

# Sophie Pinkas

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Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Yulina Dadova

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Sophie Pinkas has been living in Sofia since 1946. Here she finished her university education and established herself as a specialist - associate professor in pediatrics in the Medical Academy. Not very tall, Mrs. Pinkas creates the impression of elegance and grace. Her first memories are of the family house in Vidin where her childhood passed under the care of her mother and grandmother. In the last ten years she has been living alone in a spacious apartment in the center of Sofia, in which she lived for many years with her husband, about whom she speaks with much love.

I was born in 1923 in the town of Vidin, where I spent my childhood. We have Spanish ancestry, but I don't know any details about how and when my ancestors came here. In Vidin we all lived in one house - my paternal grandparents, my uncles, aunts and the children. We were a united family.

I remember my paternal grandmother, Simha Pinkas, nee Beniesh, as a nice- looking, sociable and kind woman. She had grayish hair and she wasn't very tall. She dressed in darker plain clothes and she didn't wear a kerchief. While she was very friendly and loved everybody, my grandfather, Avram Pinkas, was a little bit stricter and more distanced. They talked to each other in Ladino. I don't remember with whom my grandmother kept in touch, but I remember that she got on very well with her daughters-in-law. She had four daughters-in-law and they were all very united. Even when my father's other brothers, Jacques, Sami and Josef, already married with children, had to leave the family house, the tradition remained that every Friday everyone would come to have a bath at our place: we had a big bathroom with a shower and a bath tub and we lit a geyser. On that day my mother prepared cheese crackers and sweets and when all the children had had a bath, we gathered and played in the yard, while the others drank coffee and ate sweets.

My grandfather died in Vidin, when I was very little. I knew my grandmother better, because I lived with her in Vidin and when my parents came to Sofia. My grandfather was a merchant and his four sons became merchants too. My grandmother didn't work: she was a housewife and kept the house in a very good state. She knitted very nice bed covers on ? crochet-hook as well as blankets from cotton and linen. She prepared bed and table covers for all her daughters-in-law.

My father, Leon Avram Pinkas, was born in Svishtov in 1893. As far as I know he finished his secondary trade education there. My mother, Lenka David Pinkas [nee Beraha], was born in Pirot [today Serbia], but she lived in Skopje [today Macedonia] with her family. They were Serbian Jews, but they lived later in Macedonia. My father was a military serviceman in Macedonia and met my mother there during World War I. [Bulgaria occupied Macedonia in World War I.] They married in Vienna in 1920. I know no details of their wedding, because they never talked about it. I was born in 1923 and I was the first child in the whole family. My father was a merchant in Vidin: he rented a shop and sold groceries.

My brother, Avram Leon Pinkas, is three years younger than me. We got along very well, and played together when we were little. We played 'cops and robbers' and 'chilik'. [Editor's note: 'chilik' is a stick, sharp-pointed at one of its ends, which is thrown into the air by means of another special stick called 'machka'. The one, who throws it higher, wins the game.]

I must have had dolls too, but I preferred playing with the boys outside. For example, we used to jump over a rope. We also had a horizontal bar in the yard and we tried to hang down from it for as long as we could. Our parents talked to us in Bulgarian and between them they used Bulgarian and Ladino, because my grandparents talked in Ladino. Thanks to the conversations with our grandparents we learned Ladino too.

My mother was a very beautiful and intelligent woman. Although she couldn't graduate from high school because of the war, she was clever and sociable. She loved reading books. She was subscribed to the 'Golden Seeds' book collection. We read mostly novels and my mother was the most avid reader of all. When we, the children, started reading, we read different books in Bulgarian - Western European and Bulgarian literature, for example Gorky [1](#), Zola [Emile (1840-1902): French writer and critic] or Dostoevsky [2](#).

My mother was ? WIZO activist [Jewish Zionist Women's Organization]; they were not very much involved in politics. They were more interested in cultural, social and charity activities. They organized parties, holiday celebrations, and fancy-dress balls and raised money for the poor. Meanwhile, my mother also kept the house in a perfect state. She was a very good cook and made very nice embroideries. Since my mother didn't work, she was the one who looked after us the most. She valued discipline and order very much. She insisted that we study, read, be honest and good and respect the elderly people. In this respect, I should say that she achieved a lot, because we all respected the elderly people around us.

We had a gramophone at home. When the first radio sets appeared my father brought home a special kind of radio consisting of two parts with headphones. He was interested in politics and read the newspaper regularly. There were two newspapers, which were popular at that time - 'Utro' [Morning] and 'Zora' [Dawn]. This was before World War II, when there were no other newspapers than the government dailies, which my father used to read. This was the time of the government of King Boris III [3](#). My father bought them and followed the political events. Especially when World War II started, we all read them very eagerly.

At home we had discussions on Israel [then Palestine] and the necessity of this state. On the whole, my father and his brothers were Zionists. His brother Jacques -originally Jacob - left for Israel [Palestine] with his wife Roza before 1926 when their son Avram was born. Jacques started working with some machines for tile production, but it seems that the business didn't go very well and he, his wife and son came back to Vidin. Here he opened a grocery store at the market. All brothers got on very well with each other and had good business relations. They ran their finances together and they might even have had a common cash-box. I remember that some of the machines for tile production were taken to Vidin and placed in a shed in the yard of the house.

Although my family wasn't rich, we didn't deprive ourselves of food or clothes. We had a maid who did the household chores. The house in which we first lived was big, with four rooms and a hall between them, where we had lunch and supper, and two kitchens. We also had a yard where we played as children. I was born in the so-called 'old house'. Next to the big house where we lived,

there was another house, a smaller one, where my grandparents and parents lived first.

My parents had friends - Jewish families, with whom they often gathered on holidays and celebrations. Sometimes a few families gathered to play poker. There were two separate poker tables for the men and the women, but I have no idea why. The most often celebrated holiday from the national ones was 24th May [4](#) - the day of culture, enlightenment and education. When I was a student we went to manifestations and marched through the town singing songs about St. Cyril and Methodius [5](#) and then we danced traditional Bulgarian folklore dances. I don't remember celebrating other holidays common to Jews and Bulgarians. Maybe 3rd March - the liberation of Bulgaria [from Turkish rule] but I vaguely remember it. We, the Jews, celebrated all our Jewish holidays.

We didn't celebrate Nochi di Sabbath [Eve of Sabbath] at home, but I remember very well celebrating Pesach when the Haggadah was read. It was read by my father, a little by my brother, my uncles and my cousins. We always washed all plates and dinner sets very well for Pesach. We bought boyos [loaves of bread without salt and soda made for Pesach] and matzah. We prepared dishes typical for Pesach - with burmoelos [6](#) for breakfast in the morning, pastel [traditional Jewish dish made of flour and veal mince] and a soup with knejdl.

Another holiday that I remember celebrating is Purim. We made a lot of sweets and cakes on Purim. We also made ring-shaped buns with nut filling. My mother and my grandmother were excellent cooks and made delicious dishes. Our house was always full on such occasions. We all dressed up for the fancy-dress ball. Once, one of my aunts dressed as a cat, another as a chimneysweeper and my mother as a big drum. Many guests in disguise came to our house. They were all wondering if they would be able to recognize each other. We never went to the synagogue on Purim. I remember that we went to the synagogue on Sukkot when we made a tent in the yard of the synagogue.

My grandparents went to the synagogue on Pesach, Sukkot and on Yom Kippur. Especially on Yom Kippur! On Yom Kippur we all did taanit [means fast in Ivrit] and we all went to the synagogue. I don't remember from what age we started doing taanit, but we didn't do it because we were so religious, we did it more out of obstinacy, to show that we could also spend the day without eating. Our parents didn't make us do it, but we wanted to do as all the others did - maybe I was already going to school when I started doing taanit. The younger ones couldn't do it and started eating in the afternoon. In the evening before Yom Kippur we had dinner and we ate nothing on the next day. We, the children, were very enthusiastic, wondering whether we would be able to do it or not. We played in the yard of the synagogue the whole day. We didn't go much inside and were eager to hear the horn [shofar] marking the end of Yom Kippur and go home to eat. Usually, we, the children, were very proud when we managed to do the taanit.

When we had to slaughter a hen, usually the shochet came to our house to do it. We always observed the kashrut at home. My grandmother said that she didn't eat pork and nobody brought home pork. But in the pre-war years, 1939-1940, the economic situation became worse and it was very hard to keep kosher. My mother started cooking pork, although she felt guilty about it. She didn't tell my grandmother that it was pork.

Vidin was, and still is, a very interesting town, because it is situated on the banks of the Danube River. The banks itself are very beautiful. Across the river is the Romanian town Calafat, which we

could see. There was a nice park, which ended at 'Babini Vidini Kuli' [Baba Vida Fortress] [7](#). There was a Turkish prison there before in which most of the prisoners in 1939 were political ones.

The Jewish community in Vidin was very united. Most of them were merchants and most had nice houses. Our house was also one of the more beautiful houses in town. Naturally there were a lot of poor people, but there was no hatred and rivalry between the people. The Jewish families in Vidin lived in a separate quarter called 'Kaletó'. Vidin was divided by a big fortress wall, it was called 'kale' and most of the Jewish families lived in the same part of the town. The Jewish school, the synagogue and our house were also in Kaletó. Some of our neighbors were Jewish, others were Turks, with whom we got on very well.

A Turkish junior high school was opposite our house. We talked in Bulgarian with the Turkish inhabitants. There were a lot of Turks in Vidin at that time so we kept in touch with the Turks on the one hand and with three Bulgarian families on the other. We were connected to all our neighbors with doors in the fences, which were called 'kapidzhik' [small doors] in Turkish and since we were on a street leading to the center, our neighbors - both Jews and non-Jews - passed through our yard to go to the main street. These doors helped us a lot during the curfew in 1943-44. There was a curfew for the Jews in Vidin because of the Law for the Protection of the Nation [8](#) and we weren't allowed to go out. In fact, Kaletó was turned into something like a ghetto and we were allowed to go out only for two hours a day - between 10am and 12am. And we observed that regulation, because there were policemen and Legionaries [see Bulgarian Legions] [9](#) outside. But thanks to the doors in the fences we, the children, and the adults too, could get together. Thanks to those fences we kept the social contacts with our relatives and neighbors.

I remember that when I was a child my mother and I went to Yugoslavia to visit her parents - my grandmother, Sarah Beraha, and my grandfather, David Beraha - my uncles, cousins etc. Almost every summer my mother and I went to Skopje. We usually traveled by train; there was no other possibility. Once or twice we traveled via Belgrade. We traveled on board the riverboat along the Danube, from Vidin to Belgrade to meet there my elder uncle and his family. Then we left for Skopje. We had a great time there, because we were a big family.

My grandparents and my uncles lived in the Turkish quarter in Skopje and there were only Turkish families around with whom they got along very well and were good friends. The house was big with two floors. My grandmother was a very hard-working housewife and every morning she would sit by the charcoal pan and prepare the breakfast. After breakfast we went back to play. We played a lot with the Turkish children. It was more complicated with the Turkish women, because they always had their faces veiled and never showed them; especially not to men, but they did show them to us, the children. They had interesting traditions, like the Turkish bath, for example. It was made of stones only, big stone blocks and jugs full of warm water. There was a special room for sweating - something like a sauna. All women in the family went and stayed there from morning until evening - with eating and all that. We also had a Turkish bath in Kaletó in Vidin, but we didn't stay there for a long time, because we had our own bath at home.

The shops of my father and my uncles were situated on the main trade street in Vidin where various shops of Jews and Bulgarians were located. My father's shop was very close to the high school. Opposite the high school, 200-300 meters away, was the shop of my uncle Yosef, who sold textiles, while the shop of my uncle Jacques, who also had a grocery shop, was at the market.

There weren't separate shops for Jews and Bulgarians; in fact the customers were mostly Bulgarians, because people from the villages came to our shop to renew their food supplies. The youngest of the brothers, uncle Sami, had a shop in a village near Vidin, called Alexandrovo. There were one or two other Jewish families there and they maintained good relations with the Bulgarian families. Uncle Sami and my aunt Lora rented a house next to their shop. They had two boys and we loved visiting them during vacations.

There was a synagogue and a Jewish school in Kaleto. The Vidin synagogue was very big and beautiful. As far as I remember it was one of the biggest synagogues on the Balkan Peninsula. It was a two-storied building: women prayed upstairs, men downstairs. There were very beautiful colored glass windows and a big yard where we, the children, played.

We had a chazzan, who had graduated from Robert College in Tsarigrad [Bulgarian for Istanbul, Turkey]. After that he came to Vidin where he became a chazzan. He was a tall and handsome man. His name was Mois. Since I was studying French at school at that time, my parents insisted that I learn the language. So he gave me private lessons. He dressed in civil clothes when he went outside; he came to our house and I studied with him. After that he moved, I think to Israel, and our next chazzan was Avram Miko. His wife and he had very good voices and they performed some parts of the prayers using music from arias from operas by Verdi. I cannot exactly remember where he stood while singing. Probably he stood at the podium from where the prayers were read. We had a very good time at the synagogue. The prayers and the traditional Jewish weddings were very nicely performed in this way. The elder and the more pious ones protested a bit, but on the whole we all loved him, because he was a nice man. Then he left for Israel during the big aliyah in 1947-48 [see Mass Aliyah] [10](#), but he returned a couple of times to Bulgaria.

The Jewish school was a two-storied house. There were four rooms and an office used as a teachers' room on the first floor. There was an inner wooden staircase to the second floor where there were other classrooms. I remember five classrooms. There was also a yard. Adoni Koen was the headmaster and taught us Ivrit. He was a very strict teacher; the children treated him with much respect. The other teacher was Adoni Bito [mister], who also taught Ivrit, but he wasn't nearly as strict. There were also two or three female teachers. I remember most vividly Giveret Ernesta, who taught Bulgarian. She was a very pretty, plump woman, always smiling and kind to the children. I liked her a lot and long after I left Vidin, when we returned from time to time, I always visited her. The other teacher was Giveret Buka [miss], who taught us maths.

As most school curriculums in the country, ours included reading, writing and maths, which we called it 'calculation'. We studied Ivrit - reading and writing. I don't remember if we studied history, maybe some basic things. From the school subjects I preferred reading; I liked poems. Only Jews studied in that school. It was a Jewish municipal school, supported by the consistory. Bulgarians had other schools. Even in Kaleto there was a Bulgarian school where some Jews also studied. They came to our school for the Sunday classes in Ivrit. My brother also studied in the Jewish school in his first four grades. The school had a Hebraic focus, putting emphasis on the studies of Jewish history and Ivrit.

There were two cinemas - a Jew living in Kaleto owned one, the other was in the center of the town in the community house 'Tsviat' [color in Bulgarian]. There was a curfew for the students in the high school and we couldn't stay outside until late. There was a teacher in our high school, of

whom everybody was afraid. His name was Balabanov and he walked around the streets looking for students who were not observing the regulations. I don't remember at what time we should have been at home - 8 or 9pm - but we never broke that rule.

After the Jewish school we studied in a junior high school, which had three grades - first, second and third. Then we went to high school, which started from the fourth grade. I link this period with my best friend, Jina Mashiah: we were simply inseparable. Her real name was Reyna, but we called her Jina. She was a very poor girl without a father. Her mother, a poor woman, supported three children by sewing shirts at home. I remember that my mother helped them a lot by giving them money and clothes. We lived on the same street; our houses faced each other. We went to school together in the mornings and sat together in the classroom. I was one of the shortest children, she was one of the tallest, but nevertheless we sat together in the first row. We returned home together, she often came to have lunch with us and then we started studying.

My brother teased us the entire time saying that we were 'klyutskarki' - this word is not used any more. It means someone who likes studying - that we were reading all the time. Since we studied Latin in high school, which was very hard for us, we sat for hours translating from Latin into Bulgarian and from Bulgarian into Latin. My mother would usually bring us some food while we were studying and when we finished, she gave us some money to go for a walk in the town's garden. It was the so-called 'stargalo' - the garden was located along the Danube and all young people arranged their meetings and went for a walk there. At that time uniforms were obligatory - the school uniforms and the berets. There was a confectionery nearby - we went there to eat some cakes and drink boza [11](#). We often went to the cinema.

In Vidin before 9th September 1944 [12](#) there was no theater, concerts, and philharmonic orchestra at all. The town was a small one - around 16,000 people. But we had the chance to learn a lot about music from the Military orchestra. The military club was in the park in Vidin and in front of the club there was a nice platform. Every Sunday afternoon the military orchestra, which was mostly a brass band, went out to play. Usually they played overtures from various operas, popular pieces and they always put a notice outside what they would be playing. We went to listen to them and in this way we enriched our music knowledge, this being the only way to do it.

We had a piano at home and my mother insisted that I learn to play it. I started taking lessons and my brother did so too. I was more eager than him, but I wasn't very gifted. My brother didn't want to do it at all: he was always looking at the clock on the piano, counting the hours. My mother was very persevering and stayed beside us during our lessons, listening to our teacher. Although they bought the piano for us, my mother was also eager to learn something. She listened to our teacher and later reproduced it by herself.

We had Hashomer Hatzair [13](#), Betar [14](#) and Maccabi [15](#) in Vidin. I was a member of Maccabi, which was more of a sports organization. We gathered and played sports games. We had some kind of uniforms - white shirts and dark blue skirts. We had a sports hall with gymnastic apparatuses - two wooden horizontal bars - and we played a lot there. The older Jewish girls and boys told us about Israel and its history. On Sunday we went around the houses with a moneybox and raised money for charity, for Keren Kayemet [16](#). We were usually two or three children, a boy and a girl, walking from house to house. I don't remember anything particular about these organizations. When I was in high school my interests were directed to the UYW [17](#), the political youth organization.



During that time the creation of fascist organizations - Legionaries, Ratniks [18](#), 'Otets Paisii' had already begun. There were also some anti-Semitic activities. They insulted us, called us 'chifuti' [19](#) and said, 'why don't you leave?' Especially after the successes of Hitler's army in Europe and its invasion in the Soviet Union, the anti-Semites became very active. We, the Jews, decided that we should do something. This was the beginning of our left convictions and our desire to fight the fascist harassment of Jews. We had a UYW group consisting of a number of people; we raised money. Besides money, we later also collected clothes for the partisans. We read philosophic, progressive literature, which I didn't understand at all at the beginning. For example, Marx... I cannot say how many of us Jews there were, but compared to the number of Bulgarians, I think we formed the bigger percentage.

Our UYW group became very active when the Jews interned from Sofia came to Vidin [see Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] [20](#). There were many nice young and enthusiastic people among them. They had greater experience in the progressive UYW movement in Sofia. We started having meetings, we read lectures, discussed fascism or communism - we divided into a group defending fascism and a group against it, each defending its argument. We exchanged a lot of interesting ideas. Very nice poems were recited, poems by Vaptsarov [21](#), Smirnenski [classics of Bulgarian poetry]. From the foreign authors we loved the Soviet ones a lot. We read Maxim Gorky [22](#) and Chekhov [23](#) and some of the newer ones. 'How Steel was Hardened' [by Nikolay Ostrovski] and other revolutionary books were passed from hand to hand, they were not available in the libraries.

Usually we met at some big house. Once we organized a meeting in our house. We often disguised our meetings as youth gatherings and we kept them secret from our parents. My father was more conservative, but I didn't have any problems with him. My mother often gave us money and clothes for the organization. At some point my brother became the person in charge of a new UYW group. When Jews from Sofia came, we accommodated them. There were a lot of Jewish families from Sofia in our house. There was a room in the attic where my brother lived, because it was too crowded in the house. In fact, this room became an illegal UYW office - there was a mimeograph used for printing leaflets, weapons were hidden and then sent to the partisans. Sometimes Bulgarian boys from the organization hid there.

When we graduated from high school in 1942 we [Jewish students] weren't allowed to go to the traditional students' graduation ball, which was organized in the Officers' Club. Then we, the boys and the girls, because we were divided into a girls' high school and a boys' high school, decided to gather at home and listen to the gramophone. We decided not to dress up, but to wear our school uniforms. We had a great time eating, drinking and dancing all night.

In 1941-42 people were already talking about deportation and camps. I remember that my mother had sewn a big rucksack for each of us, which we filled with clothes and underwear. We had them ready, because we heard that we could be summoned suddenly during the night. Moreover, we knew what was happening in Poland, in Austria and in France. This worried us most of all. According to the Law for the Protection of the Nation nobody worked, nobody was allowed to study, my father's shop was closed. We lived on the little amount of money we had saved. Our radio set was jammed. We couldn't get any radio stations. My father liked to listen to Radio London, but the radio set was jammed. Still, he somehow found out how to get rid of it and he listened to Radio London in the evenings. In this way we received more objective information about what was happening at the front.

We got along very well with the Jewish families who came to Vidin from Sofia after 24th May 1943 [24](#). I cannot say how many people came: thousands. At every Jewish house two-tree families were accommodated depending on how big the house was and the owners lived only in one of the rooms. Many of the Jews were accommodated in the Jewish school. The adults played cards and poker, gathered to chat and celebrate the holidays. Since I wasn't allowed to work or study, my mother insisted that I go to a friend of hers who had something like a workshop for women's clothes and learn some elementary things about sewing. But I didn't like sewing at all and I didn't go. Now I regret that, because I can't sew even an ordinary hem.

My father was mobilized as an officer in one of the [forced] labor camps [25](#). He was a lieutenant. He was mobilized somewhere around Svoge [near Sofia], but I don't know where exactly. He didn't work as a labor service man; he was in his officer's rank. My mother was very worried about her relatives in Yugoslavia. At that time there were so many rumors, and only vague information in the newspapers. We didn't have any news from our relatives; we didn't know what was happening. We heard about the death camps, about Poland, the Czech lands, but we didn't know what was happening in Macedonia. We had more information only after 9th September and we tried to get more details through the International Red Cross, but we weren't successful. When my mother's relatives were deported in 1943, we knew nothing about that. Later we learned that they died in Treblinka. Only uncle Zdravko Beraha and two cousins - Jacques Beraha's son, David Beraha, and Yosif Beraha's, son David Beraha, who was known as Bato, saved themselves by escaping from Yugoslavia through Albania and Italy and from there on to Sao Paolo, Brazil.

The Bulgarian police, who was then in Skopje gathered the Jews in warehouses and schools in order to deport them to the death camps [see Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II] [26](#). Before they sealed the house in Skopje, my grandmother Sarah hid her son Zdravko and the two grandsons in the basement, thinking that they would be sent to labor camps where it would be hardest for the men. All of my other relatives went to the meeting points and from there they were transported to Treblinka where they were killed right away. We learned the truth about our relatives in the camps much later. We made a lot of attempts to understand what had happened with them; we also contacted the International Red Cross.

Some years ago two volumes on the history of the Skopje Jews were published in Macedonia, written in Macedonian and English. I found them at the place of a fellow-countryman here in Bulgaria, who had brought them from Macedonia. The title of the book is 'Evreite vo Makedonia vo Vtorata svetska voina 1941-1945' ['The Jews in Macedonia in World War II, 1941- 1945']. Its authors are Jamila Kolonomos and Dr. Vera Vangeli. The two volumes described in minute detail the facts around the deportation and the painful death of the Macedonian Jews in Treblinka. They also included a complete list of the deported people. I copied the page with the list, which included the name of my relatives.

During that time my uncle Zdravko and the two boys, thanks to the help of Albanian and Turkish neighbors, escaped disguised as veiled women riding donkeys to Albania. There they met the other brother, Albert, who, sensing the direction the events were taking, had gone there to find if it would be possible to escape with the whole family. They started working there. From Albania they moved to Italy where they also worked. Then Zdravko remained in Switzerland and Albert and the two boys left for Latin America: Brazil and Venezuela.



In late August 1944 the amnesty and the abolishment of the laws forbidding us to study were announced. At that time we were still in Vidin. Then I, a friend of mine, who was interned from Sofia - Neli Dueltas - and two more friends decided to go to Lovech where the Medical Faculty had been moved to apply to study medicine. From Lovech we went for some time to Pleven. There we got in touch with other illegal UYW members. We wanted them to arrange for our transfer to a partisan squad, not as illegal members, but as activists taking part in the struggle. They told us to wait for a while, because the Soviet army was nearing Bulgaria. We remained for a couple of days in Pleven and on 7th September we took part in the liberation of the political prisoners in Pleven prison. On 9th September weapons were distributed in Pleven and on 10th September we returned to Vidin.

Then we were told that Germans had invaded Kula and volunteers were needed for defense [Kula is situated on the border with Yugoslavia]. A friend of mine, Paulina Arie, who later left for Israel, and I decided to enroll. We met Zhivko Zhivkov, who had been in Vidin prison. We told him we wanted to be volunteers. And he said, 'what are you doing, where are you going?' At the same time a group of young male volunteers from the village of Archar arrived. They told us to join them. We got on a truck, we were given weapons and boxes with cartridges and we left for Kula.

After it got dark, they told us to get off the truck and take positions. We could hear shooting and we went to the left side of the road together with the men from Archar, carrying the heavy boxes with cartridges. At one point we realized that we were lost. The men started complaining about the heavy boxes and decided to throw them away. Then we suggested that we should open the boxes and take out the cartridges, which were arranged in cartridge belts. We put them on and we left the empty boxes. This was my first night at the front and I will never forget it. In the morning we joined the other groups.

There weren't only volunteers, but also military officers and soldiers from the 3rd Vidin Regiment. My first combat was not during the night, but on the next day. We took position near the road leading to Kula. Suddenly heavy shooting started. My friend Paulina and I were lying on the ground when they started shooting at us. Then I told her, 'If one of the shells hits me, I prefer that it kills me. I prefer to die rather than be disabled.' There were many such moments at the front later on, which I will never forget. At some point we learned that Jacques Koen was badly injured. He was the first victim of the war among us. He was a political prisoner, just released from prison. He was hit in the head by a shell during his first night at the front. Jacques was transported to hospital, but he died a few months later. There were a lot of Jewish volunteers at the front. The girls were about ten, the boys around ten too or a bit more. Some of them returned home earlier, others stayed longer. I spent a month and a half at the front. After that I returned to Vidin. We were now allowed to study and I went to Sofia.

I started studying medicine. I was admitted easily because I had been at the front. I rented a room at the flat of one of the families, who lived in our house during the internment. I started studying in December 1944. I started studying in Sofia, but I was recalled to work in the UYW in Vidin. Then I left my studies and I went back. In UYW I did some political work, which had to be paid, but since they had no money, I worked almost for free. When my brother graduated from high school he left for Sofia and finished his medical university education earlier than me. My parents remained in Vidin; my father did not have a job anymore, because his shop had been confiscated. After the war a Bulgarian family had replaced the Turkish family who had been our neighbors and who had left for Turkey. Our new neighbors were a lawyer and his wife and we got along very well with them.

During the mass aliyah in 1947-1948 two of my father's brothers, Sami and Yosef, left with their families for Israel. His third brother, Jacques, who had been to Israel before, remained in Bulgaria. Our family also stayed here. Since we were enrolled in university, we didn't discuss the subject of leaving at all. But there was a period when my father wanted us to leave very much. He even tried to persuade my mother, but she was absolutely against it. She said that she was not going to leaving without us. The reason why I didn't leave was because of my studying and because my husband and I had different political views and opinions.

During the first post-war years life was very hard, everyone was poor, but the relations between the people were very good. We had no problems: there were no anti-Semitic attitudes against us in Vidin or in the university when I got back, or in the political Party Committees and unions. In the first years we were mostly friends with our colleagues in the UYW, the colleagues from the District Committee of the UYW and from the Party Committee. We had much work to do then, because we went to the villages in the district to organize UYW branches there. The villages were in a very miserable condition; we would often catch scabies and lice.

My husband's name is Nissim Moiseev Kohenov, but everyone knew him as Simcho. He was born on 25th December 1922, the third son of a Jewish family of intellectuals. His father, Moisey Kohenov, was one of the very first doctors in Vidin and maybe one of the first doctors in Bulgaria. He was a very good specialist in internal diseases, very distinguished, having graduated in Vienna. Their family was quite well off; his mother didn't work. She had studied in some college in Vienna. They spoke German at home and Bulgarian too, of course. My father's family was Sephardim [see Sephardi Jewry] [27](#) and they spoke German, because Dr. Kohenov graduated in Vienna and his wife, my mother-in-law, was with him. They also spoke Ladino, but didn't use it much. The father took part in all wars. All the three sons are very intelligent. The eldest one, Santi, left for France to study and remained to live there. The other one, David, got a university degree in medicine in France and then moved to Israel.

While he was in the labor camps my husband was arrested for illegal activities and sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment. He spent more than a year and a half in Vidin prison - until 8th September 1944 when the prison was liberated and the authorities overthrown. He took an active part in that event and started work in the District Committee of the UYW becoming its secretary. After 9th September he devoted himself to political work, at first in the UYW and then in the Party. Later, after 1951, the Central Committee of the Party sent a group to the Military Ministry to organize and head the political departments in the army. So he was sent as a political officer and spent nine years in that position. While he was in the army, he graduated and defended his dissertation at the Military Political Academy. After the army he became a research secretary in the Contemporary and Social Theories Institute.

My husband and I met right after 9th September 1944. The Jewish origin wasn't decisive in my choice for a partner. It was all the same to me whether I would marry a person of Jewish or non-Jewish origin; it just happened that I married a Jew. We loved each other very much and we had a very nice life, recently we celebrated our 50th anniversary. We had known each other for a long time, because we lived in the same neighborhood, but we had never been friends before. He was more distant, colder and more serious. He had excellent marks in high school, and a comprehensive knowledge of the world. He painted very good pictures and loved music. We became friends and fell in love while we worked in the UYW, in the District Committee of the UYW.

We married in 1946. My wedding was very untraditional. The day we decided to marry was a Friday. At that time we both worked in the UYW organization in Vidin and we decided that we had to marry on that day. We had some meetings in the morning and at noon, at around 1:30, while I was having lunch at home, my husband came and we decided to go and marry before the registrar. At that time weddings were made by signing at the registrar in the municipality. I didn't have a wedding gown; I was wearing a plain dress, a red one with white spots. My brother from Sofia, who was a university student, had come to Vidin. He knew that we were going to be married. On our way we met another friend from the committee and invited him too. When we signed, we had to hurry off, because my husband had another meeting while I, as a bride, was given a day off. I went home, my mother had prepared dinner and we invited guests - friends and relatives. My husband had a lot of work to do, so the guests had already arrived and he was still not home. We didn't have a religious wedding, because at that time we were following the communist ideals.

I gave birth to my son Mois in 1947 in Vidin. At that time my husband was sent to work in the Central Committee of the UYW. While I was still pregnant, I had to choose whether to go to Sofia with him and continue my studies, which I had interrupted, or to continue working in Vidin. I decided that it would be better if I continued my studies and went back to Sofia. There I was allowed to start from the second year, although I had taken no exams from the first year and it was extremely hard for me, because I had to study for all exams from both years. But I managed to do it.

We had a very good time as students. My mother looked after the child and I had all the time I needed to study. I took my son only when we went to manifestations. We went to a lot of manifestations at that time: on various holidays such as 9th September, 1st May. Usually, we, the university students, gathered at a certain hour on the day of the manifestation, for example on 9th September or 24th May. We gathered in front of the Medical Academy by faculties and groups. I always took my son with me. Then we marched to the former 9th September Square, now named Alexander Batenberg in front of the mausoleum [of Georgi Dimitrov] and the palace [the former king's palace]. We weren't ordered in neat lines, we just passed with much enthusiasm, singing, carrying slogans on science, the fatherland and the Slavic script. We always had a lot of fun. Sometimes we organized parties after the manifestations.

We were politically active; we had a party organization. I became a member of the Party in Vidin in 1946. It happened at a meeting of the party organization in the neighborhood where we lived - the Jewish living estate Kaleto. In order to be accepted, one had to present two recommendations from older members. My recommendations were from people living in my neighborhood, Jews, but I don't remember their names. I graduated in 1952 and got a job in Sofia.

I don't remember if we had Jewish friends. Most of our friends were Bulgarians and we got along very well with them. It so happened that when we came to Sofia, we didn't know any Jewish families here. Most of my husband's colleagues at the Central Committee were Bulgarians as well as those in the army. Most of the people with whom we had worked during our youth in Sofia were still here and we went out with them.

Of course, at some point there was some general attitude of mistrust towards us Jews during the trial against the army doctors in the Soviet Union, in Leningrad [see Doctor's Plot] [28](#). The authorities were reluctant to have Jews working at responsible positions, although this attitude was

not expressed officially. My husband had to leave the army, because he felt that he was treated differently for being a Jew. This happened in 1951. This general mistrust meant that Jews had very slim opportunities to make a career. My brother also had problems, because he was a military doctor in the Military Medical Academy.

There was also negative attitude towards the people who were leaving for Israel. I'm not very sure if Jews were allowed to immigrate to Israel in the 1950s, but a family, who were friends of ours, moved to Israel in the 1960s. I think that if someone wanted and had close relatives in Israel, they could go. That family moved, because the parents of my friend had already emigrated. She didn't have any problems from the authorities when leaving for Israel.

On the whole all the countries in the Soviet camp were against Israel. I didn't approve of that attitude towards Israel; I was definitely an advocate for the state of Israel! Everybody at home was convinced that the state of Israel must exist and Israeli people should be given the opportunity to live at peace.

It wasn't a secret that during that period my husband and I experienced some disappointments. My husband was very active politically and true to his ideals. We were disappointed by the policy of the party, which deviated from the path, which had been designed earlier. There were a lot of digressions in the interior and foreign policy. We disapproved of the totalitarianism, which was imposed, and of some economic issues. We were also very critical of the Revival Process in Bulgaria [29](#). So, we were in favor of the democratic changes, which unfortunately also disappointed us later on.

My first job was as a chief doctor of the children's nursery 'Racho Angelov'. It included 70 children and staff - nurses, a pedagogue, orderlies and me. My whole life was devoted to this nursery. It operated during the week and children were taken home during the weekends. Everybody living in the Knyazhevo living estate knew me. At that time Prof. Kolarov was the director of the Pediatrics Institute. One day the institute management came to see how we worked. They liked everything and invited me to work in the institute. After five years of work in the nursery, I went to the Pediatrics Institute as head of the physiological ward. I worked in the institute from 1957 to my retirement.

I have very nice memories from my work. I had a lot of night shifts. I saved a lot of children. Even now parents stop me on the street thanking me for saving their child, which is really a rewarding experience. One night shift there was an earthquake - I can't remember the year - and it was very frightening. I was the only doctor on duty and I was wondering what to do with all those 300 children, who were currently hospitalized. The nurses couldn't take care of more than two or three children at the same time. We had children in incubators - in the ward for prematurely born children. They couldn't be moved outside. All the other children were sleeping. I could do nothing but go around all wards and departments and tell the nurses to stay by the children and do nothing else so that we could react fast if the moment came. It was a scary night. I will never forget it, because it was one of those moments when you don't know how to act. I never gave up in my work. I've had many professional awards - I also have the Order of St. St. Cyril and Methodius - Second Degree. I have donated blood for free every year and have been awarded for that too. On the whole, I was quite brave.

We kept in touch with our relatives in Israel. They came to visit us, we went there too and my parents also visited Israel. I went there for the first time in the 1960s. I traveled by plane. My relatives, my father's two brothers and their families, welcomed me at the airport. Since we were a very united family and I was the eldest daughter, they all loved me. One of my uncles lived in Haifa; the other lived in Sela, which was very close to Haifa. The first evening after my arrival, our two families gathered at Uncle Sela's place. I was very impressed by everything. We also went to Tel Aviv, which was a very nice and big city then. My uncle took me to Jerusalem; we traveled by train. When I saw it with my own eyes, I changed a little my attitude to what I thought was wrong - not about the order, but about the relations with the Arab people, that you cannot establish a secure atmosphere in the state. Yet, we were big patriots here in Bulgaria and we were not very positive about their leaving for Israel, but we never argued with our relatives about it. This was their choice, and a choice of most of the Jewish families in Bulgaria.

My father's brothers and their families returned often to Bulgaria. We also kept in touch by mail. We have always been interested in life in Israel. We read books, newspapers and magazines, but only those that were published in Bulgaria. There was no other way to keep us informed. We exchanged letters regularly with our relatives, but it was more of a correspondence on the family issues and financial situation.

My son also loved his cousins and relatives in Israel very much. He visited Israel for the first time later on. He had no problems for being a Jew and he has always felt Jewish. My husband disapproved of Zionism. During his studies in Vidin he wasn't a member of any Jewish organizations. He joined the illegal UYW from its very beginning before 9th September 1944. But when in 1990 I managed to convince him to come with me to Israel, he was very positively impressed. We spent around a month with our cousins. What he saw in Israel significantly changed his attitude towards the country.

We maintain very good relations with our relatives in Brazil and Venezuela. They also came to visit us. We haven't been to Venezuela, but we have been to Brazil. The brother who lived in Italy and Switzerland and the other one who lived in Venezuela after the war were quite well off and helped us a lot. They not only visited us, but also sent us money and presents.

After 9th September we celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Pesach as family holidays without following the religious rituals. We didn't do taanit for Yom Kippur. My mother made ruskitas for Purim, which were made of alhashuf ['burikitas al hashu' and 'burikitas al ruskitas' are one and the same thing. It is a pastry or a ring-shaped bun with a filling of nuts and sugar, prepared for Purim]. My mother's cuisine was a Jewish one. Unfortunately, we didn't keep kosher and we didn't go to the synagogue. The whole family gathered only on high holidays like Pesach.

My mother liked making the hard-boiled Jewish eggs for Pesach. We also bought matzah from the synagogue for Pesach, although we ate ordinary bread too. We also made burmoelos. We buy matzah nowadays too. We didn't decorate a Christmas tree for Christmas, but we decorated a New Year's tree for our son when he was little and for our granddaughters. Always! But not for Christmas, for New Year's Eve!

We stopped speaking Ladino at home when my grandmother died. My parents and my aunt spoke it but rarely. My son understands spoken Ladino, although he doesn't speak it. My husband doesn't speak Ladino since his family spoke German.



We didn't go to the synagogue. My husband put a lot of effort into trying to convince authorities to restore the synagogue in Vidin, but without success. Even during communism he made a lot of presentations and wrote many letters. He even went in person to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but they always said that there was no money. After the changes [following the events of 10th November 1989] [30](#), in 1990, when I went to Israel with him, he went to some Bulgarian-Israeli committees, but at that time they were raising money for the Sofia synagogue and they said they couldn't spare more money. In fact, all the money went for the restoration of the Sofia synagogue and the Vidin one fell into decay. One of the ideas of my husband was to turn the synagogue into a concert hall or a gallery. He also fought much for the house of Jules Pascin [born in Vidin in 1885 as Julius Pinkas: painter, aquarellist, engraver], which was destroyed. He wrote a lot of letters and went in person to the Central Committee and other places. We couldn't do anything in the end.

From the Bulgarian holidays we always celebrated New Year's Eve, then we celebrated 1st May, 2nd June [Bulgaria national day, marking the birth of the great Bulgarian poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev. Also the day of commemoration those who perished in the anti-fascist resistance.], 24th May, 9th September and 7th November -October Revolution Day [31](#). We never decorated eggs on Easter. [Christian Easter tradition, widespread in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe.]

We didn't celebrate name days [widespread in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox countries, originates from days dedicated to Saints], but people always congratulated me on the day of Faith, Hope and Love and their mother Sofia [Eastern Orthodox holiday on 17th September, also the official holiday of the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia.] In fact, I was the only one in the family who had a name day. But when my son married Vera - this is my daughter-in-law's name - she introduced some traditions into the family. When she has a name day, we congratulate her. Since they started living separately, sometimes she decorates eggs for Easter, but not because she is religious, just to follow the tradition.

My granddaughters, Sofia Terzieva, nee Kohenova, and Dora Kohenova, also feel Jewish, although their mother is Bulgarian. They are married to Bulgarians, but they consider themselves Jews. We were never ashamed or afraid to say that we were Jews. My son considers himself a Jew, because he was born one and was brought up in a Jewish family. But he didn't have a religious upbringing. He considers religion a science, something that should be known.

As far as politics was concerned, my son's ideas were very close to ours. He liked the military and wanted to study in the Naval School in Varna, but we didn't want him to. He graduated from the Machine Construction Technical School and now he is an engineer. After the changes he wanted to leave for Israel, because there weren't many job opportunities here. He had a nice job before the changes, but afterwards the management fired the progressive and left-oriented people, and he remained without a job. He couldn't find another job and wanted very much to leave, but his wife Vera didn't want to. He insisted that the children leave too, but they also hesitated. They have all been to Israel, but they still live in Bulgaria. After 1990 my son wanted to leave, my niece - my brother's daughter and her family left then - but he didn't go, because his wife, who is a Bulgarian, didn't want to. If he had left, with his profession as a machine engineer, he would have been able to find a good job. Now, he can no longer find a job in Israel, because he is more than 50 years old. That is also true of my granddaughters. They already have families here and their husbands are

not Jews.

My family and I think that the hard period we experienced before the war and the first years after it in terms of economic situation and opportunities for cultural progress ended. After the 1950s life changed and I think that until 1980-85 we lived much better. I can say that for my private life too. We weren't very rich, but we didn't deprive ourselves of anything. We had every opportunity to lead a normal life, to study, work and travel. We loved traveling and did that a lot - in Bulgaria and abroad. We had this apartment that my father bought for us, and a car. We changed our car two or three times. So, I think that on the whole we lived very well.

When the changes took place, we were in favor of them, because we thought things would improve in Bulgaria and some bad aspects of the so-called socialism - it wasn't really socialism, but was called in this way - would be eliminated and things would progress in a democratic European spirit. But we were disappointed quickly. I consider this thirteen-year period as one of the worst periods in the history of Bulgaria - not only in terms of economy, but in all respects. Our family is also not well off. Although my pension isn't that small and my husband's one wasn't either, it's not enough. We cannot afford many things - all kinds of cultural activities such as concerts, theaters, and travels. And this hatred and these relations between the people, the various political groups! Politically, I am still left-oriented.

I don't think that the attitude towards Jews has changed after 1989. I feel that there is some special attitude towards Jews. This is displayed by politicians and reflected in the Israeli policy regarding the Arabs. I don't think there is any danger of official anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, but I think that some people treat Jews differently.

I'm not very active in the Jewish community; I don't take an active part in the activities of Shalom [32](#). I just don't feel like it. I have close friends, who are Jews and with whom I meet. I go to Shalom, because there is a 'Club of the Jewish Women War Veterans'. There are seven of us in it and we meet once a month. We meet, chat, drink coffee and participate in activities related to the war - for example, on 9th May, the end of World War II, we go to the monument of the Soviet Army. On 2nd June we go to the Monument of the Unknown Soldier, and on 3rd March we lay flowers at the Doctors' Monument [memorial monument in the center of Sofia in memory of the doctors who died in the Russian-Turkish liberation war]. We also celebrate our birthdays and some significant historic dates. Last year I was asked to deliver a report in front of the club 'Golden Age' on the occasion of 9th May. These days I also take part in a doctors' group at Shalom. I don't go to the synagogue on Jewish holidays. It has very special museum value for me. When I have guests, I always take them to see the synagogue.

Glossary

## **[1](#) Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

## **[2](#) 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.

### **3 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.

### **4 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.

### **5 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.

### **6 Burmoelos (or burmolikos, burlikus)**

A sweetmeat made from matzah, typical for Pesach. First, the matzah is put into water, then squashed and mixed with eggs. Balls are made from the mixture, they are fried and the result is something like donuts.

### **7 Baba Vida fortress**

The only medieval Bulgarian castle entirely preserved to this day. Its construction began in the second half of the 10th century on the foundation of a former Roman fortress. Most of it was built between the end of the 12th century and the late 14th century. Today, the Baba Vida fortress is a national cultural memorial.

## **8 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. 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.

## **9 Bulgarian Legions**

Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. Bulgarian fascist movement, established in 1930. Following the Italian model it aimed at building a corporate totalitarian state on the basis of military centralism. It was dismissed in 1944 after the communist take-over.

## **10 Mass Aliyah**

Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

## **11 Boza**

A sweet wheat-based mildly alcoholic drink popular in Bulgaria, Turkey and other places in the Balkans.

## **12 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.

### **13 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.

### **14 Betar**

(abbreviation of Berit Trumpeldor) A right-wing Zionist youth movement founded in 1923 in Riga, Latvia. Betar played an important role in Zionist education, in teaching the Hebrew language and culture, and methods of self-defense. It also inculcated the ideals of aliyah to Erez Israel by any means, legal and illegal, and the creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. Its members supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. In Bulgaria the organization started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

### **15 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

### **16 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people. After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box'. They threw in at least one lei each day, while on Sabbath and high holidays they threw in as many lei as candles they lit for that holiday. This is how they partly used to collect the necessary funds. Now these boxes are known worldwide as a symbol of Zionism.

### **17 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'etat 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.

## **18 Ratniks**

The Ratniks, like the Branniks, were also members of a nationalist organization. They advocated a return to national values. The word 'rat' comes from the Old Bulgarian root meaning 'battle', i.e. 'Ratniks' fighters, soldiers.

## **19 Chifuti**

Derogatory nickname for Jews in Bulgarian.

## **20 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.

## **21 Vaptsarov, Nikola (1909-1942)**

born in the town of Bansko, Vaptsarov ranks among Bulgaria's most prominent proletarian poets of the interwar period. His most well known volume of poetry is 'Motoring Verses'. Vaptsarov was shot in Sofia on the 23rd of July 1942.

## **22 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

## **23 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904)**

Russian drama and short-story writer. Chekhov's hundreds of stories concern human folly, the tragedy of triviality, and the oppression of banality. His characters are drawn with compassion and humor in a clear, simple style noted for its realistic detail. His focus on internal drama was an innovation that had enormous influence on both Russian and foreign literature. His success as a playwright was assured when the Moscow Art Theater took his works and staged great productions of his masterpieces, such as Uncle Vanya or The Three Sisters.

## **24 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.

## **25 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.

## **26 Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II**

In April 1941 Bulgaria along with Germany, Italy and Hungary attacked the neighbouring Yugoslavia. Beside Yugoslav Macedonia Bulgarian troops also marched into the Northern-Greek Aegean Thrace. Although the territorial gains were initially very popular in Bulgaria, complications soon arose in the occupied territories. The oppressive Bulgarian administration resulted in uprisings in both occupied lands. Jews were persecuted, their property was confiscated and they had to do forced labor. In early 1943 the entire Macedonian Jewish population (mostly located in Bitola, Skopje and Stip) was deported and confined in the Monopol tobacco factory near Skopje. On 22nd March deportations to the Polish death camps began. From these transports only about 100 people returned to Macedonia after the war. Some Macedonian Jews managed to reach Italian-occupied Albania, others joined the Yugoslav partisans and some 150-200 of them were saved by the Spanish government which granted them Spanish citizenship.

## **27 Sephardi Jewry**

Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

## **28 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **29 Revival Process**

The communist regime's attempt to ethnically assimilate the Bulgarian Turks by forced name change between 1984-1989.

### **30 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.

### **31 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

### **32 Shalom Organization**

Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.