

My Youth



A photograph from when I was a young girl. It is a picture taken in Bursa of my teenage years. It is a beautiful dress judging by those days' criteria. Navy blue with borders. When there was no ready-to-wear industry, we had our outfits sewn.

When the children of two large families, the Abravanel's and the Sages', were married, they started living in Bursa. I am the second child of this family.

Even though I carry my grandmother's name according to traditions, Camila is only my name on my birth certificate. I am called Janet or Jana in my daily life. I remember being Camila only when I use my passport.

I was born in 1924. The house where we lived when I was born was the same as the house I lived in when I went to Istanbul as a bride. That neighborhood was called "La Juderia". All of the Jews in Bursa lived on the same street. On both sides of the hill full of trees were houses lined up. Only Jews lived until the place we called Chatalfirin (Forkbakery). We had 3 synagogues, Yirush, Mayor and Etz Hayim. We were crowded, we were like siblings.

I used to go to a school named "mestra" before I started school. Mestra was a kind of preschool like the ones that exist today. Ms. Suzan who spoke French would gather a few kids in her house, play games, and supposedly teach them French. When you compare it to the preschools of today,

the children were raised in primitive conditions there.

I started school in a Jewish school, then I transferred to Istiklal School. We met again with friends with whom we studied together, years later. None of us had changed, only our birth certificates had grown old. We would visit each other with these friends. They would not look down on us. They would not regard us as inferior because we were Jews, on the contrary, they wanted to be with us. In Bursa, the holiday visits were important too. We socialized with our school friends and their families. They were all children of intellectual families. We had very good relationships with the teachers in our school too.

I loved reading a lot. I bought all the magazines that came out in those days. Solving puzzles is a habit left over from those days. There were no puzzle books of course, we waited for the puzzles section of the newspapers impatiently.

Among my childhood memories, the bar-mitzvah of my older brother is prominent. We had visitors at home for three days and three nights. We distributed food to family and friends for two days, and to the needy for one day. We the children, played around. Towels, pijamas and socks were among the preferred gifts. 6 monetary units(of the time) were considered a good gift, and would be saved by the mother. My older brother had gone to the synagogue with only my father. My mother waited for them at home, and immediately started giving out sweets. The children of that time had limited means but were happy, today they have everything but they are tense.