

## Berta Pando's Daughter Stela Benaroy



My daughter Stela in 1965 in the park in Plovdiv. The resemblance between her and my granddaughter at the same age is striking. There is neither a stamp of a photo studio, nor any other inscription on the back of the photo.

We didn't have children for nine years. There was an interesting thing with my conception. I had a friend from Yambol – Milka Godzes. She was a Jew too. Her father had started going blind gradually since the age of ten or twelve. Her father and my father were friends. My dad helped him by reading the lessons aloud to him so that he could finish the third year at school. When Milka was born, he saw and afterwards lost his sight completely. Milka married a Jew, too. We were friends with her because she was only a year and three months younger. Later, when we grew up we both got married. Her husband was a military officer in Burgas and they moved to live there. Later, when they came to Plovdiv, they would visit us. After some years, having been in all towns in Bulgaria, he was transferred to Yambol and they settled down there. We would return to Yambol for the holidays and used to meet them in the Jewish club to celebrate – for Pesach, Rosh Hashanah. Milka gave birth to a son in 1961. He was given brit. By chance I turned out to be in Yambol at that time and was present at the circumcision. There is such a belief among the Jews that if a childless woman takes the part from the brit and carries it with her all the time, she will have a baby. They gave me the part of his weewee. I folded it in a piece of cotton and was always carrying it in my handbag. I got pregnant in less than a year. My pregnancy was very hard. I stayed in bed for nine months. I was hospitalized three times and was put on sytems because I couldn't eat anything. Then I returned to Yambol and decided to give birth there. We were bringing up Stela as a Jew but

at the same didn't want to make her feel isolated from the other children so I painted eggs and made cookies at Easter.

[Later] my Stela was friends (when visiting her grandparents in Yambol) with [Milka's] son - Isko - the boy part of whose flesh I had taken after the brit. When they were young children they were fighting and quarreling all the time. He used to pull her plaits. Later, when they grew up, they didn't keep in touch because we lived in Plovdiv most of the time. We returned to Yambol from time to time. Afterwards, Itsko [diminutive from Isak] went to Varna [a city on the Black Sea Coast in Northeast Bulgaria] to study economics, he came back to Yambol to study for some exams and they met again, but as grown up people. Stela was finishing school and had gone to visit her aunt. They started flirting, wooing. They were writing letters and in a year, a year and a half they decided to get married in 1983.