

Juliet Saltiel

Juliet Yosif Saltiel (nee Fridman)

Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Patricia Nikolova

Date of interview: May - September 2004

Juliet Saltiel is a cordial and delicate woman. Her wisdom and hard family fate make her life story sound unique. It was only her family that took a serious view of the warnings for prospective internment of Bulgarian Jews to certain places that appeared in the press of 1942. One year before that she and the next of kin decided to move to a town that they knew and where they had relatives, ahead of the events to come. Thus, Fridman family gained the most important: the right to choose. This right and this choice set their mark on her later life that she lived under the lucky name Saltiel. Juliet Saltiel is a woman advanced in years, her movement being handicapped because of the stroke she once had. Her flat is small, humble, and tidy. The curious fact is that the old family Saltiel has recently come into possession of a computer (second-hand) and with the help of their grandchildren they are now learning how to operate with it, using it mainly as a typewriter.

It is difficult for me to speak of my maternal and paternal grandparents because I have no information about them. However, I can tell interesting facts of my father Yosif Fridman's life story, who was a Russian Jew as well as the story of my mother Blanche Fridman (nee Baruh) who was a Bulgarian Jew.

My father Yosif Fridman was born in the village of Luninets, Minsk Region [Luninets is in Brest region, Belarus] in 1897. Unfortunately, I know nothing of other possible children in my father's parents; neither can I say if he had any siblings. As far as I know, my father was a soldier in the Russian army and took part in the October Revolution in 1917 [1](#). He fled from Russia most probably in the period between 1920 and 1922. I can't remember anything else about that. When he moved to Bulgaria, he received the so-called Nansen's citizenship, which means he had an emigrant status in Bulgaria but did not have a citizenship [he was a Russian subject, but received certain civil rights in Bulgaria]. His Nansen's citizenship, however, expired after 9th September 1944 [2](#) and he was forced to move to Israel [Palestine], where he died in Yagur in 1961.

I should mention that this Nansen's citizenship was helpful but at the same time, it was a handicap. Because my father was a cobbler, but he couldn't practise his profession here, as he was not allowed to. That's why my family led the poor life of nomads. Dad worked everything he could do – he used to make bars of soap and sell them. Furthermore, he was always on the go and we, a family with many members, travelled together with him. We helped each other. For example, the bars of soap were made at home. We mixed the ingredients, boiled them and then we cut them in bars. I remember all of us, including my mother, taking part in this important activity. These days I

was a second-grade student. Before that, when I was just born, my father had been a worker in the construction, he had carried stones and sand with horse and cart. But precisely on my birthday he fell over and broke his leg. He was also a trade intermediary in co-operation with my maternal uncle Israel Baruh. I remember that he loved going to a famous in its time café - 'Phoenix'; it was in Dondoukov Blvd. He also worked there, but he never had any problems in his work because of his origin.

Dad sometimes was very joyful, sometimes - extremely strict. Strict mainly with my mother and my half-brother whom he didn't want. He thought of my half-brother's ailment as a stain and he would always tell him off. However, as a whole, he was a just man and he didn't have any problems in his communication with people. In certain cases, he loved singing - in Russian or in Yiddish. His favourite song was 'Ei, uhnem!' [Russian: Come on, altogether!]. I remember him also singing religious songs in Ivrit (I cannot reconstruct them in my memory now), because my father was very religious in contrast to my mother. For example, my mother used to prepare matzah for Pesach; but secretly from my father she also ate bread. He used to observe all the traditions and often went to the synagogue. He used to wear his tallit. And he filled us, his children, with strong respect.

I remember the following event. Once my younger brother Shraga [Shraga was his nick-name, used by his friends. His official name was Faivel.] and I went to school (we attended one and the same school). I was then in the forth grade while he was in the first. These days we were allotted snacks in the breaks at school and I still think it's a good thing to do in the school breaks. All right, but it was Yom Kippur then. Faivel went to take his snack and I shouted at him 'You mustn't. How can you eat on Kippur?' and I threw his breakfast away. Now I think what I did was very cruel to the small Faivel. Now I remember that my father was very fond of going to the synagogue on Pesach. Before that, however, he would buy a hen and send my mother and me to the shochet who would cut its throat in our presence. Then my mother would cook it deliciously. Of course, all this was possible before the Law for Protection of the Nation [3](#).

My father had come to Bulgaria from Russia, coming to Sofia most probably through Vidin. In Sofia he met my mother Blanche Israel Baruh, who then worked as a clerk at a good position (but unfortunately I have no information where). After her second marriage (to my father) my mother stopped working. She was a housewife. But I know nothing about how my mother and my father had met. I know only that my mother was divorced then and had one kid. I can't say anything for certain about her first husband, Yosif Levi. Once I saw him from the back in a street. He seemed to me dirty.

All I know about my mother's relatives is that she is a descendant of a Jewish family from the Sephardim branch. Her father, Israel Samuel Baruh, was born in Vidin and his father, Samuel Baruh was an inn-keeper and had a total of four children. So my father had two sisters and a brother. Their names were Ester, Mazal, and Victor, but unfortunately I know nothing else about them. I know nothing at all about my paternal grandmother, Djamila Samuel Baruh, because she had died before I was born (that is before 1925) but I suppose she was also from Vidin and was most probably a housewife, staying at home and looking after her children, just like all the women of that time.

My mother's brothers and sisters were Samuel (called also Bucco as first born son, since this was the tradition in the Jewish families then), Israel Baruh, Avram Israel Baruh, Isak Israel Baruh, Haim

Israel Baruh, and Berta Baruh. Of course, the least information I have about my uncle Avram, who died of some illness as a child, that is - before the Law for Protection of the Nation was introduced in Bulgaria [1941]. I remember that uncle Bucco was a cobbler, Isak worked together with my father as a trades intermediary, uncle Haim made paper packaging for seeds which he sold at the market, and auntie Berta was a housewife. Except for Avram, who died very young and Haim, who died also of an illness relatively young in 1948, all other relatives emigrated to Israel at one time or another (I don't know exactly when, but it was most probably after 9th September 1944.) Avram and Haim died in Bulgaria, while all others - in Israel. The name of my uncle Haim's wife was Margarita, but they didn't have children and didn't manage to go to Israel. The names of uncle Bucco's and auntie Berta's children are Isidor, Dora, Lora, Josef, Jana, and Albert. They left for Israel and I don't know anything about them. Uncle Isak and auntie Rashel Baruh had children whose names were Tiko, Rozhe, and Jacque. I have no information about them and their families. Berta and Morits Bokumski's children were called Frida, Ani and Zhori. I know nothing about them. However, as far as I know, Berta died in Israel in the early 1980s.

I remember that my half-brother Leon, whose pet name was Edi, lived with us until I started to go to school (that is about 1931-1932). After that my uncle Haim and auntie Margarita Baruh grew him up. My brother Leon Yosif Levi (born 1920) was undesired by my father and because of that I was often present to arguments between mum and dad at home; Leon was the reason for these arguments but he was not guilty.

The point was that Edi was different from other people because he was born without thumbs on his palms and what is more - he was my mother's child from another man. All this was depressing to my father and thus a situation was provoked by which my uncle and aunt decided to take care of him. I should underline, however, that despite his defect, my brother was literate: he could read, he could write and he also had much talent for painting.

My elder brother's name was Ruben. He was born in Sofia in 1923 and died in Israel in 1999. He was an electrician. From his wife Ester (nee Sachi), he had three children: Yosif, Sima and Dafna. They live in Haifa in Israel. His wife was a housewife and now she is a pensioner. As far as I know it was Ruben who took care of our mother until she died.

My younger brother Shraga (his name used in the family was Faivel, after our paternal grandfather, Faivel Fridman) was born in the village of Karamanovo, Svishtov region, in 1928. He also emigrated to Israel. He is a constructor. They have three children with his wife Shoshana: Pnina, Hanita and David. Their children also live in Israel. Before she retired, Shoshana worked as a host at the Bulgarian old people's home in Rishon Lezion, while she was living in Yagur with her family, near to my mother.

I was born in the village of Slatina, near Sofia, on 17th December 1925. Our family was often forced to move from one place to another, because it was difficult for our father to find a permanent job. That is why my brothers and I were born in different places in Bulgaria. All this, however, didn't mean that my childhood wasn't good. But I should mention I never attended a Jewish school. All the schools I studied at were Bulgarian, except for the first one. I started my primary education in Ruse. There I studied up to first grade only. It was the local Catholic school, and I don't know why my parents decided to choose exactly this one, but it was perhaps because of the better education it seemed to provide. In my second grade I was already at the Sofia's school 'Father Paisii'. In fact,

I studied there up to my fourth grade. After that the Law for Protection of the Nation was introduced and I didn't study during this period [1941-1944]. In 1946, however, I continued my education at a night school. At this point all my relatives had already emigrated to Israel. After the night school I attended the so-called Rabfac [4](#). My favorite subject in the workers' faculty was Physics. I don't remember who the teacher was. I remember only my teachers in Bulgarian and Mathematics – Mrs. Denkova and Mr. Radulov. I can't remember any other details about my early childhood.

I remember that before and during the Law for Protection of the Nation my family lived at different addresses. We lived in a rented flat in Ruse, after that – in Sofia, where we changed our addresses very often. I remember that in my early childhood we lived in Beli Iskar Str. near the railway station. After that we moved to live in Tetevenska Str. Then we changed our address to a two-storey house in Skobelev Blvd. We lived in two rented rooms in the attic. We had electricity, running water and even a radio. I remember we loved listening to radio Sofia. After that we left for Asenovgrad where we changed two houses. After 9th September 1944 we came back to Sofia and we found a flat in Bacho Kiro Str. Actually, before that we lived for a while in Struma Str.. In 1946 my relatives emigrated to Israel (then Palestine) and I remained to live in a huge, half-empty room at Bacho Kiro Str. Except for me in the flat lived my aunt Haim and auntie Margarita Baruh with my half-brother Leon Yosif Levi. We lived everywhere in rented flats. It was not until I married in 1947 when I started to think of living in my own flat.

I remember the period of the Law for Protection of the Nation very well. When we went out we had to wear these disgraceful yellow stars; we got insulted and even humiliated by random people in the streets whom we even didn't know. We had an obligatory curfew hour; besides, Jews were banned from entering certain shops, restaurants, theaters and so on. There was an invariable sign at these places: 'Forbidden for Jews'. But what is more - the Jews were not allowed to keep running their private pharmacies, most of them - situated in Sofia's center, so Bulgarians got an advantage of taking control over the pharmacies. Of course, there were restrictions for tradesmen of Jewish origin as well (and the Jews were then predominantly retailers). Students of Jewish origin could not continue their education at universities. There was also one-off tax, for example if one had a bank account of 100,000 leva 30 per cent or 40 per cent of that sum simply got confiscated. I remember very well a historic date - 24th May 1943 [5](#), when in Sofia the Jews manifested against the decision for their internment out of the capital, as well as against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. The people were marching from the Synagogue [6](#) to the school, starting from Stamboliiski Blvd. They wanted to reach the royal palace and ask King Boris III [7](#) for help. However, the police suddenly intercepted them on Vazrazhdane Square, where Bet Am [8](#) is situated today. They stuffed them into trucks and arrested many people. In fact, the action led by rabbi Daniel [Zion] was smashed. Rabbi Daniel managed to find refuge with bishop [i.e. Exarch] Stefan [9](#), who was then an active opposer to the idea for Jewish internment.

My family voluntarily moved to live in Asenovgrad one year before that. We decided to do it after we read the announcements that appeared in the daily newspapers and on the radio that warned of a forthcoming law for forced internment of all Jews living in Sofia to places in the country [Internment of the Jews in Bulgaria] [10](#). We moved our baggage to the house of the sister of my brother Ruben's wife. Ruben had just married in Sofia. That happened in 1941. My brother was then at around 19 years of age. His wife's name was Ester (nee Sachi) and her sister was called Lili

Videva (nee Sachi). At the beginning we lived in Lili's two-storey house, where also her family lived. They were three of them then (she had just given birth to his first son Vassil). And we were seven (together with my brother, his wife and my half-brother); that is – three different families that had to live together. Of course, this situation could not continue for ever, so Lili Videva and her husband found for us a separate rented house in another district, which was however close to their place. I remember there were a lot of Turks in our district, fewer Bulgarians and Jews (who already wore the disgraceful yellow stars); no Armenians lived there though. Despite the mixed origin of the residents we lived well together. Our house was small of course, with low ceilings – a typical Turkish house. There were two rooms and a kitchen. We used logs for heating. My brother Ruben once lost his wedding ring in the pile of logs in the yard.

Men were sent to forced labor camps [11](#) - to build roads in the mountains. Thank goodness, the men in our family remained in the ghetto together with us. The authorities in the country understood that they could not feed such a multitude of interned Jews and decided to use part of the confiscated Jewish money to establish public catering units for them. Thus, the Jews received every day hot food (mostly potatoes).

How did we earn our living during the Law for Protection of the Nation? My brother was an electrician and he often went to the nearby villages to practice his profession, although it was forbidden; he used to take off his yellow star before that. Of course, the villagers could give him away to the authorities, because his activity was against the law [Jews could work only in the field of manual labor, thanks to which they could earn something for their living.] But they didn't do that. Moreover, my brother often brought home wires. In these cases, all the family gathered, including the children, enthusiastic for the work – we made of the wires elements (some kind of insulators) – that we painted after that. These wires were again for the villagers, when there was a place to be supplied with electric current. Sometimes my father made walnut oil. We all gathered for such cases again, opened the walnuts, then we milled them, heated them to a certain temperature in a big pot or a 'paila' [dialect Bulgarian word meaning big flat baking dish] we put the substance in a press and it was only after that that walnut oil was produced. My father used to sell this oil to Bulgarians. But not at the market (because the authorities would have immediately caught him) – he sold it directly to individuals. That is how we earned our living.

After 9th September 1944 my family came back to Sofia convinced that we all must emigrate to Israel [Palestine] after two years – in 1946. My brother Faivel, however, emigrated ahead of all yet in 1945 together with some friends of his. In the meantime my relatives lodged their documents in the police so that their emigration might be legally organized. I ran away from home for everybody's surprise. The reason for my flight was that I wanted to stay in Bulgaria. For a certain period I lived with a friend of mine who hid me. Eventually, I plucked up courage and decided to meet with the head of the police office to tell him in person I didn't want to leave. I still remember him finding my passport in the file with all other ready documents of my family that were required for our departure, he opened the page with my picture and crossed it out. That meant he practically had nothing against my remaining in my country. That is how I remained here despite my parents' opinion. As it happens in life, my relatives found me several days later and I got a thrashing for what I did. But what's done can't be undone. They left and I stayed here.

As a matter of fact, my reason to stay here was a boy from Jewish origin, whom I had fallen in love with. His name was Sasho. He worked at a metal processing workshop located in Nish Str.. We

knew each other well, because we were from one and the same Jewish crowd before 9th September 1944. Eventually we separated though. It was not before it that I discovered my future husband, Mois Solomon Saltiel, who was in fact from the same Jewish crowd.

I first met him when our family lived in a rented flat on the attic floor in Struma Str., just opposite to the home of my uncle Isak and auntie Rashel Baruh. Their sons' names were Tiko, Rozhe and Jacque. After that they emigrated to Israel and I have no information about them (they must have died most probably). We lived so close to each other that we used to communicate from our windows. Well, Mois worked at his father's cobbler workshop near there. I used to go there wearing a short dress, and, of course, he would gaze at me. Later, we met in the Jewish crowd I mentioned. One of the crowd was also my cousin Dori, who was interned to Kyustendil during the Law for Protection of the Nation. Afterwards, she married Rafael Kalev from Plovdiv, where she lives up to the present day (they have two sons: Izidor and Solomon). Our crowd included also Becca Koen (today her family name is Bidjerano and she lives in Israel) as well as other people.

There was also a violinist, Rudolf Benvenisti, (born in 1924) who got a 15-year sentence and was imprisoned together with my future husband Mois Saltiel from September 1942 to September 1944. He loved playing 'A Little Night Music' for us. Unfortunately, our crowd split at the point when the so called 'progressive ideas' started to increasingly creep into it [i.e. the communist ideas] and the Law for Protection of the Nation was the other thing that split us, obviously.

Of course, we knew each other with Mois yet from the period he went underground. I remember that one day when I was interned with my family in Asenovgrad I received a letter from him. Then he was imprisoned in the Skopje jail, but despite all this we had the possibility to be in relatively undisturbed correspondence. I knew they read his letters in the prison before I received them. And after I got the letters I had to show them to my mother (this was the way the things were these days - family matriarchate dominated in our family). But I didn't find these details as something wrong.

The main reason for his imprisoning was as comic as it was tragic. I will describe this important story in details. In 1942 on 'Hristo Botev' radio the platform of the Fatherland Front [12](#) was read. There was a series of requirements and tasks for the democratic development of the country set by the Fatherland Front in it, including certain points against the anti-Semitic legislation. Underground members of the Union of Young Workers (UYW) [13](#), among which was also Mois, decided that this platform has to be delivered to the broad public, because the government did not comment on it and the newspapers didn't write anything about it. Mois was then the head of several UYW groups, one of which decided to multiply leaflets with this important platform. These days I kept myself away from the underground activity of my future husband, although I was informed about it. And because it was very labor consuming to write the platform by hand and there was no printing house to publish it, they decided that they could multiply it by photo typing separate parts of the platform. One of them, Sabat Melamed, worked at a photo studio and took materials as well as cassette for film copying. The whole group gathered in the flat of Mois Perets at the corner of Odrin Str. and Stamboliiski Blvd.. [Odrin Street is one of the oldest streets in Sofia. It is a crossing of Stamboliiski Blvd, relatively near to the Jewish Center.] It was in August 1942 between 23:00 and 24:00 p.m.. And they started to copy these pictures. There was a lot of noise coming from the opening and closing of the box where the copying was carried out. Even more, the house was all wattle and daub and on the storey below them lived unknown Bulgarians. Well, as they were

producing this noise in the night the neighbors went up to see what happens. They wanted to open the door, but because Mois and the others had locked it and pulled down the curtains, the Bulgarians told them: 'You are doing something wrong and we are going to call the police, if you don't leave.' Then one of the daredevils, Leon Levi, who lived at the opposite corner, took the box with all the materials in order to liquidate them. But when he went out it happened that a policeman was sitting in the nearby café who saw that a youngster in a hurry carried a dubious box at an unearthly hour. He started shouting at him; 'Halt! Halt!' and the boy started to run, they chased each other, and finally Leon Levi was arrested. In the meanwhile, Mois together with Sabat Melamed ran away on the roofs of the low buildings from Stamboliiski Blvd as far as Positano and Odrin Streets, where another friend of theirs lived, Daniel Albahari. There they rested for the night. But when the policemen started to beat Leon Levi, after dawn, he told them who lived in the house and they went and arrested Mois Perets.

In fact, this was the beginning of Mois's underground life. Meanwhile, police started to track him down. They took one of his pictures and started to seek for him. He hid at many different places, until the police, which was carrying out its investigations, arrested most of the young men who were in the UYW groups led by Mois. They initiated legal proceedings where his death sentence was asked. But because of the fact he was juvenile, he got a 15-year sentence. Mois wasn't at the trial, so the sentence was a judgment by default. Later he eventually got to the police betrayed by one man (but I don't know the details). Mois was thus sent to the Sofia jail first. After six months there he was sent to the prison in Skopje in the Idrizovo branch [Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II] [14](#). That happened in 1943.

As I have already mentioned after 1946 - the year when my parents emigrated - I remained to live alone in a half-empty rented room. There were five more people living in the same apartment. In the next room were my brother Ruben with his wife Ester. They earned their living making for example paper packaging for seeds out of newspapers; uncle Haim sold them at the market. My aunt was a housewife. In the kitchen lived my half-brother Leon Levi.

My room seemed to be big, because I lived alone. I mentioned it was half-empty because this was the simple truth. After my parents left, I had only a bed, a cupboard and a big case chest that served me as a wardrobe. I put my clothes in it.

Then I met Mois by chance. After 9th September 1944 I worked as an editor-in-chief of 'Septemvriyche' [a junior high school communist organization in Bulgaria, preparing the children to join the Komsomol; the name is derivative of September, allusion to the 9th September 1944] child's magazine in Sofia. I was also in charge of a group of children then. I taught them to sing songs and to play games (the goal then was to reach a state of union and team spirit by playing). I was something like a primary teacher and child educator, as far as it was possible with my education. It was funny these days. The region leader was Venezia Mochiah (the future wife of Marko Isakov, the parents of the great opera singer Niko Isakov). There were only few such groups that worked with children then. It was Venezia that asked me to distribute some of 'Septemvriyche's' issues. There was also a big Jewish club on Klementina Square [even today the Jewish organization 'Shalom' is situated there]. One day, in this club, I was struggling to write something on a typewriter when Mois appeared next to me and gallantly offered me to write it for me. After this we more and more drew together. And eventually we got married in 1947.

After we married with Mois, he came to live with me - in my poor, big, half-empty room in Bacho Kiro Str. We found a wardrobe and brought it in. But actually we had nothing interesting in this room. I was already pregnant. So we decided to ask urgently for a stove from the commissariat (it was practice to ask for help in cases such as ours). But it had to be not only a stove, but a cooking range, too - multifunctional, made in Bulgaria to serve us both for heating and for cooking.

As a matter of fact, I don't remember any anti-Semitic reactions against me or my family before 1944 and after that. Gradually, my husband and I started leading a normal life (I mean in easy circumstances relatively). At the beginning Mois, who had just been employed with the People's Militia Directorate helped me find a new job as a clerk at the Interior Ministry's passport department. After that I was an Interior Ministry regional secretary. At that time I had already given birth to my first son, Solomon Mois Saltiel (1947) and he was already six months old. At that point I got fired from the passport department and I started work with Interior Ministry's political committee. My dismissal was not provoked by my Jewish origin, there were simply huge job cuts then and they had to dismiss 100 people for six months. However, I worked as an Interior Ministry's regional secretary long years after that. I was very pleased with my colleagues all of whom were Bulgarians. Mois then worked for the Youth Committee (a DCYU regional committee - Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, which was later renamed to DUNY - Dimitrov's Union of People's Youth, which was incorporated in the Interior Ministry's system; Mois was in fact DUNY chairman in the period between 1947-1950.)

In 1951 I was suddenly dismissed by Kyosovski, who was my boss then (a regional leader). After that it was very difficult for me to find a job. My dismissal was something like a stain. I think the reason was his personal attitude towards me.

At that time I gave birth to Yosif, my second son, and together with Mois and our first child Moni [Solomon] we already lived in Odrin Str., near Stamboliiski Blvd. We had our small garden with hens. However, we lived there only for one year. In 1953 we moved to a flat near the Fire brigade's office. After a long job seek I found a job as a foodstuff inspector in restaurants. It was not before this point that I managed to lodge my documents for continuing my education in RabFac. The course there lasted for three years. I think it happened in the period between 1951 and 1954. When I graduated from the Rabfac I studied Physics at the university from 1955 to 1956 and simultaneously worked as a dressmaker at home. I sewed children's clothes: trousers, blouses etc. But it was a very low-paid job. So I worked as a dressmaker until 1956 when my third child, Ani, turned one year of age. Then I stopped my studies at the university. Physics was my child's dream. I still regret I had to quit then, but I didn't have the choice. So I have an uncompleted level of higher education.

During our internment to Asenovgrad I suffered very badly from peritonitis. My parents took me as far as Plovdiv so that I might have an operation done. In order to go there we had to ask the police for permission. Before that I had suffered from pleurisy. That's why doctors told me I could not have any children. So, before marrying Mois I was convinced I wouldn't have children. Despite that we have three children with Mois: Solomon, Yosif, and Ani. They all were born in Sofia. As a matter of fact, I don't know when they understood they were Jews. We used to celebrate all the Jewish holidays at home, although we didn't always observe the tradition very strictly. My children graduated from Bulgarian schools. So I am not sure if they have an increased Jewish self-consciousness. What is for sure, no one can remember of anti-Semitic incident against a member of

our family. I remember that Moni was a very good student at the Electricity Technical High School in Sofia. I used to help him with Mathematics very often. After that he continued his education at the Faculty of Physics at Sofia University [15](#) and then in Moscow at Lomonosov University where he completed his education in Physics. Later he was on a specialization assignment in America for two years at the Irvine University where he specialized in quant electronics. Jozhko [Yosif] chose to study electrotechnics. Ani on her turn became an architect. She completed her education at Sofia's Institute of Architecture and Construction (VIAS).

Solomon is a professor today, Ph.D, and was accepted as a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in the field of quant electronics in 2004. Moni was the last of my children to get married. He married after he completed his higher education and after he started work as a teacher at the Faculty of Physics at Sofia University. His wife, Veska Saltiel, is also a physicist (she was born in Sofia and her maiden name was Lyubenova, she works in the Sofia University's administration). They married in 1977. Their children's names are Juliet (1978) and Kalina (1982). At present, Juliet lives in Haifa, Israel, where she studies the same specialty as her aunt Ani - architecture. This year she completed her university education. Kalina lives in Bulgaria and studies economy (marketing) in the American University in Blagoevgrad.

Yosif is an automatics engineer and has his own company in Sofia. He married Nina (I don't know what her maiden name was) in 1976. His wife is also an engineer in automatics. Now Nina works with the Defence Ministry, but not as a clerk. As far as I know, she is in charge of the computer network maintenance at the ministry. Jozhi [Yosif] and Nina live in Mladost district [a Sofia's suburb] and have two children; Georgi (1979) and Monica (1987). Georgi is an IT specialist (he completed his university education in this field), while Monica is still a schoolgirl.

Ani is an architect, but she is not working at present. As a matter of fact she was the first to marry - yet as a schoolgirl in 1973. My husband and I even had to ask for permission for their wedding, because they hadn't completed their high school education yet (Ani was then almost 18 years old). Her husband's name is Mladen Mladenov, they were classmates. She was still a schoolgirl when she gave birth to her first child Nikolay (1973). Nikolay graduated from the Sofia's High School of Mathematics, after which he married and went to Canada. At present he lives there together with his wife Stanislava, also a mathematician, and their two children Mladen (1996) and Anton (2001). Ani's daughter is called Elena (1978). She graduated from the Construction University in Sofia and is a water conduit and sewerage engineer. Now she is practicing her profession with a company.

Frankly speaking, I didn't like the changes that took place after 10th November 1989 [16](#). The reason is that the people in Bulgaria got significantly poorer; there is nothing left from the economy and social security of the past, which we remember from the totalitarian period; and that is why people as a whole feel bad. Firstly, because they came suddenly and lasted for too long. Of course, it is wrong to deny everything that is new, but we cannot simply bury all that was created in the totalitarian period in Bulgaria. People, despite their humble income, lived then much more calmly. I know a lot of people of my age who want the socialism back in power. This is a very understandable wish, given the increased level of crime in the country after 1989. My family is nostalgic about the time when we could afford to go to the sea-side or to the mountains every year, when we regularly bought books, newspapers, magazines. To put it in simple words: we lived very well then, without having big salaries. I will not even mention the medicines. Now we don't know how to save money to buy the medicines we need.

I have been to Israel three times (1974, 1982 and 1994) together with my husband and want to underline that the life there, even not so calm, is much better. I remember that when I first went there my father Yosif Faivel Fridman had already died. As I have already mentioned my elder brother, Ruben, took care of my mother in Israel, although my younger brother Shraga lived with his family nearer her, in the same street in Yagur actually. In 1974 Israel seemed to me a beautiful and calm country for the time. Later I began to worry because of the disorders there. Now I travel much less frequently due to my illness which makes me relatively sluggish. I go to visit our family friends (who are predominantly Jewish) more rarely, but I am well informed of everything that is going on in the Bulgarian Jewish community. It is because of my husband Mois Saltiel who was the chairman of the Jewish Library Club in Sofia for more than 10 years, and has been the chairman of the 'Golden Age' club at the Jewish Organization in Bulgaria 'Shalom' [17](#) for more than two years. The activity of the club consists of weekly gatherings on Saturday afternoons, when the old members of our community gather. The club organizes a multitude of meetings with artists of Jewish origin, more or less nearing the golden age, such as the actor Itzhak Fintzi, theater director professor Grisha Ostrovski, the writer Victor Baruh, etc. It is the arrangement and holding of these meetings, as well as the organized attendance to cinema and theater performances that my husband takes care of.

Translated by Alexander Manuiloff

Glossary

[1](#) Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the 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](#) 9th September 1944

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

[3](#) Law for the Protection of the Nation

A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets,

from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

4 Workers' Academy

In socialist times Workers' Schools were organized throughout the entire Eastern Block. Modes of instruction included both evening and correspondence classes and all educational levels were served – from elementary school to higher education.

5 24th May 1943

Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943. Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

6 Great Synagogue

Located in the center of Sofia, it is the third largest synagogue in Europe after the ones in Budapest and Amsterdam; it can house more than 1,300 people. It was designed by Austrian architect Grunander in the Moor style. It was opened on 9th September 1909 in the presence of King Ferdinand and Queen Eleonora.

7 King Boris III

The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Most Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

8 Bet Am

The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

9 Exarch Stefan (1878-1957)

Exarch of Bulgaria (Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, subordinated nominally only to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople) and Metropolitan of Sofia. He played an important role in saving the Bulgarian Jews from deportation to death camps. In 2002 his efforts were recognized by Yad Vashem and he was awarded the title 'Righteous among the Nations'.

10 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria

Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

11 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

12 Fatherland Front

A broad left wing umbrella organization, created in 1942, with the purpose to lead the Communist Party to power.

13 UYW

The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'état in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

14 Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II

In April 1941 Bulgaria together with Germany, Italy and Hungary attacked the neighbouring Yugoslavia. Beside Yugoslav Macedonia Bulgarian troops also marched in to the Northern-Greek Aegean Thrace. Although the territorial gains were initially very popular in Bulgaria, complications soon arose in the occupied territories. Oppressive Bulgarian administration resulted in uprisings in both occupied lands. Jews were persecuted, their property was confiscated and were to do forced labor. In early 1943 the entire Macedonian Jewish population (mostly located in Bitola, Skopje and Stip) was deported and confined in the Monopol tobacco factory near Skopje. On March 22 deportations to the Polish death camps begun. From these transports only about 100 people returned to Macedonia after the war. Some Macedonian Jews managed to reach Italian-occupied

Albania, others joined the Yugoslav partisans and also some 150-200 of them were saved by the Spanish government by granting them Spanish citizenship.

[15](#) St. Kliment Ohridski University: The St. Kliment Ohridski university in Sofia was the first school of higher education in Bulgaria. It was founded on 1st October 1888 and this date is considered the birthday of Bulgarian university education. The school is named after St. Kliment, who was a student of Cyril and Methodius, to whom we owe the existence of the Cyrillic alphabet. Kliment and his associate Naum founded several public schools in Ohrid and Preslav in the late 9th century with the full support of King Boris I.

[16](#) **10th November 1989**

After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

[17](#) Shalom Organization: Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.