

Engagement Ceremony



Our engagement ceremony in 1952.

The other people in the photograph: On the right, my mother-in-law, in front of her, myself, on the left, my father Saul Modiano, in front of him, my wife and in the center the Grand Rabbi of Turkey of the time, Rav Rafael Saban, putting our engagement rings on us.

When I was governing Mishne Torah [an association founded to help support poor school children] Youth Commission, there was a wave of new candidates applying to become members of the Association. I, of course, had a secretary working with me - given my status as the President. Whenever a candidate wanted to apply, my secretary would have him/her fill out a form, and include a picture on his/her application.

I remember joking about it with my secretary when my wife-to-be's application form arrived on my desk. I said to her "What is this, are we going to open up a school here or what?" because the picture my wife submitted with her application form was one that was taken when she was a student. My secretary said to me "You accept her membership, and then we can deal with it later." My wife actually became a member 15 days after that. The first meeting she attended was during a Purim ball. She was sitting by herself on one corner of the ballroom. I asked my secretary "Who is this lady sitting over there at the corner?" She responded "That would be your student."

As a coincidence, we were supposed to have our Association's 50th-year meetings in a week's time. A bunch of us decided to take the day off, and go somewhere. Some of us were going to Yesilkoy, and others were going to go to Tarabya. I was actually going to meet a lady friend at 3:00 PM in Tunel. I remember waiting for her until 3:30 PM, but she never showed. Well, I decided to go over to Tarabya to meet my friends there. My wife-to-be was there as well. This was my opportunity to see her in a closer manner. After Tarabya, my friends decided to go over to the municipal casino in Taksim, where the Ceylan Hotel stands today. I invited my wife there as my friend. We started dating shortly after.

My wife and I were dating around the same time she was working at Odeon. We were not sure as to whether we both wanted to get married. Plus, my family did not have a final decision. In an effort to get to know Ester better, my father went over to her workplace with an excuse for wanting to buy a three-wheeled bicycle for his nephew. He was also very close with Ester's managers. There, he had an opportunity to see her and talk to her even though it was not too comprehensive a talk. Her managers, meanwhile, had given for her excellent references. In the end, my father decided that Ester and I should get married.

We got engaged on the 28th of May, 1952. We stayed engaged for about a year, and then got married on the 31st of May in 1953 at the Italian Synagogue. My father was a member of the Governing Board for the Italian Jewish Community in Turkey. This is probably why our wedding was really crowded and colorful. At the same time, my father was a member of the 'Fakirleri Koruma Dernegi [Support Center for the Poor]. So, all members from there attended our wedding with their significant others. Our whole family was also a member of the Misne Tora, and so all members from the Association attended our wedding as well. Actually, members of the Misne Tora put together a ceremony team for the special day. It was composed of ten male and ten female schoolchildren dressed in clothing specifically prepared for our wedding.

Ester's mother, Luna, suffered a panic attack in 1960, during my son Alberto's circumcision ceremony. She was actually carrying Alberto from the maternity room to the ceremony hall downstairs when it happened. Luckily, my sister was able to save Alberto at the last minute. Unfortunately, however, my mother-in-law suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, and was immediately taken to the French Hospital. She lived for another week, maybe ten days, before she finally passed. My sister-in-law, Suzan Yahni, stayed with us from that day to the day she passed.

My father was a very serious, introverted kind of man. He did not speak much, and when he did, he spoke with utmost care - as if he was weighing each word. He was a reserved man just like my mother was. My father was also very smart and perceptive. He did not have a lot of time to read, but he followed all major news of the day.

When he lived in Salonika, my father used to work as a regular employee at a firm. Later on, when he came to Istanbul, he founded his own business. He became a commissioned representative for some factories located in Europe. He also provided those European companies with insurance expertise, and handled their insurance needs.