

At The Rujenuar Night Club



This photo was taken in 1965 at a night club with our friends. There used to be a famous night club in Harbiye [a district in the European side of Istanbul] called Rujenuar [the Turkish spelling for the French words "Rouge et Noir", meaning red and black]. One Saturday night we decided to go there with our friends and we went to this night club to have fun. The people in the picture are, from left to right, Vitali Menase, sitting beside him me and my wife Suzi, then beside my wife is the Yugoslavian wife of my friend Musa Esenyildiz, who is sitting right beside her. I can't remember the Yugoslavian girl's name. Then beside Musa, you can see Stella Markus and Haim Markus, and then beside them are Hayim Mayim and his wife, Fortune Mayim. Hayim Mayim used to work at an advertising company. Hayim Markus used to deal with the customs business of people. Musa Esenyildiz had an auto spare part business and Vitali Menase was an employee at the Grunberg firm [an eminent household appliances firm in Turkey]. Vitali Menase was single at the time of this photo and he is still single, he never married. Stella Markus, who is in this picture is Vitali Menase's sister. Of those in this picture, Hayim Mayim and Musa Esenyildiz have died, the others are all alive. Musa's Yugoslavian wife went back to Yugoslavia after he died.

I was born in Bursa in 1921. I lived there until I was one, and then my family and I moved to Istanbul and went to live in my mother's father's house in Kuzguncuk. My mother raised me. We did not have a nanny or "mademoiselle" [governess], and I never went to kindergarden either. I did not have many friends when I was little; my mother's friends came to visit and I would sit with them. There were not any children my age at that time among my mother's friends so I did not use to play.

We stayed in Kuzguncuk for 2 years and then moved to Galata [the Galata Tower district on the European side of Istanbul]. My childhood passed in Galata and I also went to school there. There were many Jewish families around where we lived. We had wonderful neighbors; we were like siblings with them. The Jewish community used to be quite big then. We had a synagogue in Kuledibi [Galata Tower district] and there was also the Italian synagogue. Our Italian synagogue had a hazan [chazzan] and a haham [hakham]. The haham's name was Monsieur Gabay. We also had a mikve [mikveh], a talmud tora [talmud torah] and a yeshiva [yeshivah].

I went to primary school at the Italian San Pietro school [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul]. This school was beside the San Pietro Church in Kuledibi. I studied there for a year. From there I transferred to the Italian school [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul] in Tophane and studied there until grade five, in other words I finished primary school there. These were all schools that belonged to the Italian government and they were free. Everything was free, not only the schools but the books and notebooks and uniforms, they gave all that for free. It was something really wonderful.

After primary school I continued my education at the Italian Lycée [Italian Catholic high school in Istanbul]. I studied from grade 6 to grade 12 there. Our school was next to the Italian Consulate. They taught Italian, Turkish, French and English in this school. Those who preferred, could take French or English as a second foreign language. I chose French. We also had to choose between Accounting and Latin; I chose Latin because those who studied Latin at high school could go and study the university in Italy. Those who chose Accounting could not go on to university. At that time I was planning to go to Italy for my university studies. My goal was to become an engineer. I wanted to go to Italy after high school and become an engineer but it wasn't to be. My family's economic situation was not good so I had to start working. I finished high school but couldn't go on, I started to work.

I had a lot of friends outside school. I had a friend called Hayim, another called Davit. There were many of them but now I cannot remember. I also had Jewish friends from school. There was a Toledo, a Papo, then Hayim who became a dentist and is still alive. The others are not. We used to go out together, go to the movies, go on outings, sit at cafés. Especially in the summer, we would go to garden cafés, sit in the garden and chat.

On Saturdays and on our holidays, we would spend our leisure time at a friend's house if it was winter, and we would always go swimming if it was summer. I would always go out with friends, not with my family.

It so happened that we had many a meal at restaurants with my friends. There was a fast food kind of place at Tunel, called Mandra and there was also a restaurant called Fischer. The Fischer that exists today in Taksim used to be in Tunel in my time. We used to eat at restaurants a lot.

When we grew older we started going out in mixed groups, boys and girls. We met the girls! We had a wonderful time with them.

I lived in Galata until I got married. I lived in the street across the St. Benoit Lycée. I got married 47 years ago and came to live in Kurtulus [a district in the European side of Istanbul].

I never had a lot of hobbies. I loved to read and to go to the movies. There were a lot of adventure films in my time, cowboy films, you know. I also liked to go to the theatre. At home both my mother and my father read a lot and they always advised me to read, too. I used to read books in Italian in my free time. I liked to read about the lives of poets etc... and also novels. I have not read much in Turkish because we had gotten used to reading in Italian always in school. I also read in French.