

Mimi-Matilda Petkova's High School Photo



This photo was taken when I graduated from high school in Vidin on 24th May 1946. This is my school photo - class 8a. I am sitting in the second row first from left to right. When I came back from the front in 1945, there was a special decree from the Council of Ministers, which allowed me to take the exams I needed to graduate from high school. I didn't go to kindergarten; my mother took care of me. I studied in a Bulgarian secular school. I loved two subjects: history and Bulgarian language and literature, because history was related to my ancestry and I simply love Bulgarian poems. I wasn't sent to a Jewish school, because my father was an atheist and I had already begun my studies in the Bulgarian elementary school in the village of Gradets, where I was born. The first anti-Semitic incidents were very frightening. They happened in high school and in other places and especially once we had to wear the stars, and they put a board on our door, which read 'A house of a person of Jewish origin' at the beginning of the 1940s. Before my father went to prison, he had put vertical wooden laths on the windows, like blinds, so that the glass wouldn't break when they hurled stones at the house. We sat in the dark most of the time, because the anti-Semites passed frequently near our house. Naturally, they were all members of pro-Nazi youth organizations such as the 'Branniks', 'Ratniks' and 'Legionaries'. They were very similar to the Hitler Youth in Germany. These incidents happened on Tsar Simeon Street. Such things cannot be forgotten. I remember the anti-Semitic attitude of some of my classmates. In high school our class decided that no one should wear badges, otherwise they would be 'fined'. And when the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed, we put on our yellow stars. When I went to school the first day, Romyana, who was the chairperson of the class and the daughter of the police officer of our living estate, shouted, 'Take that off or we will fine you!' I told her, 'I cannot take that off, or your father will imprison me.' Her aim was to insult me. She knew that we, the Jews, wore 'Magen David' by force, but she pretended that she didn't know that, calling it merely a 'decoration'. However, I also had some good friends, for example, Kanna Semkova, Nadezhda Mladenova, Ilinka and Yanka with whom I shared a desk. When that happened, they told me, 'Don't pay any attention to her, don't cry, she is simple-minded'. But I could feel the humiliation. For example, I had to go to a supplementary examination in gymnastics in the former fifth grade, present-day eighth grade, because my teacher was head of the Legionary organization and a Brannik in Vidin. This Mrs. Stefka Ivanova made me dance Paydushko 'horo' [folklore ring dance]. I wasn't able to dance it properly and I had to go to a

supplementary examination. I sat for it in spring, failed and had to sit for it again in fall. So, I just about managed to avoid repeating the grade. When 9th September 1944 came, I went to the front, so I didn't go to that supplementary exam, but I had the gymnastics class recognized as passed.