

Nissim Kohen's Father Mihael Kohen During His Military Service



This is a photo of my father Mihael Kohen during his military service - they are doing repair work. My father is the second on the left with a wooden hammer in hand. The photo was taken in Sofia shortly before the [First] Balkan War in 1912.

My father Mihael Kohen tried many things in life. He spent eight years in captivity during World War I. He was held captive by the French army near Thessaloniki as a soldier from the Bulgarian army. After that he worked as a tinsman. He took part in the construction of the roof of the first building of the Sofia University. He traded with second-hand products. Later, together with an uncle of my mother's Chelebi Haravon, and with the active help of my uncle Mois Haravon, he managed to set up a haberdashery on Lomska Street [present-day George Washington Street, near the central Sofia synagogue], but those were the years of the great crisis in 1929-1932 and he was forced to close it down. Then he started work as a street vendor and walked around the neighborhood with a tray selling elastic cords, tights and haberdashery. Then he made a warehouse selling coal near our house. At that time people could not afford to buy a lot of coal and came to buy 5-10 kilos. In this way my father was able to support us and helped the people in the neighborhood. That continued until the passing of the anti-Jewish laws when he was forbidden to work.

My parents met in an interesting way. During World War I or probably in the end of the war, my uncle Azarya Koen was injured and was sent to the family of my mother in Kyustendil to be looked after. There he decided that my mother would be the perfect for wife for his brother, my father. After the war ended and my father returned from captivity, his brother Azarya told him that he had found a very nice girl from Kyustendil for him. My father retorted that he did not need a wife and Azarya should marry her if he liked her so much. But his brother was already married. There were other attempts to bring them together at that time. But in the end, they met by accident when my mother came from Kyustendil to visit her brother Buko Haravon. Later it turned out that she was the girl that uncle Azarya was talking about to my father. They liked each other and got married. Their wedding was in 1922 in Sofia. In my family my mother did all the housework and she helped

my father who had a warehouse for coal near our house.