

Lina Franko



The baby you see in this picture is me.

I was born in a neighborhood of Istanbul, called Ortakoy in 1929. I wasn't named after my paternal grandmother as was the tradition, but was named after my father's sister who had died at a very young age. [In the Sephardic tradition, the first girl born in the family is named after her father's mother, the first boy after his father's father, the second girl after her mother's mother, and the second boy after her mother's father] I'm the only daughter of this family. When I asked my mother about why I didn't have any siblings, she used to reply: "la situation ke ofre la Banco di Roma no permetiya de azer otra kreyatura" meaning "the financial rewards which Banco di Roma offered did not permit us to have another child". In the beginning I accepted this answer, but later on as I thought of even poorer families who had more children but who never starved and even went onto higher education, I decided that my mother was a little bit unfair. I even found my mother more unfair when I saw that my life style wasn't even close to being poor. My father, from time to time, received some bonus or shopping tickets from the bank. He brought home food which was called delicacy with these tickets. Some examples of the delicacy are: Likorinos, lakerda [salted fish varieties], Gruyere [yellow French cheese] and Roquefort cheese, kalamata olives, and canned sardines. But within the years, I sometimes thought "I'm lucky to have no siblings, taking care of this mother and father is my duty."

During my childhood, a washerwoman [a woman to do the washing only at a time when there were no washing machines] came to our house regularly. The name of this woman was Simbul, and she was Jewish. I have two memories related to this issue. I was the only daughter of the family who

didn't eat much food. My father would find and bring home the best of everything. The washerwoman had a daughter with red cheeks. My mother asked her enviously what she gave her daughter to eat. She replied that she dipped bread into the coffee grounds which she had drunk before and gave this to her in the morning, and she shared with her daughter the food she was given at the houses where she worked. In this way, they felt very sad, because I was very thin, though they were all paying very much attention to me.

I am still choosy about food but I am not that thin any more. I still crave for the food my grandmother used to make. I like food that has been cooked and heated well with a lot of sugar.