

# Nesim Levi

Nesim LEVI

Istanbul

Turkey

Interviewer : Miriam Sulam

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*Nesim Levi, who was born as the second child to a middle class family in Istanbul, and who grew up facing a lot of difficulties, is today 83 years old, and is one of the richest people I have ever met in my life.*

*His wealth has nothing to do with money. It is based completely on his moral values. The most important things in life for Mr. Nesim are his wife, his children and his grandchildren.*

*The eyes of Mr. Nesim who has been residing in the Sisli neighborhood of Istanbul with his wife for fifteen years, light up at every question about his family members and he starts recounting with a trembling voice.*

*The biggest happiness for Nesim Levi who experiences intense emotions, is following his daughters' and his grandchildren's happinesses and successes closely.*

*Every corner of the house, starting with the walls, the counters and commodes in the livingroom, even the top of the refrigerator in the kitchen is covered with family pictures.*

*It was my luck to have chosen him as the first person I interviewed, because he seemed to take pleasure in recounting even the smallest details he remembered or knew about his past.*

*Despite the painful events in Mr. Nesim's life, like the death of his mother when he was very young, and losing his first son-in-law who he loved very much at a young age, you will notice how he embraces life fully and what a wonderful family he has, due to the power of love.*

*Nesim Levi is a beautiful person with a pleasant demeanor, warm personality and a zest for life.*



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- **Family background**

I unfortunately do not have much information about my roots. Because I did not meet any paternal or maternal grandfather. That is how the conditions were like before. It was between two wars and their life spans were not very long. It is rumored that my maternal grandfather died at 58, so did my paternal grandfather. I did not know a maternal grandmother, neither a paternal grandmother. Unfortunately, they had died before I was born.

They were normal, quite conservative families with Spanish roots. My father's father, Nesim Levi, dealt in glasswares. Glassware used to be sold in the streets in the old times. The name of my father's mother was Reyna Levi. They were both born in Istanbul, Haskoy and died there.

Nesim Levi lived between the years of 1863 - 1921, his wife Reyna Levi, between 1867 - 1922. They only spoke Spanish Ladino [Judeo Spanish] [1](#). Women especially spoke Turkish very poorly, and I remember in my childhood, that I used to think, why can we not speak Turkish well, when we lived in Turkey.

Our elders did not talk about their past with us, because there was a lot of poverty then, and they struggled to earn a modest living. We lived as a family who accepted poverty as a norm. And we were not bothered by this at all.

Unfortunately... I had difficulty recalling even the names of my mother's mother and father. There isn't even a picture left from them for us... They lived in Haskoy. I lived in Haskoy too till the age of 3. Later on I moved to Bankalar Caddesi [Bank Street], and spent my adolescence moving between a few houses there.

We never had a house with a garden. I even have a bad memory from that house that has been stuck in my mind. I remember a sofa in the house in Haskoy. I remember, when I was three years old, my sister's coffin unfortunately leaving the house. We had lost my sister who was a year younger than me to a childhood disease.

As far as I know, my father's father lived bound by his religion. Haskoy was the largest center in Istanbul where most members of the large Jewish community lived. It was a very crowded area. There was Balat, Haskoy and also Kuzguncuk where the Jews resided.

They observed the Sabbath seriously. There was no smoking on those days.. because there were elders around, there was especially no smoking. The men would go to the coffeehouses in the neighborhood after they came home. Children would be fed dinner and put to bed. The man would come home to eat in peace.

As far as I can remember, meat would be bought from kosher butchers. During Passover especially, different plates, different pots would be used [called loksa - Judeo Spanish term]. Even fork and knife sets were separate. These were kept in a big trunk. The house would be cleaned thoroughly for Passover, it would even be painted.

On Saturdays and the holidays, we would go to the synagogues. The synagogues were always filled up. Not like today. At the time, 150,000 Jews lived on the map of Turkey. This is around the 1930's, when I am about 6 years old. They lived in various parts of Turkey. My grandfathers did not live then. Even my mother had died in 1929.

My grandparents were people with limited means, I know that much. Their earnings were quite low. They could not go anywhere for vacations, they only rested. The way they dressed was also different. They would come home in the evenings, they wore a long, dress-like outfit.

They used these to feel comfortable. They would sit in the yards of the house, chat with neighbors. The women addressed each other as "Bulisa" [Judeo Spanish term], meaning "Madame" [Ma'am]... generally older men were addressed as "Monsieur"... Both French and Spanish was spoken in the old times. Furthermore, in wealthier families, the main language was French. Ours was Judeo Spanish, meaning Ladino.

There were only wars recounted to us. There were difficult days. Life conditions were very hard then.

My father Samuel Kemal Levi was a man I loved more than myself. My father was skillful but uneducated like me, he wasn't very cultured, but he had a broad philosophy of life, life had taught him a lot. He had endured long hardships, he had experienced 8-10 years of military service. He had been in wars.

In the Balkan War [2](#), World War I, from 1914 to 1918; he was wounded in wars, and taken prisoner. When their closest friends died next to them in wars, they continued fighting next to the dead, as if it was natural. There were bayonet wars then. They hit each other, from 50 meters or 100 meters away.

And my father unfortunately was terribly worn out during the Balkan War and World War I, while fighting the British together with the Germans. 8 years of my father's life was spent in wars. At the time, non-Muslims were given weapons too. They were never discriminated from our Muslim brothers.

My deceased father had a vast horizon. He had endured powerful blows, he had lost his long-awaited beloved (my mother) after a short while (during birth), he had a personality shaped by these tragedies. He saw life as it was, he did not pay much attention to materialism. He would say "Thank G-d" for a piece of bread. That is how we grew up. Poverty was very natural for us and we were very happy.

My father was not a tough person, but still he was a father I was very fearful of. I even caused a lot of big mischief. I was a child of the streets. Since I lost my mother at a very young age, I grew up without a mother. What I remember is that I was a lonely child.

My father was young and portly, he had red cheeks and he ate well. He would consume 8-10 borekas [cheese or eggplant filled pastry - similar to empanadas] within one sitting, may G-d bless him.

I loved him a lot, but I feared him a lot too. I feel pain while remembering [tears], because I lost him a short while after getting married. He saw three grandchildren, but they were very little. My father was devoted to me, but he never showed it. I don't remember him holding me on his lap once. Nor kissing me.

I did not experience a mother's lap anyways. They say that children were kissed in their sleep in the old times. He probably learned this from his father. That was the custom. I was very vary of him. I never received a beating from him except once. Only once, I received a beating when my feet were bound and lifted, and beaten by a stick [as was the custom in the old times].

My father went to work every morning.. he would come home with some sort of food in the evening, he would prepare us something. Life was very difficult for my older sister too. Thankfully my aunts watched her back, we lived very close, and my older sister stayed at their homes from time to time.

My mother waited 10 years for my father to return from the military to be able to marry him. According to rumor, they were neighbors already, and they reunited 10 years later. My mother's family was superior, culturally. The people in my mother's family were bankers or teachers.

My father's family on the other hand, belonged to the lower classes. But he was a handsome, blond and blue-eyed man. He was very lovable. Young people congregated around him; he would tell stories. They used to tell me that I took after my father. I always loved talking and listening. He could be considered cultured even though he did not have much of an education.

He wrote French very well. He knew old Turkish too and he wrote it. His calligraphy was good. He used to write letters then, he had a sibling who I never met, living in the United States then. He corresponded with them. When I was in the military, he wrote me a few times too.

They were 7 siblings with my father. Four boys and three girls. My father was the second oldest after an older sister.

The only brother of my father I knew was Uncle Izak.

One brother [Binyamin] had gone to the United States. Uncle Izak lived close to my father in Haskoy. He also had another brother, who had drowned when he was little. Both his hands were malformed from birth. His name was Yako.

One of my aunts is Gracia, the other Ojeni. Gracia was my father's elder sister: the firstborn. Ojeni was the fourth child. I met them. We lived close. We used to get together at our house during holidays. My father always hosted them on Saturdays, especially after the services, in the yard. I will never forget. I would ditch school and go play ball. I buckled up later and studied a lot. I still love reading to this day.

We used to play ball in the street behind Saint George school. We played soccer with a tennis ball. I sometimes played barefoot so my shoes wouldn't get worn out. We played with a paper ball too. One day when eight of us were playing ball, the tennis ball went in front of the ground floor behind the bank with my kick.

I was only able to get the ball by picking up a stone and breaking the glass a little more. I was like a hero then. Then all of a sudden, we see adults coming towards us. I of course ran away like all the others. They came home from the police station of course, they could not find me.

When my father came home in the evening, he received the news that I was expected at the police station. My only shelter then was my aunt, aunt Viktoria. She lived in one of the streets around

Yuksekkaldirim. The street where Barinyurt [3](#) is now. She had two sons and one daughter.

She had heart problems, but she took care of me like a mother, fed me and put me to sleep sometimes. That day I told her what happened and stayed there. There was no telephone of course, and it was a big offense. My father of course knew I had gone there; immediately he came to aunt Viktoria's house, too.

Even though my aunt said "he is a child", my father said that he could not afford to pay for the window and he was very angry. My aunt calmed him down and sent him home that night. The next day my father said he wanted to talk to me and took me calmly.

He sent my older sister and our neighbor outside. And first he talked to me. He said, if you continue to do these things, you will put us in more difficult situations. You have to receive a punishment, he said. There were brass bedframes then... he tied both my feet with a rope and attached it to the bed.

He struck and I screamed... and I received a beating for the first time in my life.. and he taught me the philosophy of "doing anything I want without harming anyone". Even though I caused a lot of mischief after that, the damage was only to me.

There was a teacher in our school, Mr. Nurettin. Every day one of us was in charge of bringing that day's newspaper to school. Burhan Felek had a daily column.. he made us read all of it. One day he made me read it, later, he would make me read it most of the time. I liked Turkish, I had an affinity for reading, but I ditched school too. I was a very polite child of the streets.

My mother Sara Levi was pregnant a year after the death of my sister, when I was three years old, and unfortunately died during birth along with that baby. I was the only boy among her four children. There is also my older sister who is still alive.

Her other two children who died were both girls. They say that the baby suffocated its mother while being born. My father did not take us to her grave a single time. Around 18 years of age, I researched a lot, I went to the military in '43, and I could not find a trace of my mother. When new roads were built on the old location of Haskoy cemetery, the tombs were demolished too. My mother died in 1929.. the graves were demolished around 1947...

Five years after my mother's death, my father married another woman. She was a very good woman but of poor health, Rebecca Araf. She was from Ankara and a Jew of Arabic descent. Her French was good, but she had had nervous breakdowns from time to time since her childhood.

From what I hear from close relatives like my aunt, my mother was an introverted, inoffensive and very clean woman who spoke little, and who was self-sufficient. She waited for years for my father so she could get married, she got pregnant four times, one after the other, she never complained. My father was a man who enjoyed food, and meals set up on tables. I am sure that my mother's food was tasty.

My father was a handsome male. My mother fell in love with him. My mother was a thin, dark-skinned woman. We took after our mother with our dark skin. She spoke French, maybe she studied beyond elementary school. They had the engagement ceremony at the age of 18.

10 years later, when the wars were over, they were finally reunited. They married in Haskoy in 1920 or 1921. My older sister was born in 1922, and I two years later, in 1924. I unfortunately never got to know my mother and could not shed tears for her. Still, for as long as I have been able to, I observe her yartzheits every year, I light a candle...

I barely remember our house. We had a sofa [a large area], and three or four rooms. At first we lived with my grandfather. We were crowded. There were midwives at home then for sure. I remember my father and my older sister sobbing in one room when my mother died.

There was running water inside the house. That water was not drinkable. We had gushing spring water close to every neighborhood for drinking water. All of us, the children, we would fill up our earthenware water jugs one by one and carry them home. The ones who had the means, would pay porters two pennies and have the water carried. We started having canisters carried for two pennies later on.

We had a brazier at home. It was small, my father bought a bigger one later on.

Before I went to the military, when I was 15 years old, a stove was bought for the house. As far as refrigerators go, none... very few families had refrigerators. There was no television then. I used to listen to the radios in coffeehouses during those days.

We heard about world news, events, wars this way. Some had radios in their homes, but very few. I followed what was happening in the world from the radio. Only wealthy people took photographs then. We only passed in front of the door of Photo Sureyya [one of the first and best-known photo studios].

I quit school when I was around 12-13 years old. I regretted it that same year. One day I had gone to Beyoglu Public House to watch a basketball game. It was a public place, open to everyone. I had a lot of friends, both Jewish and Muslim. The public house had a sports center, table tennis and pool halls. One day, one of my friends said, I am going up to the library. That day, I went upstairs too, with my friend. And after that day, he put the seeds of a great love for reading in me.

I started working too during that time. I worked as assistant to a tailor, and to a launderer. I was earning a little pocket money. I used to get out a little early from work and go to the library. My father knew this and did not say anything to me. In addition, there were people who sold or rented old books in Yuksekkaldirim. We rented books for ten cents a week. At the age of 16 - 17, I read romantic novels.

My father read the newspaper without fail. He used to sell lace and tassels under the window coverings and muslin drapes that we call roller shades now. He would buy big packages of strings, go to specific women and manufacture tassels according to demand.

And I and my older sister put knots together in the house. He sold ribbons of lace along with the tassels. There was a market in every neighborhood every day. In Fatih, in Sariyer, on Tuesdays in Karakoy, on Fridays in Kasimpasa, there were markets. My father would gather up this merchandise in the evenings, put it in a trunk [he had his name on the trunk], and in the morning the trunk would go to the other place. We worked on Saturdays too. We went to the market in Besiktas.

We rested on Sundays. Until 1929, the official holiday was Friday... until it changed and became Sunday. My older sister Rejina started working at the tailor, and did housework on Sundays.

My father and I, on the other hand, would go somewhere. We did shopping. There was the synagogue of the Italians that we called "Kal de los Frankos" [the Italian synagogue]. It was on the hill behind Neve Shalom [4](#). There were stores there from top to bottom [today it is called Ziyapasha Hill].

The kosher butchers were there too. Seafood sellers, grocers. There was even a big grocery store. He sold oil by liters. My father would take a tote bag with him [like the shopping bags of today, but made of fabric], and I would take one too. We would buy the meat and other necessities.

On Friday nights, everyone came to our house. Meat and fish were bought once a week... On Friday nights we dined all together. In our house, it would be just me, my father and Rejina. Once in a while, he recited the kiddush, not always. He knew religion, but did not follow it much.

"Leave religion to the religious", he would say. He did not criticize religion. I sometimes went to the synagogue on Saturdays. I always incorporated Judaism in my life and always felt proud about it.

I never had pets. We did not have a house with a garden, only the people who loved flowers would put pots in their windowsills in the old times.

My father told us about his military memories, even if it was seldom. One time, when a friend that they loved a lot had died, he recounted that they used him as a shield. These were very sad stories. People with their arms amputated, their legs amputated. Horrible things happened. He had talked because I insisted a lot.

One day when he was changing underwear I saw three deep wounds on his back. He had been hospitalized with three bullet hits. In the Dardanelles. Later there were small boats between Balat and Haskoy, he came to Haskoy with one of them. They did not recognize him at home. He was like an old wounded man with a beard.

Our neighbors were Jewish. They were very fond of me. After school, my older sister was generally not home. She was either at my aunts, or working. My neighbor Mrs. Roza: "Nesimiko [Judeo-Spanish for: little Nesim], did you eat?", she would ask. They spoke to me in Spanish.

There was no heat, I could not use a gas stove, I could not heat food, that is why they would invite me to their home sometimes. In general the neighbors around us were all Jewish. We lived in a ghetto-like place.

I learned Turkish at school. Around 8 - 9 years old, I spoke and read Turkish very well, and made fun of the adults because of their pronunciation.

There were a lot of Jewish ghettos dispersed in Turkey. There were Jews speaking different languages in Maras, Gaziantep, Diyarbakir, Tekirdag, Bursa, Canakkale, Corlu, and Antakya. The ones speaking Arabic, Georgian, the ones like us who came from Spain spoke Ladino [Judeo

Spanish] mostly.

My uncle Izak worked at his father's business. He sold glassware at the market. His work was more difficult. He had five daughters. His wife contracted tuberculosis. She had worked very hard too. When her husband was taken to the "20 military classes" [5](#), she continued in this business.

It was very difficult for her. My uncle was forced to go to the military. And this woman, because she could not take care of five children, put her two youngest daughters in the "Orfelinato" [orphanage for children]. Fani Levi was a very smart woman from the lower classes, she was able to run the business.

She was extremely clever, and she was the one who took care of her other three daughters. Two years later, she removed them from the Orfelinato but she died from tuberculosis a short while later. And Uncle Izak, in 1948, during the years when Israel was founded, immigrated to Israel with his five daughters, under very harsh conditions.

But his second daughter Julya went before her dad. She was 15 years old. They call her Yudit now. She lived in a kibbutz for two years... and they enrolled her in the military when she was 18 years old.

2-3 years later, uncle Izak and the other girls also went to Israel. Julya [she became Yudit in Israel] had met her superior while she was in the military. His name was Ruben Dahari, he was from Yemen and a wonderful boy. They married in the later years, and then brought one girl and four sons after that into the world. Yonit, Itshak, Raanan, Ofer and Moti.

Uncle Izak settled somewhere close to Tel-Aviv. He lived with his children. He never worked there. They got along with the help the government provided. All the children worked. He married them off one by one.

I went to see him and my aunt, aunt Gracia in 1973, three years before he died.

Aunt Gracia was my father's older sister... At that time [in the 1970's], she was 80 years old. She was senile by then... she was the one who lived the longest in the family. She contracted Alzheimers. She did not recognize most of us anymore. Six months after I returned, she passed away too. Her daughters had passed away before she did.

My father died in 1956. When the others left for Israel, my father preferred living here, in Turkey. In the summer of 1945 my older sister married and my father had grandchildren.

## • Growing Up

I started school in Kasimpasa. Kasimpasa Elementary school was very close to our home. I was a child of the streets and I ditched school very often to play. My favorite class was Turkish class. I loved reading a lot. My last teacher was Mr. Nurettin. We had a single teacher. There were classes such as geography, history, Turkish, social studies and math. There were no religious studies or foreign language education then. I liked all my teachers a lot in general.



I never had a long-term friendship from my school years. When I was 11 years old, in last grade, I used to spend time together with the most beautiful girl in class, during lunch break. I think her name was Beki. We were usually together on the way to and from school too. But I did not see her again. I did not have any news.

Only once did I have to change my school. That was in Yuksekkaldirim, when we moved. I worked at different jobs after school... and at the age of 16, I worked at a business that I loved. What we call "Garçon de bureau" [office boy] today. I worked with a distributor, manufacturer's rep.

I would go to banks, to the cambio and exchange departments all the time. These were in a building in Eminonu. I used to go to Karakoy every day. They would give me fare money for the tram to go there, but I would either hang on to the back of the tram or run, to be able to save that money.

Tram tickets then were 3 pennies for one way, and 3 pennies for the return, it would add up to 20 pennies a week. This was big money in my childhood. I used to go to soccer games with this money, mostly in Taksim Station.

Galatasaray [one of the three major soccer teams in Turkey] was a club I supported, but I always loved soccer above and beyond a team. When they are the champions, I feel great joy of course. I still follow all the games outside the country today. Today, three quarters of my life is spent watching political speeches or sports news on television.

I worked all the time in my youth, including Saturdays. I could get together with friends only on Sundays. I wasn't a member of any place at the age of 16 - 17, but I played table tennis at Beyoglu Public House, I watched basketball games.

I was an amateur player. There was pool also but it was more expensive. That is why I did not learn to play much. I played very seldom. I had a lot of friends that I met there. In addition, I would put on a uniform and play soccer with the neighborhood team.

Around 18 - 19 years of age, I took up drinking beer. There was a beer house named Novotni in Tepebashi. There was also the yard of the Beer Factory. We would order beer in a big keg and drink it together with appetizers.

I never had an interest in cigarettes. One or two with beer. We used to sit close to the restrooms, because as we drank the beer, the need to use the bathroom would arise.

During that period, we used to talk about youth, sex and sports with my friends. I was always interested in politics. I supported all the political parties that were for the people. Whether it is opposition or not. I have voted since 1950.

I cast my first vote for the Democratic Party. Adnan Menderes [6](#). We were enthusiastic about them as a novelty. And they accomplished a lot. But there were some mistakes and there were some bad consequences. They stayed in power till 1960.

The hanging of Menderes created a big reaction. I remember the day of the hanging. We always followed the trial on the radio. The decision, right or wrong [it is a political event]. When two parties went head to head, the military did a coup, but now when these consequences happened,

even the people who did not support that party were saddened.

I never drove a car. I was never interested. I still dislike long commutes and the car. I did not use a motorcycle at all either. I only used a bicycle. We used to rent bicycles with money and used them, when we were children (12-13 years of age). I learned how to ride a bicycle by myself; my friend helped a little too. Falling down and getting up of course. That did not last long either. But I never regretted not driving a car. I am someone who decides impulsively. Being a driver is not my thing.

My sister Rejina who was born in 1922, apparently looks a lot like my mother. Her coloring too. She was a beautiful, dark-skinned girl. We had some separations during our childhood. One of my aunts was old [Ojeni]. She stayed with her. My sister went to the Jewish Highschool.

She was her mother's daughter. She was a very good, organized student. She started working with a tailor daily, after finishing elementary school. She was already well known by the age of 20 and had become a skilled tailor.

She got married in July 1945, at the Zulfaris Synagogue [7](#), at the age of 25, my older sister. I had taken a leave of absence from the military and attended the wedding. They had taken a boat to Buyukada [the fourth and largest island in the Princess Island chains, south of Istanbul on the Marmara sea] that evening and stayed in a hotel.

They brought two daughters named Chela [1947] and Sara [1956] into the world. They are both fine and cultured today. They studied well. Until, their father died young. He died in 1976, at the age of 52, my brother-in-law. My older sister was widowed young. And we always lived close.

Her younger daughter was 10, elder daughter 19 years old. The younger girl finished highschool and married early. The older girl worked and married too, later. Rejina on the other hand continued working as a tailor. Her husband used to sell coats, she continued sewing coats on order.

I did not have a bar-mitzvah celebration at the age of 13. Meaning, there was no such thing like giving a speech like they do today, or sending invitations. Renting a room was the work of rich people. Yet, one day my father told me, next week is your bar-mitzvah, you will don the tefillin, you will say the prayers in the synagogue, and you will take your first steps toward manhood.

I mean, I knew what a bar-mitzvah was. I had worked with the rabbi Yako Nasi, who was the rabbi there, a couple of months before my bar-mitzvah, and had memorized all the prayers. And we performed the prayers that are associated with a bar-mitzvah that religion dictates in what we called Apolon, in place of today's Neve Shalom Synagogue. That place became the sports center of Yildirimspor later on. Apolon was in Sisane, one street before where the synagogue is situated today.

I was very excited the day of the bar-mitzvah. My father held my hand. After the ceremony in the synagogue, we went to Aunt Viktoria's house. We visited the other relatives too. We took candy to all of them. I visited them, kissed their hands; and they gave me presents for my bar-mitzvah. It was a very happy day. We did whatever was needed. My father had carried out the religious traditions.

Among the Jewish holidays, I loved Yom Kippur a lot, because from the point of view of a child, I wondered how you could fast a whole day. When I was 12 years old, I tried fasting for the first time. Our elders bought quinces. Cloves would be stuck on it and supposedly hunger was satisfied by smelling that. This is how it was then...

I was successful with my first fast. I didn't even drink water. And after that, I fasted every year, until I fell ill. Now, because I am on medication, I cannot fast. But, nevertheless, I go to the synagogue every Yom Kippur. I go in the morning, I return home at noon for the minha service [prayers chanted for the dead]. I am there between 08:00 and 15:00. I go in the evening too again and without fail listen to the shofar!

### • **During the war**

During the period when the Holocaust was happening in Europe, there was an increase in antisemitism in Turkey. Unfortunately I have to talk about this. Before the war started, fear and panic spread with the reputation of Hitler in 1936. Nationalistic emotions were on the rise in Turkey.

Turkish people always favored Germans. They were together in the big war too, in World War I, but despite that there were no Hitler followers here, only the nationalists were with Hitler. I couldn't figure it out, why do we, the Jews, have so many enemies?

As war approached, you could see antisemitism. Especially outside of Istanbul and Izmir, whether it was in the Dardanelles, in Gelibolu, in Tekirdag or Anatolia, anti-Jewish protests started. Slips of paper were pushed under the doors of the houses, "Go away" written on them. A current started from the provinces to Istanbul.

Migration started from Edirne, from Tekirdag etc. One of the floors of our house in Galata was empty. A family from Gelibolu rented the house and settled there. One boy was a year younger than me. Three older sisters, the mother and father, all lived together. And unfortunately the older girl, Roza, had died in 1943, when I was in the military, from tuberculosis. They were the Kandiyoti family. Now, I think most of them are dead.

They had told us then that they felt uncomfortable with some of the neighbors. They had yelled things like "Go away, get the hell out of here". Of course not all the neighbors.. only some of them.

As it is well known, Hitler spread quickly. He crushed France. He invaded Rumania, Bulgaria and Greece. He almost was at the border of Edirne. The fear was great. The politics of Turkey was very good. They were using delay tactics. England and France started this war as losers... because Russia was also with the Germans. The Russians left the Germans toward the end of the war. They switched to the British side.

There was panic within us too of course, even if we didn't show it. In the meantime, unfortunately there was another blow. Wealth Tax [8](#) was implemented. This destroyed a lot of families, unfairly. There was a lot of discrimination. The applications were not fair.

My father worked at the market, he had an independent merchant card. 500 Turkish liras was the

tax given to all Jews with this card. The fear of Hitler already existed. This was added on.

For us, for a person of modest means, this was big money of course. My father had 450 liras saved. He never withheld anything from the government. There was the matter we called road money, it was 6 liras a year [money given to the government]... he always paid that too. We paid 9 liras' rent for the house we lived in.

They were sending those who did not pay the Wealth Tax to Ashkale to break rocks. We tried to persuade our father fervently not to give it but he said, you cannot play games with the government and paid 500 liras to the government. He had 450 liras, I gave 22 liras from my piggybank, and the rest, my older sister took it out of her piggybank and gave it.

My father gave me the money and said go to the tax office, and pay this money. This duty was given to me, I did it and brought the receipt to my father. I was around 16-17 years old.

I did not know the ones who went to Ashkale, but in general they were people who were rich, for example there was the lawyer Franko, Barzilay's, important shipowners, sellers of sundries and notion, manufacturers... And a short while after we paid this money, this tax was repealed. 500 liras was granted an exception.

After the 1940's, it was a period when the Germans were advancing rapidly. The government needed money of course, time of war. Sukru Saracaglu was prime minister in those days.

We were following what was happening to the European Jews from the radio. Thousands of Jews were going to the gas chambers, to the camps. Their pictures were shown in the newspapers. It was a big, historic event. There was no television then, we heard it on the radio or read about it in the newspaper.

During that time there were a lot of newspapers like Tan, Cumhuriyet, Sabah and Ikdam. I read Cumhuriyet usually. In reality, I read quite a few newspapers in one day. One newspaper cost 5 pennies. If I read it at home during the day, I would go to the corner to return the newspaper, and buy a new one for one penny. I read a lot, during the time of war, and later on too.

In the meantime, when I was getting ready to go to the military, conditions had changed against Hitler. Because Russia had switched, a leader like Churchill had arrived in England. He had said "I cannot promise you anything but blood and tears, for now" to his public. A big front shaped up against the Germans. Terrible massacres had taken place in Italy against the Jews. It was the time of Mussolini.

Some of the German Jewish professors in Europe immigrated to Turkey. They found acceptance in the universities here.. Of course there were those who could not escape too. European Jews were not very religious. Even though they were Jewish, they were German. We had a neighbor who had come from Poland, they came to Turkey before the war. They immigrated to Israel, before it was founded, by various means.

World War II had shown its great effects on our economy too. Some basic staples like bread and sugar were rationed for a long time.

I remember the Struma [9](#). It was a Rumanian boat, it carried immigrants. They had waited at the dock one whole day, without food or water. And unfortunately, with pressure from the Germans, they had not accepted them into Turkey, and returned them to sea.

The head of United States, Roosevelt was paralyzed, and he had come to Adana like that, four leaders congregated. Churchill, I think it was General de Gaulle from France, they spoke with Inonu [10](#). The allies, the British and the Americans had turned the course of the war favorably to themselves. Us, the Jews, breathed easy, with the good policy of Inonu.

We were going to be saved from violence finally. The Germans had destroyed everywhere. We can comfortably talk about this because we did not enter the war, thanks to Inonu. If not, which one of us would be alive today?! Even though, you could encounter attitudes against the Jews in Turkey among the public in some circles, these attempts had not resulted in deaths, thank G-d.

There were baseless articles and caricatures in some newspapers and especially comic magazines about us Jews. The weekly comic magazine Akbaba would have caricatures insulting us, as cover. In such magazines, unfortunately, the stinginess of the Jews, their long noses and dirty attire would be satirized and this would upset us a lot.

Again during these years, there were signs of "Citizen, speak Turkish" [11](#) on boats and trams, on the streets and in the windows of stores. This has caused everyone, us and our other nonMuslim children to have Turkish as our mother tongue.

I do not remember the arrests of nonMuslims in the year 1943. That year, I was sent a summons to go to the military. Either by radio or 6 months ahead there would be inspections. They held us in the barracks in Haydarpasha for a few days, then they moved us to Malatya.

I became a soldier in April of 1943. I had just turned 19 years of age.

I was in a division for working in the airports of Malatya. There, there were a lot of nonMuslims and we were treated quite well. The military meant discipline. I had put myself under discipline too.

And this military service had a lot of benefits of course. I served in the military close to four years. Not only in Malatya, I did my service in different cities like Adana and Kayseri too. The captains treated us very well.

There was no discrimination among the soldiers. My duty there was pouring concrete on the airport field. I worked in the supplies department too. I did different jobs too.

My rank did not go up in the military. I was a private till the end. There were no high-ranked soldiers among the nonMuslims anyways. Except for doctors. When they became private soldiers, they continued as lieutenants. But our relationship with our superiors was very good.

Furthermore, before a Yom Kippur day, an orthodox Jew among us had gone to our colonel and procured permission for the Jewish soldiers to perform their religious worshipping, meaning being able to fast. And a week later, on Yom Kippur day, we congregated in a place with the order of the colonel, recited our prayers, a fasting meal was prepared for us and we fasted the following day. Very smoothly, we experienced the warmth that the soldiers could not receive in Europe, in our own military organization.

- **After the War**

I was discharged in January of 1947. I had taken a leave of absence once; for the wedding of my older sister. I was on leave for exactly fifteen days. I think it was at the end of 1945 or beginning of 1946. I had one older sister in my life and it was very important to me to be present at that wedding.

During these military years, malaria happened frequently, and I contracted it during my period of apprenticeship. Fever goes up to 40 – 41 °C, but the next day there would be no fever whatsoever. We would lie in the infirmary for a few days, and there were medicines like quinine, and antiprin, I would take them and get along.

Of course I lost quite a bit of weight during that time. The military served me as a major lesson in my life. I forgot about being a child of the streets, and learned about obeying given orders, that is to say, I learned discipline. Everyone would be wearing the same uniform, and treated the same way, and I benefited a lot from the military.

I was 23 years old when the military service ended. At first, I wanted to do a business that I liked. I was in the business of representation and commerce before the military. I took care of banking for an importing firm. However, on my return from the military, I learned that the firm had closed.

I entered the ladies' and gent's ready-made clothing business, which later became my own business, with the help of an acquaintance. Nebabish worked on outer wear like raincoats and overcoats. The owners were two Jewish brothers. Their names were Nesim Behar and Viktor Behar. I learned about the business slowly working with them. That year, because of this job, I started paying more attention to what I wore.

I progressed in my business. My salary had gone up too. My first paycheck was something like 80-90 liras. This was good money in the 1947's. I used to help my family, my father's health was failing. My older sister also was working in a sewing workshop as a skilled tailor.

In 1958, I started a business on my own, with partners. They put the capital, and I put my work experience. We didn't earn huge amounts of money, but we had a better situation than before. We left a house with two bedrooms and moved to an apartment flat in Sisli.

There was a retail store named Mayer on Istiklal street that I often stopped by. We worked with them for a long time. At one point, they went on sale, and asked for my help, thinking it would be crowded. While working there for 15-20 days, I met my dear wife Fortune who worked there [during the 1950's]. She was the daughter of a good Jewish family.

Even though I am not very religious, I always observed certain things. I go to the synagogue and say my prayers, I recite the Kiddush on Friday nights and still do certain things like that all the time.

One day, there was a conversation about the theater. I asked Fortune if she could come to the theater with me. At first she didn't give a clear answer. Flirting was very difficult in those days. You had to get permission from the mother and father first. She struggled a lot to get permission.

I did not have the means to get married. Finally, we went to that theater and our dating lasted three years. We dated for 1.5 years, and were engaged for 1.5 years after that. Going to each other's houses started during that time. Her family was a conservative family. My wife's maiden name was Kastoryano.

She was an only child, her mother Viktorya was from Kuzguncuk, her father Izak was from Haskoy. They lived in Tepebasi then. After we were engaged, they moved to Kuzguncuk. They asked about me to friends and neighbors, they believed in my intentions and they accepted me. My mother-in-law, because her father's name was Nesim too, and because they did not have a son, was very fond of me.

I had started earning 300 - 400 liras by then. We found a house on Kumbaraci Hill. It had a rent of 115 liras. We rented the house 1.5 months before we got married. I always had the attitude of being against dowry. We did not speak about anything pertaining to money.

On March 1st, 1953 our wedding took place. A week earlier was the civil marriage. We were married in the Zulfaris Synagogue in Galata.

We have a sad memory related to our wedding day. The husband of the older sister of my mother-in-law, Lazar Franko [his wife Rashel Franko] unfortunately died a day before the wedding due to a sudden cardiac problem. Of course we did not tell Fortune or my mother-in-law.

Only my father-in-law knew. When none of the family members from that side showed up at our wedding, we attributed this to the weather being gloomy and rainy. We ate at the Taksim Municipality Casino that evening. I remember, there was a good singer who sang the first pop songs in Turkey, Celal Ince. He left for the United States later on. We listened to him, and stayed in the house we rented, that night. And I told my wife about the sad news the next morning.

A month after getting married, I went to Diyarbakir [a city in southeastern Turkey] for business. We were separated for one week. Anyways, my lady gave birth in the twelfth month. Fortune was a salesgirl in the ladies' section in the store she worked at before getting married. It was a shame to have women work after getting married then.

She was supposed to raise children. In any case, six months after we were married, my father had to move from his house because it was going to be demolished. That is why we took him in with us. My father was a cardiac patient. They came to us together with my stepmother. Those were stressful days because two families were a little difficult to manage in that small house.

We had a wood stove, we kept quite warm with that, actually. I used to go to Galatasaray Hamam once a month, sometimes I would stop by the one in Kapalicharshi [Closed Bazaar]. My wife on the other hand would go to Pangalti Hamam once in a while. Fortune got along well with my stepmother, she even managed her well.

My stepmother was a very good person, but she was very sick, she had nervous breakdowns once or twice a year. She did not thrash the place but she would show childish behavior. When she was very sick, we even interned her in La Paix Hospital [mental hospital in Istanbul] for 15 days when our budget allowed. She treated me very well, but she behaved like a classic stepmother with my older sister.

My older sister had gotten to know my mother longer than me and never grew to love my stepmother.

Our first daughter, Sara was born on the 29th of December in 1953. We named her after my mother, as was my wish always.

On January 30th, 1956, our second daughter Viki was born. She got her name from my mother-in-law, Viktorya. She, the deceased, was upset, saying my name is Viktorya, why did you name her Viki. And we, as a joke, said if the third one is born, we will name her Viktorya.

I spoke Turkish with my daughters from the day they were born. Even when their mother spoke in Spanish sometimes, the children always answered her in Turkish. My daughters' mother tongue was Turkish.

When my stepmother and father came to our house, more Spanish was spoken in the house and in this way, my daughters' Spanish improved by listening. Unfortunately, my father died at the end of 1956. Viki was only eleven months old. My stepmother moved in with her older sister.

During those days, we lived in Tunel, on Kumbaraci Hill, in a two and a half bedroom house. That house still exists but I do not remember the name. As the children grew, the expenses grew too. We did not even have a refrigerator then. Everyone had a wire cupboard. Food was kept there.

Pots were put in there too. That was objectionable. It had to be closed by wire. We were only able to own a refrigerator in 1959. I think our first refrigerator's brand name was Arcelik.

In 1965, when my situation had improved, my daughters were attending Jewish Highschool, in the First Co-educational Elementary school. Sara was in 5th grade, Viki in second.

Sara finished school that year and entered Saint Pulcherie Middle School [French Catholic school]. We transferred Viki to 19 Mayis [May 19] Elementary School. It was 50 - 100 feet away from our house.

We moved to Sisli in 1965. The official rest day was Sunday, but later when banks started closing on Saturdays too, we were taking two days off. We used to go to work on Saturdays before... we stopped that later. We improved the business a little and moved to a 3 bedroom, one livingroom house with a bathroom and balcony, full of light, in a good location in Sisli.

It was in a location close to everything. And slowly our social life took off. I used to go to soccer games on my own. One time, I took my wife too but she did not like the game, and she did not come with me again. Their luck was in having formed good friendships from a very early age.

There were two movie theaters then, Site and Kent. We used to go there all together. We had season tickets. We used to go to exhibitions too. In addition, pop music had started then. There was Ajda Pekkan [one of the pioneer pop stars of Turkey]. We used to go and listen to her.

We took our first family trip when Viki graduated from 19 Mayis and Sara entered Saint Benoit Highschool [French Catholic school], to Ankara. We had a whole week's vacation during a holiday. Four couples as friends, we wanted to see the museums in Ankara and Anitkabir [tomb of Ataturk [9](#)], with our children. We went to theaters too. We had gone by bus.



As soon as we arrived in Ankara, we rented a minivan. Every day, we went around in that.

We went to hot springs in Yalova once, too. But, trips outside the country, my wife and I took it alone. We went to Israel in the 1970's for the first time for both of us. We went by boat to Haifa, cruising through the whole Mediterranean. We also disembarked in Cyprus (Cyprus was under British rule then).

Turkish money was very valuable in those days, and we would get two Greek drachmas for a Turkish lira.

The reason I went to Israel was to visit my relatives. Because there were people who immigrated from here in 1948. They lived in Batyam and its surroundings, we used to correspond with letters.

My older sister's children and my girls are the same age. They used to go to the movie theater together in Sisli. However, during the summer months, even when we lived on Kumbaraci Hill, we started going to Buyukada [largest one in the chain of islands called Princess Islands, south of Istanbul, on the Marmara sea].

At the time, Greeks were more prevalent on the island. There were Jews too of course. A lot of languages were spoken. In the 1960's.. There were a lot of languages like Greek, Spanish, Italian, and French. The Greeks on the island were happy people who loved nightlife, and having fun. Even when they were returning home, at night time, they would sing songs as a group.

The atmosphere was very cheerful. Later on, when they left, Turkish started to become the main language. Of course, their absence was felt. Now there is no nightlife on the island. The young people prefer Istanbul. It is nice for older people and young people with babies.

There weren't as many houses as there are now, of course, we had rented a house made of wood. This house was close to the boat dock, on the hill that goes to Anadolu Club, and belonged to a Greek woman. There was no view of the sea. The rent was approximately 700 - 800 liras. The kids were little.

We used to go to Sedef island [fifth and smallest one on the Princess Islands chain] to swim in the sea, sometimes we went to Yorukali beach. We carried meals from home too sometimes. On the weekends we would go to Dil [translation: Tongue, part of Buyukada that sticks out like a tongue] with our daughters for a picnic.

We would prepare meatball sandwiches from home. The island was always beautiful. We had a lot of friends. We would get together, have a lot of fun amongst ourselves. There were open-air movie theaters, 2-3 of them, there was Cambaz in Lalahatun (today it is a clinic), the girls used to go there a lot to watch movies. We sometimes got together in friends' houses and played cards. We were fond of card games. Bezik, Blum, Pishti [names of games], sometimes Poker.

We used to play lotto. We conversed. We had fun, as you can see.

There were no Jewish organizations then, and even if there were, my kids were happy with their own friends and did not feel the need. They had six to seven close friends since they were 7 years old, and their friendships continue till today.

Nevertheless, I always raised my daughters according to Jewish traditions. I do not really support mixed marriages. Because conflicts arise later on. This is a big luxury in my opinion. Our population is very small anyways.

We socialized very often with my older sister. They lived very close to us.

There were also relatives of the wife in Kuzguncuk. My wife's uncle, Izak and Camila Salerno and children: Nesim who went to Israel while he was a student, Sabetay, Pepo; and they had a daughter named Estreya [they called her Yildiz too], she immigrated to Israel too when she was married.

We used to go visit them too. Lazar-Rashel Franko's family also lived there. Once in a while when I went to a soccer game on that side, they went to Kuzguncuk too.

We used to go to Shishli Synagogue [12](#) with my daughters. Especially on Yom Kippur evenings, I used to take them to the synagogue to listen to the shofar. There were no bat-mitzvah celebrations then. That's why when they reached 12 years of age, we did not have bat-mitzvahs.

We always paid special attention to Passover. Seder is held two nights. We eat matzohs all week. We do not have a separate Passover kitchen, but we eat traditional meals during the Passover week without fail. We always eat leek meatballs, lamb dishes and special Passover meals like these.

My wife cooks Jewish dishes. My favorite is navy beans with spinach. My wife's dolmas [refers to dishes labeled "stuffed"] are delicious too. She prepares very good dolmas. Both stuffed grape leaves and cabbage rolls. My wife learned how to cook first from her mother, then from my older sister. Because my older sister's husband was fond of good food, my sister used to cook very well.

My father is in Haskoy Jewish cemetery. At my father's funeral, we fulfilled whatever our religion dictated, with a rabbi. I did not go to work for 8 days. I went to temple every day. We recited the kaddish.

I still observe the yartzheits of my mother, father, mother-in-law [Viktorya] and father-in-law [Izak]. I recite the kaddish myself. Even if we cannot observe the yartzheit, we do not neglect lighting a candle at home in the evening. We recite the beracha [religious prayer] without fail. I have the death dates of all of them registered. I lost my father at the end of 1956 anyways, my father-in-law around 1967, and three years later we lost my mother-in-law.

Most of my friends were Jewish. Some of our friendships still continue: Pepo - Ester Tovim, one of their sons is Jak, the other Sami. Jak Memi and his wife Alegre Memi. Around the time of his son Sami's bar-mitzvah... There was Albert Adato, his wife Sofi and son Moris. The name of my partner was Albert Kucukbahar. His wife Elmas and two daughters, Meri and Suzi. My partner was 15 years younger than me. We socialized once in a while.

Once a week, we went out to dinner with friends without fail.. We used to go to a restaurant on the Bosphorus or to the steak houses in Cekmece. I sometimes did not attend lunches because of games. I had season tickets, when there was a game of Galatasaray, I went to watch it without fail.

Before the game, we used to take the children to one of the meat restaurants in Kucukcekmece. There were big play areas, the girls had fun there. After the girls turned 15, they stopped going out with us. Viki attended Robert College [14](#). Sara was studying in Saint Benoit. They were going out in groups with their own friends.

In 1948, when the nation of Israel was founded, an embassy was opened in Istanbul. When the flag was raised there for the first time, we went and savored the emotion like a lot of Jews did. The founding of Israel was very important for us. If it had been founded earlier, maybe Hitler wouldn't have been able to accomplish all the things he did.

There were no special celebrations at homes, but cocktail parties were given at the embassy. The newspapers wrote about it too. We felt great happiness of course.

When my daughters finished their education, first Sara got married on January 30th, 1977. The name of my son-in-law was Mimi Yakim Sarfati. They met in a group of friends. After dating for 1.5 years, we had the engagement ceremony in our house. I and my in-law put the rings that were on a plate in front of the young couple, on our children's fingers.

Sara had not attended university because of political events, but she had a good job. She worked as the secretary to the import manager in the firm Henkel. In 1979 my deceased son-in-law became jobless and they immigrated to Israel in 1980 when they had a job offer from a relative there.

My in-laws were Aron and Fani Sarfati. Aron Sarfati died about 25 years ago. His wife Fani on the other hand lives with my daughter Sara currently. In Gayrettepe. The woman is very old. In summers she lives with her daughter Leyla Arditi and her husband Yavuz Arditi in Burgaz [Second one in the Princess Islands chain on the Marmara Sea].

Viki finished Industrial Engineering in Bosphorus University the same year and was working at El-Al, and would fly to Israel once in a while. She used to visit her friends from college who were in Jerusalem University. On one occasion, she met my current son-in-law, Yuda. Yuda Lerden was born in Istanbul.

The names of his mother and father are Ester and Ibrahim Lerden. Yuda had immigrated from Turkey around 15 years of age, and attended highschool and university there. I, as a father, did not know much about Yuda. I learned about it last. I had principles. Viki had once told me "Dad, we cannot do anything against your wishes, you brainwashed us so much. So just relax".

One day, in the beginning of 1979, she had not graduated yet, and she told me a friend was coming from Israel and that she would come home late. Apparently it was Yuda... I asked my daughter, what are your intentions with this guy? I am thinking of getting married here, and living in Israel, she said. And we married Viki to Yuda in 1979 in Neve Shalom Synagogue. We had the celebration in Tarabya Hotel. Yuda's father is now deceased, yet his mom still lives in Jerusalem today.

Sara married first. Then Viki. But Viki left for Israel before her. Sara and her family first went to the Ulpan in Ramat Aviv, meaning to Beit-Milman. She started working in a real estate firm. We

suddenly found ourselves in a strange predicament.

Both our daughters were in Israel, and I have always been someone who finds happiness with my family. That's why I started disengaging from my work. I always had them on my mind. It wasn't so easy to connect with the telephone then either. And in 1981, we decided to go there. Unfortunately I broke up with my partner.

We went to Beit-Milman in June of 1981, six months later rented a house in Ramat-Hasharon. My deceased son-in-law Mimi Sarfati was working in a French firm. Because I was with my children, adapting to life there was very easy. There were a lot of Turks around me. I was 57 years old. First I went to a language school for 3 months.

Hebrew is a very different language for us. And I persevered, went for 5 months and learned enough to be able to converse. I started working in the ready-to-wear business for half a day. I worked as a sales person.

Afterwards we were with our children and grandchildren all the time. I had three grandchildren from Viki, one after the other, one boy, and two girls. Eyal was born in 1981, Efrat in 1985, Shira in 1987. We were with them at every birth. Sara gave birth to her second son there.

We had other relatives who made their aliyah. Usually they lived around Batyam. They had also gone either because of their children or because of their jobs. There were others who made aliyah after us, including young people.

As bad luck would have it, there were conflicts in the business of Sara's husband, my deceased son-in-law. They offered him a managerial position in Turkey in a zipper factory, and they decided to return to Istanbul. After living there for four years, they returned to Istanbul in 1984. In this situation, Sara's sons continued their education in Nisantas Boys' Highschool [15](#) in Istanbul.

Both of them graduated from there. When my older grandson Roni was about to graduate from middle school, we lost his father, meaning my son-in-law, from a bad illness in the year 1992.

We stayed in Istanbul, on the island in summers for 3-4 months anyways. When Sara was left alone in 1992, we decided to return. Sara continued in the business her husband started. And I started going to work every day to help her. We rented this house in Sisli. Roni went to university in Tel-Aviv when he finished highschool.

And he studied economics there. He had a lot of help from his aunt. Viki left her work at El-Al. And started helping out in her husband's business and they expanded the business. They have three children. One of them is Eyal [born in 1981], Efrat was born in 1985, and Shira in 1987 [today she is 20 years old and is doing her military service].

Efrat finished his military service and went to South America. Eyal on the other hand is studying economy at university and is in his father's business. Roni works there too. The business has expanded. My son Yuda is usually on trips.

My family visits with us very often, at different times and on different occasions.

In 1986, during the Neve Shalom massacre [16](#), we were in Israel. We lost some acquaintances. We were all panicked then. It was an event that we did not deserve. It is very sad for people praying in a synagogue to die of course.

Last month we lost my older sister Rejin [we had to take a break from our interview because of this] and I went to the synagogue every day. She suffered for eight months. She has two adult daughters and five grandchildren. One of them had gone to Israel around 1978. Her daughter Cela. Her husband Mondicakir. Chemical engineer. He is a very valuable person, very cultured, speaking three or four languages. Sara Reyna and her husband Yasar Reyna. They have one daughter and one son.

Both of my older sister's sons-in-law are very respectful, good sons-in-law who love their spouses. Cela even has a great-grandchild. Her older son is married too. Both my sister and I had five grandchildren each. We get together very often. Like during Passover or Rosh Ashana.

We lived the bombing in Levent in November of 2003 [17](#), moment by moment. They immediately showed it on television. Unfortunately. I can not understand how we, the Jews, are the recipients of so much bad will in the world.

We did not encounter any problems here after the war of '67 [18](#) in Israel. There were antizionist articles in newspapers of course, but I did not experience anything personally.

In the years 1955 and 1964, Jews were harmed also during some revolts against Greeks. Unfortunately, sometimes the innocent suffer alongside the guilty. Nothing happened to our store. But they demolished Beyoglu. All the Greek stores were targeted. There were rumors that Ataturk's house in Salonika was bombed and the public revolted because of this. The stores where the Greeks were the majority, were destroyed. The national wealth was trashed. Of course some Jewish stores also were gone in the meantime. [19](#)

There was a Greek carpentry shop across the house we lived in. One night they destroyed that place too, rolls of fabric and refrigerators were strewn on Kumbaraci Hill. It was unforgettable. There were no preventive measures, I think.

I do not personally use the internet to correspond with my family in Israel. I have nothing to do with technology. My girls correspond every day, they talk constantly; we receive the news about everything right away.

Finally, I wish to impart my secret to all young married couples. Marriage does not depend on two people getting along absolutely well. I and my wife are very different and despite that we have been together for 57 years. The secret is not to be mad. My wife would be silent when I was angry sometimes.

When it was nighttime, without fail she would lean her face towards me in bed. We never went to bed angry. And I am very grateful to my spouse. I can never forget all the sacrifices she made. Respect, sacrifice and understanding are very important in the institution of marriage.

- **Glossary:**

**1** Ladino: also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 [and Portugal in 1495] - it was merely the language of their province.

It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated.

Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers:

'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese.

The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitro. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet.

At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

**2** First Balkan War [1912-1913]: Started by an alliance made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. It was a response to the Turkish nationalistic policy maintained by the Young Turks in Istanbul. The Balkan League aimed at the liberation of the rest of the Balkans still under Ottoman rule.

In October, 1912 the allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire and were soon successful: the Ottomans retreated to defend Istanbul and Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace fell into the hands of the allies. The war ended on the 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

**3** Matan Baseter Bikur Holim / Barinyurt: Literally 'Secret Help Care for the Sick'; a Turkish Jewish community institution that looks for the needy in the community and helps them. It supports children in school and health related issues, sends needy families all necessities for the Jewish holidays, and looks after the sick. All expenses are met by donations and sponsorships inside the Turkish Jewish community. In its building, called Barinyurt, the old and the needy are looked after.

**4** 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.

**5** The 20 military classes: In May 1941 non-Muslims aged 26-45 were called to military service. Some of them had just come back from their military service but were told to report for duty again. Great chaos occurred, as the Turkish officials took men from the streets and from their jobs and sent them to military camps. They were used in road building for a year and disbanded in July 1942.

**6** Menderes, Adnan [1899–1961]: Turkish prime minister and martyr. He became one of the leaders of the new Democratic Party, the only opposition party in Turkey in 1945, and prime minister after the elections in 1950. He was re-elected in 1954 and 1957 and deposed in 1960 by a military coup, lead by General Cemal Gursel. He was put on trial on the charge of violating the constitution and was executed.

**7** Zulfaris Synagogue/Museum of Turkish Jews: This synagogue, recorded in the Chief Rabbinate archives as Kal Kadosh Galata, is commonly known as Zulfaris Synagogue. The word is derived from the former name of the street in which it is located: Zulf-u arus, which means Bride's Long Lock.

Today the street is called Perchemli Sokak which means Fringe Street. There is evidence that this synagogue preexisted in 1671, when Haim Kamhi was Chief Rabbi, as the foundations date from the early 15th century Genovese period.

However, the actual building was re-erected over its original foundation, presumably in the early 19th century. In the 1890s, repair work was carried out with the financial assistance of the Camondo family and in 1904 restoration work was conducted by the Jewish community of Galata, presided over by Jak Bey de Leon. (Source: [www.muze500.com](http://www.muze500.com))

**8** 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.

**9** Struma ship: In December 1941 the ship took on board some 750 Jews – which was more than seven times its normal passengers' capacity – to take them to Haifa, then Palestine.

As none of the passengers had British permits to enter the country, the ship stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, in order for them to get immigration certificates to Palestine but the Turkish authorities did not allow the passengers to disembark. They were given food and medicine by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish community of Istanbul.

As the vessel was not seaworthy, it could not leave either. However, in February 1942 the Turks towed the Struma to the Black Sea without water, food or fuel on board. The ship sank the same night and there was only one survivor. In 1978, a Soviet naval history disclosed that a Soviet submarine had sunk the Struma.

**10** 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.

**11** 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.

**12** 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.

**13** 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.

**14** Robert College: The oldest and most prestigious English language school in Istanbul since the mid-19th century providing education to the elite of Turkey as well as other countries in the region.

Robert College was born in 1863 in the village of Bebek by the Bosphorus, when Christopher Robert approached Cyrus Hamlin with his desires and found a receptive audience. Hamlin, an American



schoolmaster, had been running a school, a bakery and a laundry in Bebek at the time.

Robert was a wealthy American industrialist desiring to establish in Turkey a modern university along American lines with instruction in English. These two men, an educator and a philanthropist, successfully collaborated to found Robert College.

Until 1971, it included two campuses: the actual Robert College exclusively for boys and the American College for Girls. In 1971, the American College for Girls and the Robert College boys school united and co-education started under the name of Robert College at the previous American College for Girls campus.

At the same time the Turkish government took over the boys' campus, which became Bogazici University [Bosporus University]. Robert College and today's Bogazici University were and still are the best schools in Turkey. Through the years, these schools have had graduates occupying top positions in Turkey's business, political, academic and art sectors.

**15** English High School for Boys: Founded in 1905 in the district of the Galata Tower by the British Consulate, primarily to provide comprehensive education for the children of the British colony in Istanbul.

In 1911, Sultan Mehmet V gave the British Embassy a 5-storied wooden building in Nisantasi for exclusively schooling purposes.

The school gained the status of high school in 1951 and also became coeducational. In 1979 it was nationalized and renamed as Nisantasi Anatolian Lycee.

**16** 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.

**17** 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.

**18** Six-Day-War: The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three.

Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

**19** Events of 6th-7th September 1955: Pogrom against the ethnic Greeks in Istanbul. It broke out after the rumour that Atatürk'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.