

# Roza Anzhel

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Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Svetlana Avdala

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Roza resembles a heroine from a novel written in the 1940s - a lofty mien, a peculiar sense of dignity, tenacity of character, which can be spotted in her eyes and the corners of her lips. She speaks slowly and at the same time claims that she is extremely impatient which in practice means that she is able to control her emotions perfectly. She is always ready to help and to take on responsibility, which usually means a serious burden for her. Her husband Larry - Leon Anzhel - is joking that this is the reason for her hump (the slight bending of the spine which appeared because of her advancing age). In fact, although Roza is very sensible and keeps everything in order, and her house is immaculately clean, she is very emotional. This can be seen in the repetitions she makes, in the peculiar structure of her speech, which I have left in its authentic forms in certain parts. And this was most pronounced in her intonation patterns - slowly flowing speech resembling the sweetness of a fairytale, which gradates in certain repetition of words and in some phrases.

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## Family background

My name is Roza Bitush Anzhel [nee Varsano]. I was born on 13th November 1924 in Sofia. I have one brother, Isak, and two sisters, Ester [Stela], born in 1926, and Rebeka [Beka], born in 1932. My husband's name is Leon Anzhel. We call him Larry and he was born in the town of Yambol [in Southeast Bulgaria, 261 km from Sofia] in 1921. We have two children, Yafa and Zhak. We are Ladino [Sephardi] Jews [1](#) [2](#) both on the father's and on the mother's side.

Grandpa Yonto Almozino, a saddler by profession, my mother Olga's father, who loved us very much, told me that his kin had come from Spain [3](#) and settled down directly in Sofia 500 years ago. I have no memory of Granny Roza, his wife.

Grandpa Isak Varsano I don't remember and have no information about. Granny Ester I do remember - she was a woman of soft personality and was always wearing a kerchief on her head, she lived in the town of Samokov. I know more of my distant relatives on the mother's side.

My maternal grandmother's name was Roza Almozino and I was named after her. My mother, Olga, is the second oldest daughter. When my mother was about to be born, Grandpa threatened Granny that he would kill her if the baby were a girl. And sure enough, it turned out to be a daughter. All the neighbors gathered and went down by the river, on the bridge of Positano Street to wait for my

grandpa Yonto in order to prepare him and calm him down because he was very temperamental. All was well but they struck a bad patch because that day Grandpa, who was a saddler, was commissioned a big order by the Tsar's [4](#) court for which he received a big amount of money. With the money he bought a lot of goods and full of joy he was returning home. When they met him on the bridge and saw that he was in a cheerful mood, they decided to tell him: 'Yonto, do you know that Roza gave birth?' 'So what she gave birth to had brought me luck,' my grandpa replied. And he was very happy and he accepted with a lot of joy his second daughter, Olga, no matter it wasn't the long awaited son.

As a saddler in the Tsar's court he started earning a lot of money. When my mother was born they used to live in a tiny house. The conditions there were basic; the well was outside the house. They used to draw water from there and they used to bathe in a tub, both in winter and in summer, or they went to the river. My granny Roza gave birth to her five children in those conditions: Soffie, my mother Olga, Izrael, Benyamin, Manoakh.

Grandpa was commissioned orders, earned a lot of money and after some time he bought a two-story house on Positano Street. He settled down there with his family but, unfortunately, Granny Roza was already incurably ill at the time.

How did Granny get ill? The women gathered every Friday to go for a bath. They used to usually bathe in tubs but that day they decided to go the river although it was quite chilly. They broke the ice in order to wash themselves. My granny was quite a fastidious person. And when she came back home Grandpa was furious because she dared do something so silly, he took her by the hair and pushed her into the well... So at the age of 45 she got ill and started suffering from asthma because of the stress. In fact, no one was sure about the reason for her illness and no matter whether due to fear or to stress the illness was a fact. Afterwards he took her to Vienna, and to Bucharest, and to Istanbul, for treatment because he had money, but at the age of 45 she departed from this life.

Afterwards Grandpa decided to marry for the second time, Buka, a Jew, too, who was 25 and had a child, Isak. Later she had two more children from Grandpa, Roza and Zhak. So mother had seven brothers and sisters in total.

Buka gradually led him to bankruptcy because she made him take her to bars, she traveled by carriage, spent his money on entertainment with a dash. She also usurped the dowry which Granny Roza had prepared for my mother, as she had bought things from the different places where she had undergone medical treatment - Vienna, Bucharest, Istanbul. Little by little Grandpa went broke, sold the house on Positano Street and they again moved to the tiny house in Dor Bunar on Pernik Street. In Turkish Dor Bunar means four wells and Iuchbunar [5](#) means three wells. Dor Bunar is the today's quarter of Konyovitsa which is next to Iuchbunar. The Vladayska River which crosses Positano Street and Klementina Street, today's 'Stamboliiski' Boulevard, separates Iuchbunar from Dor Bunar.

My grandpa used to be very religious, and my mother Olga was religious as well. He attended the synagogue and my mother went to the synagogue with him on high holiday.

My mother had a very hard life with her stepmother because she was the oldest in the family - her older sister Soffie had already got married - and had to look after all the other children. Buka often

maltreated her in such a way that her brothers usually came to her rescue. One day she beat her in such a way that my mother lost her front teeth. Of course, her brother didn't let their stepmother get away with that and took his vengeance on her, but the fact was that my mother didn't have front teeth until she got artificial teeth.

My paternal grandfather's name was Isak Varsano. He married my granny Ester and they had two children, Bitush and Asher. After that Grandpa died. They arranged marriage for Granny Ester to a white-haired old man with a long beard and she had two more children from him, Yahiel and Rashel. But my grandfather's sister Matilda, who didn't have her own children, adopted my father and his brother - Bitush and Asher - and brought them up in her own home in Sofia, on Positano Street.

Before my mother moved to the old, ramshackle house with her whole family, which means before my grandpa Yonto's complete bankruptcy, she saw my father in the garden next door, as he used to live with his aunt in the same street. They saw each other there, through the window, she looking from one window, he from another one opposite, and they liked each other. Afterwards, by a coincidence, they sang together in the Tsadikov choir [6](#). I can't say anything about how they started singing there. I only know that later when they came back from rehearsals, and I don't know where those took place, they were learning the songs from the choir together with us, the children. Bit by bit, after attending the rehearsals and meeting there, they fell in love.

Then my father went to war [7](#) and he used to send letters then, too. I even have a photo which shows him standing in front of the gun in Tulcha, which I donated to the Synagogue museum. They even gave me a receipt that I had donated it. Let the people see that the Jews went to war and fought as well. I have dim memories of his stories about the war. It was a hard time for them, their clothes were torn to pieces, their shoes, too, their feet were freezing.

My mother and father had a poor wedding, without dowry, they married in the synagogue in Luchbunar, on the corner of Osogovo and Bregalnitsa Street, in 1919 [the rabbi in that tiny synagogue was Haribi Daniel Zion] and immediately after that started living in rented lodgings.

## Growing up

My father, Bitush Isak Varsano, had elementary education, but as a young man he started acquiring the tinsmith and the plumbing craft with some craftsman, a Jew, too, whose name I don't know. Afterwards he started working alone with some entrepreneurs on building sites. But at that time building was a seasonal job only during the summer. The winter days were ones of hunger.

My father was a very nice person, so good, with such a soft personality, he wouldn't harm a fly. He didn't know how to tell us off, he never cursed; I never heard him say such words, never. Not to say that he wouldn't ever slap us across the face. He was very hard-working - of medium height, let's say his complexion was fair, he wasn't dark, and his hair wasn't auburn. He was well-preserved; one couldn't say how old he was. He was religious; he spoke Ladino and Bulgarian and used to sing very well.

My mother, Olga Almozino, had taken the responsibility for our bringing up at home. She was quite strict but very amiable at the same time. She was telling us off, shouting, even beating us at times. She was very fastidious and wanted everything in the house to be immaculate. She gave all kinds

of orders, about everything. And don't forget that she was illiterate and not because they didn't send her to school, but because she didn't want to study. But she used to test us to see if we had learned our lessons. She made us read the lessons aloud; she memorized everything and then she would open the book and pretend she was reading in order not to lose face, but in fact she didn't know the alphabet.

When her first grandson, my son Zhak, was born and started school, she decided to examine him in the same way. A good idea that was, but he was in the habit of, just like that, with no good reason, walking around while he was telling the lesson aloud. And he started walking around her in circles like that until one day he noticed that she was holding the book upside down.

My mother was taught to read by my sister Rebeka's daughter, Albena. Later she was able to read the newspapers. She was very exuberant, a person of very cheerful and soft personality. Energetic, very energetic, very sociable, very easy-going, very outgoing she was. There wasn't a single person in the neighborhood who didn't know her, not a single person. 'Granny Olga!' 'Granny Olga!' Not a single person. They all cherished good feelings towards her.

I had one brother, Isak, and three sisters. I was the second oldest. My brother was three years older than me. I am only a year and a half older than Stela, Rebeka is eight years younger than me.

My brother Isak was born in 1921 in Sofia. Not only was he the oldest of all the children but he was also the only man. He was the one in charge, the ringleader, so to say. All of us more or less conformed with him. He helped my father to make our living by working after school and during the holidays as an apprentice at a barber's. He used to help with the tinsmith work, too, and after finishing the third grade at the Jewish school [8](#), he became a salesman.

In addition, Isak was very ambitious. After 9th September [9](#) he attended evening-classes and afterwards graduated from the Institute of Economics and became the director of 'Stalin' Vocational School. During our difficult childhood years he was not only responsible for us, but he also made sure we were in a good mood and thought of different games. While with people he would always attract and be in the center of attention, no matter whether he was with men or with women. He was a handsome, charming man. He got married at an early age, in 1942 or 1943, to Tsivi Nusan, who had actually come to our house to live with him a year before their marriage. She was so much in love. While he was a student my brother used to sing in the Synagogue choir. He was religious. My parents had arranged his bar mitzvah. He had two children with Tsivi, Subby and Rout. Isak died in Sofia in 1981.

My sister Ester or Stela Galvy, nee Varsano, was born in 1926 in Sofia. The fact that we were almost the same age made us very close because of the common problems we used to have. She was my first confidante who would often defend me in front of our mother. Stela finished the preliminary classes and the first, second and third grade at the Jewish school and the Jewish elementary school as well. After 9th September she started going to evening classes, but then she got married, the children came and she didn't complete her education. She worked as a seamstress. She got married in 1948 to my husband Leon Anzhel's friend, Aron Galvy. They have two daughters, Olga and Galya. At present Stela lives in Israel. She left twelve years ago, in 1994.

Rebeka or Beka Varsano was the youngest and she had the most independent way of development irrespectively of the fact that we have always been united. She finished the first, second and third

grades at the Jewish school, which was in one and the same yard with the synagogue in the framework formed by the streets Osogovo, Bregalnitsa and Positano. After that we were interned to Vratsa [10](#). The classes in the school were discontinued. On returning to Sofia, she finished the Jewish school but after 9th September there was a completely new curriculum and in practice it resembled a Bulgarian school. After the Jewish elementary school she finished the Third High School for Girls and after that studied medicine.

My sister worked as a doctor in the medical center ISUL. She married the Bulgarian Vladimir Naydenov despite the resistance from our parents - they opposed this marriage not because he was Bulgarian, but because he was an actor. Later she divorced him. They have one daughter, Albena. In 1994 Rebeka left for Israel and lived there for ten years but then came back to Bulgaria and now she lives with her daughter Albena.

We had a difficult childhood. There we were - six mouths to feed - and the experience, especially during the winter, was quite hard. Our suffering during the winter was so severe that we, the children, would go to buy coal, one bucket at a time, from the warehouse, to warm ourselves. The skin on our hands would chap due to work and cold, our feet, too, they would itch, hurt. Poverty, great poverty we lived in. So bad was our hunger, but we didn't have a choice.

When my mother had Beka, there was this family, a man and his wife in our yard, tailors. They didn't have children and the woman was crying so much to give Beka to them, to raise her, to adopt her - Beka. But my father would always say: 'We may have nothing, but these are our children!' The woman who wanted to adopt Beka used to come often out of curiosity to see what my mother was cooking and, as Mom didn't have anything to cook, she would put water in a pot, place the lid on top and put it on the cooker. And when this woman came, led by curiosity, she would always ask: 'What meal have you prepared today? And Mom would reply: 'You are always asking, you want to know too much, I won't tell you, come on - go home!'

Sometimes we received aid from the Jewish school. Sometimes in winter they gave us a pair of shoes, an apron for school and a coat, but that wasn't much and, after all, there were four of us, they gave to one, to the others - not. And do you know what we did - my brother went to school in the morning, I went in the afternoon. I used to put on his shoes and go to school, and in the morning he would put them on again and go out, and I remained home.

Our poverty lasted till my brother finished the third grade at the Jewish school. Then he started work as a salesman. Whereas before that he used to work only during the holidays, he was going to a barber's shop, to assist, got tips and brought the money home. The meal we would buy with that money was the only one we got per day.

We were helped with medical treatment at a medical center on Osogovo Street, between Positano and Tri Ushi Street. That was something like a dispensary in which we were mainly examined by medical auxiliaries. The Jewish hospital [11](#) was on the corner of Hristo Mihaylov and Positano Street and it was a very elegant building. Women from our kin had given birth there and they told us that there was a room in which the brit ritual was performed.

When we were ill we turned to our family doctor, Doctor Burla, who had his private practice on Paisii Street. He would come home whenever one of the children got ill. My parents must have paid him, but I know that the fee was symbolic, for the poor families. I remember that when I was a child

I got scarlet fever, the doctor came, made the diagnosis and after that I was sent to the regional hospital, to the isolation ward there in order not to infect my brother and sisters. I never went to the Jewish hospital.

There was also a Jewish soup kitchen. Our wealthy people, the wealthy Jewish people, wanted to show, to demonstrate how merciful they were on holidays and because of that they would give something to the school. But poverty remains poverty. In the summer life was good. My father was working and we could put some money aside for the winter but the saved was never enough. He didn't earn so much money; after all there were four children, six mouths to feed.

We usually lived in rented lodgings. We changed several houses. We usually had a room and a kitchen. We couldn't afford more. My mother and father used to have a bedroom suite that consisted of two panel beds whose boards we used to clean and polish. They used to sleep on the suite while we, the children, slept on the floor. Our parents would prepare a bed for us on the floor; they would lay mattresses that were removed during the day and put back again in the evening.

When we were on Morava Street, in Iuchbunar - we lived there for nine years, but where we had lived before that I don't remember because we were too young - we lived with Bulgarians. The owners of our place were Bulgarian. They had a son and a daughter and there wasn't much difference between them and us, the Jews. They spoke Ladino as well as we did. There were other Bulgarian families in the same compound and they also spoke Ladino, maybe because the majority of the tenants were Jews. So, everybody in the compound was speaking Ladino, we were living together.

In winter my brother would take a big board, put all kind of gadgets on it and turn it into a sledge, and on letting us, all the girls, get on the sledge, we would slid back and for, and all the children, we were all sliding in that sledge. They were all playing football together. We used to fight together, all of us from Iuchbunar, against Dor Bunar, down by the river. [There are several rivers that flow through Sofia. They are tributaries of the Iskur River. The biggest ones are the Perlovska and the Vladayska Rivers. The Iuchbunar neighborhood was divided into two parts by the Vladayska River.] They would throw stones at us, we, the girls, used to gather stones and give them to the boys to throw at the other side. A war was taking place.

After that we moved to Odrin Street. There we lived with one more family, only a man and his wife. While we lived there, there was one tiny living room that we shared with the other family, with a kitchen and two rooms. There were two chimneys in the kitchen - the other family cooked on one of them, ours - on the other. We, the children, were sleeping in the room, on those beds, and our parents bought a bed - the ordinary size and a half and were sleeping in the living room with our neighbors' permission because we were living together with them. There was electricity and my father, as a plumber, always ensured there was running water in the house.

The yards in Iuchbunar were brimming with life. When it was time for coffee, one or another of the women living there would take the brazier outside and would start the fire, and everybody would go there and put their coffee pot there. The most important thing was that they sat together to talk, to chat. They were all chatting - Bulgarians, Jews - everybody. In that respect the poor were living much more in harmony, they were more united, there was a feeling of togetherness, they got on with each other much better and they quarreled, quarreled, but there were no anti-Semitic attitudes. The children quarreled, the families quarreled with one another, for example if a husband



returned home drunk, in the yard there would invariably be a real spectacular scandal - very Italian-like. There wasn't a distinctive line between wealthy Bulgarians and wealthy Jews, but there was a distinction between poor and wealthy Jews.

The majority of the wealthy Jews were merchants and bankers whereas the poor were porters, carters, house-painters, masons, workers on the pipeline, construction workers, cobblers, tailors... That version, that story, what people say that all Jews are merchants is not entirely true. Few of the Jews were bankers and wealthy people, only a few, a small percentage, relatively small. There was a serious gap between wealthy and poor Jews and we felt different. The wealthy Jews used to live in Sofia, in the center, let's say from Sveta Nedelya Church, from Halite shop onward, from Vazrazhdane Square onward, to beyond where the ISUL medical center is today, down Iskar Street, down Ekzarh Yosif Street, down Tsar Simeon Street, opposite the building of the fire brigade. Even now you can see the beautiful houses from those times, and that's where the wealthy Jews used to live.

### During the war

Most of the Jews were hired laborers in the factories. My father, for example, before the internment had found a job in the Platno factory, in Hadzhi Dimitar quarter. [The interviewee is referring to the English- Bulgarian textile company which was registered in Bulgaria in 1921. That company also owned the textile mill Platno (Linen).] He was making ventilation systems there. When he started working there, poverty stopped being so severe but, on the other hand, we had already grown up, had started making our own living, as the saying goes, and life started being better. But at that time the camps appeared, he was sent to Somovit [12](#) and my brother to labor camps [13](#) and only we, the women, remained at home and we had to support ourselves, had to cope on our own.

I studied at the Jewish school; I had been to elementary school and to junior high school there - until the third grade. There were 35 to 40 students in class at that time. We studied all the subjects, which were taught in the Bulgarian schools, and Hebrew. At the end of each school year there would come a commission to test us - something like matriculation - in order to be allowed to move to a higher grade.

After that I started work, like my brother, as an apprentice to a seamstress in an atelier on 4, Denkoglu Street which later moved to Aksakov Street. I used to work in the day and go to school in the evening - to the Jewish school on Kaloyan Street. In that school they had organized, after the end of the workday, a school for vocational education. It was called ORT [14](#). Fintsi was our principal. I remember some of our teachers' names - Ilich Rafailov, or Todorova, who was our class teacher and so on.

After work, at 6 o'clock, we went to school and used to attend the vocational school for four hours - we studied how to draw designs, to embroider, to sew, all the different kinds of embroidery, of knitting. We had all kinds of subjects separately from the vocational subjects; we used to have Geography, History, Bulgarian, Arithmetic, Bookkeeping by Double Entry. In general we had all the subjects that were taught at both the vocational and the general high schools. They taught us everything.

The course of education lasted four years. That's why, when we went there in the evening, they gave us snacks after two hours had elapsed. They used to give us boza [15](#), or halva [16](#) on bread,

gave us all sorts of sandwiches at eight o'clock and then we continued until ten o'clock and then we got back home. On completing the first two academic years we were examined by a commission. Some people came from the labor chamber, from the Ministry of Education and there were exams to prove we had successfully finished the first two years of education. After two more years we sat an exam again. We passed that exam as well and were ready to become masters.

The synagogue was wonderful, big, spacious. We always went there on holidays. And on Friday. We used to live nearby. We lived right next to the synagogue. While walking about, to some place or another, we would go round to the synagogue. I feel so sad that it was demolished. It used to be in Luchbunar, on Positano Street like the Jewish school, somehow they shared one and the same yard. It remained in my memories as quite a big synagogue. The synagogue was in the middle, with its own yard - a big, beautiful synagogue. That's how it remained in my memories. When a ritual or some kind of holiday took place the men took their places on the floor below, and on the upper floor - the women, there was an upper floor. [The services were conducted by Rabbi Daniel, the most respected rabbi in the neighborhood]

As the neighborhood was rather big and the synagogue wasn't enough, right on the corner of Opalchenska and Positano Street there was a tiny midrash, as it is called, and prayers were read there. It was actually on Bregalnitsa Street. Between Stamboliiski and Positano there was one more tiny midrash, and there, too, prayers were read and on the corner of Dimitar Petkov and Positano there was a big yard and there was another midrash, where prayers were read, too. A lot of Jews, there were a lot of us, Jews, really a lot. There were sacred books in one of the midrashim, like in the synagogue, prayers were read there, there was also a rabbi to read the prayers [cf. Sofia Synagogues] [17](#).

My mother and father used to sing in the Tsadikov choir. I neither know where the rehearsals were taking place, nor did they take us to any concerts of the choir. [Apart from the fact that the choir was an establishment at the synagogue, the literature doesn't mention where the rehearsals were taking place. According to a bulletin of the Sofia Jewish Municipality, on 3rd August 1937 the first foundation stone of the Jewish Cultural Center was laid - in the place of the former and until then existing Cultural Center that had been built in 1892 on the corner of 4 Maria Luiza Boulevard and 3 St. Nikola Passage. As the edifice belonged to the Sofia Jewish Municipality and it subsidized the two elementary schools and the two junior high schools, the rehearsals of the choir probably took place there.] Usually in the evening, after coming back home from work, they would sit down and sing at home and we were around them. All the songs I know I've learned from them. Through the singing we used to forget about the poverty and the cold.

We used to go on excursions a lot. We frequently went to Vitosha Mountain, at that time there were no rucksacks and my mother would put all the things in a hamper, my father would carry it. And how were we setting off? By tram? A ticket was 5 leva, there were six of us - how could we find so much money! From Sofia to Zlatnite Mostove [The Golden Bridges - a site on Vitosha Mountain, which is not far from Sofia] we walked on foot. We first went to Knyazhevo and from Knyazhevo we climbed the mountain.

We used to play a lot of games - Jewish and Bulgarian children together. We would take walnuts and put them in a straight line but one of the walnuts we would leave aside. It was the captain. And the child who managed to hit that walnut took everything. Or until another child hit - he took



everything. Or the boys would make a hole in the ground and started throwing whole handfuls of walnuts and if the whole handful entered the whole, the boy who threw it won whereas if a walnut went out, the other boy won.

We used to play the balls, too. The boys used to play the balls a lot. There was even a game with little lamb bones. The boys would scrape them and played with them. The game was called 'chilik' and it was extremely popular. A little rod was used, a little one, with its two ends sharpened and it was put in a hole and then thrown in a certain way. A lot of games there were.

I do remember Yom Kippur and this is how I remember it: we would take a quince and stick clove seeds into it so that we could smell it all day long, without any desire to eat. In fact, at home we had Yom Kippur quite often, that's what we used to say jokingly because we were often starving. And you know, the seamstress whose apprentice I was at first, was a Jew as well. Once I saw Tanti [auntie] Rebeka was preparing cookies and I wanted to taste them so much, while baking the aroma could be smelled from far away. She came and told me: 'Roza, have a cookie, eat it.' 'Oh, Tanti Rebeka, it is Yom Kippur today, I shouldn't eat.' The poor woman was flabbergasted and said: 'What are you saying, girl, what Yom Kippur, come on, have a bite. God won't punish you, it will be my sin.' You can imagine how terrible it was to be hungry.

At Purim and Rosh Hashanah there were amazing carnivals and not only at school. In Positano Street, in Morava Street, all the people went out in disguise, we were singing, laughing. 'Mavlacheta' were sold in the streets - those were made of sugar, colored shapes, like hearts, roosters, little red roosters, different circles. We used to buy those, there was such fun in the street and in the yard. The celebration was mainly around Positano Street, around the school, around the synagogue. We used to get together a lot, to play a lot. We used to make masks, put on different shirts. We found a way to disguise ourselves despite the hunger.

Rosh Hashanah was a big holiday for us. Very stately. No matter whether we had money or not, Rosh Hashanah was stately celebrated at home. And for Pesach they used to again give alms from the Jewish school. My father and brother would go there and load themselves with those round loaves, there were round loaves, very hard round loaves, called 'boyo,' which were kneaded not with yeast but the dough only and they were baked. They also gave us matzah and because we were a big family they gave us three kilos of matzah and a bag of boyo loaves. We took them home and had Pesach with the whole family. We had neighbors who didn't have children but were in a good financial situation. And they invited us to their home. For Pesach we didn't eat bread for eight days.

For the celebration of Chanukkah we used to light our candles, took turns to light them, we sang - we did all this at home.

Usually for all the holidays - for Rosh Hashanah, and for Sukkot, and for all the holidays - we were supposed to eat chicken. One would buy from the market a hen, a chicken, a rooster, and would go to the synagogue. There was a separate hall in the yard. On entering the synagogue yard, there was a little house, like a shed, where the cheese and other things were stored, there were some fountains nearby, before that some troughs were there and there was a Jew with a special task, the so-called shochet, who used to slaughter the hens and put them there to let their blood pour out; we took the slaughtered hen and ran home while it was still warm so that our mother could pluck it because the Jews didn't use to scald to pluck the hen's feathers, but plucked them immediately

after slaughtering it. After plucking the animal they would take newspapers, set them on fire so that everything that remained after plucking would be burned, then they would wash what was left well, dry it and that was the way they cooked.

For Sabbath we would also slaughter an animal. At Sabbath we usually gathered, my mother would put on her kerchief, light a candle and start reading a prayer. And before laying the table, she cooked during the day and before she laid the table for Sabbath, we all went to the tub so that she could bathe us, give us a clean shirt, dress us. Everything had to be shining with cleanliness on the table. At Sabbath it was obligatory for us to have pastel [traditional Jewish dish made of flour and veal mince], obligatory. It was also obligatory to have a boiled dish - soup, boiled beef or some other soup. And this soup wasn't for eating. Then the meat would be taken out and roasted with a little pepper or some other seasoning, potatoes or rice would be added, and there you had a wonderful meal. We used to put noodles and a bit of parsley.

The people from Ruse [city in Northeastern Bulgaria 251 km from Sofia] who lived in Sofia were the best in preparing the soups I am talking about. They cooked the soups with hen meat because there was more fat in it - they used to boil the fat, to cook it with some seasonings - carrots, parsnip, other vegetables and on top of the pot they put other things to cook on the steam. We sometimes visited some families from Ruse. And that Ruse-style soup was the greatest deli for us because apart from the sauce there were veggies prepared on steam, which were extremely delicious. Apart from the pastel there were pasties with leeks, different kinds of scones and 'tishpishtil,' which was obligatorily prepared for the holidays. My mother used to cook kosher. When we bought meat, which wasn't often, my mother would always salt it so that the blood would go out.

The Jewish chitalishte [18](#), which didn't have a name, was located on the corner of Stamboliiski and Opalchenska Street, next to the Mako hosiery factory. [Mako Hosiery was founded in 1931. In the following year the Bulgarian Textile - Industrial Joint Venture 'Mako' was registered as well.] The things that were happening there took up most of my spare time. My brother and sister went to the chitalishte often, too, but I don't know if they were members of any Jewish organizations. My brother used to sing in the Synagogue choir. We used to borrow books from the library, there were lectures, discussions on different topics - we clarified Darwin's laws, there were history lectures or we made ourselves familiar with some topics from physics. The most important thing was that there we met other people with whom we organized some parties and we created a whole organization to raise money and to gather clothes and food for the poor. In fact the main activities of the chitalishte were educational, but while meeting we were actually performing some illegal activities, too.

In the chitalishte I also met Leon Anzhel - my future husband. He was a cheerful, natural and pleasant - a nice person to talk to. With him we often discussed the topics presented in the lectures or the books we were reading at the time. One day he told me: 'Do you want us to become comrades?' and that was how our relationship started. At that time I was 15.

My mother Olga would always find suitors for me. Some marriage arrangers used to come home. And on finding out they were home, I would run away. My sister, Stela, often covered up for me but after that got a licking for defending me. My mother could serve as an example even to the strictest tutors. And after finding out that I had a boyfriend she didn't allow me to go out and

always found some work for me to complete. She wanted to marry me to a man of good stock - learned, gentlemanlike. She was looking for a different cultural milieu although she was illiterate. She was doing her research by interrogating my friends. One day I couldn't take all that any more and I told her I had a boyfriend.

'Well, then,' she insisted, 'I expect him to come and tell us, the parents, that he has serious intentions and one day you will get married. I want him to promise - it wouldn't be an engagement - but I want him to promise that his serious intentions will remain and one day you will get married.' And one day I told him - I was feeling too tormented that they wouldn't let me go anywhere; I wasn't allowed to go out at all. And I made him come with his mother, but he took some friends along to encourage him. He came home, talked to my mother. They liked each other and I was free to go out again. But the men were already being sent to the camps and we didn't see each other for a year. The year was 1942.

I became a member of the UYW [19](#) in 1939. My father had already joined the BCP [20](#) in 1937 or 1938. The poverty around us had given him a reason to join the Party and he believed that everything would change for the better some day. In general our family had leftist political orientation. In our houses we talked about justice that had to be fought for. My mother and father kept contact with the entire Jewish community because the quarter we lived in was Jewish but I don't know whether they had been members of any Jewish organization. At that time anti-Semitic incidents had started - window shops were being broken, signatures were collected against the Jews, the Jews were fired from work, we were wearing badges [yellow stars] [21](#).

When the men left for the camps I became the sub-group person in charge in UYW. I was supposed to lead four UYW groups, which were independent, which meant that they didn't know about the existence of the others and I had to monitor and coordinate their activities. I was supposed to give them instructions, to tell them to sell stamps, to write appeals and so on. But, quite unexpectedly, there was a failure in one of the groups. At a meeting there were two boys, somebody had drawn them to the group but they turned out to be provocateurs. They betrayed the whole group and all the members were arrested. They were taken to the Police Directorate. It was great that the work was organized in that way - that the people from the different groups didn't know each other. So, when the leader of the group was captured he didn't know the others and, thank God, betrayed me only.

While I was at work one day my future sister-in-law, Tsivi, who was living at home at that time, together with the agents and the policemen, came to the atelier where I was working. They couldn't find me at home and she took them to my workplace because the policemen didn't know where the place was and she couldn't explain it to them, so finally she decided to take them to the place. And then I saw the policemen, the agents and the leader of the group - he was with them but he could hardly walk because they had beaten him black and blue. On seeing them I went inside; the previous evening I had received stamps for seven thousand leva. I went inside and I was lucky - when they rang at the door it was me who went to answer the door, and, fortunately, on answering the door they asked for Mrs. Zvuncharova. That was my boss's name. I told them that I would tell her they were looking for her.

I went inside and said 'Mrs. Zvuncharova, somebody is looking for you.' And when she went out to see who was looking for her I managed to thrust my hand into the bag and to throw the packet with

the stamps behind the radiator so that they wouldn't have any evidence against me. Then Zvuncharova came back and said: 'Well, actually, Roza, they are looking for you.' And they arrested me right there and took me to the Police Directorate. In my pocket there was a letter from Larry from the labor camp - I had forgotten it in my pocket. On the way to the police department we were on a crowded tram and with the policemen around me I managed to, little by little, tear it carefully to pieces and nothing could be heard as the tram was whirring and then I threw the little shreds of paper in the tram. We got off the tram but I had got rid of the letter.

I had to hide that letter - because I had received the letter from the labor camp - so that they wouldn't arrest him. And I don't want to tell you about the police department - the way I was beaten there, it's indescribable, even now... can you hear it? My jaw is still cracked. Electricity. My hair moved down to here. They used electricity - on the joints, on the hands, on the feet, here - on the face, my whole body was shaking - because they wanted to make me speak.

The leader of the group had told them that I had instructed him, had given him stamps, had gathered aids, that he had given me money from the aids the group had been gathering for me. What had I done with that money? Who had I given the money to? Those stamps, where had I taken them from to give them out for distribution? Literature, had I given out any appeals to the people to read? Where had I taken all that from? He had told them everything - he wasn't a provocateur but simply gave in because of the beating. He told them everything at the very first beating. And after that they were all... the police couldn't get any more information from them; they all turned their attention to me. And you can imagine what the next month was, a whole month of inquisition, what torture...

My stay there was very long because they wanted to find out everything no matter by what means. And they asked 'Who is involved? Who is involved? Who is involved?' 'Well', I say, 'It is Mr. Münchhausen...' I used Baron Münchhausen's name [a character from 'The Surprising Adventures of Baron Münchhausen' by Rudolf Erich Raspe, a collection of stories published in 1785, based on the German adventurer Karl Friedrich von Münchhausen]. 'Münchhausen. Who's that Münchhausen?' 'I don't know.' I said. 'We arrange to meet in Borisova Gradina [Boris's Garden].' 'Have you arranged a meeting with him for now?' 'We don't have a meeting.' 'Do you have any arrangement?' 'We don't have an arrangement.' And they were looking for that Münchhausen, they were looking but there wasn't such a person, he didn't exist. So they beat me almost to death and I had to tell them the names but I didn't tell them to the end and then it was over.

There was a trial I had to stand with the charges that I had been the leader of our activities but there was no evidence; there was no Münchhausen, no money, no stamps. I hadn't betrayed anyone so I had to be acquitted. But they couldn't just let me go so I was given a one-year suspended sentence. Afterwards I was interned to Vratsa [a town in Northwestern Bulgaria, 112 km north of Sofia] with my sisters... During the arrest and after that I received full moral support from both my father and my mother.

After the arrest I was forced to change my name by the police. In their opinion Roza was a Bulgarian name so I had to choose a Jewish one, for it to be obvious that I was Jewish. I was given a list and I chose the name Rout. And, as I got married before 9th September, my name in the marriage certificate is Rout. I restored my name after 9th September [22](#).

At first we had an invitation from the town of Kazanlak [in South Central Bulgaria, 170 km from Sofia] as there used to be an aviation factory, but there wasn't a single Jew to remain in the town. The Jews from Kazanlak were also interned to Vratsa. What can I tell you? The train was overcrowded - cattle trucks, we were carrying clothes, we had even taken the sewing machine, mattresses to sleep on. Can you imagine how much luggage we, the women, were carrying and were dragging to the railway station in order to move to Vratsa? We traveled all night long. That was the first time I had been on a train.

At the very station we were awaited by policemen and military officers and we were accommodated in the building of the school which was on the way to Vratsata [the 'Vratsata' site, which is not far from the town of Vratsa and the name literally means 'doors'], they called it 'kiumiura' [the charcoal]. We were accommodated in a classroom, how shall I put it, do you know what packed like sardines means - we were sleeping man to man. There wasn't enough room.

After a while we started looking for lodgings because we were given permission to do so. So we went to live on Tsar Krum Street. We were living in a cellar there - in a basement. There lived a lot of people - my mother and Tsivi and Stela and Beka. My father was in Somovit. Before the internment they had arrested him and sent him to Somovit. Opposite our place there was a Turkish bath house, which wasn't working, and there were rooms for rent. There we rented a room for my future mother-in-law who had been interned to Lom [in North-West Bulgaria, 128 km from Sofia] alone and we took her from Lom to Vratsa. So we helped her to settle down there, so that when her son came back from the camp he would have somewhere to live together with her.

We had to pay rent but in order to pay this rent we had to work, we didn't have money. There were work restrictions for us [23](#). But Granny Olga was woman of strong character [The interviewee is referring to her mother here]. She called one of our neighbors, who lived just opposite us and offered her to sew a dress for her because I was very skillful, and asked to tell her relatives and acquaintances about my skills if she liked the result. Then this woman brought some striped fabric and I sewed a dress for her to wear when visiting friends. The ends of the stripes met the so-called herringbone cloth. She was extremely pleased with the result. She was the wife of a lawyer and after that all her friends started calling on us. They came to bring the cloth and we only worked.

All the girls helped, Stela, and Tsivi, we used to even sew at the light of the gas lamp. We used to sew until we stopped seeing anything. We didn't have a mirror for the women to look at themselves. We used the window for those purposes. And we were making our living that way. It doesn't mean that we had a lot of work but at least we got some money to pay the rent.

As for the food, in the school there was a soup kitchen. And during the time in which we were allowed to walk outside, we took food from the school and then returned home. We had the right to be outside for two hours a day - between 8 and 10 o'clock. The rest of the time we didn't even have the right to show our faces at the windows because in Vratsa was the headquarters of the gendarmerie and there were blockades all the time, there were gendarmes in the streets. We couldn't go anywhere, even to buy bread. A bit later, I can't say exactly when, there started a UYW movement in Vratsa, but I couldn't join as I was too busy sewing.

We knew what was happening to the Jews around the world. When the men came back they told us about the trains full of Jews they had seen. It was rumored that we were supposed to be moved gradually closer to the Danube so that we could be loaded on barges and then sent, like all the

rest, to the concentration camps.

While we were in Vratsa, Larry was working in the labor camps. They demobilized them from time to time, to spend the winter at home, and then mobilized them again. In the winter of 1943 he had come back to Vratsa. He came back and started living opposite us. We had decided to get married. We had made an arrangement with the rabbi in Vratsa, decided on the day. The wedding was between 8 and 10 o'clock because we could move about freely in this period. A lot of young people came. Granny Olga had prepared cookies with jam and had cooked some modest dishes, she had done all she could do and the wedding was fine. They had freed Grandpa Bitush from the camp [The interviewee is referring to her father]. He had returned. Otherwise what wedding would it have been? The date was 16th March 1944.

Before our wedding, there had been a big air-raid over Vratsa, a very big air-raid. The central part of the town was completely destroyed and burned to the ground by the Englishmen. Larry was mobilized in Vratsa to clear off the debris; they even made the women clear off, particularly those of us who were living in the center. The men were also digging the graves because there were a lot of victims from the raids. After we got married the air- raids continued. The raid alarm sounded twice that night, during our nuptial night. The first time we ran away because there were raids after all but we stayed after the second one - three of us in the bed as my mother-in-law remained on one side of the bed. The woman was very scared. We all survived after 9th September.

## Post-war

We came back to Sofia in November 1945 - we had no place to live or any furniture because we had always lived in rented lodgings before that... A first cousin of mine who had the same name as me - Roza, a daughter of my mother's sister, told me: 'Come here, there's a little apartment on the ground floor - two rooms and a kitchen. It belongs to a relative of mine. His family won't return soon. They are in the town of Tolbuhin [24](#).'

The owner of the apartment, which she offered us, was the mayor in that town. My husband and I agreed to live there. My mother-in-law was with us. Thus started the ordeal of going to different commissariats because there wasn't a single window glass that had remained in the apartment, we had to repaint it, to clean it in order to make it decent to live in. The apartment was on Rakovski Street. We managed to clean the place and in 1945 I gave birth to our first child, Zhani [Yafa]. And then the wonderful owners of the apartment appeared and told us they wanted their apartment back despite the fact we had a signed contract. That was quite a situation for us. But being rather compassionate my husband and I decided to give them back the apartment, after all it was their property. And the four of us - Zhani, my mother-in-law, my husband and I - settled down in a single room until we'd find a proper place to live in.

It was a real hell when the owners returned. The husband was an alcoholic. He came back in the middle of the night although there was a curfew. There weren't restrictions for him and on coming back home he started knocking on our door, shouting: 'How long are you going to stay here? When are you leaving?' That was the situation. And as we were living on the ground floor and my husband had a shift job for the police, they made him ask a chair from me when he returned home from work. I gave him the chair through the window, he stepped on it, jumped and entered the apartment in that way.



At that time we knew about these apartments here, in the Zaharna Fabrika quarter. We had been told that there were apartments that were still being built and we submitted a request for such an apartment. When we told the people about the torture we had to go through, we were included in a list to receive an apartment here, which at that time wasn't ready. Nonetheless, without even knowing where the quarter was or which one the apartment building was, I asked the management of the Ministry of Interior to lend us a truck, we packed our luggage and came here. And on arriving here we saw our apartment for the first time.

Can you imagine how awful our life had been? We had let the people use their apartment despite having a contract with the owner. We were supposed to live there at least two years but he didn't wait even a year. We came to 'Zaharna Fabrika' quarter and settled down in the new apartment. And around us there was only mud, there were no shops, no place to buy milk from and we had a little baby.

At that time I started work as a telephone operator in the Ministry of Interior and I worked there for six years. Larry was a policeman. There was a lot of work in the police. My mother-in-law, who used to live with us, gave me a hand in the raising of the children. I worked in the Ministry of the Interior until 1951 and then I was dismissed for having connections in foreign countries, as was stated in the order for dismissal. I want to declare that wasn't true. All my relatives - my brother and sisters - at that time were here in Bulgaria. In fact, I was dismissed due to my Jewish origin. I started work in 'Voroshilov' works [in Sofia, situated in the region of 'Zaharna Fabrika' quarter, its scope of production included electricity technology and electronics] as a chief controller. I had already become a member of the BCP in 1944, immediately after 9th September.

The works was new, it was near our apartment and that was good for me because of the children. I knew that I would have spare time. I started work there and they appointed me a secretary of the Party despite my dismissal because I had been a member of UYW before 9th September. And things were going very well, they called upon from the Party and cited us a model because we were working very well.

One day Todor Zhivkov [25](#) came to attend a big meeting and they seated me next to him, on the platform and I was so grieved at what had happened in the police that I told him all about it. I sat next to him and told him everything: 'Before 9th September we were victimized for being Jewish. We were in disgrace and I was working here for seven years, my work was excellent and still I was dismissed for being a Jew.' 'Such were the times,' he started explaining. 'Those were the events, there was no other way...' Because a lot of Jews were dismissed. There were no consequences after that conversation, but at least I told him everything and felt much better.

There were 7,000 employees in the works and I was a chief controller there. Everybody knew me. They all knew I was a Jew, I still meet some of them, but they had never minded that - had nothing against my Jewish origin or me. The dismissal from the Ministry of the Interior was the only such case.

My first child Yafa, who was named after my mother-in-law, was born on 2nd June 1945 in Sofia. She goes by Zhani. She finished high school and got a degree in engineering. She used to work as a designer-engineer. Now she is retired. She got married to Yozhi Beraha in 1968. She has two children, Isak and Roza. My son Zhak was born on 23rd April 1949 in Sofia. He has a secondary vocational education and works as an electricity technician in the trade system. He is married to

Emilia Dimtirova, a Bulgarian. He has a son, Leon.

We brought up our children in Jewish self-awareness. We kept the Jewish high holidays Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, Purim, but we didn't stick to all the rituals. For example, we didn't disguise ourselves at Purim; we weren't fasting for Yom Kippur. We went to the synagogue but rarely. The most important thing for us was that the whole family got together for the holidays. And we always had a great time.

There are no Bulgarians in the family with the exception of my daughter-in-law, Emilia Dimitrova, and that's why we are indifferent to Christmas and Easter. After my son got married I started visiting my daughter-in-law. For Christmas and Christmas Eve. She was working a lot and didn't have time to prepare for the holidays so I went to their place in the morning and prepared everything necessary for Christmas Eve. I don't go there anymore because I have grown old but she still uses my recipe for the hors d'oeuvre with walnuts. It is a very delicious dish.

We were all talking about the state of Israel. Not only with Larry and my mother-in-law, not with the children because they were too young at the time to discuss it with them, but I also talked to my mother, father and brother. We all discussed this issue but we all felt so tired of the ordeals we had been through and, additionally, we had already found jobs, had set up homes and we had simply got used to the things we had achieved with so much work... So we decided that we wouldn't go, at least for the time being, and at that time there was a big emigration wave [26](#), journeys, letters were coming - things not arranged, ordeals again. The people who left for Israel deserve admiration for all the things they went through but we felt so exhausted - from the camps, from all the ordeals we had survived - and the whole family decided not to leave. My two sisters, Stela and Beka, went there much later. Stela is still there, but Beka came back and now she is living with her daughter in Bulgaria.

I think about Israel with a lot of love and a lot of grief because there are a lot of incidents there, assassinations, other terrible things... And because of the fact that they continue although they have returned the Gaza Strip...We are deeply worried after each incident.

We left to visit our relatives in Israel during the period in which the relations between Bulgaria and Israel weren't very good [27](#). For us the official state policy wasn't a personal opinion. All the things that happened there made our hearts ache because it's true that my kin were here but my husband's brothers were there, the nephews, too, cousins - you can see how big our family is. We accepted all the incidents there with great pain.

It was very hard for us. I can't say that we overcame easily everything that happened after the change of the regime. Yes, I saw the mistakes that the Party and the state were making. Both my husband and I saw them well. We weren't blind. Regardless of all the plenums that were held all the decisions were formal, just on paper, nothing was put into practice. Nothing actually happened in reality. There was no food in the shops, there was no milk even. But there were good things before 10th November [28](#), too. Life was safer, there wasn't such a crime rate, but things weren't going well and we could see that. And there wasn't a single meeting without criticism, without us wanting the criticism to be included in the minutes. We sent out all the minutes but up to no effect.

My life changed after 1989. They put a limit to the size of our pensions, and that is normal, but, after all, one can live with a lot or with little. Thank God, we are not as poor as beggars, we have

survived to the present day. I can't say what will happen in the future. My husband has been receiving some money for compensation for two years. [These are the compensations from Claims Conference given to all Jewish men from Bulgaria who had been in labor camps during World War II.] But why did he have to wait for so long - he worked in the labor camps for four years. There were cases when he got back home as thin as a skeleton, without clothes. The state didn't give them money and they worked dressed in their own clothes, with lice, sick, with malaria. Not to mention what condition we, the women, were in. We were interned, we suffered so much, we had to travel with so many bundles and all that without our husbands. And after so much suffering to be able to adapt to a normal way of living! We weren't compensated in any way. There is no justice.

Frankly speaking, we have been quite active in the Jewish Cultural Center [Bet Am] [29](#) for seven years. If there hadn't been the things done by the rehabilitation center, maybe we wouldn't have been among the living now because there are only the two of us at home - Larry and me. Our children don't live with us and they are very busy, they go to work. It has never been so quiet in this house before and we were simply looking for something to fight over, to quarrel about little things. We were rather irritable. Our big walk was to go to the market place and back. Well, we attended the synagogue, too, but only on holidays. It's great that this rehabilitation center was created and we started going there - not because of the food, we don't even eat there now, but because of the people we meet and spend time with.

In 'Zdrave' [Health] club we do exercises, sing in the choir, you saw the photos, didn't you? We dance traditional dances in the dance classes. There is more diversity in our lives now. [The interviewee is referring to all the activities and events of the Jewish organization in Sofia. There are similar activities in all the towns throughout the country where the life of the Jews is more organized and there are more Jews.] And no matter what the weather is - it may be freezing or boiling, we are always there.

## Glossary

### **1 Sephardi Jewry**

(Hebrew for 'Spanish') Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

### **2 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 Solitreo. 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.

### **3 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. There were more and more false blood libels, and the polemics, which were opportunities for interchange of views between the Christian and the Jewish intellectuals before, gradually condemned the Jews more and more, and the middle class in the rising started to be hostile with the competitor. The Jews were gradually marginalized. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. Many Jews were forced to leave their faith. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians, who were accused of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. At the end of July 1492 even the last Jews left Spain, who openly professed their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (Source: Jean-Christophe Attias - Esther Benbassa: Dictionnaire de civilisation juive, Paris, 1997)

### **4 The dynasty of Ferdinand I Saxe-Coburg-Gotha**

Ferdinand I Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1861 - 1948), Prince Regnant and later King of Bulgaria (1908-1918). Born in Vienna to Prince August of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary and his wife Clémentine of Orléans, daughter of King Louis Philippe I of the French. Married Princess Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma, daughter of Roberto I of Parma in 1893 at the Villa Pianore in Lucca in Italy, producing four children: Boris III (1894-1943), Kyril (1895-1945), Eudoxia (1898-1985) and Nadejda (1899-1958). Following Maria Luisa's death (in 1899), Ferdinand married Eleonore Caroline Gasparine Louise, Princess Reuss-Köstritz, in 1908, but did not have children from this marriage. After Ferdinand's

abdication in 1918 Boris III came to the Bulgarian throne. In 1930 Boris married Giovanna of Italy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel III of Italy. The marriage produced a daughter, Maria Louisa, in January 1933, and a son and heir to the throne, Simeon, in 1937. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris\\_III\\_of\\_Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_III_of_Bulgaria) and others)

## **5 Iuchbunar**

The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means 'the three wells.'

## **6 Tsadikov, Moshe (1885-1947)**

Born into a poor family, he started showing love for music at an early age and drew the attention of professional musicians. He started taking lessons with Dobri Khristov. On the occasion of the sanctification of the synagogue, the board decided to organize a special choir. Tsadikov was awarded a grant from the board and in 1908 he began studying at Wurzburg Academy in Germany. He graduated with flying colors and returned to Bulgaria. He started work with the synagogue choir, re-organized their repertoire and changed their manner of singing. At his first concert works by Mendelssohn, Schubert, Brahms were performed. He attracted some extremely talented singers to the choir among which were the eminent Mimi Balkanska and Gencho Markov. He presented on stage his own operetta for children entitled 'Prolet' [Spring] and he took part in the first symphony concerts of Maestro Georgi Atanasov. After World War I the repertoire was enriched with classical works by Brahms, Schubert, Handel, Haydn. In 1934 he prepared the performance of the oratorio 'The Creation' by Haydn and the concert was celebrated as a real musical sensation by connoisseurs of music throughout Bulgaria. Eminent Bulgarian composers like Dobri Khristov and Petko Staynov devoted some of their musical works to Tsadikov's choir. At the 25th anniversary of the choir Boris III decorated Tsadikov with a medal for public service. In 1938 Tsadikov immigrated to the USA where he died on 4th November 1947. The Jewish choir was reinstituted by Bulgarian Jews in Israel where it is now known as 'Tsadikov's Choir.'

## **7 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 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

## **8 Jewish schools in Sofia**

In the 19th century gradually the obligatory religious education was replaced with a secular one, which around 1870 in Bulgaria was linked to the organization Alliance Israelite Universelle. The organization was founded by the distinguished French statesman Adolphe Crémieux with the goal of popularizing French language and culture among Jews in the Ottoman Empire (of which Bulgaria was also part until 1878). From 1870 until 1900 Alliance Israelite played a positive role in the process of founding Jewish schools in Bulgaria. According to the bulletin of the organization,

statistics about Jewish schools showed the date of the foundation of every Jewish school and its town. Two Jewish schools were founded in Sofia by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in 1887 and 1896. The first one was almost in the center of Sofia between the streets Kaloyan, Lege and Alabin, and in the urban development plan it was noted down as a 'Jewish school.' The second one, opened in the Sofia residential estate Iuchbunar, had the unofficial name 'Iuchbunar Jewish school.' The synagogue in that estate was called the same way. School affairs were run by the Jewish school boards (Komite Skoler), which were separated from the Jewish municipalities and consisted of Bulgarian citizens, selected by all the Jews by an anonymous vote. The documents on the Jewish municipalities preserved from the beginning of the 20th century emphasize that the school boards were separated from the synagogue ones. A retrospective look at the activity of the Jewish municipalities in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century indicates only that the education of all Jewish boys had to be obligatory and that there was a school at every synagogue. In 1891 the Bulgarian Parliament passed a law on education, according to which all Bulgarian citizens, regardless of religious groups were supposed to receive their education in Bulgarian. The previously existing French language Alliance Israelite Universelle schools were not closed, yet their activities were regulated and they were forced to incorporate the teaching of Bulgarian into their schedule. Currently the only Jewish school in Bulgaria is 134th school 'Dimcho Debelyanov' in Sofia. It has had the statute of a high school since 2003. It is supported by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and AJJDC. It is among the elite schools in Bulgaria and its students learning Hebrew are both Jews and Bulgarians.

## **9 9th September 1944**

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union 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.

## **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 the Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

## **11 The Jewish Hospital**

built in 1933 - 1934. Built in 1933 - 1934. It was officially consecrated on 19th March 1934. Its full name was Jewish Hospital - Memorial. It was devoted to the participation of 8,000 Bulgarian Jews in the Balkan, Second Balkan and World War I and most of all to the victims, mainly people from the medical profession - 211 Jewish doctors were killed, 54 of them were from Sofia. The hospital itself was built on 750 m<sup>2</sup>, it was a four-storey building and there were 60 beds in it. There was a



surgical ward with two operation theaters, a maternity ward, an outpatients' department, X-ray, physiotherapy, and a urologic ward. 40% of the patients were poor and the hospital didn't receive any state subsidies. At the same time the personnel of the hospital accepted and treated all patients no matter what their religious denominations were. The memorial stone of the hospital was made by the Ukrainian artist, an immigrant to Bulgaria, Mikhaylo Paraschouk.

## **12 Somovit camp**

The camp in the village of Somovit was a Jewish concentration camp created in 1943. The camp was supposed to accept Jews that didn't obey the rules and regulations decreed by the Law for the Protection of the Nation. It existed until 1st April 1944 when it was gradually moved to the 'Tabakova Cheshma' [Tabakova's Fountain] terrain following an order of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. After a fire broke out there, it was moved to the 'Kailuka' terrain, 4 km from the town of Pleven. After a protest demonstration of the Jews on 24th May 1943 against the attempts on the part of Bogdan Filov's government to deport the Jews outside the country, about 80 Jews from Sofia were sent to the Somovit camp.

## **13 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.

## **14 ORT**

(Abbreviation for Russ. Obshchestvo Rasprostraneniya Truda sredi Yevreyev, originally meaning "Society for Manual [and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]," and later-from 1921-"Society for Spreading [Artisan and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]") It was founded in 1880 in St. Petersburg (Russia) and originally designed to help Russian Jews. One of the problems which ORT tackled was to help the working Jewish youth and craftsmen to integrate into the industrialization. This especially had an impact on the Eastern European countries after World War I. ORT expanded during World War II, when it became a world organization with branches in France, Germany, England, America and elsewhere, in addition to former Russian territories like Poland, Lithuania and Bessarabia. There was also an ORT network in Romania. With the aim to provide "help through work", ORT operated employment bureaus, organizes trade schools, provided tools, machinery and materials, set up special courses for apprentices, and maintained farm schools as well as cooperative agricultural colonies and workshops.

## **15 Boza**

A sweet wheat-based mildly alcoholic drink popular in Bulgaria, Turkey and other places in the Balkans.

## **16 Halva**

A sweet confection of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and largely enjoyed throughout the Balkans. It is made chiefly of ground sesame seeds and honey.

## **17 Sofia synagogues**

The number of the synagogues and midrashim in Sofia was changing over the years - according to a report of the Sofia Jewish Council in 1927 the Sephardim in Sofia used to have four synagogues with one rabbi and six religious officials whereas the Ashkenazim used to have one synagogue with one rabbi. The number of the midrashim was not specified. The synagogues in Sofia are on Pasazh Sveti Nikola [St. Nikola Passage] - the oldest synagogue named 'Le Keila de Los Grego,' 'De Los Francos' on 'Maria Luiza' Boulevard; on the corner of 'Maria Luiza' and the passage to 'Trapezitsa' square - 'Ashkenazim' synagogue, 'Shalom' synagogue - on the corner of 'Maria Luiza' and St. Nikola Passage.

## **18 Chitalishte**

Literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc. The first such organizations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival (18th and 19th century) and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

## **19 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'etat 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.

## **20 Bulgarian Communist Party (1919 - 1940)**

the successor to the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (left-wing socialists). It was renamed to Bulgarian Communist Party in May 1919. Its co-founder is International III and the party adopted Lenin's theory of Imperialism as the final stage of capitalism. While the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union was in office (1920 - 1923) the BCP didn't support their government and didn't take part in the June Uprising in 1923. Two months after that it changed its course and took part in the preparation of the September Uprising, which was suppressed. It was banned by the Law for the Protection of the Nation in January 1924. In the 1930s it changed its tactics in order to survive as an illegal party. In 1938-1940 it practically merged with the Workers' Party and the Bulgarian Workers' Party was founded.

## **21 Yellow star in Bulgaria**

According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were

made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

## **22 Change of Jewish names**

according to the Law for the Protection of the Nation and after the regulations for its application were enforced in 1941, the Jewish family names lost the endings -ov, -ev and -ich. In 1943 in relation to the internment of the Jews from Sofia, and the Jews from the countryside, all the personal Jewish names, which happened to resemble Bulgarian names, were also changed. In 1944 the anti-Jew legislation was abolished and the old situation was restored - the Jews retrieved their real personal and family names. There is no information about a following change of the names although until 1951 - 1955, especially after the passing of the Dimitrovska Constitution on 4th December 1947, all the names had to end in -ov/-ova.

## **23 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.

## **24 Tolbuhin [Dobrich]**

Town in northeastern Bulgaria not far from the city of Varna. The town has a population of about 110,000 people and was built on the remnants of a Roman and Thracian dwelling. In the Ottoman past it was a lively commercial center with a big cattle market and its name was Pazardzhik or Hadzhioglu Pazardzhik. It was renamed to Dobrich in 1882 after a Dobrudzha ruler from the past - Dobrotitsa. At that time a big fair was held in the town every year. After the Second Balkan War and according to the Bucharest Peace Treaty from 1913 the town had to be given to Romania. It was returned to Bulgaria on 5th September 1940 due to the Krayova Treaty. On 25th October 1949 the town was renamed to Tolbuhin (after a Soviet marshal, Fyodor Ivanovich Tolbuhin) and in 1989 it was renamed to Dobrich again.

## **25 Zhivkov, Todor (1911-1998)**

First Secretary of the Central Committee of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (1954-1989) and the leader of Bulgaria (1971-1989). His 35 years as Bulgaria's ruler made him the longest- serving leader in any of the Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe. When communist governments across Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, the aged Zhivkov resigned from all his posts. He was placed under arrest in January 1990. Zhivkov was convicted of embezzlement in 1992 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

## **26 Mass Aliyah**

Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

## **27 Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel**

After the 1967 Six-Day-War, the Soviet Union cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, under the pretext of Israel being the aggressor and the neighboring Arab states the victims of Israeli imperialism. The Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) conformed to the verdict of the Kremlin and followed the Soviet example. Diplomatic relations between Israel and the ex-Communist countries resumed after the fall of communism.

## **28 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.

## **29 Bet Am**

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