

My Sister Eugenie And Her Son Leon Davit Surujon



In this picture, my sister and her son are on a bridge over the Seine river. As a result of a proposition from France for my oldest sister Öjeni who was born in 1911, my mom, dad and sister left for France in the summer of 1932 for what they thought was a 15-20 day trip. Their trip to France proved to be quite difficult. First they took the boat named Stella Moris to Marseille which lasted 8 days and then from there took the train to Paris. This voyage coincided with a period named "Shiva Avsarmeta"(the three weeks of mourning) unbeknownst to them. They were able to come back 2 months later. During those weeks, there can be no marriages by the Rabbinate, no house buying, no new clothes and no moving into a new home. They were there and had nothing to do, so they stayed in a hotel for 2 months, married my sister and returned. My sister's wedding was done in a hotel (just like in Israel, the rabbi came to the hotel). The ceremony wasn't done in the synagogue (my brother-in-law was an atheist, maybe that's why it did not take place in a temple, I am thinking that he must have accepted being married by a rabbi out of respect for my father), in the evening, after a family dinner for 90 people, my mom and dad returned to Istanbul again on the boat named Stella Morris after an 8-day voyage. My brother-in-law Henri's (In Judeo Espagnol we called him Haskiya, the husband of my sister Öjeni) father Nisim Surjon was sent as an ambassador to Italy by Padisah (Sultan) Abdülhamit . Nisim Bey (Mr. Nisim) did not get along with his wife, she settled in France in the 20th. arrondissement [neighborhood]. At the time their son Henri was studying in Galatasaray Lisesi(highschool), it was a boarding school, when he graduated he tried to go to France to get a law degree but the Turkish bureaucracy did not give him a passport. That's because Istanbul was occupied by the French and British then. Henri applied to them, and got the "Protégé orientaux" certificate and left for France, but the Turks rescinded his Turkish nationality. How unfortunate that the French also did not accept him as French. My brother-in-law finished his law degree with this certificate and married my sister Öjeni in 1932. My father had transferred 20,000 Turkish liras to France as a dowry for my sister. With this money, the young couple opened the store "Bonneterie" on Rue des Pyrenees. My sister would stay at the store and my brother-in-law would go to adjacent cities to buy merchandise and take orders. The pleasant

days unfortunately were short-lived because the world was on the edge of a new war. During the second world war when the Germans invaded France , they could not touch my sister when she said "I am a Turkish citizen". The Nazi hunters were after Jews like everywhere else in the world. The staff of the police station where my sister lived would learn that the Germans were coming to look, beforehand, and warned all the Jews. Because my brother-in-law Henri was neither Turkish nor French nationality, he would escape to the nearest villages when he heard. He would hide for a few days and then return home. My sister's store was open for business and she would earn some money. Her husband would come whenever he could, shower, eat, take some money, and when he got news, he would take the train and go hide in the nearby villages. This continued on for 4 years. Only once when he was at the train station, just as he was boarding the train two Germans noticed him. When they started asking: -"Stop, who are you? What are you", my brother-in-law who had been an atheist until that day, prayed for the first time: -"Please God, save me" One of the Germans took pity on him and can you imagine that he said: -"Let him go, maybe he has a child" My brother-in-law boarded the train right in front of the Germans and descended at the Gare St. Lazare. He went to the synagogue there, took lessons of Torah and Hebrew from the rabbis and as if this were not enough, started fasting 5 days a week. For a long time he only ate on Tuesdays and the Sabbath. He took a vow that he would live this way because G-d saved him from going to the camps and he followed it. He became the volunteer custodian of this synagogue. During his escapades, he became a member of French Underground Resistance, he never fought the Germans, but he gave blood 7 times to injured French soldiers. When the French government became aware of this, they said: -"From now on you are a French national" and gave him his French passport. Their store remained open between 1932 and 1941 for about 9 years. One of the Germans became manager in the store, took over half the money earned, my sister could not tolerate this for long and transferred the store to another merchant. She received a good amount of goodwill money from this transfer, their house belonged to them, they had no rental expense, my brother-in-law Henri had started working as a salaried employee at the synagogue near Gare St. Lazare where he was the custodian. In this way they lived independently. My sister produced a son named Leon Davit Surjon.. Leon is a full Frenchman. He completed his whole education and career there. He became an employee of the Ministry of Finance after graduating from university. Today he is 67 years old and currently is an inspector in the ministry. I was able to meet him when he visited Istanbul in 1987. When Celal Bayar became president, he granted pardon to a lot of people like my brother-in-law who had been expelled and passed a law allowing them to enter Turkey for three months a year. That's why my brother-in-law and sister were able to come visit us after many long years. I was married to my wife Erna in those years and we lived in Kadıköy [A neighborhood on the Asian side]. My brother-in-law stayed with us for only three months but took advantage of his time here. My sister and her son Leon stayed for 5-6 months, of course when it was this long, we rented a small flat in the apartment owned by my father's second wife Mrs. Eliz [the information is provided later]. There was a period of 7-8 months of discord between my brother-in-law and my sister, finally my brother-in-law convinced my sister and the family resumed their life in Paris. Because my brother-in-law was French, my sister also took on the French nationality, they were both eligible for social security by the French government.