

Nissim Kohen's Mother Sarina Kohen With A Friend



This is a photo of my mother Sarina Kohen, nee Haravon around 1970 in Sofia. My mother is sitting and standing is a friend of hers, whose name is Amada Kohen. She was also a widow like my mother at that time. Amada Kohen was born in Sofia. We were neighbors in the Jewish neighborhood.

My mother's kin comes from Kyustendil. My mother's parents Yuda and Bohora Haravon lived there. I went there every summer when I was a student in the first grades of the Jewish school. My grandfather was a tinsman and my grandmother - a housewife. My mother's kin is very large. She had six brothers - Yosif, Rahamim, Shimon, Nissim, Chelebi and Mois Kohen. What is interesting about them is that my grandmother's parents left as early as the beginning of the 20th century, around 1906-1907 to the blessed land (Palestine at that time) to die there. They left their lands, their children and set off. My mother Sarina Kohen was 8-9 years old then. As far as I know my grandparents have graves in Jerusalem.

There were a lot of Jews in Kyustendil. They had their own synagogue and a community house. My grandparents lived in the Jewish neighborhood, which was around the synagogue. I remember that they lived in a small house, which had a ground floor and another floor. A relative of my grandfather's lived on the ground floor. His name was Manoah, and on the next floor lived my grandfather's family and my uncle Isak Haravon.

My mother had graduated primary school and started studying in a vocational school which she did not finish due to lack of money. She kept her notebooks from the vocational school for many years. They contained sewing designs, which can be drawn only by a professional designer nowadays. My mother had a hard life. She had two more boys after me, but they died. My first brother Leon was born in 1927 but he died of diphtheria in 1933. In 1929 my second brother Albert was born. He died in 1934.

My mother was clever and hard-working. She read books in Ladino. I think she got the books from acquaintances. At home we had Bulgarian literature, which we took from the community houses. There was a Jewish community house on Klementina Boulevard [present-day Stamboliiski Blvd] and on Lege Str. I also took books from the Bulgarian community house on the corner of Tsar Simeon Str. and Bregalnitsa Str. Its name was 'Hristo Botev'. Thanks to my mother I learned to read a little in Ladino in Rashi. She had a beautiful handwriting and expressed herself very well. Her Bulgarian was also very good. Uncle Mois Haravon also expressed himself very well. He wrote to us very good letters in Bulgarian from Israel.

After September 9th 1944 we did not stop celebrating the Jewish holidays. We have a tradition to gather with our children. We have always lit candles on Chanukkah. My mother went to the synagogue when she could. Even when she was not able to go there by herself, we drove her and then we took her back. I did not have any problems to accompany my mother to the synagogue. It could have had negative consequences, but I personally did not have any problems. During totalitarianism the religious followers were persecuted. Yet, I have not heard of any Jews arrested for visiting the synagogue. My mother died in 1991. She went regularly to the synagogue until 1990.