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CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

THE CENTRAL EUROPE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION

FAMILY NAME: LEONTINA ARDITI

CITY: SOFIA

COUNTRY: BULGARIA

INTERVIEWER: PATRICIA NIKOLOVA



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Leontina Arditi

[*Leontina Samuilova Stoyanova is known as an actress under her maiden name Leontina Arditi, which was also used in her biography.]



This is a photo of my mother Mariika Samuil Arditi, nee Uziel, with me as a baby and with friends in front of the maternity ward. The photo was taken in Sofia in 1929.

Leontina Arditi is a part of the history of Bulgarian theater. She was among the first to successfully introduce one-(wo)man performances, or the so called 'theater with one actor', as a separate art category in Bulgaria. A character actress of vast and flexible range, she has played dozens of brilliant comedy and drama roles. Her hard life path as an actress in the communist regime in Bulgaria prevented her from immigrating to Israel. The love of the Bulgarian culture and society induced her to become a stage-director. She has been teaching half-professional and amateur teams for several decades, coming to know the 'charm discreet' of the Bulgarian province. The international awards that followed proved that she had made the right choice. One of Leontina's unexpected talents turned out to be writing. Her autobiography 'Sahraneni broenitsi' ['Safe-kept Rosaries'], which concentrates on the period of the Holocaust, or to be more precisely the Law for the Protection of the Nation in Bulgaria, is written in the rarely found succinct and precise, schooled style of a writer. 'Safe-kept Rosaries' was translated into German and published in Austria under the title 'In meinem Ende steht mein Anfang' ['In my End is my Beginning']. The book attracted the interest of a broad public at its presentation in Vienna last year. Israel has also expressed interest in translating the story of an early Jewish childhood transposed over the prism of horrible historical events. Despite the poverty and humble style of living – a two-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of Sofia – Leontina's home is warm and hospitable, although it creates a bit of a sad impression. This is due to the fact that she lives alone, away from her daughter and her granddaughters, repatriated to Israel. They are the only thing that still makes her believe in life, apart from the Arts and Theater that she is still involved in as a stage-director.

When the Spanish Queen Isabel and the Spanish King Fernandez expelled the Jews from Spain in 1492, some of them went to Western Europe, others to Russia [Editor's note: there was no significant Sephardi settlement on Russian territory.] and the remaining part to the Orient [also see Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [1]. The Turkish people, for example, are thankful up

to the present day that Jews have come to them, because they were doctors and as a whole people with intelligent professions. As far as my kin is concerned, they were a part of one group of Jews who got to Italy this way. They lived in the Ardennes, one of the borders of what was then Italy. [Editor's note: this is only a supposition of Leontina Arditì, since the Ardennes are actually in Belgium, Luxemburg and France.] That's where my name comes from – Arditì. Italians gave a gun, ten she-goats and two or three sheep to each family and told them to protect the borders. 'Arditì' – 'Ardennes' – that's the most probable etymology of my family name. At the beginning, in the 16th and 17th century, these Jews expelled from Spain lived in lairs dug by themselves in the caves. They were mere nomads. They were religious, I suppose. I don't know anything else about them.

My kin that came from Italy and settled in Ruse, northeastern Bulgaria, was my father's family. All of them had a strong sense of humor. They played the guitar, the mandolin; they used to sing Italian songs and speak Ladino. They were dark, emotional and swarthy like the Spanish. In Ruse the Arditì family had a very severe argument. I don't know the reason, but it was about money, I suppose. That's why one part of the family ran away as far as Pazardzhik, southwestern Bulgaria. I'm from the Pazardzhik branch of Arditì, while my relative, Elias Canetti [2], my father's cousin, is from the Ruse branch.

My maternal grandmother, granny Mazal [Uziel], almost always covered her head with a kerchief. She used to put something on my head, too, but I don't know what it was. She spoke Ladino. The whole Jewish neighborhood in Sofia, or Koniovitsa, Pernik Street, where my grandmother lived, spoke Ladino or the so-called Spaniol in Bulgarian. It was a very poor quarter. The way of living itself – with those huts, with those cortijos ['small gardens' in Ladino], and the fountains in the yards - all that was 'borrowed' from Spain. The Jews of the neighborhood used to speak Turkish too and some of them spoke Arabic as well. Their Bulgarian was very funny. [i.e. they spoke grammatically incorrect Bulgarian]. More refined Jews would definitely speak French. [Ottoman Jews traditionally enrolled in French language high schools instead of Turkish or Bulgarian ones in the late 19th century.] I don't know if they spoke Hebrew, but I have seen some books in the houses of both my grandmothers. I've never seen a Jewish woman wearing a wig in

Bulgaria. I haven't seen a Jewish man wearing a kippah either, nor do I remember a Jew walking down the streets with a black hat. Kippot were worn only in the synagogue.

Granny Beya [Arditi, nee Tadzher], my father's mother, was married to a very rich Jew, the banker Aron Arav, in her second marriage. They owned several huge houses, each one with several floors. They had Persian carpets, wonderful expensive furniture and a piano. They also had many cats. They had a housemaid and a cook at their place. The cook's name was Berta and she felt pity for my father, because he wasn't allowed to live with his mother and his stepfather, and was treated like an orphan. He had been sent to live in the basement, so he grew up around Berta the cook. The family spoke French, which was considered an aristocratic language at the beginning of the 20th century. Even later my mother, who was of humble origin, used to feel humiliated because she didn't speak French and this language was spoken in her presence.

I know little about the military experiences of my relatives. I was told that my grandfather when he was a soldier, although wounded, saved a man. He dragged him 16 kilometers at the front during the Balkan War [see First Balkan War] [3]. After the war this man showed his gratitude in a very bad way. I don't know anything about my grandparents' brothers and sisters. I've been told only about the brother of my paternal grandmother Beya – colonel Avram Tadzher. He was very clever and brave, a famous big shot with free access to the palace. He fought in the Bulgarian army in World War I [see Bulgaria in World War I] [4] and was awarded two military crosses for his bravery.

My father Samuil Moisey Arditi was a very intelligent and interesting, sweet-tempered man with a very rich inner life. I think he brought me up well. He taught me not to get dead set against anybody and anything. One of his major gestures towards me was that he sold his wedding-ring in order to buy me a violin. He felt I had an ear for music; I was only four then. The neighbors reproached him for this, because 'a musician can't make a living for a family', especially if the musician is a girl.

My father often used to read me books and acquainted me with the works of

the authors of the world. Anatole France was his favorite writer. Under my father's influence I started to like Edmond Rostand and his play 'Cyrano de Bergerac'. [Editor's note: France, Anatole (pen name of Jacques Anatole Francois Thibault, 1844-1924): French novelist, poet and critic, most famous for his novel 'The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard'; awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1921. Rostand, Edmond (1868-1918): French playwright, 'Cyrano de Bergerac' being the most famous example of the poetic romantic drama he created.]

Although he originated from the Italian Jews, papa didn't have an ear for music. He was born in Belogradchik in 1902. After he got married, he lived in Sofia. My father specially showed me a paper issued by His Majesty King Boris III [5], which read: 'I hereby declare the Italian citizen Samuil Moisey Arditi a Bulgarian citizen – the same'. He needed this document so that he could marry in Bulgaria. So, he became a Bulgarian citizen before I was born. We used to celebrate Noce di Sabbath [Erev Sabbath] systematically in our family, mastika [6] would be drunk and the Jewish appetizers would be prepared under the Italian influence – with spaghetti: spaghetti with vinegar, since there were no lemons here, served cold and with pepper.

My father had suffered a lot in his life, but he was a man of great dignity. He was half an orphan: as I mentioned before, his mother – granny Beya – had a second marriage, to the banker Aron Arav, a fabulously rich man, who couldn't stand his stepson, that is my father. Thus, being in a huge and expensive house, my father was thrown to live in the basement, and the only person who used to take pity on him was Berta the cook, around whom he grew up. Despite his merciless fate, my father managed to set off legally for France but in a goods wagon. There he started working jointly with some gypsy tin-smiths. Then he was accepted to study juridical sciences in Montpellier or in Toulouse, I don't know where exactly. As a student he found a job in a cathedral: washing the windows, cleaning, sweeping. He had worked for quite a long time there when one fine day somebody told the priest that 'he is a Jew and desecrates the church'. They fired him. After that he was a door-keeper in some French bar.

I have to tell you a funny little anecdote in regard to this: My maternal grandmother didn't like much my other grandmother because she had abandoned



This is a photo of me as a schoolgirl. The picture was taken in Sofia in the 1940s.

her child. And when she was angry, she would always feel pity for my dad: 'This golden youth, who worked in a cabaret at the door and the cloak room, where there is always such a draught! ...' And my mother when in a row with my father always used to shout: 'Of course, how can I be your favorite woman! You have seen so many naked women in this cabaret...!' My father would always set himself right with her: 'I wasn't allowed in at all.' Papa always insisted on his being a Jew. But he would say: 'I'm a Bulgarian Jew first of all.'

My father wasn't in favor of the communists. He was an antifascist. He used to say that the communist idea was wonderful in that everybody wanted to live in fraternity and equality. That it all was amazing, but it was a utopia, because man is imperfect and pollutes the good. However, to a certain extent his views were leftist. When he came back from France in 1925, he was recommended for the position of a stenographer in the Parliament by Josif Herbst [famous journalist and publicist of Jewish origin, the first director of the state Bulgarian Telegraphic Agency (Press Bureau), who was killed during the events of 1925.] A little later Josif Herbst was killed. Somebody then noticed this recommendation and my father was entered in a list of people recommended by the Jew, the journalist with left views, Josif Herbst. And, as far as I know, my father was put in the Lovech forced labor camp which later was called 'Slanchev Briag' ['Sunny Beach'] [also see forced labor camps in Bulgaria] [7]. This was a camp for Jewish antifascists, but I'm not quite sure of these facts.



This is a photo of me with my rich grandmother Beya Ardit, nee Tadzher. The photo was taken when we went for a walk in Sofia in 1941.

My mother Mariika Samuil Ardit was born in 1906 in Sofia, but her father was from the village of Kalishte, Radomir region. She had only elementary education but was intelligent by nature. She insisted on calling herself a Jew and brought home to us that the Jewish people are clever and that I shouldn't make an exception to this rule. She was tolerant to all nations. She had a gypsy woman for a friend; our house was always crowded with kadin [Turkish for married women] and so on. That's why I think the Balkans are the midpoint of the greatest culture in this world and I am convinced that it is a fortune that so many ethnic communities live in one and the same place.

My mother was an extremely beautiful woman. She became a seller in a perfumery as early as the age of 14. Once a wagon with perfumes was arranged

outside and my mother was set to sell them. My father passed by chance and bought a bar of soap for shaving. That's how he met her. That happened in 1927. It was raining one the day of their first date. He was waiting for her in front of the Halite trading center and my mother was speeding with the umbrella so much so that she fell over and tore her, as my father used to say, 'veiling' stockings. When they had a quarrel later she used to say: 'Don't think I am nuts on you!' and he would calmly reply: 'You don't say; you nearly died for me, remember the veiling stockings?' They got married the same year in Sofia's [Great] Synagogue. [8]

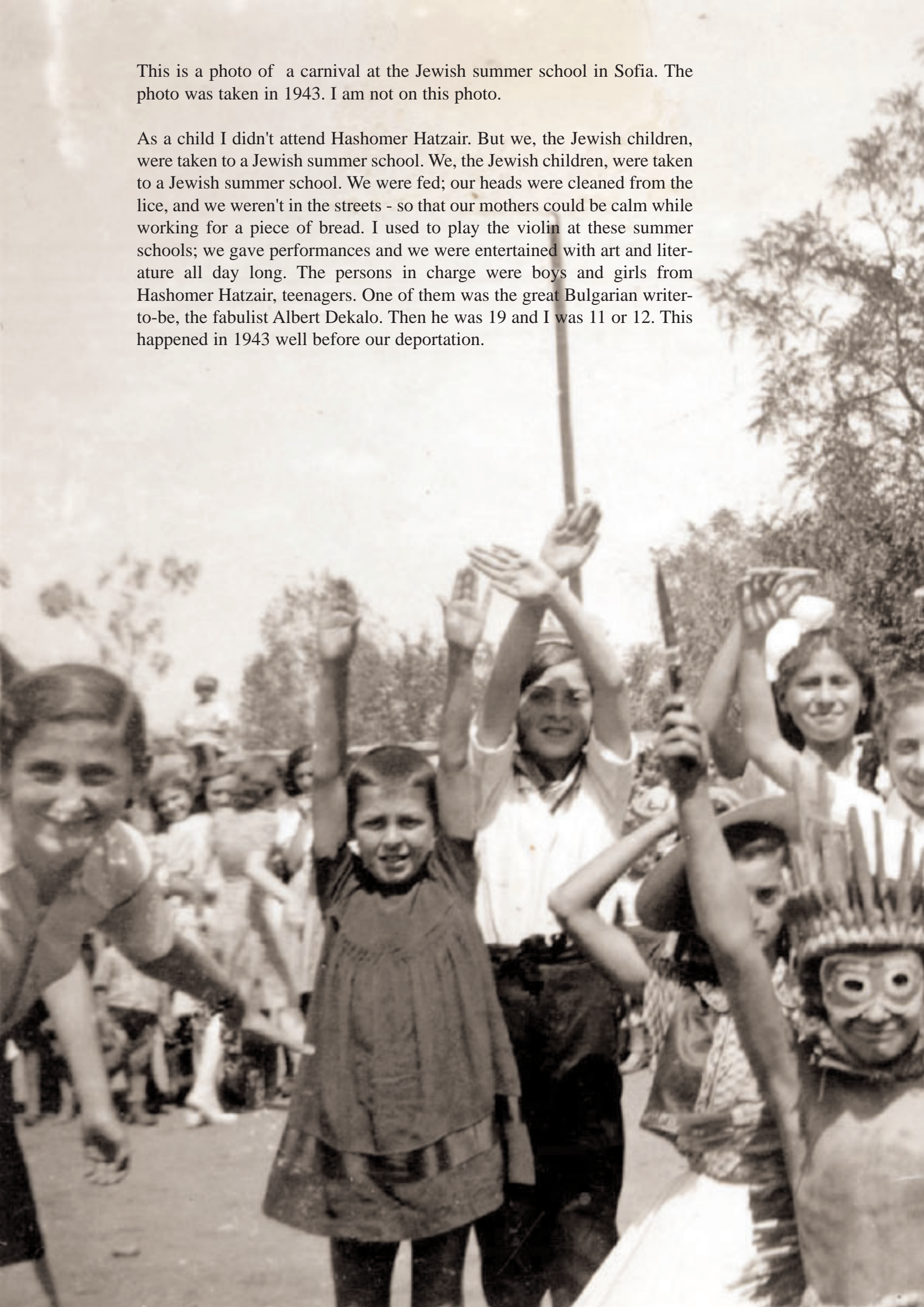
I know very little about my parents' brothers and sisters. I am, however, most familiar with my maternal relatives, especially with my mother's sister – auntie Lisa. Her husband's name was Bentzion Bar David. He was from Kyustendil, where he worked as a tinsmith. It may sound strange, but his workshop in Kyustendil was named 'Silence'. Later they left for Israel and lived in Kfar Hanagid and had an orange tree garden there. In fact, their daughter, Zelma, first immigrated to Israel and settled in Rehovot, where she married a Polish Jew, but I don't remember his name. The names of my mother's brothers were Benjamin or uncle Bucu, and Rahamim or uncle Raho. They immigrated to Israel, too. They lived in Haifa, working as stevedores at the port. Then they went to Jaffa working again as porters. After that they opened jointly a grocer's shop. When I first went to Israel – in 1964 – they had already bettered their position a lot. Each one had a grocer's of five square meters. They lived in Arabic houses, which were miserable, without fridges and without air conditioning.

I was born in Sofia in 1929. I know my mother had difficulties having children. I was born in the seventh month and they suffered a lot because of that. They didn't have any children after me at all. They had wanted many children, because all the Jews had many children then. My parents used to dress fashionably for their time – European style, elegant and neat. I want to underline that the Jews in Bulgaria, even up to their ears in misery, were very clean people. Despite the poverty, their houses were shining, no matter if hens strolled in front of them.

The financial situation of my family was very bad. We lived in the so-called 'Slatinsky redoubt'; there my parents had built a house, having bought the

This is a photo of a carnival at the Jewish summer school in Sofia. The photo was taken in 1943. I am not on this photo.

As a child I didn't attend Hashomer Hatzair. But we, the Jewish children, were taken to a Jewish summer school. We, the Jewish children, were taken to a Jewish summer school. We were fed; our heads were cleaned from the lice, and we weren't in the streets - so that our mothers could be calm while working for a piece of bread. I used to play the violin at these summer schools; we gave performances and we were entertained with art and literature all day long. The persons in charge were boys and girls from Hashomer Hatzair, teenagers. One of them was the great Bulgarian writer-to-be, the fabulist Albert Dekalo. Then he was 19 and I was 11 or 12. This happened in 1943 well before our deportation.





plot beforehand with my mother's dowry and hired a gypsy – according to the superstition of the time – to bring them good luck. The plot was abound in clay. The gypsy and my parents made clay bricks, burnt them and built a house: a room, a kitchen and a foyer. Oh, at the beginning we used to walk over some planks and often fell into the basement because we didn't have a floor, but after that they bought some furniture and took some things from my grandmother, the rich one, my father's mother; we even had an upholstered armchair. We had running water and a toilet only in the yard. We had hens, rabbits and cats. My father dug a pit in the ground and filled it with water so that we could have ducks. We even had a dog but a car ran over it. We heated the house gathering fir-cones from the wood for kindling.

Once dad told my mother: 'Come to me on Sabbath all of you. I will take you to a restaurant.' He worked as a typist in the center of the town. And he added: 'But you will come by foot'. The restaurant was in fact a shed. We go there and he says: 'Today nobody came to me for me to write him an application, but don't worry.' We ate soup and kebapcheta [grilled oblong rissoles] and he said: 'Write it over there'. That is, we had our food on credit. That's what our financial situation was like. However, despite this absolute poverty, my parents regularly bought me children's books, because in our house we used to read a lot. Newspapers, books – all of them secular, no religious ones. Two thirds of them were in French, all bought by my father. I still have a 'Mister Pickwick' in French.

'Zora' [Dawn], 'Zaria' [Sunrise], 'Utro' [Morning] were the [leftwing] newspapers, which my father used to read. Mum didn't read newspapers. She loved the works of Anatole France, Balzac, Zola etc. [Editor's note: Zola, Emile (1840-1902): French writer and critic, leader of the naturalist school.]. Papa recommended me to read Jules Verne, Karl May and Stefan Zweig [9], and once he bought me Jack London's 'Martin Eden'. He registered me as a reader at two libraries of the capital – the municipal and the town library. My parents loved reading books aloud at home. This way they read Gustave Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary' for example. My mother felt pity for her. When we were to be interned [see Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] [10], my mother sold a lot of things but the books we brought to Professor Kamen Popdimitrov – uncle Kamen – my violin teacher. He put them away in the attic. And when we returned [from the internment], he gave them back to my

father, who said: 'Well, now I know I'm happy.'

My parents weren't very religious, especially my father – he was an atheist. My mother used to prepare matzah and tarhanah [dough, turned into sheets of pastry which are left to dry out and then sliced to thin stripes resembling macaroni] for Pesach, but we used to eat pork at home and my parents always made fun of themselves when they ate pork. We always observed Rosh Hashanah. My father wouldn't go to work. We would put our new clothes on and pay visits to people. We didn't observe Sabbath in our family, but we used to go to my grandfather's, my mother's father, whom I hardly remember. We observed the religious holidays only as a tradition. We gathered with my maternal relatives at Purim and we, the children, wore masks. For example, [as a 'disguise'] I wore my father's coat turned inside out. I should say my father respected all religions. I remember him talking to me for hours about the Catholics, about Joan of Arc and the history of France.

I've never entered a synagogue in my life. Neither of my parents ever took me to one. Well, I recently went to Sofia's synagogue to see how they restored it, but that's it. I've never studied Ivrit, but my parents taught me morals with their behavior, and I'm thankful for that. I've never seen quarrels at home. Well, my father was very jealous, all the more so because a Russian guardsman once fell in love with my mother. All this passed quickly, but when in a certain moment I did something wrong with my life, my mother called me and said: 'Las judias son onoradas' [Ladino, meaning 'The Jewish women are honest.']

Papa regularly attended Jewish gatherings in Bet Am [11] and especially so after 1944. My mother didn't. I haven't seen them going there together. I remember my father coming back home and my mother saying: 'What's up, walkie, what's there in Betama [Bet Am]?' And dad would say: 'Jidios, jidios, jidios – muchos jidios' [Ladino, 'Jews, Jews, Jews – a lot of Jews.'] I want to underline that after 1944 my father sent me to Bet Am, where the great Bulgarian stage director, Boyan Danovsky, also of Jewish origin, gathered young Jews for his class in acting. There I played violin in Mario Menashe Brontsa's orchestra. We had a wonderful big symphony orchestra. My first theater recital was held at the library club of the Jewish Center years after that.



This is a photo of my father Samuel Moisey Arditi. The photo was taken in Sofia in the 1940s.



This is a photo of my mother Mariika Samuil Arditi, nee Uziel, taken in Sofia in the 1940s.

I was small then and I remember vaguely the famous manifestation of 24th May 1943 [12] when the Jews marched to tell the King not to expel them. As a matter of fact 24th May [13], the day of the Slavic alphabet, as well as of the saint brothers Cyril and Methodius [14], who created it, was my favorite holiday. I was 14 years old then. I remember I had put on my red blouse. Suddenly the people who participated in the events started running because there was mounted police that scattered them. I was playing in the street; mum came, collected me, brought me home and said: ‘Take off this red blouse! You have chosen a bad moment to wear it!’ [red as a symbolic color of the communists] It was this day that I first heard of the word ‘anti-Semites’. I heard: ‘The anti-Semites battered to death the Jews!’ I didn’t know what it meant; I couldn’t even pronounce it. We were six Jewish children, who studied in the Bulgarian school, but nobody bothered us, nobody maltreated us.

We, the Jewish children, were taken to a Jewish summer school. We were fed; our heads were cleaned from the lice, and we weren’t in the streets – so that our mothers could be calm while working for a piece of bread. I used to play the violin at these summer schools; we gave performances and we were entertained with art and literature all day long. The persons in charge were boys and girls from Hashomer Hatzair [15], teenagers. One of them was the great Bulgarian writer-to-be, the fabulist Albert Dekalo. Then he was 19 and I was 11 or 12. This happened in 1943 well before our deportation.

I remember the prettiest holiday parade in my childhood. My mother used to take me with her every time. The whole Jewish neighborhood flocked there. We were together – Bulgarians and Jews – to celebrate 24th May. It was the loveliest thing to see: the kids with the fanfares singing ‘Go, oh, nation, reawakened’. We danced and applauded and our parents bought us Bulgarian flags; and this flag was hanging for a year at home after that. I also remember the traditional military parade on 6th May [St. George Day] [16]. We used to go there to see the handsome soldiers with their weapons.

As a child I didn’t attend Hashomer Hatzair. But my mother’s sister, auntie Lisa, had a daughter, Zelma, who participated in Hashomer Hatzair. She was one or two years younger than me. Suddenly Zelma set off for Israel by boat;

this was before 9th September 1944 [17] or maybe it was this very year. Their departure was arranged through Hashomer Hatzair, but I don't know anything else about it. Zelma lives in Rehovot up to the present day, where she retired as a teacher several years ago. Following her departure, her parents, who came from Kyustendil, went to Israel. They were accommodated in Kfar Hanagid, where they had an orange tree garden.

I have paid a visit to Zelma; she is what a Jew must be: religious and so on. Her husband is from Poland but I don't remember his name. His parents were gassed in a concentration camp and he was saved. His story is horrible. He was small when the Nazis found room for themselves in their house in Poland. Some good people hid him this way: there was a plank toilet in the yard, but another one was dug for the Nazis. Polish people who saved this child used to let him down to the bottom of this toilet every day and he had to go through everything in order to avoid the Germans' suspicion of his presence there. The neighbors took him out by night, washed him and let him down the other day again. That's how Zelma's husband survived the Holocaust as a child. He has passed away by now, but I think he wrote a book about his fate, if I'm not mistaken, and it was published in Israel.

I have lived between two classes. I remember that the Jews were on friendly terms with the Bulgarians as well as with the other nations. There were as many Jews at a Jewish celebration as were Bulgarians, Turks and even gypsies. As a whole, I've grown up in the surrounding of horses, carts, hens, gypsies, Turks, Wallachians, Russian guardsmen. I've grown up in a healthy atmosphere. We are talking about my childhood years in Mezdra. It was a small town with some 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants, where no other Jews lived except my family. And I never heard offenses.

I had a very happy childhood. I learnt how to walk in Dolni Dabnik, and began going to school in Mezdra. My father worked in a mill and my mother was a housewife but she managed to breed simultaneously two geese, twenty hens and God knows how many ducks. My mother used to stuff the geese with maize so that they would get fat. She had learnt that from her mother. My poor granny Mazal had a strange nickname: the Courtier. The history of her nickname was the following: She was close to a cook of King Boris III, who liked meals with goose very much. Once her friend the cook

told my grandmother: 'Mazalika [diminutive from Mazal], if you can bring me four geese a month you will earn a lot of money'. She didn't earn much money, but she kept on taking four geese a month to the palace, stuffing them with maize the same way my mother showed me. The geese swell this way only for a month or two.

The most special occasion in Mezdra was when in the evening the women would take the men's arms, the children behind them, and go to the station. The train from Sofia passed through there and had a stop at Mezdra station. We weren't rich, so my mother used to take a slice of bread from home and used to buy me a kebapche from the station. I remember once I was taken ill with diphtheria and was crammed into a train to Sofia, where I was to be treated. After that I took pride of place among the children of Mezdra, who had never entered a train. As a child I never got in a car, of course, but I often took rides in a cart.

I met my first love when I was seven – Geshko Lishkov, a small gypsy. His father ran the roundabouts near the station. We decided to get married, Geshko and I. He would let me in to the roundabouts ... With the children in Mezdra, mainly gypsies, we played all day long.

When my family moved to live in Sofia I was growing up in the poor Jewish quarter Koniovitsa. We lived in the house of my maternal relatives and it looked very bad. It consisted of a primitive room with a small corridor, without running water and electricity, but still five or six people lived there. When we got interned we went to live for a while there again. Then we had to go to Dupnitsa.

One fine day my father came back from work at an unearthly hour bringing something in an envelope and some buttons scattered on the floor. And he put a piece of cardboard on the table. My mother and I asked: 'What are these yellow buttons?' And he answered: 'These are the stars and they have to be sewn on all clothes.' – 'And this cardboard, what is it?' – 'A Jewish house'. Mum put the sign 'A Jewish house' outside and there came the neighbor auntie Mika, a Bulgarian, to ask us for something – some salt or vinegar, it didn't matter. And she cried: 'My word, what's that? Oh, Gosh, take this bullshit out of here.'

Our deportation was very fearful. We were already in this den, the house of my mother's parents, which was situated on Pernik Street in Koniovitsa. We brought out all our belongings and started selling them. Dad was sent to a forced labor camp and my mother was cleaning the casks of some Jews, who intended to sell them. As a matter of fact, my father was sent to four Jewish forced labor camps. The first was in the village of Izvorche, Lovech region, the second in Shiroka Poliana, Batak region, the third in Dupnitsa, and I don't know where the fourth was. The last time my father came back from a forced labor camp his back was all in violet straps from beating. He never told us why he was beaten. I know he arrived by train at 3am, but he didn't call us until 6am. He stayed at the front door stairs in order not to wake us up. He was afraid he was infested with lice. Then mum undressed him in the yard, kindled a big fire and boiled all his clothes in a cauldron. After that she wrapped him in a bed sheet; it was snowing outside! Then she cleaned him from lice in the house.

My mother's encounter with the commissioner Belev [18] of the so-called Committee on Jewish Affairs [19] in 1943 was interesting. The Committee was formed after the arrival of the Germans in Bulgaria, that is after the Law for the Protection of the Nation [20] was passed. Mum herself insisted to meet him at the time when they intended to expel us from our house. Her meeting was organized by a friend of a friend of Julia de la Gnese, who was in turn my father's friend. She was a very decent woman; she taught me French for free. She fell in love with some German and we used her contact. Although pointless, this encounter was remembered. I accompanied my mother – Belev appeared to me tall and sinister, with a yellowy-white face, pale as a dead man. My mother entered and came out again immediately. And said: 'Impossible'. That meant, we had to leave our house; we weren't allowed to stay there. But I remember well the cleaning woman at the Committee, who was sweeping and in front of her some young Germans in uniforms were sitting and smoking. She cursed them in the face: 'Got smite them', she shouted, 'and me, to sweep their shits here! Who brought them here...' And so on. A man heard her and said, 'What the hell are you talking! They will hear you!' 'You don't say! They don't speak Bulgarian let alone Shopski dialect.' [Editor's note: the northwestern part of Bulgaria is popularly called Shopluk or Shopsko.]



This is a photo of my maternal grandmother, Mazal Uziel. The photo was taken in Sofia in 1943.

This is a photo of me with friends in the children summer camp in Dupnitsa. The photo was taken in 1944, but before 9th September 1944.

[9th September 1944: The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.





As a matter of fact this Julia had a very tragic fate. When the Germans came to Bulgaria in 1943 she fell in love and got engaged to one of them. But he went to fight at the Eastern front. He got killed and she suffered a lot. She had even got pregnant from him and mum took her somewhere to procure an abortion. Julia was a teacher in Italian and French. After 9th September 1944 she suddenly disappeared. She was slandered for having been a Germans' slut and was put in a very severe forced labor camp. My father was off to look for her. My mother went to search for her. They were told she had died.



This is me playing the violin. The photo was taken in Sofia in 1943.

Before our departure I studied in a Bulgarian secular school. I hated geometry. And the hateful teacher was Miss Yankova, our maths teacher, of course. I was a poor student. When I received a satisfactory mark [3 out of 5] my mother would make a pudding for me. And she would give the women from the neighborhood a treat. My parents even hired a private teacher for me, but it was fruitless. I liked geography a lot and I loved literature and the Bulgarian language. I knew by heart half of the 'Epopoe of the Forgotten' by Ivan Vazov [21]. I loved my teacher in literature, Mrs. Kateva, and I remember her even now as if she was standing right in front of me.

Once people came to summon students for Brannik [22] in our school. And my classmates put their names down. We had a very stupid boy in our class, Haim, and I often had fights with him. He said: 'I also want to write my name down'. They told him: 'We don't accept Jews.' Some teasing was heard: you the Jews are such and such. Then Mrs. Kateva turned red and said: 'I won't tolerate such things in my class.'

I remember another interesting story of this period. Apart from my pointless private tuition in mathematics and the wonderful lessons in French with Julia I took up lessons in music for free. As I mentioned before, my violin teacher was uncle Kamen, the famous violinist Kamen Popdimitrov, my father's friend from his years in France. Well, when we were to be interned, in my third year in the junior high school, I had a final poor mark [2, that means failed] in geometry. Everybody graduated and I had to sit for a make-up exam. We set off for the province. We were first allocated to Haskovo, but I was summoned to the police for some verses I had written. Then they sent us to Dupnitsa, where I wasn't accepted to enroll in the high school, because I

didn't have a diploma for the junior high school. They wanted at least some document stating that I had studied up to the third class of the previous level. Then mum wrote a letter to uncle Kamen. As a response he sent me a grade book for a completed 3rd class of the junior high school. My maths teacher, Mrs. Yankova, had been my nightmare; she used to give me only poor marks; I had wanted to suffocate her... And now we read that there are two good marks [4 out of 5] in the certificate for completed third class - one in geometry and one in maths. What had this man done? In which way had he spoken with Mrs. Yankova? What could he have said to her? I don't know, but this cruel woman for me became a saint, despite the fact that I wasn't accepted in the high school but in the business school. Never mind! What does this mean? It means that two Bulgarians had tried to give a blunt-witted Jewish child as best as they could, a chance to continue her studies.

I've had a lot of friends; I was an exceptionally friendly and sociable person in contrast to now. I had friends everywhere – in the villages where I grew up, at elementary school, at high school, at drama school, at the conservatory and in the theaters where I practiced as a beginning actress. These people were always tolerant towards me, so I didn't suffer from anti-Semitism. All the more, I remember in those hard days of our internment to Dupnitsa that the grandfather of my friend and classmate Lili, who was a miller, came to my mother. And he came from a village far away from Dupnitsa to say: 'If you need to escape, if you are to leave the country, I have men in the mountains, they can save you.' So I nearly became a partisan since the old man, who wanted to hide us, was obviously a supporter. And I don't even know his name.

In Dupnitsa we were rationed two or three cups of soup every noon. My father would also come to take his soup when he was back from the forced labor camps. As a matter of fact, soup was rationed then everywhere in the country. There was some talk that an officer in Haskovo was putting naphthalene in the soup for three consecutive days and the Jews couldn't have their meals. But one fine day – here we have an instance of anti-Semitism – one of my classmates in a Brannik uniform, Lida Zhadrovska from Dupnitsa, took my stove and began kicking it around, shouting: 'And we are going to feed these chifuti [23]?' She tried to hit me. And I couldn't hit her because she was fat and two times as heavily built as me – a small Jewish fry.

I remember very clearly the bombardment of Dupnitsa in 1944. It was a terrible bombardment in a small town. The population was approximately 5,000 to 6,000 and 100 died because it was a market day. There were rumors that several Jews died in a house, but I don't know exactly how many. They gathered there on Friday, because Sunday was to be the wedding day of their children. And then a bomb fell.

I remember another event. It was a great occasion for me when King Boris III died, a king whom my family respected. He died on 28th August [1943] but the funeral was on 1st or 2nd September in Rila Monastery. The train, the cortège with his body was to pass through Dupnitsa. We, the kids of between eight and ten years of age, climbed a hill, which stood exactly over the tunnel where the train had to pass. We got on there and started waiting for it. And we saw it – an open wagon with the King's body and four guardsmen who were standing straight. The train was moving very slowly with the coffin, covered with a wine-red cloth. It passed slowly and then it was gone. I remember the little boys taking off their hats. An old woman brought us a loaf of bread and shared it between us saying: 'Even though from another religion, he was your king too, and a mortal man as he was.' I remember this scene very clearly.

After 9th September 1944, we moved from Dupnitsa, where we were interned, to Sofia to live in the small house built by my father, my mother and the gypsy. Then two Russian women-soldiers were accommodated with us, one of who turned out to be a Jew. Her name was Lida Kunkunina. The name of the other one was Mira. By night these girls disappeared somewhere and came back in the mornings. Then they would take off their clothes and walk topless to the tap to wash themselves before the critical eyes of the whole neighborhood. Of course people talked: 'These are sluts. By night they attend to the needs of the army and then they come back here to have a wash. Mariika, what an evil has entered your house!' One morning they didn't come back. Sergeant-major Derepchiisky who accommodated them with us and was also a Jew came home in tears. Their beds were taken away and it wasn't until then that we understood the two girls had been bombarding Belgrade every night. We were told they were killed. I came to love these unknown girls, who left us books and who left us guns. They had brought me a pair of

boots, because I was walking barefoot then in the bitterest cold, muddy up to the ears. I didn't have anything to put on.

A little later my father and sergeant Derepchiisky went to the synagogue together. In fact the fate of this sergeant was also very tragic. He came from Vinitsa. His wife was also a Jew; they had a daughter, Ezdra. Derepchiisky always used to say: 'You will study with Ezdra'. His daughter played the violin. One night he got drunk; my father treated him to vodka. And he told us that when he had got back to Vinitsa during his leave in place of his house he had found only a pit filled with water. Neither his wife was alive, nor his daughter. And he showed us a photo which I remember very clearly: it was of his wife who was wearing a single plait.

After 9th September 1944 I joined the UYW [24]. I entered this left movement thankful I had survived. After that I joined the Communist Party with the thought it would offer me protection. I was given free education. At a certain point the arts became more important for me than everything else and I withdrew from the Party. In spite of that, up to the present day I still have left views.

The typical Jewish professions in Sofia these days were mainly those of small tradesmen and small craftsmen, for example cobblers. Some were kebabche makers; others were selling things at the market: needles, threads, vegetables arranged on a hand cart. There were no Jewish tavern-keepers, because Jews didn't drink and that was very important. But they had small grocer's shops. At a certain stage the Jewish quarter Koniovitsa was transformed into a ghetto. There was no electricity, no running water. From all the houses from three streets there was only one with a radio and we all used to go there to listen to it. Even now I can still smell the absolute poverty when I pass through there. But there was no anti-Semitism. I remember I was six or seven years old when a kid told me: 'You are Jewish', and I answered: 'What's that?'

The market of the past was fabulous – a diversity of colors and melodies from all languages. I used to steal fruits because I didn't have the money to buy them. A friend of the family, a Bulgarian policeman, often went to this market. His name was uncle Doncho. He used to say to my father: 'Today I'll fill my bag and I'll be in pocket from your Jews.' And he pursued those who had-



This is a photo of me and my friends in the Jewish neighborhood in Sofia playing violin. The boy from left in the photo is Niso [Nisim] Benbasat, my first love.

n't paid their taxes or the fees for selling goods at the market. In the evening my father would say: 'What happened with my Jews?' And his friend, the policeman replied: 'I got hold of what I could. Here – I've brought three heads of cabbage, two kilos of waffles...' They gave him these things as a bribe for him not imposing fares on them. Would you call that anti-Semitism?

As I've already said, I started going in for the arts more seriously in my school years. Then I was in the 5th or in the 6th class of the business high school in Sofia. Simultaneously I was playing the violin in the symphony orchestra of the Jewish Center, conducted by the superb Mario Menashe Brontsa. At the same time I took up the drama course of the great Jewish stage director Boyan Danovsky, who formed a class in acting at the Jewish library club. The first he gave us to work on was: 'For lunch at Bear's Place', a well-known fable by Krylov. [Editor's note: Krylov, Ivan Andreyevich (1769-1844): Russian fabulist, playwright and journalist; famous for his short fables in verse. The best-known of his dramatic works are 'The Fashionable Shop' and 'A Lesson for Daughters'.] It must have been 1945-1946, because I was accepted at Sofia's Theater School as a full-time student in 1946-1947 and as an extra violin student at Sofia's Musical Academy.



This is our house in Koniovitsa, a miserable Jewish residential district in Sofia. The picture was taken in the 1940s.

I don't remember precisely the other students in Danovsky's drama course, but I remember an outstanding performance of poetic art from 1944, presented in Bet Am by the great director Grisha Ostrovsky, then an actor, the famous violinist Yosko Rozanov and Viza Kalcheva who drowned the following year. I was 15 years old then and this event definitely helped me in choosing the profession of an actress.

The Theater School, where I was accepted as a student in acting, offered a two-year course then. In 1947, following a decree of the National Assembly, it was transformed into DVTU [Public Higher School of Theater], which was known as VITIZ [Higher Institute of Theatrical Art] in the totalitarian period [Communist regime] and as NATFIZ [National Academy of Theater and Film Arts] after 10th November 1989 [25]. We, the students, had just finished our second year. We were told that one may graduate and have a lower educational degree or may choose to continue his studies for two more years completing his education in the newly formed Public Higher School of Theater. Some of us, including me, stayed in the school, others scattered to the the-

aters to perform there.

In my third and fourth year at DVTU I started making records for the radio. Then I experienced my first meeting with a great writer – the living classic Elin Pelin [Dimitar Stoyanov, famous under his literary pseudonym Elin Pelin (1877-1949): among the greatest masters of the short story in Bulgarian literature, a ‘painter’ of Bulgarian village life.] It must have been in my fourth year, in 1950. I partnered with the unique actor Konstantin Kisimov and I nearly lost consciousness with those two classics around me. We were recording ‘Choheno kontoshche’ [‘choha’ is the Turkish word for a silky thick cloth, while ‘kontosh’ is a Persian word for a short outer garment to the waist]. When we came out of the room, I was introduced to Elin Pelin and he asked me: ‘Where have you mastered our dialect from?’ I told him I had grown up in the country. Then he offered me to perform some other of his works. This gave me wings. I performed ‘Pizho and Pend_’ as a one-man show – my first performance - and it became part of the repertoire of the Army Theater in Sofia after its premiere. It was presented hundreds of times over several decades and is now in the golden fund of the National Radio. I was then being sent to different regions of Bulgaria to present it, especially to military audience, at garrisons, and in library clubs.

I graduated in acting in 1950. I had a one-year probationary period at the National Theater. Meanwhile the Army Theater organized a casting for its troupe; I applied and was accepted. The same year I got married. My first working day was the day of my wedding – 11th September 1951. Of course I didn’t go to work; I went to marry my husband, Dilo Dikov Stoyanov, who was of Bulgarian origin. I was immediately assigned some roles by the theater, but I had already got pregnant. I gave birth to my daughter Tatyana in 1952. That’s why I played my first role as late as 1952 – in ‘Song for the Black Sea People’ by Lavrenev.

The first person who gave a one-man recital in Bulgaria was the actress Slavka Slavova with ‘You Can Endlessly Recount for Mothers’ based on a piece by Maxim Gorky [26]. Those days in Bulgaria such performances which represented the so-called ‘theater with one actor’ were a very rare occasion. The following were the actors Spas Dzhonev with ‘Song of the Songs’ and Tanya Masalitinova with ‘Anna Karenina’. And I was the fourth





This is a photo of the Jewish children's summer school in Sofia. The photo was taken in 1943.

person, namely with Lermontov's [27] 'Daemon'. The dressed rehearsal with audience took place in the building of the Jewish library club.

More than ten of my performances were banned during the totalitarian period [communism]. The reasons: 'snobbism and unhealthy western influence', 'cosmopolitanism' and 'eclectics'. These were especially my performances of 'Vanity Fair' based on Thackeray, 'Crime and Punishment' based on Dostoevsky [28] and '24 Hours from the Life of a Woman' based on Zweig. Those three were banned en block for 'snobbism and unhealthy western influence'. 'The Researcher or Don Quixote Fighting' by Vadim Karastilev was stopped for political reasons. 'Earth, Wait' – same thing. They didn't even explain to me why 'In the Sun and in the Shade' was stopped. The commission just saw it and gave me a curt refusal. However, I think the reasons were neither political, nor anti-Semitic. In my opinion, it was due to the famous envy that colleagues in the theater harbor against each other.

I met my husband Dilo by chance. I was a student in the third year when I suddenly got paralysis nervi facialis – a disgusting distortion of the face caused by stiffened muscles. The reason was perhaps some kind of flu. It passed, but the doctor recommended me in any case to go to a brigade [28] so that I could have sunbaths. That's how I found myself in the students' camp at the Black Sea. There my husband-to-be was, suffering from some kind of illness on his legs; apart from that he was studying to become a hydro-engineer. There I was continuously playing the violin, because I was to have an exam at the Conservatory. He was often listening to me. And that's how we met.

Our daughter Tanya [short for Tatyana] had hard childhood years. She was a well cared for but very unhealthy child. She grew up in sanatoria. At the age of nine she had a serious cardiac malfunction. She had to study at the sanatoria, we often called her tutors home, because she wasn't allowed to go to school. Tanya wanted to become a painter. But she completed her education at HTI [Higher Institute of Chemical Technology] in 1975 or 1976. First she was a professor at HTI, but she worked as a painter, too. She had cardiac surgery when she was 27. The annual exhibition of the Union of Painters in Bulgaria was opened on the day of her operation and she received an award for the original puppets she had made. Then she became a member of this

union and was sent as its representative to an international competition and puppet exhibition in Poland, wherefrom she returned with a gold medal. 59 countries took part. After that she received the award of the children audience at this competition. She and her two daughters, Leontina and Maria, immigrated to Israel in February 1996, where she is a well-known puppet designer and teacher, and a member of UNIMA – the international union of puppet makers [Union Internationale de la Marionette].

My granddaughters, the twins Leontina and Maria, were born on 13th October 1982. Maria is the elder – by four or five minutes. I helped with their bringing up until they turned 14. They had just finished the Jewish elementary school in Sofia and were accepted to elite schools: Leontina to NGDEK [National Lyceum for Ancient Languages and Cultures] and Maria to the Spanish High School. Several months after their acceptance they immigrated to Israel. In Tel Aviv Leontina graduated from the most prestigious local high school, in which Yitzhak Rabin had studied. Maria graduated from an art school. She is now professionally in coiffures and maquillage. Leontina graduated concurrently from a music school, directed by Russian teachers in Israel. When she graduated she was offered a chance to give a Mozart violin concert. But she didn't want to continue studying music, because in Israel the situation is like this: you can find a good violinist at every corner. She is of such nature that she chose a male profession to establish herself. She went to the hardest army in Israel – 'Kravi'. She became an officer there and 30 boys were entrusted to her care. Even now, Leontina continues serving at the hottest spots in Jerusalem.

I first went to Israel in 1964. The second time was shortly before 1989 – I was invited as a guest artist with the act '24 Hours of a Life of a Woman'. After 1997 I visited my daughter and granddaughters three or four times, and I am going to visit them this spring again. Although this is a very beautiful and intelligent country I have never felt cozy there, partly because of the Israeli way of thinking. Otherwise it is a very precious country to me.

I was happy on 10th November 1989, although I keep my left views. But I gradually got aware of the fact that we go from a certain lie to another. I am still sorry for the totalitarian period because one could do everything then, despite the immense difficulties that I encountered. And now one just has to



This is a photo of me as a schoolgirl. The photo was taken in Sofia in 1943, before the internment of my family and I from Sofia to Haskovo and Dupnitsa. Then I had taken up playing the violin. I started going in for theater a little bit later - when we came back home after our internment; that is after 9th September 1944 [the communist takeover in Bulgaria].

have money and be an insolent lout in order to make one's way in life. Once there also were such kind of people, but the strong and the intelligent managed to make their way. The period that has come to our country is pernicious and corrupt, especially for the young people.

Glossary



This is a photo of a scene of my famous one-man performance 'Pizho and Pendo' by Elin Pelin, staged at the Army Theater, Sofia. The photo was taken in the 1960s.

[1] Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Izmir, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Edirne, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Vidin).

[2] Canetti, Elias (1905-1994): Born to a family of Sephardi Jews in Bulgaria, Canetti immigrated to England with his family at the age of 6. After his father's death he moved to Vienna, lived and studied in Austria, Germany and Switzerland and earned his doctorate in chemistry from the University of Vienna in 1929. In 1938 he moved to France and later to England. His first and only novel was 'Die Blendung', published in 1935 (tr. Tower of Babel, 1947). In 1960 he completed the nonfiction masterwork 'Masse und Macht' (tr. Crowds and Power, 1962). Canetti's work defies national categorization, is original and extremely attentive to sounds and meanings of language. In 1981 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, the first Bulgarian to be so honored.

[3] First Balkan War (1912-1913): Started by an alliance made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. It was a response to the Turkish nationalistic policy maintained by the Young Turks in Istanbul. The Balkan League aimed at the liberation of the rest of the Balkans still under Ottoman rule. In October, 1912 the allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire and were soon successful: the Ottomans retreated to defend Istanbul and Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace fell into the

hands of the allies. The war ended on the 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

[4] Bulgaria in World War I: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

[5] King Boris III: The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Most Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

[6] Mastika: Anise liquor, popular in many places in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East. It is principally the same as Greek Ouzo, Turkish Yeni Raki or Arabic Arak.

[7] Forced labor camps in Bulgaria: Established under the Council of

Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18–50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

[8] Great Synagogue: Located in the center of Sofia, it is the third largest synagogue in Europe after the ones in Budapest and Amsterdam; it can house more than 1,300 people. It was designed by Austrian architect Grunander in the Moor style. It was opened on 9th September 1909 in the presence of King Ferdinand and Queen Eleonora.

[9] Zweig, Stefan (1881-1942): Austrian biographer, novelist, essayist and playwright, best known for his humanistic view on European culture expressed in his essays and biographies of major literary and historical figures. Among his most famous fictional works are his only novel, 'Beware of Pity' and the novella 'The Royal Game'; his best-known drama is the biblical play 'Jeremias'. Zweig left Austria in 1938, first for England then Brazil. In despair over the defeat of humanism in the Third Reich, Zweig and his wife committed suicide in 1942.

[10] Internment of Jews in Bulgaria: Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared. [11] Bet Am: The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

[12] 24th May 1943: Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943.

Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

[13] 24th May: The day of Slavic script and culture, a national holiday on which Bulgarian culture and writing is celebrated, paying special tribute to Cyril and Methodius, the creators of the first Slavic alphabet, the forerunner of the Cyrillic script.

[14] St. Cyril and Methodius: Greek monks from Salonika, living in the 9th century. In order to convert the Slavs to Christianity the two brothers created the Slavic (Glagolitic) script, based on the Greek one, and translated many religious texts to Old Church Slavonic, which is the liturgical language of many of the Eastern Orthodox Churches up until today. After Bulgaria converted to Christianity under Boris in 865, his son and successor Simeon I supported the further development of Slavic liturgical works, which led to a refinement of the Slavic literary language and a simplification of the alphabet - The Cyrillic script, named in honor of St. Cyril. The Cyrillic alphabet today is used in Orthodox Slavic countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It is also used by some non-Slavic countries previously part of the Soviet Union, as well as most linguistic minorities within Russia and also the country of Mongolia.

[15] Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria: 'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

[16] St. George Day: The 6th of May, the day of the Orthodox saint St. George the Victorious, a public holiday in Bulgaria. According to Bulgarian tradition the old cattle-breeding year finishes and the new one starts on St. George's Day. This is the greatest spring holiday and it is also the official holiday of the Bulgarian Army. In all Bulgarian towns with military garrisons, a



This is a photo of a scene from the experimental one-man performance 'For You, Man' at the elite chamber-theater '199' in Sofia. Here I play the mother from Hiroshima. In the performance I personify without any make-up and almost without any props 15 different dramatic characters. The photographer of this picture, Dimitar Sibirski, was awarded a bronze medal at an art photography competition in Hong Kong. The photo was taken in the 1960s.

Еврейски Труф
Широка поля





This is a photo of one of the forced labor camps, where my father Samuil Arditi was sent to. The photo was taken in Shiroka Poliana in 1942, but my papa isn't on the photo.

During the war, dad was sent to a forced labor camp and my mother was cleaning the casks of some Jews, who intended to sell them. As a matter of fact, my father was sent to four Jewish forced labor camps. The first was in the village of Izvorche, Lovech region, the second in Shiroka Poliana, Batak region, the third in Dupnitsa, and I don't know where the fourth was. The last time my father came back from a forced labor camp his back was all in violet straps from beating. He never told us why he was beaten. I know he arrived by train at 3am, but he didn't call us until 6am. He stayed at the front door stairs in order not to wake us up. He was afraid he was infested with lice. Then mum undressed him in the yard, kindled a big fire and boiled all his clothes in a cauldron. After that she wrapped him in a bed sheet; it was snowing outside! Then she cleaned him from lice in the house.

parade is organized and a blessing is bestowed on the army.

[17] 9th September 1944: The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

[12] Forced labor camps in Bulgaria: Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the age of 18–50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

[18] Belev, Alexandar (1900-1944): The first commissar for Jewish affairs in Bulgaria (1942–43). He was one of the founders of the anti-Semitic organization Ratnik. He was sent to Germany in 1941 to study methods of enforcing anti-Jewish legislation and, in September 1942, he became head of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. Belev implemented the anti-Semitic 'Law for the Protection of the Nation'. He succeeded only in deporting the Jews from the Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories under Bulgarian military occupation.

[19] Commissariat for Jewish Affairs: An institution set up in September 1942 at the Ministry of Interior and People's Health that was in charge of the execution of the Law for the Protection of the Nation. It was headed by Alexander Belev, a German-trained anti-Semite.

[20] Law for the Protection of the Nation: A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day.



This is a photo of me in a spectacular scene of the one-man performance 'Daemon' by Lermontov, completed in 1957 for the Army Theater in Sofia.

They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

[21] Vazov, Ivan (1850-1921): Bulgarian writer, who, following Bulgaria's liberation from Turkey in 1878 almost single-handedly filled the void of a national literature. He wrote in every genre and set a standard for subsequent literary developments in his homeland. He published several volumes of poetry and won international recognition with his novel 'Pod igoto' (Under the Yoke), published in 1893.

[22] Brannik: Pro-fascist youth organization. It started functioning after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

[23] Chifuti: Derogatory nickname for Jews in Bulgarian.

[24] UYW: The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'état in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

[25] 10th November 1989: After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov

who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

[26] Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936): Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.



This is me with my girls. I was very happy during this visit to my daughter Tatyana Dilova Dikova and my granddaughters Leontina and Maria, in Bat Yam, Israel. This photo was taken in 2003.

[27] Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841): Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

[28] Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881): Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

[29] Brigades: A form of socially useful labor, typical of communist times. Brigades were usually teams of young people who were assembled by the authorities to build new towns, roads, industrial plants, bridges, dams, etc. as well as for fruit-gathering, harvesting, etc. This labor, which would normally be classified as very hard, was unpaid. It was completely voluntary and, especially in the beginning, had a romantic ring for many young people. The town of Dimitrovgrad, named after Georgi Dimitrov – the leader of the Communist Party – was built entirely in this way.



Нисим Уziel & family

12/18/1916
4/10/1912

This is my grandfather Nisim Uziel in full military gear. The photo was taken in 1914 -1916 somewhere at the front, but I don't know exactly when and where. I know only, that grand-papa Nisim fought in the Bulgarian Army in World War I and was awarded a military cross for bravery. The writing on the photo says: 'This is my father; a handsome man'.



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