

Avram Merkado Natan's Classmates From The Jewish School In Ruse



These are my classmates from the Jewish school in Ruse. In the middle on the left is the geography teacher Kamilarova (mother of the famous Bulgarian violine player, Emil Kamilarov), next to her is the headmaster of the school Ben Avram and the literature teacher (I can't remember her name). I am the first on the left on the lowest row. The picture was taken in Ruse on 27th October 1942.

In the Jewish school I was good at maths, geography. Our teacher was a very kind and delicate woman - Mrs Kamilarova. I also loved literature because the literature teacher was also a very interesting woman. The subject I most disliked was Tannakh. Our teacher was the headmaster Ben Avram and when he entered the room he put me and my friend Aron Kapon (he died in Israel years later) in the opposite ends of the classroom so that we would not make noise. I thought that all the legends about Avraam, Izhak, Yakov did not sound real enough and I could not understand them. That is why, we made noise during the classes.

There was no anti-Semitism during those times. I did not go to private classes. My school friends were Jews and in the neighborhood we played with Tosho and Nikola Korabov (a famous Bulgarian cinema director), because he lived nearby. We kicked the rag ball, played hide-and-seek, walked in the vineyards around the town. When we were older, we went to the river. Games were our hobby - we played 'ashitsi', marbles. There was a gym in 'Maccabi' in the Jewish neighborhood. There were around 200 children there. Various people were instructors in it - Aron Alfandari, Jacques Kapon - brother of my friend Aron and others. There was also a nice volleyball playground, a little football field and in the gym there were gym apparatuses. 'Maccabi' also organized tourist excursions - we went outside the town in the 'Sveta [St] Petka' cave. It was 5-6 kilometers from the town in some limestone slopes near the Lom River. We went there on foot, had lunch, and went back. We also went to a monastery for a walk.

Our parents did not have the money to take us anywhere and we did not go anywhere with our friends. Yet my father tried not to deprive us of anything. On Sunday evenings we sometimes went to the neighborhood pub. It was visited by Jewish, Bulgarian and Armenian families. During the week only the men went there to drink rakia [brandy]. Our father ordered kebapcheta [gilled oblong rissoles] for us in wooden plates and lemonade. They gathered with other families and it was something like a ritual for us. We did not go there every Sunday, only when we had money.

When our parents got together with their friends, they did not play cards. They usually gathered after dinner to talk (there was no TV then), usually they told each other jokes and had fun. My father did not play cards. He knew how to play but did not do it in order to protect us from becoming gamblers. My brother Mois and I grew up and studied together. Then he left for Czechoslovakia and I remained in Bulgaria. We had mutual friends. My father went to the synagogue, but not regularly. When the time for my bar mitzvah came, the Law for Protection of the Nation was already adopted and we all lived in one room. My brother had his bar mitzvah. At that time we lived in the nice house of Aftalion. My father threw up a great party then - invited all relatives and friends. Of all religious holidays I was impressed most by Yom Kippur, when you fast and ask for forgiveness. Purim was a merry holiday. We, the children, were dressed in fancy clothes, and acted out some performances. On Yom Kippur we did not eat all day and waited for the evening to come in order to eat. In fact, the men were in the synagogue the whole day and the prayers were told there. In the evening we laid the table with the typical Jewish dishes. For Purim we prepared some masks at school, but I do not remember what they were.