

Nissim Kohen With His Cousins Roza (Hemda) Eshkenazi And Sofi Lazar



This photo shows two cousins of mine. On the right is Roza or Hemda Eshkenazi, nee Kohen, I am in the middle, and on the left is Sofi Lazar, nee Kohen. Probably the photo was made in 1927 in Sofia. Both of my cousins are children of my father's elder brother Eliyah Kohen. Sofi Kohen moved to Israel in 1938 or 1939 and she lived in the kibbutz Meselot at first, then in the kibbutz Hatsoah. She died in 1996. Roza left for Palestine in 1946 or 1947. She lived in the Meselot kibbutz and died in 2000.

My grandfather Nissim Kohen was a leather worker. He had a small workshop in the center. He made shoes of calf and horse hide called 'opintsi'. Those shoes were low and shallow. They were closed and were made of processed or unprocessed leather. They were pointed, the color of the leather and had shoelaces. Our grandfather's kin was called 'los konyos'. This is a combination of Bulgarian and Ladino. It means 'people who work with horses'. My grandfather and uncle Eliyah bought horse hide, tanned it and sold it. That's how their nickname appeared. My grandfather had a small beard and he wore a hat. He was fair-haired and a little stooped. He was a wise man and his word was respected in the family. We spoke to him in Ladino. My grandmother was always ill and rarely went out of the house. Sometimes she stood on the doorway in the yard or in front of the house. She was a wise woman with a very good memory. She knew a lot about many people, although she stayed mostly at home. My parents looked after my grandparents. My mother did all the housework.

My grandfather's house was on 12 Slivnitsa Street. Later the street was renamed to 7 Gyueshevo Street. Our house was made of adobe and at first it had only one room and an entrance hall. Later another room was added as well as another extension, which was the house of my uncle Rafael Kohen. My father's elder brother Eliya Kohen also lived in that yard. His house was the most solid one. My father Mihael Kohen took a half of one of my grandfather's rooms and enlarged it. He also built another room with a small entrance hall where he lived with his family. There were some inconveniences. The toilets were outside and we had no running water inside. There was a tap on the street which we used. We had electricity. Later we had running water in the yard, but not in the house. The street, on which we lived became all muddy when it rained. And so did most of the streets in the Jewish neighborhood.

My father Mihael Kohen had three brothers - Eliyah, Rafael and Azarya Kohen. The eldest one, Eliyah Kohen, was a cobbler. The next one, Rafael Kohen had a workshop for mending shoes in the center of the town. He took to drinking and lived very miserably. Before going home, he would stop in a pub and since he was in much debt, he had to get home using less traveled roads so that he would not meet any of the people whom he owed money. Later he moved his workshop in our house. The third brother of my father Azarya worked as an adolescent for the Arie family in Samokov. That was a rich family, whose house is now a museum. The Arie were in the leather and the banking business. My uncle was a leather worker. He worked for free, because my grandfather had taken money from them to build his house. There my uncle learned the craft and decided to start a leather business by himself. He also lived in the Jewish neighborhood on Shar Planina Street and Tri Ushi Street. I had a lot of cousins in Sofia. There were nine children in the families of my uncles who lived in our yard. Uncle Eliyah had four children - Mindusha, Moshe, Sofka and Hemda, and uncle Rafael - five - Buka, Simanto, Nissim, Elazar and Milka. Uncle Rafael married Buka-Miriam (nee Toledo) who was from Provadia. Uncle Azarya had a girl - Hemda, who lived and died in Sofia. His wife's name was Buka, nee Konfino and was born in Shumen.