

# Lilia Levi

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I know both my grandfathers. My maternal grandmother died very early and I didn't know her. My grandfather married a second time.

My mother, Lora Baruh is from Kiustendil. My maternal grandfather, Moshe Baruh, was a very religious man and assisted with the services at the synagogue. He had become a widower with two children – girls -fairly early and married a second time to a woman who didn't have any children. My two uncles were born afterwards. His second wife Ventura hadn't been married before. Honestly, I found out very late that my grandma wasn't my mother's real mother. When I grew up Mum told me the story about her mother who had died having a miscarriage. Their stepmother [ Lili's grandpa's second wife] raised all the kids in fact.

My mother wanted to continue her studies after she finished school, but her stepmother Ventura told her that it was not necessary for a woman to study anymore and that she had already been educated enough. She had a great desire to become an obstetrician, but she never managed to. My Mum got married very young. On the day when they [the in-laws] had to take her from Kiustendil, they [ my Mum and her relatives] got to a certain place on the road, somewhere in the middle and my father and his relatives took my mother from that place with carriages to Dupnitza. Weddings used to take place in the synagogues according to the Jewish tradition then.

How did my parents meet each other? There used to be traditional meetings between the Jews from Kiustendil and Dupnitza on various occasions. There was a Jewish chitalishte [ community center] in both towns. "Suznanie" [ the word means Consciousness in Bulgarian] -was the name of it in Dupnitsa, and "Dobro budeshte" [ Nice Future] in Kiustendil. Amateur artists from each of the two centers made regular tours from one town to the other. That is how my parents met each other.

We used to go to Kiustendil on most of our holidays. That was an opportunity to see each other. I had an aunt and uncles there. It was a tradition to visit all our relatives when we went on holidays like Rosh Ha shannah there. My grandma had a neighbor who lived downstairs. This woman would have been really cross with us if we hadn't visited her as well. That is how we grew up, in a fairly Jewish environment.

My father's parents were both from Dupnitza. I was born there too. My paternal grandparents Isac and Linda Levi, used to live together with us and I spent my childhood with them. My grandfather died in 1942 and my grandmother survived the war. I learned much about our Jewish traditions from them.

My grandfather Isac was a deeply religious man and he used to observe all our traditions. I know our holidays thanks to him. In the Jewish school, we used to give performances on our holidays. I have nice memories of all the holidays from those years, because we used to meet all those people in our family we were close to then. We, children, liked Rosh Hashanah very much, because then we received new clothes, shoes, etc. We liked Purim as well. On that day, we used to put on different masks, and, gathered in small groups, we visited our relatives. Our parents usually made some small bags in which they put money. I cannot explain why they did that. Relatives, whom we visited, also put money in our bags.

For Hanukkah, at the Jewish school they usually gave us small loafs with bun and halvah – a traditional food on that holiday. For Pesach, of course we had a traditional seder. We used to sing traditional songs till late in the night. In those evenings, neighbors without relatives came to celebrate with us. Quite often, people took the table and the dishes and thus they went to their neighbors. Nobody was alone, or only with his own family, on that night.

Grandpa attended synagogue regularly. We used to celebrate all our holidays. He even got out of his sick bed to read the prayer at the table on Pesach. My grandfather had his own set of religious books at home and my father also had his own set. They both had a tallith [prayer shawl]. I don't remember anyone wearing a tipi [skullcap]. Men would put on a hat when they went to the synagogue. That is definitely how I remember it.

My grandfather didn't like to go out very much. He was a reserved person and he could hardly stand us – a bunch of children, bothering him with the noise we used to make. Apart from that, he was a good man. I remember that poor people used to come to him and he usually gave them some things from the shop. There were people in our community who were really starving – disabled, lonely people... He was compassionate, but not sociable, in contrast with my grandmother who was a very sociable person. She used to contact many people. She was in touch with her sisters all the time; some of them [her sisters] lived in Dupnitza and one - in Sofia. She had some brothers as well. Their families have always been in contact with each other. We also became close with their parents and their children.

On holidays, especially on Pesach, the whole family used to get together. Usually all the relatives came to our house because there was more space. We were several families and everyone used to bring some food. While my grandfather was alive, he performed the whole ritual. The houses were thoroughly cleaned before Pesach as well as everything inside. The dishes were not simply washed up but even “boiled.” We used copper baking dishes, so if there had been some tin fallen from them, my mother used to send for a tinsmith – usually a Gypsy man – and he would come with his blowing device and would tin all the containers. All the cleaned containers and dishes had to be kept for the Pesach, they had to be paschal, which means cleaned and sanctified especially for the holiday. It is not allowed to eat bread on that holiday, only matzah. The matzah should be put into water first, then squeezed, squashed, and mixed with eggs. After that we make balls from that mixture and fried them. We call these balls burmulikus. They are usually dipped in syrup. Some part of the pastry may be made salty. We also used to make some small loafs of bread from matzah that are called boio in Ladino. Those breads were made of water, flour and salt only and they were extremely hard. We used to eat only that during all the 8 days of Pesach.

My parents and grandparents only ate kosher meat. But the young people changed that. We couldn't make my grandmother eat pork or anything prepared with fat even during the war, when it was hard to find absolutely anything to eat. Anyway, my mother usually mixed fat with vegetable oil when she was cooking. All the old traditions just faded away after the war. Or the families that really wanted to keep them left Bulgaria.

When I was young families often gathered together for every holiday. For example when a boy was born, all the relatives gathered on the day of its circumcision; then again for the Bar-mitzvah. If there were weddings, or deaths, my grandmother's relatives always gathered together.

As far as wedding go, there was such a tradition in the past – if the wedding was supposed to take place on Sunday, all the women together with the future bride went to the baths on Friday. And after that everybody went outside the baths, which were of Turkish type, there was some room for sitting outside, and they had a small party. Afterwards they went to the bride's house. And the very wedding procedure was taking place at the synagogue. Nowadays young people are restoring this tradition little by little. Recently I went to a wedding only to refresh my memory about how it used to be in the past.

When my grandmother got married, there were a number of things that had to be present in the trousseau – among them some coverings, a little bit of Turkish type, made of velvet with gold-thread embroidery, it was called bindali. Some women used to wear dresses made of bindali on their wedding. But it was obligatory to prepare such coverings for cushions and whatnot made of the same material [to have them in the trousseau]. Later it was not necessary that they were made of that material, but still there had to be a personal coverlet, pillow etc., because women used to give birth to their children at home, with the help of a midwife, and in rare cases – of a physician. Hospitals were mainly private at that time. And not only this – it just wasn't accepted to go to a hospital for the delivery. We were also brought into the world at home. There had to be some clothes for the baby [in the trousseau] as well. Before the wedding, the trousseau was put before the relatives, so that they could see what would the bride bring. Women [usually the bride and her mother] did their best to work out a perfect trousseau. I have seen some underwear with lace and embroidery, a slip, a nightgown, also embroidered from my mother's trousseau. Sometimes they put a sheet of colored paper under the embroidery in order to make it more contrast and visible. Once I created a splendid blouse from one of mum's nightgowns. I was a student in the first year at the university and my colleagues were very impressed by that blouse.

Our [Jewish] religious funeral rites require that the deceased person be fully purified, i.e. thoroughly bathed, even internally. There were groups of old people, specialized in that, men for men, women for women, they were called ruhisim. I remember when my grandfather died they came to our house with special plates, large enough to put the whole body on them. According to our Jewish rituals, deceased are buried naked, only covered with a shroud. Before the funeral the closest relatives made kria: they cut away a small piece of the dead person's clothes that would remind them about him/her in the future. In the past, women didn't go to the cemetery. Only men did. Women gathered together at home. And after the funeral the family stood "in siete" – the closest relatives (brothers and sisters) sat on cushions on the floor for seven days. Nobody was cooking. Close relatives were coming every day bringing food. These rituals are no longer observed. Even my parent's generation didn't observe them.

My grandfather owned a small-ware shop for vegetables and other goods. He had served as a soldier in the Balkan War. My grandmother was a housewife. She used to assist him in his work. Grandpa sold foodstuffs in his shop, and fruit and vegetables as well. He was a retailer. He always stuck firmly to the quality of the goods. I remember that they used to divide nice fruits from fruits with lower quality, and they set a lower price for the latter. I also remember that in the winter they were selling fish as well. I remember a funny incident in this connection. They had just bought some fresh fish and had to pickle it in brine. My two uncles and my father used to assist my grandfather with the work in the shop, for he couldn't cope with everything alone. The three of them [Lili's grandfather and her two uncles] went to prepare the brine. And my father was just coming back from school. He was wearing a soft hat. And he decided to help, too. And his hat fell into the brine. It was funny.

The shop wasn't big, but they had lots of customers. The shop was closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Saturday was a market day in our town. People from the nearby villages brought fruit with their horses or asses that day. My parents usually went there to buy some fruit, although it was not accepted to work on Saturday. My grandfather didn't go, because he was very strict as far as it concerned religious issues, but my grandmother did. After all, there had to be fruits for selling during the week. In wintertime they worked hard to preserve the fruits, they put them into hay when it was extremely cold. There was a small room in the other house (there were two houses in our yard). They used to put the fruit there and light large braziers with charcoal in the room to prevent the fruits from freezing. They had to work really hard to survive, my grandparents.

My father had two brothers, Leon and Albert. He was the only one from the three of them who succeeded to get a good education. The others had been short of money so they had to start work very early. My father was the oldest and after finishing school, they [his parents] managed to send him to the university with the help of some relatives. My father was a physician. He had the possibility to go abroad and specialize after graduating from university. Unfortunately, the family had already been deeply in debt so my father had to start work in order to pay off the family debt. My father didn't serve as a soldier; he was a student at the university at that time. I remember they used to call him to the reserves on a regular basis together with other physicians. My uncles Leon and Albert started work immediately after finishing school. They both worked in the shop, one of them constantly. The other went to a tailor to learn the trade, but he used to assist with the work in the shop in his free time. [After World War II] one of my uncles fell seriously ill and retired on a pension. The other continued his work at a state shop, again as a seller - it was forbidden to have private shops. They had both been soldiers. They are both deceased now, but they have families - one of them has a daughter, she is a physician, too, she is married and has two girls. They all live in Israel now. The girls are married as well. My other uncle has three sons who also live in Israel. They moved there after his death. Their mother stayed here for a while and later she also went there.

My grandparents Isak and Linda Levi had contacts with other Jewish people. Many of them [The Jews in Dupnitza] lived in the Jewish quarter. Our house was in the center of the town on the main street. We had lived in another house before - a smaller and an older one, which was situated in the rear part of the same yard - that's where I was born and where we all had lived together in our childhood years - my [paternal] grandparents, my two uncles and my father's family. Afterwards we moved to the new house. My father did some reconstruction after he bought it from some

friends. He bought it on the investment plan. It was a two-floor house. On the first floor, there were only stores. We had three rooms, a kitchen, and a hall in the middle. The original kitchen was facing south and happened to be the sunniest room in the house. So, my father reorganized one of the north rooms and made it a kitchen. It was a fairly large room and usually it was the best-heated room and my brother and I used to stay there. The other rooms were heated late in the afternoon, before we went to bed. We couldn't afford to heat the whole house, because it was big and with very high ceilings. There was a toilet in the house, but there wasn't a bathroom. We used to go to the public baths. There were some baths very close to our house; they called them the Jewish baths, because they were in the Jewish quarter. They were granted on lease to different families that were managing them. Even when my daughter was born, these baths still existed and her grandmother used to take her there. It was not until my brother graduated from the university and came back home that he made some reconstruction work and then a bathroom was made in our house. We used a coal burning stove for heating. Later on my two uncles got married and left the house. My grandparents stayed to live with us. When my grandpa died in 1942 grandma went on living with us.

My grandparents spent most of their time working at the shop. In the past, they used to make vermicelli at home and the so-called tarana, something like couscous [a kind of paste in the form of tiny little balls]. It was a really hard work, which had to be done in a single day. First, they kneaded the dough. Then, after it dried up a little, they rubbed part of it between their palms to make the couscous. They rolled out the other part forming thin sheets, then folded it many times and cut them with a knife, making thus the vermicelli. Every family prepared some winter supplies, because only few things could be found in the stores. We used to make plum jam, treacle. We used to make different sauces - tomato sauce, for example, and other different things from peppers. We didn't sterilize [as we usually do nowadays]. We regularly used to dry the peppers. That is why women from the neighborhood used to gather and work together.

□ The atmosphere at home□ wasn't always calm, especially when my uncles were there, but... One of my uncles was a little bit strange. When my mother's relatives visited us, he was irritated and was trying to cause some little troubles. Apart from that, there weren't conflicts at home, despite the fact we were a big family. Nowadays children want to have separate rooms for themselves; everyone wants to have his own desk to write on, etc. My brother and I used to study in the kitchen, because there was no heating in the other rooms. That was the kind of life we lived until we graduated. Thanks God we both did it well and became physicians.

There were some girls coming from the nearby villages to take care of us when we were children. My parents had to hire these girls because our house was really big. My father had a consulting office in the house, my grandfather's shop was downstairs and there was a lot of housework as well. These girls used to come and work for food and clothes. Many of them wore their traditional dresses, as you'll see in the pictures. When my brother was born, there was a maid who was extremely clean and tidy. Her dress was always shining white as the snow. People were turning round to look at her on the street. Later she got married but she stayed close to my parents. Her daughter came to Dupnitza to study years after that and she stayed at my mother's. She kept on visiting them. She was like a member of our family. There was always a girl helping with the housework. And we used to hire a woman for the bigger cleansing. It was impossible for a single person to maintain such a big house. At present, my daughter-in-law [who lives in the same house]

hires a woman when she wants to do a big cleansing.

My mother was a housewife, so it was mainly her that was doing the cooking, but my grandmother also took part for some dishes. She [Lili's grandma] was very good in preparing pastry. I hadn't prepared any winter supplies until Mum died. She used to say that I won't need to prepare it as soon as she could do this and that I would have to decide whether I would go on doing that or not. She was extremely dedicated. And she was very skillful – knitting, needlework, fancywork, everything. She was very good in fillet work. I still keep many things made by her. Women used to gather together for handiwork in those days. I remember Mum sewed the underwear for the whole family for many years.

My father loved to read. He was always with a book in his hands. Even at the end of his life when he couldn't walk any more he was constantly reading and was aware of all the novelties concerning his job. My mother also loved to read very much. And she was also a very sociable person. After the War [World War II] she started with social activities.

I have one brother who is younger than me. He was a child when the War [World War II] broke out. He was only 10. He also went to the Jewish school first. Then the bombardments started and we left for Sv.Vrach. He was a lively child. He was playing with all the other kids in the neighborhood. But he was a very good student. He finished high school and then became a medical graduate. He went to work in a village as a physician and then started work in our town [Dupnitsa]. His wife is from Blagoevgrad. She is an assistant pharmacist. She wanted to become a pharmacist graduate, but she got pregnant. I even remember that she came here [in Sofia] to pass her first exam and caught flu. Then my brother decided she had studied enough. They have a son who is also a physician, as well as his wife – we are a big medical family. Their son is now in the first class at the Jewish school. He has lived with his grandmother in Dupnitsa till now and he came here recently but he still cannot adapt himself. He hadn't spent a lot of time with his parents. My brother is a very sociable person. It doesn't take him a long time to establish contacts with people. He had to work in Varna for several years. He worked as ship-doctor as well. Thus, he visited many countries. In fact, that was the main reason to accept that job. Otherwise, it was impossible to travel. He is retired now. He lives in Dupnitsa. Recently they called him to Belogradchik, as they needed a surgeon there. They asked him again to go there about a month ago. His son is here [in Sofia].

We spoke in Ladino at home. That was the language we knew best My daughter speaks a little Ladino also, because her grandmother raised her while her brother attended kindergarten.

I graduated from a Jewish school. It was only till 4th grade. We studied everything there, including Hebrew language, exactly the same way as they do at my granddaughter's school now. We went to synagogue every Friday evening when I was a student at the Jewish school. There were some parts of the service in which we took part in. My grandmother was very proud that I sang in the temple. After the Jewish school, we went to schools for primary education

There was a choir at "Saznanie" institution □ the Jewish community center□ and many young people used to sing there. I have many sweet memories of that time. I learnt many songs there, not only Jewish. The conductor was very good and he became famous later. I have heard his name many times after that.

My parents used to sing in the choir and got together with friends. There was a place - they called it "The Casino," I don't know why, for it wasn't a casino at all. It was something like a café. My parents used to go there in the evenings to meet some friends. Sometimes they would let us go with them, and we used to get a piece of Turkish delight there. When they went without us, they always promised to bring us a piece of cake if we behaved as "good children."

Mum wasn't a vain woman. She demonstrated a refined taste in her clothing. Before the War [World War II] women didn't walk around without hats, and her hat was always chosen according to the season and to the case. My parents liked music very much, so I was a little child when they started to take me to concerts and operas. The "Ivan Vazov" State Theatre [it usually performs in the capital now] used to tour throughout the country in those years, so I have seen their performances in Dupnitsa, on the stage of the chitalishte [community center]. Later, when we came to Sofia, we used to go to the opera. And people were very elegant when they went to the opera. And if it was wintertime, there they put on the so-called shushon [kind of waterproof boots] over their shoes and took them off before going into the hall. In the past, especially in my student years, it was a real event to go to the theater or to the opera, because it was very hard to buy tickets. Theater halls were always full.

I am a sociable person by the way. I used to have many friends, most of them were Jewish girls, but there were others also. My first unpleasant experience with the Law for Defense of the Nation was when I graduated from high school. There was a tradition in our town that the best students, who finished junior high school, received their certificates at a special ceremony at the community center. I was one of those students, so we all got dressed and headed for the school. The school director called us in his room and told my father that he was very sorry but he had received an order that I shouldn't be given my certificate at the ceremony. That was in 1942-1943. Of course, that was a real tragedy for me and I kept crying the whole day, my parents would do anything to console me - they even brought me to a confectionery!

Then it was time to enter a high school. There were certain quotas for us - the Jews. Practically the only students with very high grades managed to enter high school. There were other Jews in our class. Classes at school were formed according to the foreign language that we wanted to study. And, as we [Jews] were ill disposed towards German because of all the sufferings we had borne, we were all inscribed in a French parallel [a class for students studying French as a foreign language]. We were all girls at the same age. And we are still friends. I even meet those who are still here from time to time. There were Bulgarian girls who were our friends as well. We entered high school in the years of the War [World War II]. There were different youth organizations then - Brannik, etc. Our classes took place in the afternoon. And sometimes electricity cut off and [as it was too dark to see] our teacher used to make us sing. Usually girls who were members of Brannik insisted that we sing their songs [songs of their organization]. But we didn't. I remember one day a girl stood up and said: "Madam, Jews and communists don't sing." There was a classmate of mine who was a little pushy and she was brave enough to answer "Let's sing some song that we all want and can sing." Out of school most of my friends were Jews, maybe because we lived close to each other. As far as it concerns the subjects we studied, from the very beginning I liked mathematics. Our math teacher was a very nice person. Sometimes you like the subject because you like the teacher. And I had another teacher who was teaching Geography. He wanted to rate my work with a lower mark. I don't remember why. There was a school-leaving examination for students with lower marks. So, I

was forced to pass that final exam because I needed high scores to have better chances when applying to the university.

Not far from Dupnitsa is Separeva Bania, a town where there are mineral springs. All the adults enjoyed going there very much. We – the children – often went there to play. We didn't go anywhere else on vacation, because my father was always busy and he couldn't leave his patients. There are still people who tell me that my father had been their mother's doctor and their own doctor also. He usually used to take care of the whole family. He was something like a GP.

Both my parents loved mountaineering. We climbed mountains regularly, mostly the Rila Mountain. My father even organized groups who went to the mountain together. We have gone to the Rhodope Mountains together with a group. My mother used to complain a lot that she couldn't find any time for herself, a time for a real vacation. There was a time when my father worked at the Social Insurance Fund. They used to send groups of employees to a holiday house in Samoranovo village in Rila Mountain. The doctors who went together with those groups had the right to take their families together with them. So for 2 or 3 consecutive years we went there on vacation. We liked it very much to do marches in the mountain. I saw the sea for the first time in my life after the 9th of September 1944.

There was a train passing through our town, and there were cars as well. There were buses traveling from Dupnitsa and Kiustendil. During the war [World War II], on their way back from the bombings on Sofia, the planes dropped several bombs on my town. Fortunately, I wasn't in there at that moment. I was at my aunt's in Kiustendil together with a close friend of hers. We wanted to go back to Dupnitsa, but there were no buses, nothing. I remember a private driver agreed to drive us with his car and as there were many other people traveling in the same car I had to sit in this woman's [her aunt's friend] lap. The bombs ruined a lot in a short time. Many people died, there were our compatriots among them as well.

Repression against us [Jews] began in 1943. We started wearing badges – every Jew at the age over 14 had to wear the yellow star; we couldn't go out after 9 o'clock in the evening. Later, when the deportations began, the military trains with Jewish people from Macedonia passed through our town. They put these people in tobacco warehouses for a day or two. It was announced that clothes and blankets had to be gathered for them. Many of our compatriots responded to that request. Carriages full of clothes and blankets were gathered, but nothing was given to them in fact. People told us that they went closer and threw some food to these people over the fence for they were starving.

Soon after that, an order came that we should be kept inside our homes for an indefinite period of time. My father was sent to Radomir. There he and another Jewish physician organized a meeting place for all the people who were supposed to leave for the camps. That was the first time that I saw my Dad crying. He was a really tough man. He warned us that we might never see each other again. So he left and we stayed alone with our mother. My grandmother was with us too. She and my mother sewed bags for us to carry things in. They didn't know where we were going to be sent. We all thought that we were going to be sent to the labor camps. We had no idea of the truth.

There was a man, an old friend of my father's - a pastry-cook. He had come to Dupnitsa from the Aegean region with his family. He was a very good man. I remember that our house could be



accessed from the narrow street in the back and he came and spoke to my mother. Later she retold us what he had already told her. He said that the place where we were about to be sent wasn't a good one. He proposed that we - the children stay with him and promised to find a place to hide us.

Only children under the age of 14 had the right to go out to buy bread. And one day - my 14th anniversary had already passed, but really not long before - I decided to go to the Jewish bakery, which was nearby. Grandma told me to buy a loaf of bread for her sister too and bring it to her because she had no children. She lived some 100 meters away from our house. The bread was already in my hands when a group of brannik □ soldiers□ stopped me. There was a classmate of mine among them. One of them asked me rudely where I was going. I answered that I was out to buy some bread. He said that I was obviously not 14 years old. I turned to my classmate and said that she knew my age exactly because we had been classmates. Then in the same rude manner they told me to go with them straight away. They took me to their headquarters. Their chief wasn't there. I had been waiting for him until noon when he received me. He started to swear and warned me that if I went out again nothing good awaited me. Meanwhile my poor mother was having a horrible time not knowing where I was. About a week later we got the message that our deportation was canceled.

My father got to come back, but the chief of his camp kept them in the camp for an two extra days, just to abuse them. After that he was sent as a doctor in the Jewish labor groups who worked on the railway line - a wide gauge track was under construction on the place of the narrow gauge one. Some time after that he was moved to Sveti Vrach near the town of Lom. We also went there and stayed till the 9th of September 1944.

The truth is that ordinary people weren't bad to us. Most of our classmates at high school didn't make a difference between them and us. And we never thought of ourselves as different from the others. We only observed our traditions. We knew that on New Year's Eve, for example, we received new shoes, new clothes or something like that. My mother had many Bulgarian friends. My father kept contacts with many Bulgarian colleagues.

We lived in rather miserable conditions in Sveti Vrach. The place was half a town, half a village. We hardly managed to find a place to live and practically we lived four people in a single room, which was big enough for two beds only - one for my parents and one for my brother and me.

There were only one or two Jewish families there. Our first contacts were with them. Later on many of our compatriots came to work on the railway as laborers and technicians. We used to gather at one of the Jewish families, especially on Jewish holidays. We celebrated according to our means. Once, I remember they weren't sure about the exact date of a certain holiday so we arrived at a compromise [about the date to celebrate].

Nobody treated us in a different manner. We didn't have to wear badges there. The only thing was that we couldn't do was to leave the town without a special permission from the police. It had been like that since the Law for Defense of the Nation was accepted. Only once, when my grandma got her eyes operated on [for she had a cataract], my mother accompanied her. Nobody else left the town till the 9th of September 1944 when we all went back home in Dupnitsa.

My mother has always told us that we should have our own profession and be independent. She said she had never been deprived of anything, but every time she had needed something she had to ask my father and tell him about it. There was another thing that she kept on telling - and that was because she had always lived in a big family - first with my father's parents, then when my brother got married she lived with his family. She used to say that I had to consider these words of hers as a testament to me. She told me never to live with my children when they are already married. She told me always to do my best to help them but live separately. My father was strict and tough, but he had never raised his hand to beat me. We have always taken his opinion into consideration, but he was smart and he has never tried to work his will. For example, he has never meddled when we had to choose profession, although both of us [Lili and her brother] became physicians. There was a time when my brother, who has a good taste for music, declared he was going to study music. My father only told him that a musician cannot take care of a family, but my brother gave up the idea all by himself.

I graduated high school in 1946. I applied to the university in 1947, but I wasn't admitted. I managed to enroll in 1948. I became a student in medicine in Sofia. [As a student] I lived together with another girl in lodgings. It was a tough period for me - there was a problem with heating, we could use only a limited amount of wood, coal etc. Moreover, there was a rationing system. If our parents hadn't sent us some food, we would have been lost. The rationing was canceled in 1952. When I was a third year student, my brother enrolled in the university too and from then on we lived together. My father kept sending money to us and we did our best to survive with it, while Mum used to send us some food.

As my father hadn't succeeded to take a specialty before the War, he signed up for a course after the War. I was a student in the 4th year then, and he had enrolled a course in internal diseases and was sitting in our classes. My colleagues would tease us that "father and daughter were studying together." He passed the exam and became a chief of the internal department and then head physician at the hospital in Dupnitsa.

I graduated in 1952 and I got married the same year. My husband Mois Rahamim is from Sofia. I had a colleague at the university who got married before me. Her husband had some friends. We started to go out together, most often for a walk in Vitosha Mountain. That is how I met Mois. Practically almost every boy from that group got married to a friend of mine. And we kept our contacts afterwards. Our children became friends too. Unfortunately some of them are now dead. But I still meet their wives. When our children were little we were inseparable, our children grew up together and they are still friends. And now the "Zdrave" club in the Jewish cultural house provides us a wonderful opportunity to see each other more often.

My husband worked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He got discharged right after Stalin's death. Many compatriots there at the Ministry had the same destiny. My husband was really very embarrassed, but later he was employed at NarMag  short for Public store, state trade institution  . He had started work very early, because my father-in-law had been ill [he had raised cows] and they hadn't had enough money. My husband had a brother and two sisters - the three of them were twins. His brother was killed as a partisan together with his wife. His sisters are younger than he is. They all started work very early and they finished night school.

We have two children – a daughter and a son. Zelma Mois Levi and Yosif Mois Levi My daughter is a physicist, she works in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and my son is an engineer; he works in the Telecommunication Company.

Before the War [World War II], there were many religious obstacles for mixed marriages. If a Jew decided to marry a Christian, he had to convert. And I know people who have become Christians in order to get married. But later mixed marriages between Bulgarians and Jews have become something usual. It became more and more rare to see couples that are entirely Jewish. There are many people now □ who are not Jews□ who feel like Jews no less than their husband or wife.

My father was rather opposed to the idea of moving □ to Israel□ . When the emigration process began in 1948 he told us that we should not even mention it and that he would never agree to go there. At that time there were two groups – the Zionists and the others. The relations between these groups, at least in our town, were hostile. They □ the “others”□ thought the Zionists were nationalists. And my father was a member of the Comsomol □ Young Communist League□ , then a member of the □ Communist□ Party. He told us that even if we went to live in Israel we should not expect that my mother and he would go with us. That is why we stayed. We made our life here, found a job and we were no longer thinking of emigration. But honestly I am a little sorry that we didn't go when our children were little, it would be different, but... Thank God, they graduated successfully and set up.

I have a bad memory – they ruined the synagogue in our town, and it was a very beautiful synagogue, with a nice interior design, but most of all, with marvelous acoustics. The War finished and they decided to make a store out of it, and afterwards they decided to destroy it. While they were destroying it, as my nephew told me, they found some clay pots built in the walls from which that splendid acoustic must have been coming from. I am deeply sorry that they did that stupid thing to the synagogue, it was a great monument.

Translated by Violeta Kyurdyan