings. We still talk at least twice a week on the phone with each other and meet once a year.

We lived together with my mother-in-law for long years. When my wife's siblings emigrated to Israel, she also went to stay with them, during certain periods of the year. And she died when she

was with them in Israel and was buried there.

My wife's English was very good, because she was a graduate of the British School in Istanbul (see English High School for Girls). Besides this, her French was also very good. Like I said, we were working at the same firm. We met and went out together. Her mother didn't want me, because of my low income, when we decided to get married. Nevertheless, against everything, we got married in the synagogue in Kuzguncuk, in May 1935. (not the one that is in use today, there was another one on the upper part of Kuzguncuk. I forgot its name.)

At those times, the weddings were not celebrated like today's ostentatious weddings. In the afternoon, as the whole family we went to the Novotni Garden, across Union Francaise in Tepebasi. We ate our dinner, and sat outside, as the season was favorable. It was very nice. We all returned home together and went to work the next morning.

After we got married, we rented a flat from the apartment named "Belvu" [from the French "belle vue" meaning "nice view"] on Bankalar Street. These flats were so large that we rented it together with our closest friends, David Eskenazi and his wife. They had not had any children, so they loved ours as theirs. They had two rooms, and we had two rooms and a living room. We shared the kitchen and the bathroom. As a result of the solution found, paying the rent was not that hard.

After we got married, Suzan always gave her family what she earned. Her family came to live with us when her father got sick. Later on, when the financial situation of Moiz, Suzan's elder brother, improved, he took care of his parents. When my father-in-law died, my mother-in-law started living with us. Later on in 1957, she went to Israel with her younger son, Moiz, and died there in 1967.

I was working at Koc, when the Struma Ship [17](#) Tragedy took place. There were Romanian Jews on the ship. With the help of our friend Altabev and Vehbi Koc, we were able to convey food aid to the ship. We took the 2-3 people, who were saved from the ship near us, and gave food to them. ( I don't remember their names). They were sheltered at the Orphans Protection Association. We arranged their passports at the Israel Consulate, and sent them to Israel. Nisim Palti and Mr. Brot were within the organization, and they arranged such things. Brot used to give the visas. Even my former boss had wanted to send me to Israel. I had gotten my visa from Mr. Brot in 24 hours. But my family's character was not suitable for this. I had to stay here. Mr. Brot was a Zionist. He was the owner of the shop called "Mayer" (the first multi-storeyed shop in Beyoglu). The ones saved from Struma told us how the ship had been bombarded. They had stayed on the sea for 4-5 days, and had suffered a lot of difficulties. Unfortunately there were 700-800 people in the ship, but only 2-3 people were saved. It was a very big tragedy.

Then, Izak Altabev [was elected to the National Assembly in 1957. He was tried at Yassiada after the military coup on 27 May 1960] wasn't a member of the Turkish Parliament yet. We only had two parliamentary members, as Jews. One of these was Altabev, and the other was Abrevaya. During the Menderes period [18](#) Altabev was one of the people who was sent to Yassiada [an island on the Marmara Sea, 16 km south of the Bosphorus. It is the smallest of the series of islands known as the Princes' Islands. After the foundation of the Republic, some naval facilities were built on this vacant island. During the military coup of 1960, all politicians who were arrested, were taken to these facilities and tried there]. Izak Altabev was saved from hanging, but unfortunately got sick and had a stroke. He was examined by a neurologist who came from Israel when he returned to Istanbul. He struggled for his life for a month but died. He had a family, but I don't



know what happened to them.

My neighbor and friend, the lawyer Eli Behar, is actually from Thrace. In 1933, there was a rumor spread about the Jews, claiming that they were cooperating with the enemy. [19 see Thrace Events] Because of these slanders, a lot of anti-semitic movements took place. As a result, the Jews sold their possessions for nothing and either emigrated to Istanbul or somewhere else. Eli is one of these families. He completed his education in Edirne, became a career man there, and came to Istanbul. He was the lawyer of the first firm named Niyego, which I worked at. This was the way we met.

## **Family life**

I returned from my second military service in 1941. We had been married for six years, then. We could have a family. Of our children, Selim was born in 1943, and Seyfi in 1945. We had been living in Talimhane, Taksim since 1942, and raised our children there. We moved to Sıracevizler, Sisli in 1958 [a neighborhood on the European side].

We used to go on picnics on weekends after we became a family. Sometimes on Sundays, we ate kebabs at the “Bursa Kebapcısı” in Harbiye, for 30 liras for four people. We went to the fish restaurant sometimes in Kilyos.

On Saturday nights, season tickets were bought for cinemas. In this way, we both used to watch the film, and then had the chance to meet friends. We used to go to Konak [in Harbiye] and Yeni Melek [in Beyoglu] cinemas.

We had our sons’ circumcision [brit milah] ceremonies at the hospital they were born in. (I think it was the American Hospital). That year I was the president of Matan Baseter [a local Jewish institution to help the poor]. For that reason the chief rabbi of the time, Rav David Asseo, was among the guests. There were friends, family and relatives at the ceremonies.

Suzan took care of Selim and Seyfi very well. We never went on trips, leaving them to someone to care of them. Only when they grew up, she felt comfortable about leaving them behind, and thus we went abroad. We had the children’s Barmitzva [bar mitzvah] ceremonies at the Bnai Brith hall.

We used to speak French and Spanish, with my late wife. Of course we also spoke Turkish. We usually spoke Turkish with the children. In this way, the children became acquainted with these two languages when they were small.

We were able to give a good education to our children. Selim went to the primary school at Yeni Kolej. [Literally New College, it is a private Turkish school that has a reputation of being very easy to finish] He then finished secondary high school in Saint Michel [French Catholic school], and the high school in Saint Benoit [French Catholic school]. [In the Turkish education system, primary school was 5 years, then came 3 years of secondary school and then another 3 years of high school or lycee] He started the Faculty of Law of Istanbul University, and graduated from there. He is working as a lawyer. He married Verjel Abuaf, whom I love very much, and regard like a daughter, at the Neve Salom Synagogue, in 1971. They had two sons, from their marriage. In 1973, my first grandchild, Eytan was born. He was a very good student. He finished Robert College [20](#). He then finished Business Administration at the University of Istanbul. He started his working life. He married Sibel Almelek, in May 2004. They moved to Izmir [third biggest city in Turkey] and settled



down there, because of their businesses. My youngest grandchild, named Koray (Selim's second son) is 17 years old, and still studying at the Jewish High School in Ulus.

On the other hand, Seyfi finished the primary school in Yeni Kolej, the secondary high school in Saint Michel [French Catholic school], and the high school in Ata Kolej. He then went to Israel for a year. Upon his return from Israel, he studied to become a dentist in Istanbul. Now he's continuing on with his career, as a good dentist. He married Suzetta whom I regard as a daughter, and love very much, in 1975. In 1979, my granddaughter, Nisya was born. Nisya, finished Bilgi University. She is now the manager of the Jewish Museum. Hopefully, we'll have Nisya married in June.

My elder son Selim, had a mild asthmatic condition. Upon the doctor's advice, we went to Uludag [National park, south of Bursa] for one or two weeks, in summer. But it was not of much use.

We have become residents of Burgaz [one of the Princess Islands] since 1945. We had everything within reach there. The sea, the sun, friends, and the entertainments at the clubs. We used to spend our summers in this way. We didn't fancy going to Bodrum and etc like nowadays' families. We didn't feel such a need.

In 1955, the 6th and the 7th of September events [see 6th and 7th September Events] occurred, which shook Istanbul. We were in Burgaz at the time. We had bought the land of our present house then. Many looters who came to the island on freight ships, attempted to step ashore. But I witnessed the armed police, at the shore, 5-6 in number, did not let them do so. I went downtown, with the first ship in the morning. Our firm [Koc Firm] was Turkish, so nothing had happened to it. But Karakoy, Sishane, and Beyoglu were all disasters. All the non-muslims' shop windows were broken, their goods thrown on the streets, their safe boxes thrown out of the windows, their white goods thrown out of the windows, thorn rolls of fabric on the streets... I can not tell you what more horrible scenes there were. There were the stores of the Greeks in Karakoy, and they were usually engaged in the dye business. All of their goods were ruined and looted. A very big emigration on the part of the Greeks and also the Jews from Istanbul took place, after this event.

When we were raising our family, we especially always celebrated Pesah and Hanuka [Chanukkah]. We took a lot of care to do as required. I still recite the Shema in the mornings and at nights. I always wanted my children to go the synagogue more often. But it didn't happen that way. My elder son Selim, was a student of Saint Michel, and there was school on Saturdays then. I had sent Selim to Mahazike Tora [21](#). Nisim Behar was his teacher there. When he said "Oh! How can you go to school on Saturdays", my son Selim lost his interest in the synagogue. Now, he only goes to the synagogue when it is required to do so.

Seyfi learned how to read and write in Hebrew when he was in Israel. He is a little bit more interested. But he also only goes to the synangogue when it is required to do so. On the other hand, I go to the synagogue every week on the island. During winter, I sometimes go to the Sisli Synagogue. I always said to my children to teach Judaism to my grandchildren. Thanks to my daughter-in-laws, they did whatever they could have done about it. Because they themselves do not care too much, the grandchildren don't either. But thank God, all of them are aware of their Jewishness and are proud of it.

We were very proud of the State of Israel when it was founded. But nevertheless we never spoke about Israel and its politics, with the major public. We never thought of emigrating to Israel while

our children were educated and married here, though I have Zionist ideas.

My first car, was a Vauxhall with 6 cylinders, in 1951, a British car brand. The gears would not function properly, the car itself and its wheels were high. When I drove at 70 km/hour, I thought I was flying. Later on I bought an Opel for 25.000 liras. I sold that one for 40.000 liras and bought a bigger Opel. Later on I bought a Captain Opel, at 6000 km, for 57.000 liras, from a Chief of Police. I sold it for 90.000 liras and bought one of the cars we were producing at Koc Holding [the biggest business holding in Turkey dealing in banking, construction, automotive, all sorts of production, energy, trade sectors. The business started with the small grocery shop opened by the patriarch Vehbi Koc in 1917. Today, it is a huge business holding] called Dogan. [Turkish representative of the Italian Fiat cars] In spite of my children being angry at me, I've been driving for 51 years.

We went to Europe 2-3 times, when we had our car. We also went abroad 1 or 2 times by plane. We went all around Switzerland, France and Britain, with Suzan and Leon Alaton (very close friends). We spent very cheerful holidays.

Risar Hazday and Rabenu Aruete, both my classmates and neighborhood friends, had emigrated to France. During our first trip to France, with my wife, I searched for Rabenu and found him. He had become the representative of "Barletta" motorcycles. [an Italian make motorcycle.] He used to import them to France and sell them. He had become a very important and a very rich man. I had to get permission from three people in order to reach him. He was very happy to be with us, he took very good care of us. He had changed his name to "Benoit Aruet". I wasn't able to find my other friend, despite all the search I did for him.

When my elder son, Selim, graduated from high school, we took him with us and went around Europe. On another occasion, we went to Switzerland with the lawyer Eliya Behar and his wife, Rejin. (both our neighbor and close friend). Rejin's brother, Isak Menase, was living in Switzerland. We stayed at a hotel, and they stayed over at their siblings'. We went around together every day. They were very hospitable. They didn't let us spend a penny. We went to Britain from there. The trips I liked most, were the ones we made to Israel. It is always nice to be with my late wife's siblings. We like each other a lot, because we are like a very big family.

We celebrated our 50th marriage anniversary, with our family and close friends, at Bizim Tepe [the association of Robert College graduates, a club with a Bosphorus view.] We were around 50-60 people, it was a very special and a very pleasurable night. The video show, which my son Seyfi had prepared, made us and our friends spend a very nice time. It was very good that we had prepared that night.

Unfortunately, my wife Suzan got very sick, and though we did everything to save her, we couldn't. She died in 1989, and was buried in Arnavutkoy. [The sephardic cemetery in Ulus was always called Arnavutkoy]. I miss her so much that, I go to visit her very often, and talk to her from heart to heart.

I never experienced any anti-semitic event, targeted at my family or myself. There was the issue of "Citizen, speak Turkish", which scared us. [22](#) Like I said, our families at home barely knew any Turkish. They were harassed by people on the street, who heard them talk. Our Turkish had started with the foundation of the Republic, when the education at school started being in Turkish. Naturally, we were very much affected by the Wealth Tax and the slogan "Citizen, speak Turkish".

The Jews' accents almost always differed from the Turks, due to the upbringing they had at homes, and due to the way their families used to speak. They used to make fun of us slyly. They would make remarks such as "Hoow are youuu, arre youu okaaay?". Another remark that was made, for me and my wife to be, Suzan, when we were going around in Kuzguncuk: "Sooo, now arre youuu goiing to Tarlaabasiii?". Naturally we were sad, but these events were not as destrucrive as The Wealth Tax.

During the attack of the Neve Salom in 1986 [23](#), I was in Burgaz. We came to Istanbul at once and did whatever we could do. Those days were horrible.

I like the opinions of the today's government, anyways. They did no harm to us. He [Prime Minister Erdogan] visited the chief rabbi at his home, after the attacks to the synagogues on 15th of November in 2004. [see Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues] [24](#) I was in Abant with a big group, on a tour organized by the Protecting the Poor Association. [Bnai Brith]. We heard the news there and came back immediately.

Also, from the hostile acts against the Greeks in 1955 and in 1964, a few Jewish families of Greek origin, had also been harmed. They were exiled from here. As far as I can remember, the Azuz family and the Nahmiyas family left Istanbul, at once.

I don't know of any "Selaniklis" or "Donmes" [25](#) I know one or two Karaite [26](#) families. One of them is Leon Coskun. I once went to their synagogues, for a funeral ceremony. The structure and pattern of the prayers they were chanting, were like the ones we chanted at Kipur. It wasn't different from ours at all.

I did volunteer work for the community in the years of 1958 and 1959. I first worked at Matan Baseter Birkurholim. [27](#) Later on I did different jobs at the Associations of Protecting the Orphans, and Protecting the Poor, and the Kizba. [28](#)

When I was the Vice-President at Matan Baseter, we would determine the poor families, would do research about the ones who had applied, then we would take food and the financial aid to them. There was everything in the packages, required for a festival, at the time of the Pesah Festivals.

We would help the children of the families, who were in need, at the Association of Protecting the Orphans, in Ortakoy. Rone Somak was the president, and I was the Vice-President. Some of the families would give their Friday, Festival or family dinners here. We would meet the needs of the children, with the money we earned from these organizations. The office of the chief rabbi, would support us, whenever there was a need. Our expenses were too much. As you know, we would take care of the children in Burgaz, in the colony, in summer time [this is a place where the children are taken care of all throughout the summer, we can call it a summer camp]. This place was not chic and well equipped till now. The total number of children which was 60 in the beginning, fell to 25. Emigration to Israel played a role in this. Besides, some were old enough for marriage, and they got married. We worked for long years, till the place of the Association Protecting the Orphans was closed in Ortakoy (I don't remember the date). They rented this place to a firm which was selling medicine supplies, for a very cheap price. Later on, the Community wanted an increase, but the other side didn't want to increase the rent. So we ended up at court. Finally, they got out of the building. This building is still empty today. Naturally it wasn't well kept, and now it's old and shabby. I moved this institution with Albert Yanni, to the old building of Alliance Israelite [The old

Alliance school at Yazıcı Street, a neighborhood on the European side]. The school was closed anyways. We turned the classes into dormitories. Only one or two classes were left as they were. They came to Burgaz during summer time. We gave the remaining children, who were small, to families, in exchange of their care charges. We always kept an eye on those children. We were responsible for them. The families, who were taking care of the children, both received financial and moral help. In this way, children also lived in a family atmosphere. Due to this situation existing, the institution got closed. It exists today, but I don't know what they are doing. We took these children to a villa in Burgaz, which was donated to the institution by a citizen from our community. (We call this villa either a "summer camp" or a "colony"). We used to collect money from philanthropists, in order to cover for the expenses of the place. I had put a lot of work into this issue. With this money, food for children was bought, the cook was paid, the head-mistress's salary was paid, and the other daily expenses were paid. The head-mistress was at the same time the head-mistress of the Orphelinat, in winter. Only the head-mistress, from the personnel was Jewish. Later on, they said: "Don't collect any money, we established a coordination, from now on, they will manage the money business". The children of the Orphanage and the Association, of Protecting the Poor, benefited from these facilities on the island for two months. The children of the orphanage would stay in the school building, before coming to the colony, and thus get bored. They became happy in an unbelievable way when they came to the island. Every family in Burgaz would make donations here. Most of them would dine here. A lot of activities were prepared, and expenses of the place were tried to be covered in this way. Today the colony expenses is always a big problem, as everything is much more expensive. Anyways, as you know, during the last years, we also serve our old folks here. Against all the difficulties, everyone receiving service from here, is very happy.

I became a member of Bnai Brith in 1965. Then I worked as the president in the colony, for 6-7 years. I did different jobs at the Bnai Brith. Presidency of Local Commissioning, was one of them. We had organized great balls with the late Lazarro Franko [the owner of the first many storeyed shop in Beyoglu] during the Purim Festivals, either at our building or in Hilton. We did twice in Hilton. We had earned real good income. Like today, we payed close attention so that the food served was Kasher [kosher].

Of my sons, Seyfi, was engaged in community affairs a little bit, he worked in the various departments of the Bnai Brith and organized many parties both for kids and for adults in Purim. Selim, however, wasn't involved at all.

I'm 91 years old today and have certain sicknesses. The major one these days is the liver cancer I have. At the moment the treatment is going well, but you never know. I've had many operations. Nevertheless, I thank God for today.

I live together with my youngest son Seyfi in summer and live in the same apartment building in the winters. We are always together. We exchange calls with my elder son and visit each other. I was never interested in the computer since it was not possible for me to learn after this age. As you know, I'm almost 92 years old. I meet my friends every day in the summer, and once or twice a week in winter time. We sometimes chat, sometimes play backgammon.

## Glossary

## **1 Raki**

Anise liquor, popular in many places in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East. It is principally the same as Greek Ouzo, Bulgarian Mastika or Arabic Arak.

## **2 Fez**

Ottoman hat introduced by Sultan Mahmud II (1839-1876) after he abolished the traditional Ottoman dressing code in 1839 (Imperial Prescript of Gulhane). The fez was then commonly used by the male population of the Empire regardless of religious affiliation.

## **3 Reforms in the Turkish Republic**

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic (29th October 1923) Kemal Ataturk and the new Turkish government engaged themselves in great modernization efforts. Fundamental political, social, legal, educational and cultural reforms were introduced in the 1920s and 30s in order to bring Turkish society closer to the West and shape the republican polity. Ataturk had abolished the Sultanate earlier (1922); in 1924 he did so with the Caliphate (religious leadership). He closed down the dervish lodges, the turbes (tombs of worshipped holy people) and forbade the wearing of traditional religious costumes outside ceremonies. According to the Hat Law (1925), the traditional Ottoman fes was outlawed; surnames were introduced and the traditional nicknames were outlawed too. International measurement (metric system) as well as the Gregorian calendar was introduced alongside female suffrage. The republic was created as a secular state; religion and state were divided: the Shariah (Islamic law) courts were abolished and a new secular court was introduced. A new educational law was created; the institutes of Turkish History Foundation and Language Research Foundation were opened as well as the University of Istanbul. In order to foster literacy the old Arabic scrip was replaced with Latin letters.

**4** Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909): Born in 1842 and died in 1918, he was a great conservative ruler of the late 19th Century, saving the Empire, once more, from collapse. He accepted the First Ottoman Constitution in 1876 but suspended it in 1878 and introduced authoritarian rule after the Berlin Congress when -due to European Great Power interference- much of his European possessions were lost to the newly independent Balkan states (Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria). After losing Tunisia to the French (1881) and Egypt to the British (1882) he turned towards Germany as an ally and signed the concession with it for the construction of the Istanbul-Baghdad railway (1899). During his reign the University of Istanbul was established (1900) and a nation-wide network of secondary, elementary and military schools was established. The Empire went through immense modernization: railway and telegraph systems were developed and new industries were created. Despite the continuous effort of the Zionists however, he would not allow Jewish settlements in the Holy Land, neither would he give it to the British. Sultan Abdulhamid II was overthrown by the Young Turk Revolution in 1909 reestablishing the Constitution and expelling him to Salonika.

**5** The Ottoman military in the 19th century: The traditional poll tax, which had been levied on non-Muslims for exemption from military service, was replaced in 1855 by a military substitution tax, "bedel-i askeriye" (the military price), levied on Muslims and non-Muslims alike who wished to be exempted from military service requirements which now were supposed to be applied to all, regardless of religion. In fact, however, Jewish and Christian youths continued to wish to avoid

military service in preference for the greater opportunities offered in civilian life, and the Muslims were not anxious to have them, so all non-Muslim youths of military age paid the *bedel-i askeriye* and none served in the army. It was only in 1910, as a result of pressure from Grand Rabbi Haim Nahum Efendi in particular to show the Jews' loyalty to the Ottoman state, that this tax was abolished and non-Muslims were in fact conscripted into the armed forces along with the Muslims despite the continued opposition of the Christian patriarchs to such military service for their young men.

**6** English High School for Girls: It was established by Lady Redcliffe, the wife of the British Ambassador, in 1849 on Bursa Street, Beyoglu, Istanbul. In 1979 Great Britain stopped subsidizing the school and the Turkish government took it over; it was renamed English Secondary. In 1980 new classes were introduced and it was renamed again and called Beyoglu Anatolian High School.

**7** The Ottoman Empire in World War I: The Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, as they were the ones fighting the traditional Ottoman enemy: the Russian Empire. During the winter of 1914-15 the Ottomans launched an ill prepared campaign in the Caucasus against Russia with the hope to be able to turn the local Turkish-speaking Russian subjects (Azerbaijan) to their sides. Instead the Russian counter-offensive drove the Ottomans back behind the borders and Russia occupied North Eastern Anatolia. The local Armenians received the fellow Christian Russians as liberators and many of them assisted them in their efforts against the Ottomans. Assuming an Armenian conspiracy during the winter of 1915 two million Armenians were deported to the war zone; there were mutual massacres that resulted in thousands of people (both Turks and Armenians) to die. In the spring of 1915 the Entente was to occupy the straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and ensure the passage of supply to the Russian Black Sea ports. British troops landed in Gallipoli (Dardanelles) but were not able to expand their beachheads against the army of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Ataturk); they evacuated in February 1916. Although the Ottomans were able to resist the British in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in 1915, they finally took Baghdad in 1917 and drove the Ottomans out of the entire province. Although the Russians made further advance in Eastern Anatolia they left the war after the October Revolution and according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) the Ottomans were able to regain Eastern Anatolia. Due to the Arab Revolt supported by the British as well as the direct British military intervention the Ottomans lost both Palestine and Syria; Mustafa Kemal was able only to withdraw his forces intact to Anatolia. Sultan Mohammed VI (1818-22) was forced to sign an armistice with the Entente (October 1918) and as a result British and French battle ships reached the port of Istanbul. The Sultan finally signed the Peace Treaty in Sevres in August 1920, according to which the Arab and Kurdish provinces and Armenia were lost as well as the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul, and the Aegean littoral was to be given to Greece.

## **8 Journal d'Orient**

The main newspaper of the French-speaking Sephardi Jews in Turkey, it was published between 1917 and 1971 by Albert Karasu, his wife Angele Loreley and Jean de Peyrat idi. It consisted of four pages of daily news. The paper ceased publication on 25th August 1971, when Albert Karasu retired.

**9** 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.

## **10 The Turkish Republic**

The Turkish Grand National Assembly gathered for the first time on 23rd April 1920, thus paving the way for the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The Assembly organized and directed the Turkish Independence War. On 1st November 1922, the Assembly abolished the Sultanate, thereby cutting off ties with the Ottoman Empire. On 29th October 1923, after coming out victorious from the independence war, the Turkish Republic was officially founded and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was elected the first president. On 30th October 1923, Ismet Inonu formed the first government with himself as Prime Minister.

## **11 Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)**

Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

## **12 The 20 military classes**

In May 1941 non-Muslims aged 26-45 were called to military service. Some of them had just come back from their military service but were told to report for duty again. Great chaos occurred, as the Turkish officials took men from the streets and from their jobs and sent them to military camps. They were used in road building for a year and disbanded in July 1942.

### **13 Tunnel**

The oldest subway that connects Tunnel to Karakoy. Local transportation changed overnight with the completion of the city subway (called Tunnel). When the construction of the subway was completed in 1875, it was treated as a national celebration, and as a grand victory for the proponents of modernization.

### **14 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.

15 Inonu, Ismet (1884 – 1973): Turkish statesman, the first Prime Minister of Turkey (1923) and President after the death of Kemal Attaturk (1938). He played a great role in the Turkish War of Independence and signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, reviewing the harsh measures put on Turkey by the Entente at the previous Sevres Treaty (1920). He was “all-time president” of the Republican People’s Party. He succeeded in keeping Turkey out of WWII. He was Prime Minister 10 times and governed for more than 16 years. In 1972 he resigned from his party and became a member of the Republic’s Senate.

16 The 6th – 7th September 1955 events: The basic policy of the first years of the Turkish Republic was to “turkify” all its citizens, demanding that they have a common history, culture and language. The government knew that this was not easy to do with the non-muslim citizens. With the events in 1915 with the Armenians, and the population exchange (Greeks with Turks) in 1924, there were barely any non-muslims left in Anatolia. The government then turned its eye towards Istanbul, which hosted a large number of non-muslims, especially Greeks. In the minority report written by the government, it was suggested that Istanbul be cleansed of all Greeks. The catalyst in realizing this aim came with the problems that arose in Cyprus. When on 6th September, Istanbul awoke to the news in the papers about Ataturk’s house being bombed in Salonica. This came as the spark that lit the rioting, looting and rape that followed. It was later realized that most Greek houses and businesses had been marked beforehand. Of course, other non-muslims got their share of the looting and destruction, too in the general frenzy. All in all the result was: 3 people dead; 30 wounded; 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafés, 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.

### **17 Struma ship**

In December 1941 the ship took on board some 750 Jews – which was more than seven times its normal passengers’ capacity – to take them to Haifa, then Palestine. As none of the passengers had British permits to enter the country, the ship stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, in order for them to get immigration certificates to Palestine but the Turkish authorities did not allow the passengers to

disembark. They were given food and medicine by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish community of Istanbul. As the vessel was not seaworthy, it could not leave either. However, in February 1942 the Turks towed the Struma to the Black Sea without water, food or fuel on board. The ship sank the same night and there was only one survivor. In 1978, a Soviet naval history disclosed that a Soviet submarine had sunk the Struma.

## **18 Adnan Menderes**

1899–1961, Turkish prime minister (1950–60). In Jan., 1946, he formed the Democratic party, the first legal opposition party in Turkey. When the party came to power (1950), Menderes became prime minister, and in 1955 he also assumed the duties of foreign minister. In May, 1960, an army coup under General Cemal Gürsel toppled the government, and Menderes was arrested, charged with violating the constitution, and executed.

## **19 The Thrace Events**

In 1934, after the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, a lot of antisemitism occurred in Turkey. With World War II at the door, the Turkish government wanted to secure the lands at its borders of Thrace, which for the most part were populated by Jews. Non-muslims were considered dangerous in times of war. The rightist press did a lot of antisemitic propaganda, which led to riots and looting and rape of Jews in the Thrace area. This caused most of the Jewish population in the Thrace area to leave, mostly with none of their belongings, to Istanbul and later on to Palestine.

## **20 Robert College**

The oldest and most prestigious English language school in Istanbul, since the mid 19th Century providing education to the elite of Turkey as well as other countries in the region. Robert College, was born in 1863 in the village of Bebek by the Bosphorus, when Christopher Robert approached Cyrus Hamlin with his desires and found a receptive audience. Hamlin, an American schoolmaster, had been running a school, a bakery and a laundry in Bebek at the time. Robert was a wealthy American industrialist desiring to establish in Turkey a modern university along American lines with instruction in English. These two men, an educator and a philanthropist, successfully collaborated to found Robert College. Until 1971, it included two campuses: the actual Robert College exclusively for boys and the American College for Girls. In 1971, the American College for Girls and the Robert College boys school united and co-education started under the name of Robert College at the previous American College for Girls campus. On the same date, the Turkish government took over the boys campus, which became Bogazici University (Bosphorus University), an English-medium Turkish state university. Robert College and today's Bogazici University were and still are the best schools in Turkey, having students from the top 1% of the student population. Through the years, these schools have had graduates in the top positions in Turkey's business, political, academic and art sectors.

## **21 Mahaziketora**

the earlier name for the "Talmud Tora", a kind of Sunday school where Judaic religious education was given to Jewish children.

## **22 Citizen, speak Turkish policy**

In the years 1930's - 1940's, the rise of Turkish nationalism had the Turkification of the minorities as its goal. The community that was mainly aimed however, were the Jews, with whom the Turks did not have a history of enmity. The Salonican Jew Moise Cohen (1883-1961), who had been in close touch with the Young Turks in his home town in the years preceding the restoration of the Constitution, took the old Turkish name Tekinalp and led a campaign among his fellow Jews to encourage them to speak only Turkish to integrate them fully into Turkish life declaring that "Turkey is your home, so you should speak Turkish". In the major culture however, the policy of "Citizen, speak Turkish" was seen as pressure put on minorities to speak Turkish in public places. There was no law to enforce this but it was more of a social pressure to make sure everyone learned how to speak the language of the new country. There was a lot of criticism and verbal attacks and jeers on those who did not comply with this social rule.

**23** The 1986 terrorist attack at the Neve-Shalom synagogue: In September, 1986, Arab terrorists staged a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the 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.

**24** The 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.

## **25 Donmes**

The Sabetay Zvi followers, who lived in Salonica. They were always considered to be crypto-Jews and were treated as such. They have been known to marry amongst themselves and have their religious ceremonies in specific mosques only and bury their dead in specific cemeteries.

## **26 Karaite**

Jewish schismatic sect, founded in Persia in the 8th century. Karaites reject the Oral Law, the Talmud, and accept only the Torah, but have developed their own commentaries. In Russia the Karaites initially enjoyed the same rights and suffered from the same oppression as Jews, however, after the 18th century they were given the right to purchase land. During the Nazi occupation they were not persecuted, as they were not considered a part of the Jewish community. Up until the end of the Ottoman era, Haskoy was the center of the Karaite community in Istanbul, however they lived in Karakoy too. Today Turkish Karaites are parts of the greater Jewish community, but they bury their dead in a separate plot of the Jewish cemetery and Jewish-Karaite mixed marriages still have a problematic status.

**27** Matan Baseter Bikur Holim: Literally Secret Help Care for the Sick, it is a Turkish Jewish

community institution that finds the needy in the community and helps them. They aid children with their school and health needs, send the needy families all necessities for the Jewish holidays, and look after the sick. All the expenses are met by donations and sponsorships inside the Turkish Jewish community.

## **28 Kizba**

Turkish Jewish community organization to collect the annual tax from the members (Kizba is taxation in Hebrew).