

## Avram Merkado Natan In The Group For Bulgarian Folk Dances In The Jewish Cultural Home In Sofia



This is I (the third from left to right) in the group for Bulgarian folk dances in the Jewish Cultural Home in Sofia in 2003.

The pension I received after I retired in 1990 was more than enough. I even managed to help my children financially. But after the inflation in 1996-7 my pension decreased significantly. We did not live in misery because my wife Simha worked in the Institute of Communications at the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company and had a good salary. We have been living together for ten years and she has never said anything about the fact that she receives a high salary and I - only a small pension. So, we live as well as we could and we do not deprive ourselves of the basic things. Now we receive a pension from the 'Claims Conference' and we live comfortably. When our pensions were low we received aid from 'Joint'. Three years ago we received aid in dollars from Switzerland but we already spent it. Now we take an active part in the community of the Jewish Home in Sofia. The women gather on Mondays and Wednesday morning - they do gymnastics in the health club. They listen to lectures, dance, cheer up. They also learn songs and do Jewish and Spanish dances twice a week. We also have our male dance club and there are women in it too - they are even more than the men. Overall, we are never bored.

Nobody harassed me because of my Jewish origin. But I was very angered by the attitude towards the wars in Israel in 1967 and 1973 and the breaking of the diplomatic ties with Israel. That was a policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which disappointed me a lot. Because I had been to Israel and I had seen how they worked and how people became real men there. There was no industry in Israel yet, people were building with primitive technologies. Their settlements were green gardens and between them - deserts. People had a lot of enthusiasm. So, I could not accept the idea that they were aggressors. A colleague of mine, Tihomir Stanev, met me at that time, one or two days

after the war in 1967 ended. He hugged me, kissed me, and said, 'Avram, I heard that you were wise people, you are a handful of people and you scared so many Arabs.' That was the only man who greeted me warmly, but the propaganda was unpleasant. The other colleagues did not change their attitude towards me. They were very tactful about the war in 1967.

I did not have problems keeping in touch with my relatives in Israel. My uncle David, who was the youngest, came to visit me in Bulgaria. I only had some problems when I returned from Cuba. My former director, Marin, with whom I went on excursions, offered me a job. He worked in the Institute for casting using anti-pressure of Academician Angel Balevsky. But the institute was secret at that time. And Marin's condition to employ me was that I should not keep in touch with any foreigners. I had to sign a declaration. I told him that I had so many relatives in Israel and I had to keep in touch with them. So, I went to another institute - the Hydrotechnics and Melioration Institute. And my relatives continued to visit me. After the changes in 1989 I was disappointed - the mistakes which were made before that were exaggerated. That fierceness between the parties was very unpleasant.