

Rebeka Evgin

REBI REBEKA EVGIN

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I am here with a loving mother who harmonizes the warmth of the Mediterranean with the Jewish personality: Rebi Rebeka Evgin. She shared with us her childhood years that were spent in Adana, her close relationships with her family, the hope and the despair of the war years, her marriages. My job is to relate this to you and to enable this beautiful story to pass down generations. Rebi Evgin is of medium height, with chestnut colored hair, a woman considered petite. The traces of the life she lived are evident in the wrinkles on her face. In reality these wrinkles have been diminished with the aesthetic procedures of the modern times. It is evident that she takes care of herself. Her home reflects all the criteria of an organized and neat housewife. She lives with her daughter Sara and grandchild Yoni. In her classically styled home, handmade rugs and ornaments stand out. The habit of never offering coffee alone is part of this family too. Rebi Evgin never forgets the difficulties she endured during her lifetime, yet she disperses the pessimistic feelings created by these, with her own willpower and spends her life with her friends, her children and her relatives.



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Family background

In Fiddler on the Roof, the heroes ask each other “Why do Jews wear hats all the time?”, and the answer, just as we all know, is, “Because Jews are always ready to migrate”. As in one of George Moustaki’s songs, “Le Juif Errant” (The Wandering Jew) has become the fate of the Jews. And when I think about my ancestors, we see that my roots extend to Urmi. Urmi is a town between Russia and Armenia.

My paternal grandfather Avram Babakardash was born in Urmi around 1870. He lived in Iran, in Van Bashkale, in Konya, in Halep [last three are cities in eastern, central and southeastern Anatolia

respectively], and in Damascus. I don't have much information about him but I know he was quite religious and that he spoke in Georgian. They dealt with livestock. A lot of his family members died during World War I. My grandfather married Cevahir Babaoglu after losing his first wife.

My paternal grandmother, Cevahir Babaoglu, was a woman who lived in Russia, and who had escaped the Bolshevik Revolution [1](#). She would poke her eyes with needles when she saw the picture of Stalin in the newspapers. Cevahir Babaoglu was an obese woman who wore the garments that were in fashion in those days. Her clothing was always dark-colored. When she sat at the edge of the table, the table would disappear under her weight. I am guessing that inactivity in her last years was the cause of her condition. She never uncovered her head, she wrapped a scarf around it. Even though her husband was Avram Babakardash, her last name was Babaoglu. This situation was actually prevalent in those years. Even siblings from the same mother and father would be remembered with different last names. Since there was no surname law [2](#) during those years, the last names that were acquired later on were changed at will.

Cevahir Babaoglu worked at the market in an era when ladies never worked. She sold socks and handkerchiefs in the market. Since she had suffered through a lot of poverty in Russia, she was used to working. It was a second marriage for Cevahir also, with my grandfather. She had two children from her first marriage, she had lost her first husband. But there is no information about him. A lot of people called her "Mr. Cevahir". You needed courage to go to markets to sell merchandise.

When I came to Istanbul, I went to her house. She lived in Kuledibi [A neighborhood in Istanbul. The surrounding area of Galata Tower was known as Kuledibi. This area was densely populated by Jews. Even all the merchants around were Jewish. Galata Tower was built by Genoveans. It is one of the important touristic spots of Istanbul today. There are small restaurants in the narrow streets around Galata Tower. The Neve Shalom Synagogue [3](#) is in this area too]. This was a large house with 5 rooms and a living room. Old-fashioned sofas and mirrors decorated the livingroom. There was a large section they called "hamam" [Turkish bath] in the house too. Laundry would be washed in this section in large pots. Food was kept in wire closets [there would be a closet in a cool part of the house in an era when there were no refrigerators. It was called a wire closet because the door was made of wire]. The house was heated by stove. She prepared a meal made with garbanzo beans called "abushifte". You added potatoes, meat and onions to this meal.

Cevahir Babaoglu was a pleasant, cordial woman who liked to converse and to give advice. She suffered through a lot of poverty in Russia. She worked at anything she found there. After my grandfather died, when she was left alone, she thought commercial life would be more active in Istanbul, and followed the family Pur who were her relatives to come to this city. When I went to visit her with my daughter, she would make cloth dolls for my daughter. She was a very creative woman when you consider the conditions of those days. I have no information about Miriam who was the real mother of my father.

The livelihood of this family who was constantly migrating was earned from different jobs all the time. Selling dry goods and notions and dealing in livestock were the prominent careers.

I have no information about the mother and father of my mother. Her father was called Daniel Nuriyeller, her mother Simbul. My mother's father married twice too. There is no information about his first marriage. Those are war years, unknown ailments [there were no antibiotics then,

high fevers would cause deaths], epidemics [flu, typhus, cholera epidemics] would cause deaths at young ages. Georgian would be spoken in this family too, and religious rules were deemed very important.

My father Yasef Babakardash was a radiant faced, saintly person. Medicine had not evolved much then. There were no doctors either. There was the problem of malaria in Adana [a city on the southern coast of Turkey, overlooking the Mediterranean]. Neighbors would come and look for cures for their sons who were feverish. My father would write their names with a pencil or an inkpen somewhere, tie knots on ropes and pray something. And he would put those ropes on the arms of those children like bracelets. The kids would get better and the neighbors would be happy. He had a long thick moustache, he wore fez's at first, then felt hats. A black suit and tie were never missing. He dealt in dry goods and notions, he was the owner of a large fabric store. My father was very religious. He would not go out to the street in the mornings without donning his tefillin. My father was a very pleasant and honest person. He was a good spouse.

My mother was an authoritarian mother. Because there was a large difference in age between them, whatever my mother said, was done. My father did all the shopping. My mother did not even know how to buy bread. When my father died, my mother would give me the baskets, I would do the shopping and bring it home. Since I was the youngest child in the family, the whole family spoiled me. On Saturdays or Sundays, when my father did not go to work, he would hold my hand and lead me to the park. We would sit on the benches, I would swing on the swingsets. When we went to the park, we looked more like grandfather and grandchild rather than father and daughter. When people asked, he would proudly say "she is my daughter". But he felt sad inside, being taken for my grandfather.

My father would always come home for lunch. He would close up the store and come home with my older brothers. All the men came home for lunch in Adana. Stores would be closed for lunch break. Since distances were not long, the distance between home and work was walking distance. My mother was a very good cook. There were coal stoves in the kitchen. There would be two pots of food every day. We would eat that food for lunch and dinner. Everyone would wait for each other for lunch, we would all gather around the table together and eat our meal. Sometimes we would eat kebab [skewered grilled meat] and "lahmacun" [pronounced as "lahmajoon", thin, slightly spicy meat pizza] that is famous in Adana. But because the meat had to be kosher, my mother would give me the ground beef she prepared for the lahmacun. I would go to the lahmacun maker, wait for the dough to be stretched, and when the lahmacuns were cooked, bring them home hot. If my father wasn't going to be able to come home for lunch for whatever reason, he would definitely take food to his store in a thermos.

When my father died, my mother mourned him for a long time. She wore a black turban, and black pantyhose. Since fabric handkerchiefs were used then, she had black bands sewn around white handkerchiefs to show she was in mourning. She would lament after my father "who did you entrust me to, to leave me". My brothers wore black bands but did not allow us to wear black. I don't have information about my father's first wife. I am guessing she died from an epidemic.

My father had two brothers named Avram Babaoglu and Yakup Babaoglu. They were born around the 1880's. Avram Babaoglu married a lady named Mina who had escaped from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Mina went to Israel when her husband died.

Yakup Babaoglu married Shaabe and they went to Israel. I never saw them.

My mother Varda Babakardash was a beautiful woman with a light complexion, medium height and brown eyes, she did not wear make-up but would dye her hair with henna. [Henna is a kind of plant. This plant is mixed with water to make a paste and put on hair. This mixture nourishes the hair and gives it a reddish hue. There is also a tradition of painting hands with henna. This is when young girls put henna on their hands before they are married and their hands become dark red. It is a tradition mostly applied in Anatolia. With this tradition, the family of the girl gathers together before the wedding. Music is played, folkloric dances are performed, local outfits are worn. Even though painting hands with henna is no longer applied today, the tradition of family and friends gathering together the night before the wedding to eat sweets and have musical entertainment still continues. In this way, the tradition of sending off the young girl from her home in a joyous atmosphere and enable her to have pleasant memories is given weight]. She was a woman who dressed well. She had tailors sew her outfits. These outfits were usually dark-colored, long-sleeved and with shoulder paddings. There was no problem for fabrics because my father was in this business, and he always brought the best fabrics. Sometimes foreign sample fabrics were used, sometimes domestic ones. There were people who worked as tailors in the family. They would sew it for my mom.

My mother never went out with her head uncovered. In Adana, they would not look kindly on women with uncovered heads. She wore scarves. She was a very good housewife. Her first husband had died in the war, too but she did not have children. She was very fastidious about her clothing. They had 25 years of age difference with my father. She was quiet and calm. I would get the impression of a woman who had accepted her fate in my mother.

My mother had lost her first husband in the war. My uncle Nesim Ipekeli took her under his wing. When my uncle met my father and became friends with him, he found him appropriate for his niece. He said "Look, he has two children but he is wealthy, and a very good person. Get married, you will be comfortable". She agreed to marry my father because of poverty, the stress of being a widow, and most importantly, not being able to contradict the words of your family elder. My father was a friend of my uncle's family. In an era when family relationships were very strong, the families' decisions were applied. There was no such thing as dating then of course. You couldn't even think about women working. The best reference for women was being a good housewife. My mother and father married in Iran. They had a civil marriage but I don't think they were married in a synagogue. They were married at home. This situation reflected on my mother's relationship with my father in reality. My father was both wealthy and handsome. He had two children, but he was older in years nevertheless, and "knew the value of a woman" according to the mentality of those times.

My mother was a very clean woman, she cooked very well. Her time was spent that way anyways. She had jewelry. When I had measles, she would put that jewelry on me so I would not get up from bed and catch cold. She was obliged to sell all of the jewelry in time. In reality, even though my mother married because of pressure from her family, she demonstrated a very decisive and tough personality in her later years. After my father died, she took my older sister and me and came to Istanbul to prevent the family from dispersing.

Avram Babaoglu, who was my father's brother, never had children. Therefore he was very fond of me. And he wanted to adopt me. They even had a confrontation with my father about this subject. My father had promised that if he had another daughter, he would register the child with his brother Avram Babaoglu to enable him to adopt her. When I was born, my uncle had verbalized his wish, but my father had not warmed up to the idea. When my father died, this time my uncle felt a debt towards me and the family in his conscience, and came to Istanbul to take us under his wing. This way, someone from his family would get his inheritance. His wife Mina wanted to adopt a niece from her side of the family. During this time, it became imperative for us to move to Istanbul. It was the beginning of World War II. There were blackouts. My mother sold everything to pay for the move and we came to Istanbul all together. Avram Babaoglu took us under his wing.

My aunt Mina hosted us very graciously but she wanted to adopt the daughter of her sister who had passed away. Some friction started at that point. Yet this adoption did not take place with my getting married at a young age. Mina could not adopt her own niece, either. In fact, after my uncle died, Mina settled in Israel. My mother, after marrying my older sister and me in Istanbul, went to live with her sons in Israel claiming "it is a shame to live in the house of your son-in-law".

Israel was going through the birth pains of a country newly established. My mother was a well-liked woman. Her sons-in-law treated her with a lot of respect. There were shortages and poverty in Israel during those years. A country is getting established on one hand, it is growing economically on the other hand, and the people live concentrating on their own problems. It saddened her that she did not receive from her daughters-in-law the close attention she had from her sons-in-law, that she could not find the relationships with her neighbors and family that she was used to in Istanbul, and that she could not speak Hebrew as much as she needed. My mother settled in a house that the Israeli government provided for her as a result of my older brothers' efforts and died in her own home in 1958.

My mother's father also had a second marriage, I don't have much information on this subject but I know that my mother had step-siblings. One of my mother's brothers was Nesim Ipekeli; he dealt in dry goods and notions. Of his children, Bohor died in war at a young age. Eli married Ceni, Gabi married Beki, and Ruben married Monik. All of these kids came to Istanbul and became successful at commerce. Yayir Daniyelzade married a lady named Hana. Of his children, Daniyel married Belkis Gulcan, Mois married Miryam Babakardash, Shamuël married Shaabe, Rifat married Ester, Ester married Misha, and Matild married Zeki Basmaci.

I don't have information about my mother's other siblings Mordehay Basmaci and Anna. I only know that all the siblings were involved in businesses like the commerce of fabrics and textiles. I do not know why the last names are so mixed up. When the surname law came out, everyone took their own last name and maybe the nicknames became last names. I don't have much information about this subject.

I am the fifth child of my family. Avraam and Yakoov are the sons of my father from his first wife, they are my brothers from the same father, but different mothers. They weren't very happy about my mother and father getting married. They thought that since my mother was a young woman, she would have a lot of children. They manipulated the dry goods and notions store the way they wanted and during a period when my father was ill, they used it to further their own financial benefits. My father sold fabrics by meters during that time, he opened up a small store and earned

our living. He did not have a fabric store any more when I was able to remember. He had a small grocery store and earned his living from this store. They say that Avram Babaoglu resembles my father a lot. When I went to Israel in 1977, I saw my older brother after a lot of long years. He had already grown old. During the years Avram Babaoglu immigrated to Israel, Israel had not even become a nation, it was under the protection of the British, it was a place of war and poverty. Going there seemed like an adventure more or less.

Avram Babaoglu married a lady named Matilda. He had children named Isak, Janet, Niso, and Yosi. Janet was a guardian in jail. Niso was an engineer. Isak and Yosi dealt in commerce.

Yaakov went to Beirut because the economy was better and commercial life more active. Yaakov married a lady named Shaabe. I never got to know him.

Among my siblings from the same mother and father, Israil Babakardash was born in Damascus in 1916. He dealt in hardware, he migrated to Israel, he worked in a military office there. Israil was a very smart young man. I don't know what would have happened if he wasn't the son of a very enlightened mother and father. He drew very well. When he came to Istanbul, he would go to the Bosphorus and draw the shoreline across. He did all my art homework from school. He married a Turkish Jew named Pnina in Israel. Pnina was a really beautiful woman. She was a productive lady. She always supported my brother by working at home. They had children named Dalya, Yosi, Sami, and Judith. Dalya had a beauty salon. Judith deals in the catering business of a kibbutz. Yosi and Sami work on computers.

Simon Babakardash was born in Damascus in 1925. He left for Israel during the Wealth Tax [4](#). First he learned the language in the kibbutz. He married a lady named Margeurite that he met in the kibbutz and became a traffic cop. He was a handsome young man. There was no one in Tel-Aviv who did not know him. He was always in the very front during ceremonies. He always received support packages during the war years. Margeurite was a smart woman. My older brother had gone to his mother-in-law's house as a live-in son-in-law. He had two children named Eti and Yosi. Eti was a make-up artist. Yosi on the other hand had a certificate on diamonds. He worked in the stock market. He decided to go to the United States. He planned on doing the same work there. One night when he was going home with a bag full of money and diamonds, he was attacked by blacks. He tried to resist giving the bag to the blacks but did not succeed. The blacks killed him right there. Yosi was newly married. His mother Margeurite was extremely upset from this event and died a short while later.

Miryam was born in Damascus in 1920. Miryam was a tailor. She sewed for the most famous people in Adana. She married my cousin Mois Daniyelzade. The family objected to this marriage. Because they were cousins with Mois, and in addition they dated. Dating was frowned upon in those days. When they went out, Miryam would take me with them. She would meet Mois with the pretext of taking her sister out. She would ask me not to mention this to my mother. In time my mother accepted this union. They left for Israel too, after they were married. Miryam continued working in Israel. Mois who was a sophisticated man on the other hand, could not find work and started working in construction. First he settled in Hertzelia. He started living in a small house with the opportunities that the Israeli government provided him. Later he moved to Holon with the money he earned. But Hertzelia became a city that bloomed. And my older sister lost this

opportunity that was given to her. They had children named Suzan, Yosi (my father's name), Yayir (her father-in-law's name) and Hertzal. Suzan and Yosi were born in Istanbul, Yayir and Hertzal in Israel.

These siblings who immigrated to Israel, started meeting up and socializing with each other. They were together often on holidays. Even though each one had their own lifestyle, the siblings and their spouses were very happy being together. My uncle Simon and Miryam came to visit Bodrum this past summer. From there, they came to Istanbul to visit with us too.

My older sister Sara was born in 1932 in Adana. She was my biggest support after my father died. As soon as we came to Istanbul, there was a proposition for Sara. A young man from Samsun [a city on the shores of the Black Sea], his name was Yusuf Murat. They had lost their mother. Their father had remarried a lady named Mari. Mari was from Istanbul, but went to Samsun as a bride. Mari also gave birth to three children but she was a very good stepmother. She never discriminated between her children and the children her husband had had with his first wife.

My uncle Avram Babaoglu was meeting up with Yakup and Mordo Murat. Yakup was engaged to a Sephardic lady but he had rejected the engagement thinking that the wishes of this lady were excessive and that he could not live up to these wishes. My brother-in-law Yakup had done his military service in Adana, long before this. My father-in-law and my father were distant relatives. My brother-in-law's family also immigrated from Georgia but the Murat family went to Samsun. When his son started his military service in Adana, he gave him our address. There was a big military branch in Adana. Yakup Murat had come to our house to visit our family while he was doing his military service. My older sister and I were very young then.

Meanwhile the years passed. They had left Samsun and had started working in Tahtakale [A neighborhood in Istanbul where the heart of commerce lies. All kinds of things are sold in this neighborhood. A business market, especially ready-made clothing is sold in Tahtakale. In addition, especially young men, when they finish their education, start working with a boss they call the master in Tahtakale. Later on, they establish their own business. They call the young who have not been educated much, graduates of Tahtakale University. Boys would work as apprentices during the summer months to learn a trade. But not with their father, it was more appropriate to go with a relative. In this way, it was thought that they would adapt better to business]. On a day when they come to visit our house, Yakup Murat sees and likes my older sister. At that time, neither my older sister nor I have any dowry [the money given when girls marry]. The Murat family is a wealthy family.

My older sister accepted her fate and married in the Sisli synagogue [5](#). I had an outfit made from pink moire. My older sister rented a wedding gown from Eliya Pardo [A place in Kuledibi where women rented wedding and engagement gowns, and men tuxes]. My older sister Sara and my brother-in-law Yakup rented a house in Sisane and started living there. My older sister became the means for my marriage, too. Because I married Yakup Murat's brother Mordehay Murat. Sisters became sisters-in-law. Sara and Yakup Murat had two sons named Yosi and Hertzal. Yosi, after finishing St. Michel French Highschool [French Catholic school] went to Belgium and attended university there. He works in the university as a researcher and academic employee. Hertzal on the other hand finished St. Benoit French Highschool [French Catholic school], he continues his father's business in Istanbul.

Growing Up

I, Rebi Rebeka Evgin was born in 1934 in Adana [A city on the Mediterranean coast. The Taurus mountain range runs parallel to the ocean in this city. Adana is famous for its cotton fields. In addition it sits on the most famous valley of the Mediterranean, the Ceyhan valley. The Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers run through Adana. Among its most prominent architectural structures you can count the Adana Fortress, Clock Fortress, the Ulu mosque, and Stone Bridge over the Seyhan river]. Adana was a really wealthy city. Wheat and cotton was planted. Depending on the season, Adana would either be covered in yellow with wheat or white with cotton. Citrus groves, vineyards and vineyard houses are like Adana's symbols. All of the houses had gardens. My mother would gather the eggs from the chickens in the coop and have us drink them raw. There was a statue of Ataturk [6](#) in the plaza. The street going all the way to the station was surrounded by citrus groves. Stores were in this area. In the area which was called the Old Station, there was a neighborhood called Dipdil. Darker skinned people who talked mostly Arabic lived in this area. We called them "fellah" [peasant/ negro]. They wore baggy trousers, the tough guys among them gathered sugar canes. Later on they would gather the sugarcanes together, tie them up and play games among themselves to break them in two. The Jews did not have much to do with them. Jews dealt in commerce mostly. Our street was wide or it seemed that way to me from a child's perspective. The side streets were narrow. The floors were cobblestone or dirt. There were very, very few cars. Transportation was mostly done by horse carriages. Horses would poop in the streets. We would gather the horse dung and dry it under the sun. This was called dried horse dung. This dried horse dung was burned in stoves afterwards.

Our house had three stories. We rented it. A different family resided on each floor. We, three siblings, slept in the same room. There was no running water, we would pull up water from the outside pumps and carry it home. Our neighbors planted in the garden. Laundry was done by hand and washed with rain water, and this laundry that was washed using bluing would be hung in the wind to dry. There was no electricity in our house, we used kerosene lamps that we called night lights.

I loved reading a lot but when I was into books trying to read them with the light from these lamps at night time, my mother used to say "are you going to become a bad woman, reading and reading all the time". It was believed that women would become knowledgeable by reading and be more open to the outside world by that knowledge. In short, having girls with open minds was not a desirable thing. A very shrewd girl would not obey her family at first and then her husband. She will become independent and then go off the correct path, it was believed. I really loved reading novels but my mother would always turn off the night light.

In our house the floors were made of wood. This wood was called planks. Starting at the age of 10, mopping this wood was my chore. The floors would be scrubbed by brush, and after the dirt was cleared, would be painted with yellow paint. It would become bright yellow. Our relationship with our neighbors was very good. The biggest pastime of those days were visits to neighbors and relatives anyways. The children would visit with them too. It becomes very hot in Adana in summer. We would sleep on the balconies in summer. Our balconies on the upper floors were almost interlocking with the balconies of the house next door. The young people in Adana never looked at us with bad intentions. They would call us sister ["baci"-- a term used in Turkish to address people who are not siblings which indicates that they are considered as siblings], and

loved us like siblings. They even protected us in the market. Girls and boys forming relationships was frowned upon. It was not correct to talk with not only Muslim young men, but with Jewish young men also.

The hamams of Adana were very beautiful. Going to the hamam was an event in itself. We had special hamam combs, towels and clogs. We would pick our embroidered bundles, and would go as if we were going to a picnic. The people of Adana are dark skinned. I, on the other hand, was as white as could be. In the hamam, everyone would gather around me and joke to my mom "did you adopt this girl, she doesn't look like anyone". [In the old times, adoption is the process when children with no parents were taken in, not as servants but to be raised as the child of the house. These children also helped with housework]. Taking a bath was another problem when we did not go to the hamam. Water would be boiled in pots on top of coal stoves, there was a toilet in the garden. My mother would place the pot, mix up the hot water with the cold, and bathe all her children one by one. Later on we started bathing ourselves.

My mother never went to the market. She would shop from the vendors who passed in front of our house, and my father would come home with his arms full every evening. Plastic bags were not invented yet, shopping was done with baskets. Buying bread from the bakery was my job. Taking the lahmacuns [A type of thin pizza where ground beef, onions, tomatoes and peppers are spread on a thin round piece of dough, and baked. This used to be a southern food in the old times. Today you can find it at every corner in Istanbul] that my mother prepared with kosher beef, to the bakery was one of my chores too. My mother would prepare sponge cake [a type of cake made with eggs, flour and sugar. It rises because the eggs are beaten for a while, vanilla extract, mahaleb or mastic can also be added], taking it to the bakery was mine too. When I remember my childhood days, the scent of the lahmacun and the beautiful sight of the sponge cake come to my mind.

Between my friends and me, we had childhood games like jumping rope, playing hopscotch. The guys twirled tops. I wanted to twirl tops like boys but could not do it. The mothers of my friends made cloth dolls. We would draw eyes and eyebrows on these cloth dolls and play with them. Because my older sister was a tailor, she would give us the leftover fabrics. We would weave floor mats with those ropes. During summer months, in order to earn my allowance, I would nail wood boards and make cases to put the oranges that our neighbor gathered from the citrus groves. Tomatoes or peppers were also placed in those cases. I would wrap candy in papers (Grocers would wrap candy in a thin paper before selling it. This way, it would prevent the candies from sticking to each other). Again during the summer months, I would go to my older sister, and do overcasting [a simple sewing technique to prevent the unraveling of fabrics]. In this way I earned my allowance.

My school years were colorful. All the holidays were celebrated in our school. We would wear black uniforms with white collars, and take part in parades. We would get in line according to height. Turkish Independence day on October 29th [7](#), National Independence Day and Children's Day on April 23rd (The anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Parliament by Ataturk. Ataturk gifted this holiday to the kids, and created the first children's day in the world in this way) would be celebrated with exuberance. The love of Ataturk had been instilled in all of us. We had very innocent relationships with our friends. We would go to each other's houses. We would kiss

the hands of our elders and our teachers on religious holidays.

During the War

One day I was at a friend's house. My friend took me to a room. The room was full of sesame seeds. She said that her father sold sesame seeds. A room full of sesame seeds, it was a sight I had never seen before. When I was finishing elementary school, we had a teacher named Mr. Ata. I loved him a lot. When I was going to take my final (for a while, in order to graduate from elementary school, you had to take the final for each subject separately. The teachers would evaluate the students and give the diploma accordingly), Mr. Ata said to the other teachers: "Rebeka has a very pretty voice. Let's have her sing us a song". I was very embarrassed, my grades were very good. I was not afraid at all, but I turned red. I sang the folk song "Do birds land on the telegraph wires" (it is a very famous folk song). All the teachers clapped and they did not ask me another question. My involvement with music did not go further than being a good listener. If I had grown up in Istanbul, rather than in the conditions of Adana, I would definitely be a student of conservatory.

Yet I could not find the same tolerance level from every teacher as I found with Mr. Ata who loved me, at the finals for elementary school. One of our teachers often asked this question: "Tell me Rebeka, how many churches and temples are there in Adana?". And I always blushed even though I was not embarrassed while answering this question that was asked so unabashedly. "There is one church in Adana. There is one synagogue in Adana, my teacher". She would be content with the answer, and ask me the same question a couple of days later as if there would be some new development. The children on the other hand would ask a question like "how many feet does the cat have?" I have not grasped the meaning or the answer to this question even today. I was only able to attend elementary school in Adana. I was not able to continue my education after we came to Istanbul. If it were possible, I would have liked to attend the conservatory. I would have liked to develop my musical talents.

There were no opportunities to swim in Adana. Adana is not a city bordering the sea. You could only swim in the Seyhan river. But you had to know how to swim very well to be able to go into the river in the environment we were in. Frankly, swimming in the river was not looked upon in a positive manner. To swim in the sea, we would go to Mersin [A city bordering the Mediterranean. It is famous for its citrus groves] in the summer months.

After the War

In 1956, the Seyhan Dam was opened on the Seyhan river. Life in Adana was revived by the opening of the dam. I remember the opening ceremony of the dam very well. Foreign guests had arrived. And they had put on a ceremony with a lot of hoopla. We used to go on picnics next to the dam. We would prepare everything at home because the rules of kashrut were meticulously observed. Outings to the dam were an important type of entertainment for the people of Adana. Miryam Zade's spouse liked me a lot, they would take me everywhere they went. There were public houses [It was an organization operated by the Education Ministry and the municipalities to ensure the wide acceptance of Ataturk's principles and revolutions. Its goal was to organize cultural events, and to elevate the public's cultural level], Turkish style casinos [restaurants with Turkish style music played]. They would take me to such places.

The Sephardic Jews and the Georgian Jews lived together in Adana. Georgian Jews were weaker culturally than Sephardic Jews. Georgian Jews spoke Georgian among themselves without fail. My father used to go to the synagogue on Saturday mornings. The synagogue was a rented house that had been converted to a synagogue anyways. There would be extensive work for the holiday of Passover. Coffee beans would be boiled, dried up and ground in a special way. Rice would be rinsed, dried, and filled in bags. Since there was no matzoh, bread would be baked with yeastless flour and salt, and that bread would be eaten throughout those 8 days. My mother would make orange marmelade at home and it would be offered to guests on silver trays along with water. There were no chocolate or other types of candy then. It was a tradition to offer sweets like this. During one Passover, one of our Muslim neighbors came to visit us. They did not grasp that they had to use a spoon to eat the jam my mother was offering this way. They started eating it from the bowl. After a few spoonfuls, they apologized saying they couldn't finish the bowl. This practice is quite special.

My uncle would translate the Passover Hagadah into Georgian after reading it, so that the children could understand it. The Hagadah was in Hebrew. My uncle would translate the Hagadah that was in Hebrew instantly, to enable us to understand. In this way, we comprehended Passover. White candy [made with sugar. Mastic, oranges, milkfat, almonds could be added to it. This candy that needs to be mixed with a wooden spoon after bringing to a boil, is quite difficult to make], charoset, and homemade wine were specialties of Passover. On the second night of Passover, we would drink a special soup with rice [recipe at the end of the interview].

We would not eat the dried fruit distributed during Purim right away. We would put those dried fruit under our pillows, and sleep like that till the morning. There was poverty and shortages. This dried fruit that was offered to us, seemed like a blessing. From a child's perspective, we ate them slowly so we would not run out. We even put them under our pillows to protect them. There wasn't the abundance of today. Those bags were like blessings for us. Candy, dried fruit were not stuff that was bought usually. My mother would rinse the seeds of a watermelon, salt them, dry them up in the sun, and then bake them, and we would munch on them with a lot of pleasure. In Adana, where holidays were celebrated in the true sense of holidays, relationships between friends were as strong as family.

There was no synagogue in Adana, a house had been converted into a synagogue. This was a rental house. And a lot of effort had been put into converting it into a synagogue. This house did not belong to a Jew. Jews were not able to own a lot of real estate then. A lot of them were foreign nationals anyways, and legally foreigners could not own real estate. The community was connected to each other in Adana. The president was Gaston Mizrahi. Gaston Mizrahi had spent a lot of effort to convert this house into a synagogue. And they would invite us to their home on Passover evenings. The Mizrahi family was a wealthy family. They had an optical business. The Mizrahi family had four sons named Isak, Moiz, Albert and Metin. These children also worked for the Jewish community in Adana.

My father was sick during the Wealth Tax. He was in bed. The only thing I remember was his bronze bedframe. And he was in no shape to pay the tax that was demanded of him. When the officers came, they registered that bronze bedframe among the furnishings that could be taken. My siblings were around 16-17 years old. They were doing odd jobs. They did not demand a high tax from my oldest brother. But the younger one suffered quite a bit. My oldest brother was

working with a hardware store owner named Salamon Benyesh, and they took on this tax.

The younger one of my older brothers, Simon was a somewhat lazy young man, he was very smart but used to act lazy. He would fill small bags with lemon salt and sell them. He appeared like a merchant and got his share of the Wealth Tax. My older brother came home one evening, he looked quite worried. My mother gave money and underwear to my older brother Simon. When we heard from him the next day, he had crossed the border already. With the help of a prison guard on the road, he went to Damascus, and later to Israel. He attended the police academy in Israel, he improved himself, overcame his laziness like this; the officer education changed the course of his life.

When the events of the Second World War broke out, we were all scared. Our friends in Adana took us under their wings, and said nothing would happen. My stepbrother who lived in Istanbul came to Adana to check on us. The rumor that there were even ovens being prepared in Istanbul [referring to the gas chambers used to kill Jews during World War II due to Hitler's politics, mentioned by the Jews living around Balat] struck terror in our hearts. During those days, our elders who were politically savvy said "Don't be afraid, Ismet Pasha [8](#) is going to get out of this with the minimum amount of damage". Truthfully, Turkish Jews were spared the horrors of the second World War with the attitude of Ismet Pasha.

We were very happy when we heard about the establishment of Israel. We listened to the news on the radio. It was a happy event for us.

Adana Jews were not affected much by the policy of "Citizen, speak Turkish". [9](#) Turkish was always spoken anyways. Even though we spoke in Georgian between ourselves from time to time, we always spoke Turkish on the street.

My father did not live long after that. When he passed away, I was in middle school. My older sister Sara was in the institute. My stepbrother Avram Babaoglu took us under his wing and told us that it was imperative for us to come to Istanbul. The year is 1949, I am 14 years old, I left Adana with my mother and my older sister Sara, ending an era, and moving towards a new adventure. It was time for me to say goodbye to beautiful Adana where I spent my childhood years and my youth.

We boarded the train in Adana. It was midnight. My mother had thought of making big quantities of citrus, orange and pumpkin jams, and tomato and pepper sauces, and bring them to Istanbul. I settled on the window seat and watched the road in awe. First we came to Eskişehir [a city in central Anatolia]. My mother had prepared some stuff to eat. We took them out in the compartment. We put it between bread slices and ate. In the morning we arrived to Istanbul. It is December of 1949, there is knee-high snow on the ground, and it is snowing in big flakes, and I am seeing snow for the first time in my life. I am imagining Topkapi Palace, Dolmabahçe Palace [touristic spots in Istanbul, the former being the residence of the sultans, and the latter the residence of the first president of Turkey, Atatürk] in my mind. I am very excited because I will get to see Istanbul.

Haydarpaşa [The last station in Istanbul for all the trains coming from Anatolia. It is both a train station and a dock for boats. You can cross from the European side to the Asian side with the boats

taking off from there. In this regard, Haydarpassa is where Istanbul's heart beats. Both the dock and the station are like historical treasures] seemed big and magnificent to me. We disembarked from the train, and boarded a boat. I did not understand what the boat was. I thought we had arrived home. First we came to Karakoy [a neighborhood on the shores of the opening of the Bosphorus to Marmara sea], then we took a taxi and came home. It was the first time for me in a taxi then. Istanbul was empty then, there were no houses on its hills. There was no trace of the crowds of now.

We started living with my uncle but we absolutely need money. My uncle took me to Karakoy every day. I learned handywork there. After a while, my uncle started frowning upon my going to work. I was an attractive girl even though I was young. There could be people hitting on me during the commute from home to workplace, in those conditions. It wasn't easily acceptable for a girl to go and come from work. Just like the mentality that the books I read would be detrimental to me, going to work was considered a potential to change my mindset.

This time, a machine was bought for the house. They bring the merchandise home every day, I sew it and send it back. They bring rolls of fabric home. They pick it up sewn in the evening. I had to help with the family budget. In the meantime I was dreaming of going to Israel. I was only 15 years old. I started corresponding with my older brother. I was torn between my mother, my older sister, and going to Israel, I was constantly crying. My uncle told me that my older brother was telling me to stay there in his letter. I was devastated, was my older brother giving up on me? While all these developments were happening, my brother-in-law's brother Mordehay Murat asked for my hand. Mordehay Murat was a prospect approved by the family. For what it's worth, the older brother had married my older sister Sara. I would get to preserve the family ties by agreeing to this marriage, and my mother was going to stay with us.

Mordehay Murat was a handsome young man. He was respectful. Even though later he seemed to be an authoritative father in his relations with his children, he doted on them. His philosophy in life was honesty and living with your principles. He paid a lot of importance to his children's education. He wanted his son to obtain a career and his daughter to study in a foreign school no matter what. When we started this marriage, when I took the first step by getting engaged, I had a condition, we would move into my older sister's house too when we got engaged.

A house with the back rooms overlooking Halic [the Golden Horn], linoleum floors and no bathroom. Husband and wife, my mother, myself and my fiance, we started living together. This time, a machine belonging to the workplace of my fiance came home. There were handkerchiefs that were sold in Anatolia then. You would sew the edges of those handkerchiefs. This stitch was called "bibila" [Judeo Spanish term]. Every day a roll of cut fabric would come and I would stitch the edges.

We were happy, we were truly very happy. 6 months after the engagement, we had the civil marriage, we were living in the same house with my fiance nonetheless, it seemed more proper to us to be civilly married. I still have no dowry. One morning my fiance got up and took me to the market. We bought black fabric for a coat, green fabric for a coat, black for a dress, green for a dress, blue silk fabric for a nightgown and a nightdress, bed jacket and a lot of other necessities. My fiance paid for all of it and he said to me "this is the payment for a year's worth of work, you worked and you earned it and you bought it".

I was really very happy. We gave my nightdresses and nightgown to Sara, the embroidery expert. Nightgowns and nightdresses were an important part of the dowry because brides greeted the family members coming to visit on Sabbath mornings with a nightdress, nightgown and bed jacket. We married in Sisli synagogue too. My wedding gown was rented from Eliya Pardo, too. The only difference with my older sister was that I left the house of a relative as the bride [according to tradition a bride cannot return to the house she left in a wedding gown, this is not considered lucky, if she is returning to her own home, she leaves another house as a bride]. We did not have the luxury of having an evening reception.

In this way, two sisters, we became sisters-in-law. According to Georgian traditions, a bride's virginity is important. The mother of the girl waits through the night and without fail sees the bloodied sheets. She takes those sheets home, and offers stuffed grape leaves with yoghurt and sweets made with walnuts to the family [recipes at the end of the interview]. The mother-in-law is called, this is called "yuzgorumlulugu" [a present given by the bridegroom to his bride when he has unveiled her for the first time and seen her face]. Offering stuffed grape leaves with yoghurt means we delivered our daughter pure. Even though we lived in the same house with my fiance, and even though we had the civil marriage quite a while before the wedding, my mother waited at the door of the bedroom till the morning. And I gave her the sheets. She wanted to see it because we lived in the same house. She wanted to prove that even though we were married civilly, my husband and I did not have a sexual relationship before the wedding. My husband was so respectful that I don't remember him holding my hand once while my mother was present.

The other siblings of my husband, Efraim Murat married Luisa Sirinyildiz. They dealt in hardware in Samsun [a city on the northern coast of Turkey, bordering the Black Sea]. They had two children named Samuel and Sara. My older sister Sara and Yakup had two children named Yosi and Hertzal. Yosi is a professor of chemistry in Belgium. Hertzal continued the family tradition by dealing in commerce of ready-made clothing. Avram Murat married the sister of his older brother's wife. In this way two sisters became sisters-in-law again in the family. Luisa Sirinyildiz and Viktorya Sirinyildiz became wives to two brothers. Viktorya Murat currently lives in Israel. She had children named Kamer, David and Meri. Isak Murat married a lady named Nina. They live in Israel; they have children named Sami and Viktor.

I had two children named Sara and Sami. There is 18 months' difference between them. They were two very cute kids. Sara's grades were always very good. She first attended St. Pulcherie, and then Notre Dame de Sion [French Catholic schools]. She got engaged when she was a senior in highschool.

Our happiness was sealed with the birth of Sami. His circumcision was done in the French Hospital. Cake and lemonade, chocolates and mint liquor was offered at circumcisions then. I was resting in my bed with the nightgown that Sara the embroiderer had prepared. Sami's bar-mitzvah lacked luster. Father and son went to the temple and put on tefillim, then there was a brunch. My son finished St. Benoit Highschool [French Catholic school]. He graduated from the electrical engineering department in the university. He worked in Netas, a big firm, for long years. He retired from that firm, now he continues in commerce.

My life was spent at home, working and raising children. My husband was an extremely good

person. We used to go to the movies, to the theatres, to musical entertainments. We used to buy bulk tickets [tickets bought at the beginning of the season, for movies playing at a certain time and certain day in a movie theatre throughout the year]. We used to dress in our best clothes to go to the movies. On musical nights, we would watch artists like Perihan Altindag Sozeri, Adnan Senses [Turkish Classical Music performers]. It was a privilege to go to the matinees in Maksim Casino [the most famous casino of the times]. The matinees were for ladies only on Wednesdays, and ladies and gentlemen on Sundays. Women's matinees were a complete chaos. Food would be prepared at home, the artists would perform different routines. We used to go to Cinarcik [a vacation area close to Istanbul] in summers. The sea was clear blue. We had fun with our friends. The men came only for the weekends.

We were living in Sishane during the events of 6-7 September events [10](#). We had Greek neighbors. Our doorman wrapped himself up in the Turkish flag, and said "if you enter through this door, you trample the flag". Our house was saved from looters in this way. The scene in Beyoglu was horrendous. The cakes and chocolates of the pastry shops were all over the streets. The thought "we weren't able to afford them, you don't eat them too" was prevalent. The furs, jewelry on the ground, people desolate. It was said that this event happened because of a few looters. The government defended itself like that.

After 15 years of marriage, my husband first had kidney stone surgery, he had surgery in a private hospital. After about a month, he had chest pains one night. We called the doctor, medicine was not as advanced then. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Bypass procedure was not developed much in the 70's. When we were married, my older sister, my brother-in-law, my mother, myself and my husband lived in the same house. When the children were born, we couldn't fit in one house any more. My husband and I first moved to Taksim [a neighborhood in central Istanbul]. Mostly people who came to work from the United States lived in Taksim, Kazanci Hill. I was very young. My husband's friends said "Mordo, are you crazy? How can you live here, they will hit on your wife. You will have no peace". So we moved to Kurtulus, a short while later. I would wait my husband's arrival on the hill every evening, and take the bags from his hands.

One evening, after dinner, Sara went out with her fiance. My husband wanted to lie down. I thought he did not look well, so I called Sara back home. When I came back from the telephone, it was over already. I lived through a huge shock. I really did not know what to do. The cure for depression is in working, apparently. I started going to work after so many years. My brother-in-law warned me "to wear a coat over pants to go to work". I know that a porter accompanied me to work every morning from the boat in Karakoy, and every evening from work to the boat again. 8 years passed like this. When my first grandchild Elsa was born, I left work.

Sara was raised quite conservatively by her father. She was only allowed to the movies on Saturdays. Sundays were for homework. We used to go to Cinarcik in summers then. The mother and father of my son-in-law, Mordo Altaras were also there. Mordo Altaras was there too. He was dating a girl. The father-in-law knew my husband. He said this to his son: "You leave that girl, and see if you can arrange to go out with the girl downstairs". They started going out together. They exchanged phone numbers on our return from Cinarcik. They had bonded, Mordo started calling continuously. I tried to keep the peace despite the opposition of the father. Her father did not want his daughter's education to suffer. She had been accepted to Notre Dame de Sion Highschool

[French Catholic school] without a test because of her high grade point average at St. Pulcherie [French Catholic school]. But that year, because of Mordo's phone calls and going out, she failed her first year of highschool.

Her Dad did not know she was dating. If he knew, he would kill me first. One Saturday, she came a little late. Her father turned to me and said: "If this girl is seeing someone, I will first kill her, then myself". He was so rigid. He was a very good father, a very good husband, but he was very conservative. I acquiesced, I was raised in such an environment anyways. But when it came to Sara, we had to formalize this union. She was only 16 years old. Her father who was at Sara's engagement, unfortunately could not witness her wedding. The day Sara was married was a beautiful day, my brother-in-law and older sister held the thallis. In this way, my older sister happened to hold the thallis for me and my daughter. I was wearing a violet-blue lace dress, navy blue shoes and purse, and a salmon colored hat at the wedding. I was very well-dressed but everyone pitied me. I don't like being pitied at all. Sara was wearing a simple wedding gown, the best part of the dress was the veil. We celebrated by having a family dinner in the evening.

My son was grown up too then. One morning when I went to work, I left the siblings at home arguing. The two siblings got along well usually. That morning they started verbally arguing about an insignificant, small thing. In reality it was a period when my nerves were really wrought. I told my son not to be lazy. When I returned home in the evening, I saw my son with a bundle of money in his hand. I asked "What is this money?". "I started working", he said. He decided to become a tourist guide. His first job was to take tourists to the Dardanelles [a city on the Aegean coast, where the Dardanelles strait connects the Marmara Sea to the Aegean. The Dardanelles strait divides Turkey into European and Asian sides just like the Bosphorus]. The firm where he worked had given him the hotel and excursion money for the tourists. In this way he earned his living by being a guide for a long time and continued his studies. During this time he got engaged and broke up once. The girl he got engaged to had different expectations about life. The discord between them ended with separation. He married the granddaughter of my uncle Sami.

Sami's wife's name is Rachel. She had gone to Israel to study after finishing highschool in Adana. She had studied to be a preschool teacher. But she could not stay there, she missed her family too much. My son, when he was a tourist guide was changing girlfriends frequently. Just like captains who find a lover at every port, tourist guides return with a different girlfriend from every trip they take. This situation worried me of course. My uncle's granddaughter Rachel was a beautiful girl, she had come to Istanbul from Adana, and did not have much of a social circle. She and my son met. This was a type of matchmaking [proposition—families deciding first and the children marrying in a short time]. But my son went out with Rachel for a while after meeting her, they did not decide within three days like in the old times. They got to know each other and fell in love.

They had a happy life. Rachel could have been a working woman, preschool teacher was an ideal career for a woman. But my son did not budge from the principle "I will not allow my wife to work" even though he was an open-minded person. His wife became a good homemaker.

My son had a very severe cold when he was 9 years old. He developed nephritis [kidney infection] after the cold. I encountered a lot of difficulty for his therapy. We went from doctor to doctor, the levels would not go down. A Greek doctor started a new therapy. This time the leukocytes [white blood cells—they fight the infection] went down, and the kid felt better. In reality, this doctor took

a big risk, and gave my child cortisone without letting us know. Truthfully, if you think about the side effects of cortisone, the fact that a mother is kept in the dark about it could lead the patient to very dangerous directions. After this event, my son had to be raised with more care. I did everything I could until he got married.

After he was married, I did not concern myself with my son like I used to, so I would not be meddling in their lives. All of a sudden, it was found out that one of his kidneys was not functioning. We started going from doctor to doctor again, and it was decided that he needed dialysis. He contracted hepatitis during the dialysis. My son was in a very bad state. You could say he was on his deathbed. They called me to their home and said they were going to India. India has an abundance of donors and it is a country that is advancing technologically. When we reached India with an ambulance, a Turkish doctor received us and took us to the barracks where the operation was going to be done. You might find the term barracks a bit of an exaggeration. But it was really a very dirty, primitive environment for such a surgery. All the preparations were done, and the kidney transplant operation took place.

India is a poor country, where the destitute have trouble finding food. The donors think they can buy a car to take tourists around or a small kiosk to prepare food to sell outdoors with the money they receive, to get on with their lives. But the pleasant demeanor and encouragement the people provide is really outstanding. The streets are full of people at peace with themselves. The doctors know the techniques very well, they have been educated at top levels in the world. The nurses do not have beds to sleep in but they are trying their best to serve. And I gained a new life experience by staying there a long time. Some of the things I did to support my son during that period was misunderstood by some people and they hurt me by calling me "a carefree woman". However, it is much better for a son to see his mother in a good mood than nervous and sulking. My son could not understand the seriousness of his situation when he saw me with lipstick and a happy face. I never asked but I know that the necessary financial help was provided by a campaign in the Jewish community but my son and I never discussed this face to face.

One of the biggest turning points of my life was my marriage to Erdal Evgin. Erdal was a business major and a very decent person. We lived in Kurtulus. He had lost his wife too. But he had taken a step towards remarrying, and was living with a very attractive lady named Viki. We were friends. Erdal went on a trip and brought me a perfume and a scarf. My son commented immediately "mom, a man who brings perfume from a trip has different intentions". "Don't be silly", I scolded my son. One Sunday morning, I left home and saw Erdal at the window. When I saw him at the window again on my return, I asked "where is Viki?". He sighed, "We separated". I went up home. A few minutes later the phone rang. It was Erdal calling. He said he wanted to talk to me.

We met at the corner, entered a pastry shop. He went right to the point. He explained that he wanted to marry me. I was surprised, I asked him to give me some time. When I returned home, I told my daughter Erdal's offer. She reacted by saying "They will say that Elsa's grandmother has married a Muslim". But Erdal's family did not react like this at all. Because Erdal's first wife was also Jewish. I wrote a letter to Erdal's first wife's sister who lived in Israel. And I asked her permission for this marriage. I received a positive reply right away. I faced my daughter and convinced her by explaining the difficulties of being alone. In this way, Erdal and I had a civil marriage ceremony. He introduced me to his family. We really loved each other a lot.

Erdal was a person who knew the Jewish traditions and who was very respectful. And I respected his holidays, and the holy nights when the minarets are illuminated. Erdal would not drink alcohol during the Ramadan. My friends also obeyed this rule when we went to a restaurant during this period. We had our most important memory when we bought the flat that we are living in now. The people who sold us the flat thought I was Muslim, and Erdal Jewish. When they saw that my name was Rebeka on the deed, they were surprised. We only had Jewish neighbors in the building. During Passover, Erdal would fill the trunk of the car with spinach and leeks, and distribute it to everyone.

We went to Cleveland with Erdal during a trip to the United States that we had planned and had his heart checked. This is my fate I think; we stayed in Cleveland for 3 weeks and dealt with heart problems. After we came back, we repeated this trip and had wonderful memories. One morning, he put on his best suit and went to work. He looked in the mirror. "You are very handsome, my husband", I said. A few hours later I received a phone call from his work place. He was already in the hospital and there was nothing to be done. The only thing the doctor said was "you are lucky, ma'am, if he had lived, he was definitely going to be paralyzed".

I started living with them when my daughter Sara divorced her husband. Elsa got married. Yoni continues with his education.

My son's children also continue their education.

We heard about the massacre in Neve Shalom [11](#) on the radio. It is very sad that people who are in a temple only for praying are subjected to violence. My granddaughter Elsa let us know about the attacks on November 15th [12](#) from abroad. I had the same emotions again.

I lost both of my husbands, my children are my most valuable assets in my life.

I take my leave with Rebi Evgin. Today we can only talk about the presence of a Jewish community in Istanbul or Izmir. However, in the first half of the 20th century, there were several cities within one life story. Even though there are different traditions in each one, they all come together under one roof. This roof is the Jewish identity. I hope that we never lose the different tastes of these different colors.

Georgian recipes:

GALYA SHIHNA

Ingredients: 1 kg potatoes

4 onions

½ kg blade steak

2 eggs

Salt and pepper to taste

Fry the potatoes that have been cut in rounds in oil in pan. Slice the onions in rounds too, and cook in oil until softened. Salt the meat and cook it separately. Stack one layer potatoes, one layer onions, and cooked meat on top in a pan. Beat two eggs and pour on top. Cook over low heat.

STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES WITH YOGHURT

Ingredients: 2 cups rice
dill weed
2 medium onions
mint
salt and pepper to taste
250 gr. grape leaves

Boil the grape leaves. Slice the onions thinly and cook in oil, add rice, mint, dill weed, salt and pepper to make the filling. The leaves are filled with this filling and rolled. For two cups rice, you put 4 cups water to cook. While serving, you pour yoghurt beaten with a little garlic and sizzling melted butter on the plates.

BORCH

Ingredients: Beef broth or bone marrow broth
Cabbage
Lentils
Garbanzo beans
Homemade noodles
Salt and pepper to taste

Bring the broth to boil. Soak the garbanzo beans the night before. Wash the cabbage and cut it in bite size pieces. Add to the broth and cook to prepare the soup.

SHILLECE

It is a Passover meal.

Ingredients: Chicken broth
Swiss chard
Rice
Turmeric
Salt and pepper to taste

Bring the chicken broth to boil. Wash the chard and cut into bite size pieces. Add chard and rice to chicken broth. Add salt, pepper and turmeric.

GOZLEME (THIN PANCAKE)

Ingredients: 2 eggs
2 cups flour
2/3 cups milk
Slightly fermented grape juice, molasses, honey

Mix the eggs and flour with milk. It becomes a soft dough. Fry in oil in pan in pancake style rounds. Add fermented grape juice, molasses or honey as desired, to eat.

ZIRREDOSH

Ingredients: 250 gr. walnuts
2 eggs
1 cup sugar
A knob of turmeric

Mix all ingredients to make paste. Shape with hands to serve.

GLOSSARY

1 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

2 Surname Law

Passed on 21st June 1934, in the early years of the Turkish Republic, requiring every citizen to acquire a surname. Up to then the Muslims, contrary to the Jews and Christians, were mostly called by their father's name beside their own.

3 Neve Shalom Synagogue: Situated near the Galata Tower, it is the largest synagogue of Istanbul. Although the present building was erected only in 1952, a synagogue bearing the same name had been standing there as early as the 15th century.

4 Wealth Tax

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

5 Sisli Beth-Israel Synagogue: Istanbul synagogue, founded in the 1920s after restoring the premises of the garage of a thread factory. It was rebuilt and extended in 1952.

6 Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)

Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

7 Turkish Independence Day

National Holiday in Turkey commemorating the foundation of the Turkish Republic on 29th October 1923. The annual celebrations include military parades, student parades, concerts, exhibitions and balls.

8 Inonu, Ismet (1884-1973): Turkish statesman and politician, the second president of the Turkish Republic. Ismet Inonu played a great role in the victory of the Turkish armies during the Turkish War of Independence. He was also the politician who signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, thereby ensuring the territorial integrity of the country as well as the revision of the previous Treaty of Sevres (1920). He also served Turkey as prime minister various times. He was the 'all-time president' of the CHP Republican People's Party. Ismet Inonu was elected president on 11th November 1938, one day after Ataturk's death. He was successful in keeping Turkey out of World War II.

9 Citizen, speak Turkish policy

In the 1930s-1940s, the rise of Turkish nationalism affected the Jewish community as well. The Salonican Jew Moise Cohen (1883-1961), who had been in close contact with the young Turks in his home town in the years preceding the restoration of the Constitution, took the old Turkish name Tekinalp. He led a campaign among his fellow Jews to encourage them to speak only Turkish to integrate them fully into Turkish life, declaring that 'Turkey is your home, so you should speak Turkish.' In the major culture however, the policy of 'Citizen, speak Turkish' was seen as pressure put on minorities to speak Turkish in public places. There was a lot of criticism and verbal attacks and jeers on those who did not comply with this social rule.

10 Events of 6th-7th September 1955

Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in

Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of Events of 6th-7th September 1955: Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Ataturk's house in Salonika (Greece) was being bombarded. As most of the Greek houses and businesses had been registered by the authorities earlier it was easy to carry out the pogrom. The Greek (and other non-Muslim communities) were hit severely: 3 people were killed, 30 were wounded, also 1004 houses, 4348 shops, 27 pharmacies and laboratories, 21 factories, 110 restaurants and cafes, 73 churches, 26 schools, 5 sports clubs and 2 cemeteries were destroyed; 200 Greek women were raped. A great wave of immigration occurred after these events and Istanbul was cleansed of its Greek population.

11 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue: In September 1986, Islamist terrorists carried out a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the Neve-Shalom synagogue, killing 23. The Turkish government and people were outraged by the attack. The damage was repaired, except for several bullet holes in a seat-back, left as a reminder.

12 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues

On 15th November 2003 two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues. The terrorists drove vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside, however, 26 pedestrians on the street were killed; five of them were Jewish. The material loss was also terrible. The terrorists belonged to the Turkish branch of Al Qaida.