

Leon Moshe Seliktar During The Internment In Dupnitsa In 1943



This is a portrait of mine taken during the internment in Dupnitsa in 1943.

During the war we were interned in Dupnitsa. We left our house and our possessions and took as much as we could carry. We locked the house, but later we found out that that didn't stop the burglars. We went to Dupnitsa. It was very difficult to find a place to live there; there was no work. The Jewish municipality had organized some food for the Jews. I was with my sister, and my brother had been mobilized to the Jewish labor camps. He had graduated from high school and was mobilized every year. Suddenly, in September some policemen came to Dupnitsa, took our family and 10-15 more Jews, mostly intellectuals, and put us on a train. We were being guarded by armed policemen. We spent the night in Sofia, in the basement of the police commandant's office: the men were separated from the women. During the night we heard some screams, in the morning we found out that my sister had had a nervous breakdown. Then we were once again put on the train and taken to Somovit. That was a camp for Jews to be repatriated to Poland. The barges were waiting on the Danube and the policemen showed them to us, 'You see, we are waiting for the order to put you on them.'

My mother and sister weren't with us, because after my sister had a nervous breakdown, she was taken to Alexandrovska Hospital in Sofia and my mother was with her. But we didn't know what had happened and were wondering where my mother and sister were. After a few days my mother

arrived. We asked her about my sister and she said she was in the hospital: Adela was ten years old then. But the policeman who was guarding my mother and sister turned out to be a kind man, because he agreed to find a Bulgarian, a friend of ours, who would look after Adela. The Bulgarian promised to help and he really kept his word. After a few days he took Adela with him and hid her. When we were released from the camp we took her home. We spent two and a half months in the camp. At first, we were accommodated in a school: a few hundred people slept next to each other on the floor. We could only walk around in the yard of the school, which was guarded at several places. We were given food, but it was terrible. The moment we arrived, we were searched and all our money and jewelry was confiscated.

When September came and the village children had to start school, they built some sheds on a hill and took us there. The place was surrounded by barbed wire and there were guards. We were made to work: we made the sheds and some other buildings. We lived there until the end of November when the orders started coming and we were released in groups. We went back to Dupnitsa and took our sister with us. We did whatever work we got: digging, manual labor, etc. Sometimes we were given some work to do, but weren't paid after we had done it. My brother was still in the labor groups at various places in Bulgaria: they built roads. We slept at some distant relatives' of my mother's in Dupnitsa. We were there until 9th September 1944.