

Josif Kamhi At The Time Of Internment In Kyustendil



This is a photo from my internment to Kyustendil in 1943. My future wife, Venezia Kamhi (nee Konorti), is in the front. All young people of the interned Jewish families gathered every evening at the Jewish school and despite the many limitations that were imposed on us, we found the time to have fun. I am the first from left to right and next to me is a friend of ours, a Jew from Kyustendil, who is also wearing the yellow star. We met at the Jewish school, where we were accommodated initially. There we received food from a big cauldron in the yard of the school. On 27th May we received the notice that we were to be interned to the town of Kyustendil. I think that someone came to tell us that in person. At that time we wore yellow stars which showed that we were Jews. I had been wearing such a star since 1940. If we had not worn them, we could have been sent to a concentration camp. We were allowed to keep our houses but most of the Jews sold away their possessions. We arrived in Kyustendil by train and we were accommodated in the Jewish school. We slept on the floor on blankets which we brought from home. We ate from a big cauldron where they prepared some food for us. Shortly after, I started work. At first I was a waiter in a cafeteria for the meager sum of 20 leva a day – the price of one loaf of bread. Each evening the interned Jews gathered in the Jewish school and once I was told that I could go and take part in the digging of a river path, which was much better-paid. So, I started working there. The first day I was so tired, I could hardly walk. Then I got used to it and even dug much more than the others. My father also came to work with me. We could afford better housing and rented an apartment. My brother was in a labor camp and came back at the beginning of 1944. He escaped at the beginning of May and became a partisan. Soon people found out that my brother was not returning home. One of our landlady's sons worked in the police. My father was arrested to be questioned about his son. He did not say anything and spent 20 days in the police station, where he was beaten. At that time I was the only one who worked – we had to bring him food to the police station and pay our rent. We managed to keep ends meet because my employer paid me regularly and was a very honest man. Something interesting happened one day. I had to dig an area one meter deep, seven meters long

and four meters wide. But the supervisor deliberately measured the width of my excavation right to its very limits where it was 20 centimeters more shallow. His son also worked there and he probably wanted to write down that his son had completed my work. But the technician saw that, corrected the measurements and paid me the full sum. I was very happy with the organization of labor there.