

## The Ovadia Family And Efraim Levi



That is the family of my mother Victoria Efraim Levi, the Jewish family Ovadia in Greece and their new son-in-law, the Bulgarian Jew Efraim Levi. He is the second from right to left with the white handkerchief in his boutonniere. The others are my uncle, aunt, my grandmother Donna Merkado Ovadia and my grandfather Jeuda Merkado Ovadia. My father is standing behind my grandfather, and my uncle is standing behind my grandmother. The two young women are my aunt (the third from left to right) and my mother. Unfortunately, I can't remember the names of my aunt and uncle. The picture was taken in 1930s in Salonica, Greece.

I was named after my maternal grandfather, who was Jeuda Merkado Ovadia. I'll always remember Grandmother Donna with her noble beauty and the songs she sang to me from the cradle until I became a pupil. The songs with which she put me to sleep were the wonderful Spanish romances 'La paloma', 'Maria la O,' and 'Donde estas korason.'

My parents have always been the nicest couple on earth, according to me. My father was born in Samokov to the large family of the local rabbi. He was one of seven children. After the polytechnic school, in 1912, he graduated in architecture and just as he received his degree, he got the news on the start of the wars: the First Balkan War, the Second Balkan War and World War I. He decided to return to Bulgaria immediately. My father had a proverbial sense of duty and responsibility. When he got back to Bulgaria, he joined the engineer forces and fought at the front for eight years. For some well-done task, of which I don't know any details, he received a Medal of Valor, two more medals and some stripes. Besides all the awards and victories in the wars, he achieved another victory of a different kind. And it was the greatest one!

During his leave my father went to Seres. There was a Bulgarian garrison there and his eldest brother Buko was serving there. Since my uncle was in the supply service, my father had permission to sleep outside the barracks and he was accommodated with the family of Mr. Jeuda

Merkado Ovadia. He had four sons and one daughter. The daughter was the youngest and obviously the most wanted. Her name was Victoria. Whenever my father visited his brother he slept at the same house. During his last day before he returned to his company, my father shared with his brother that when World War I finished and if he was still safe and sound, he would go back and ask Mr. Ovadia for the hand of his daughter, because he was sure she was 'the lady of his heart.' My uncle told his landlord that, but he answered that his daughter was too young: she was 16 years old, and they would have to ask for her consent. Then, the door opened 'by accident' and the young girl said, 'I'll wait for him!' And so it was.