

The First Store We Opened With My Older Brother “Bakara”



In this picture you can see the first store we opened in Beyoglu with my older brother Kemal.

I was born on November 6th, 1927. The Jewish school in our neighborhood was closed, reason unknown to me. I started my education in a public school "23rd Elementary School" (without tuition). My father enrolled me at the Art School in Sultanahmet after elementary school since I was artistically talented. I would go to school with the tram from my home. I learned ironworking there, that is to say, to manufacture tools and machine parts from iron.

While I was in that school, I became an apprentice to "Zangochian Stove" factory where our neighbor Izak Gaon worked, during the summers. I learned how to make stoves, stove pipes and the piggybanks that Labor Bank produced for the first time. I earned three liras a week from this job.

I started my first job as an apprentice in a shirt manufacturing place where Davit Ner was the manager, and Nesim Franci the manufacturer, in Marputcular [An area on the European side where wholesale commerce is done] at the age of 14 or 15. I worked for a weekly salary in this workplace. Meanwhile World War 2 was shaking up the whole world and affecting our country too. Poplin fabrics became hard to find at our work, only a heavy type of cotton was available. Because of this, the manufacturing of our shirts was disrupted. One day a fabric merchant who was a Jew from Istanbul but who lived in London came to our store and Franci who saw the British merchandise in his hands, accepted his offer and we restarted the manufacturing. This gentleman started coming to Istanbul very often, he started giving me 5 liras every time he came to the store, I mean, I almost got as much in tips as my weekly paycheck. I started saving these 5 liras.

One day, unfortunately, this man said to Franci: "I will bring you this amount of merchandise, give me this amount of money". Franci's trust in this person was already in place and he gave him the

money he asked for before receiving the merchandise, of course this gentleman never showed up, he swindled Franci in a bad way. I worked in this place for exactly 15 years and I learned all the ins and outs of the business.

I went to the military in 1937 for 36 months. I was put to work in the art workshop in the military, but unfortunately I had some bad memories there due to some misunderstandings.

After my discharge I returned to work with my old boss Franci. At the time, my older brother Kemal was a janitor in a handbag store named "Yildiz" (Star). After 2-3 months, he said to me: "I received a very good offer from the lady I work with. Would you like to be partners in this store?". "O.k. Kemal, how will we do this work?", I asked. "You have a credit history in the market, you can bring various merchandise here, we will fill the store, we will build a new showcase. I am sure that this store will work like clockwork because of you". I thought for a while, because I am a little fearless, I accepted the offer. I went and explained the situation to my boss. "I regret to inform you that I will quit. Because I became partners in a store and I was promised to Fani Levi". I cannot describe to you how sad my boss was. "My goodness, I loved you so much and I wanted to marry you to my daughter Leyla" he says. "Whatever, hope everything is for the best. I will give you the shirts, pijamas and men's underwear that you need for your store. And you will do good business", he said.

After this, I became investment partners with the lady Ester Civre who was the owner of Yildiz store and who sold handbags at the age of 23 or 24 only and we agreed to share the profits 50/50. The store was on Istiklal Street (on the European side, between Taksim and Tunel, the street that is closed to traffic today where in addition to shopping, you can find bars, movie theatres and entertainment centers), close to Tunel, next to the Swedish embassy, at the entrance of the apartment no. 397. The lady Ester was also married and had children, but unfortunately when I met them, her husband had declared bankruptcy.

With the help of my old boss, I added shirts, underwear, pijamas, along with ties and belts to the store, I rearranged the showcase and we held the opening of the store. However, for a certain while, this business did not go as I wished it would. So I changed the things I sold, I removed these and instead I bought women's pantyhose, scarves, my older brother Davit was one of the best glove merchants of the market, I got different assertive colored gloves from him, I got many various colored handbags, I even placed practical hats and fantasy jewelry. I placed purple colored gloves and a voile purple scarf next to it in the showcase, and next to that, a pink pair of gloves and same colored voile scarf, and I tagged them with a price of 5 liras. Whoever saw the showcase, came in, looked at it and came in. In this way we increased the sales of Yildiz store.

On September 20th, 1958 we opened the store "Bakara" with a brand new look. When we moved to Bakara, I left Yildiz store to my brother-in-law Sabetay', but when he could not manage, we transferred it to another merchant. Our daughter Verjel who was born in June of 1953 brought us a lot of luck. After her birth, everything worked out for the better. Until that day, because we did not have much money, we shared a house with Fani's older sister Sara, her husband Anri and my mother-in-law. A short while before her birth, business in the store started to work like clockwork, a specific clientele was formed, and I took the plunge and bought a tiny flat at Shishane (on the European side, where Jews lived together) to live with Fani alone and moved in.

We had a grand opening for our store in September of 1965, with the slogan "Evin, the store that brings Europe to your doorstep" and with a lot of advertising. For exactly 10 years, 60-65 people worked with me.

I suffered a serious stroke in 1979. I recuperated with difficulty, bless him, Kemal took care of the business. When the contract of the store ended, we took a decision among the family and liquidated all the merchandise in the store and started living our life with my wife. Bless them, my children said to us: "My dear father, life is short, you worked very hard until you were worn out. Now live your life one day at a time with your wife. Go to places that you wish to see in the world. Enjoy your retirement while you are still young".

After closing up our store we went on a worldwide tour for about one month. There was almost no place that we did not see. May G-d bless my children, we toured and saw a lot. Until this year that we are in, during summer, the months of June, July, August and September, we go to the Aegean or the Mediterranean with my wife for a week each.

I worked actively in the Old People's Home as a volunteer after retiring, I still go as my health permits. I take the elders that are able to walk, and that are sensible, on outings and to eat fish once or twice a month as long as I can find sponsors, which I have always found until now. In addition to that, I supervise the repair work of the building, the most difficult part of my work is the last duty I perform for the elders. What I mean is the procedure after their death (burial, the dirt, the tombstone etc.). I am approaching 80 too, almost. The therapies that were given because of my illness exhausted me already. Even though I tell the young volunteer friends in the Old People's Home, come and learn this job and take it from me, none of them want to undertake this duty. I will try to perform this duty as long as G-d gives me strength.