

The Mashiakh Family



This is my first picture ever, taken in Sofia in 1930. I'm two years old here. My parents are standing around me. On the right one can see my three brothers standing. My two sisters Jina (right) and Vinka [Venezia] (left) who emigrated to Israel, where they live today, crossed themselves out here, because they didn't like how they came out in the picture. My elder sister Sara is to the left of my three brothers. The first from the right is a nephew of my father, Benzion, our houses had a shared yard, but I can't recall anything more about him. The sitting woman (the second from the right) is Aunt Lucha, our father's sister. Our cousin Mati is sitting with a purse in her hands below Benzion, she's a daughter of my father's sister. She immigrated to Israel in the 1930s, but I know very few things about her life. She and her relatives think of themselves as sabras, 'local citizens.'

We were a merry big family of ten members. Eight of us were only the kids: five sisters and three brothers. Mois was the first, born in 1911, followed by Ester in 1913, then Albert in 1915, Nissim in 1917, Sara in 1920, Venezia in 1922, Jina in 1925 and lastly I was born in 1928. We lived poorly, I would say, but our life was very spiritual and amusing despite this. What's for sure is that we never lacked a sense of humor.

After my mother gave birth to me, she got paralyzed from rheumatism. She sat on a chair and was no longer able to stand up. Then they decided to 'sell me' to some rich relatives of my mother, her cousins. In those days it was routine for the poor and fertile Jewish families to give one of their children, usually the youngest one, to a relative childless family. In exchange, the well-off family offered financial support to the poor one. As far as I know they were trading with clothes. Since my mother was paralyzed, a woman had to come to wash and swaddle me. My brother Nisso [Nissim] helped her do that. He was eleven years old then. Once he came back from school and saw a car in front of the house. Let me mention that it was 1928. Automobiles weren't a usual thing to see even in the capital. Right at this moment, they were preparing the baby's napkins at home to give me to these people.

My brother entered and shouted, 'Mother! What's that car doing here?' Are you going to separate us? Don't give Milka away! I'll fill my pockets with pebbles and I'll break this car's windows, mind

you...' And he started filling his pockets with pebbles. And it was exactly what my mother had waited for, 'We will not give her, go away, that's it!' That's how she abandoned her decision.