

## Berta Pando With Her Classmates From ORT



In this photo you can see me with some of my classmates from ORT. The photo was taken in 1950 in a studio in Sofia. There is an inscription in blue ink on the back of the photo: 'A souvenir from the end-of-term celebration. Dance group at Secondary Vocational School of Mechanics ORT. Sofia, 6th June 1950.' There is a stamp of photo studio 'Photo Tih Troud', 51 Skobelev Street.

At first I studied at ORT for three years and after that I moved to Stalin Vocational School because electricity technology was too hard for me to study. Afterwards ORT transformed into Kirov Vocational School of Electricity and Stalin was a school of mechanics. My main subject was Engines with Internal Combustion.

The photo was taken during my second year at ORT. There was an amateur dance group at the time. The teacher, whose name I can't remember, is in the middle. She was half-Jew. I am in the first row, the first on the left. Behind the teacher is Vera who has a kerchief on her head – she is Bulgarian, a friend of mine. There were some Bulgarians studying at ORT as well.

In 1949 I went to Sofia to study there. They had just opened a boarding house and a vocational school sponsored by Joint. They called it ORT. It was situated near Rouski Monument whereas the boarding house was on 20 'Pozitano' Street, next to the Jewish school. In the first year there was only me and three other girls. In the second – there were eight girls from all over Bulgaria, in the third – fifteen. In the first year there were 52 boys and 4 girls.

Our boarding house was on 106 'Pozitano' Street and the school was near the Rouski Monument. Our teachers were Bulgarians and Jews. We used to study general and technical subjects. We had some practical lessons of cold working, locksmith skills, turnery in workshops that were fully equipped. There was a separate room for electrical engineering but we also visited other factories, like furrieries and foundry work factories. There we also had some practical lessons. The cold working and the electrical engineering were conducted in the school. At noon we would return, the whole group, for lunch. Lunch always consisted of soup and main course, there was no shortage.

And from the canteen – to the study-room to prepare our lessons. Downstairs we used to have this big, sports hall, which was turned into a study-room, with tables. We studied individually. Rouzha Isakova was the manager of the boarding house and Marko Isakov was something like a mentor of the students. Uncle Yakov was in charge of the supplies, tanti Rashel was a cook, and later came tanti Sara. My classmates were Stela Davidova and Sara Mandil from Kyustendil, Zhozefina Isakova from Plovdiv. The boys from Yambol were Albert Sintov – the husband of our famous [opera] singer Anna Tomova-Sintova, who is a first cousin of mine, Isak Benaroy and Hari Basan, from Yambol as well. We used to throw parties in the evenings. It was such fun, there was a guy who played the accordion. He was playing, we were dancing – tango, waltz, rumba...We were joking, presenting little drama plays... It was wonderful...