

High School Photo Of Matilda Levi



I guess everybody has a picture like this - finishing school is a big day in one's life! The year is 1936. I finished high school in Sofia and soon after that I left for Paris, where I was studying for a year. It's difficult to see me here - I'm third from left, standing. We gathered in the school yard to have this picture, with the graduation certificates in our hands.

After I graduated, I left for Paris. My mother laughed because I didn't know French. I spoke only German; I had studied it in high school. I began learning French in Paris. There was a three-month course called 'Pantheon' where I began learning French. I studied really hard; I had really good written French. When I came back, the fact that I could speak French didn't help me at all.

I liked medicine very much. My mother was never healthy, she used to take a lot of medicines and I became keen on medicine but when I was told that I would have to see dead men, I gave up. My father advised me, 'Well, then enroll into French philology. What will happen then? You know that a Jew won't be accepted as a teacher.' There were no Jewish teachers indeed. My mother wanted me to study chemistry. I have never had a mark lower than excellent but I wasn't especially keen on it. Well, I enrolled into chemistry but when my mother left for Bulgaria several months later, I moved to the Sorbonne and enrolled into Archeology and History of Arts. I had just returned for my holidays when the war began.

I spent a year in Paris and it was the best year of my life. The landlady was very strict; I lived at her place just for a while and later I took a separate room. It was very interesting there. I used to go out on the street at sunset and I watched Paris life; it was wonderful. I was a beautiful girl and people were very tolerant and accepted everything; I was from the Orient. However, I immediately turned towards the Bulgarians there. I was in the subway and two men, standing behind me, were talking, 'Shall we try talking to her or not?' And I turned, and said in Bulgarian, 'No, you won't talk to me, I'll talk to you!' So, they told me where the Bulgarians met. They were a great company. It included Iliya Beshkov, and Nenko Balkanski, an artist called Popov. There was a little restaurant, which worked as a canteen also. Popov had painted it all. Stefan Sarchadjiev was there on a

specialization. The great director, Krastyu Mirski, was studying there too. There were more modest people as well who had left Bulgaria because of their leftist political orientation. The company was really nice and we got together every evening.