

At Home In Buyukada



On the balcony of our home in Büyükada

The other people in the photograph: seated is my mother, myself and my wife.

My mother, Ester Modiano, was born in Salonika in 1894. My mother went to a Greek school, but the educational language of the school was French. She later attended a French school. When my mother was attending high school, she was able to secure a scholarship to study at the Alliance Israelite Universelle. She was going to go to France in an effort to further her French skills. But, my father, being her groom-to-be, talked her out of it. He actually did not let her go there. As a result, my mother took a job as a French teacher in a Greek school. French was a very popular language back then; students would begin learning French starting from elementary school. My mother continued teaching French until she got married. She did not work after she came to Istanbul. My parents had, what I would call, an arranged marriage. My mother's brother, Jak Kohen, happened to be my father's best friend long before she and my father met. Starting from when my father was 14-15, he would go over to her house all the time to see Jak. My father and mother became very close over time. They got married when my father was 31. My parents were both religious people, but they did not spend all their time at the synagogue. They did, however, observe all important Jewish Holidays, and specific traditions according to each Holiday. My father placed a special importance on keeping Kosher. He would always go to the synagogue on Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and on Holidays. My mother, on the other hand, would only go during the Holidays. Seats would be reserved for my parents at both the Buyukada and the Italian Synagogues.

My mother died in 1979. She is interred in the Italian Jewish cemetery.

My parents were both religious people. They raised us so that we learned how to observe and behave according to important traditions. My kids are interested in their religion today as a result of experiencing my parents' and my religious behavior.

Both my parents are buried in the Sisli Italian Cemetery as part of the Italian Jewish Community. My wife's parents are buried at the Haskoy cemetery. I had the opportunity to read the Kadis prayer during their burial ceremony. My mother passed away one day before the Aasara Betevet Tubishvat Holiday. My father, on the other hand, passed on the fourth night of Pesach.