

Beniamin And Iafa Kohen



These are my parents Beniamin Shemtov Kohen and Iafa Beniamin Kohen. The photo was taken in 1960 in Samokov.

My mother's name is Iafa Beniamin Kohen, nee Levi, and my father's name - Beniamin Shemtov Kohen. They were both born and raised in Samokov. My mother had primary education and my father - secondary high school education. He knew French, because his parents wanted him to go to study in France, which did not happen, because my father was the first born child and his duty was to stay and support the family, who was not very well-off. My father believed in communist ideas, but I did not remember if he was a member of the party or if he was involved in illegal party activities. In this sense my father was more of an idealist and communist in beliefs than an active party member. My mother was apolitical.

My parents spoke in Ladino to each other. Of course, since we had to go to a Bulgarian school and when we were among Bulgarians, we spoke Bulgarian and learned Bulgarian very well. So, we spoke Ladino and Bulgarian equally well, though our Bulgarian vocabulary was richer. My parents did not know Ivrit, though they both were very religious, observed kashrut on Pesach, fasted on [Yom] Kippur, celebrated erev Sabbath and all other high religious holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, Chanukkah, Sukkot, Lag ba-Omer, Tu bi-Shevat, Simchat Torah.

I do not know how my parents met. But I know for sure that their wedding took place in 1919, when my father was 37 years old and my mother - 29 years old. My parents' brothers and sisters were kind people. My parents kept in constant touch with them. They met on holidays, weddings, celebrated holidays together, visited the ill relatives. My father's sisters are Ester Beniamin Kohen [her maiden family name] and Victoria Beniamin Kohen, but I do not remember anything else about their families or about them. My mother's sister's name was Rashel Rahamim Levi [her maiden family name] and her brothers' names were Mordehay Rahamim Levi, Leon Rahamim Levi and Ruben Rahamim Levi. I have no information about them.

I remember that my father worked in a small shop owned by him, but did not earn much money. I also remember that we were constantly short of money and my father had to carry goods on his horse to the nearby villages on Sundays. He carried the villagers' hats, which my mother sewed and knitted at home, as well as cotton, or other things they needed. The Bulgarians bought them and provided us with an income. At first my mother sewed clothes for my father's shop. My father often worked as a travelling salesman to the nearby villages so that his children would have enough food and clothes. My parents also insisted that we further our education. When my parents wanted to go for a walk, they asked us to draw or write something interesting, made up a variety of artistic activities, then they came back and pointed out our best works.