

Picnic In The Sea [embankment] Garden In Varna



This is a picnic in the Sea [embankment] Garden in Varna. I am on my mother's knees - Rebeka Avram Natan (nee Geron). On the right from her is her sister Ester and above her is her husband Merkado Mois Natan. From the left is his brother Albert, from the right is his other brother Marko. The sitting boy is David, my father's younger brother, while the woman on the left is unknown. The photo was taken in 1926.

I was born in Varna in 1925. We moved to Ruse when I was two. I don't remember Varna from this period, I remember it from the period when I started visiting my grandmother in Varna. My parents seldom went on holiday. I remember that one year we came to Sofia's Ovcha Kupel with my mother (there is a mineral water spa there) because of her illness. My mother and I used to visit my grandmother in Varna. My parents used to gather with their brothers and sisters as well as with my mother's cousins in Ruse. In 1933 and 1934 all my father's brothers gathered in Varna to visit my grandmother: Aron and Albert came from Dobrich [Romania at the time], Marko - from Milan (Italy).

We didn't have a garden, but we had a big yard in one of the houses, shared between four other buildings and we played there. My mother was ill because she had two hard births (mine and my brother's). She had problems with her physical condition and so we used to hire a housemaid from the neighboring villages Dimitrovden and Gergyovden for the winters. [The villages are named after Bulgarian Orthodox holidays. Dimitrovden is St Dimitar's Day, while Gergyovden stands for St. George's Day.] The housemaid had a bed in the kitchen.

We had both religious and mundane books, but I don't remember their titles. My parents did read, and especially my father, because my mother didn't have the time for it. Dad used to read contemporary novels. I remember that when I was 12, he brought home the 'Brown Book' [Editor's note: Probably a reference to 'Brown Plague' in the sense of Nazism.] against Hitler and I understood from it that Hitlerism persecuted Jews and communists. It was an international issue, it read also about the Leipzig trial [Georgi Dimitrov], for the Kristallnacht ['The Night of Broken Glass':

the pogrom against German Jews. On the nights of 9th and 10th November 1938, gangs of Nazi youth roamed through Jewish neighborhoods breaking windows of Jewish businesses and homes, burning synagogues and looting. In all 101 synagogues were destroyed and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 died (Snyder, Louis L. Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. New York: Paragon House, 1989:201)].

I haven't had a nanny, but for one year I attended the 'Gan Yeladim' kindergarten at the Jewish school. It was one year before I started school. 'Gan' means garden in Ivrit, while 'yeladim' stands for 'children'. After that I studied in the Jewish primary and secondary school. I was very good at mathematics. When uncle Bucco made us do sums, he would always ask me first what the answer was. This teacher whom we learned a lot of things from was a mathematician. From him we learned many sayings, many things, for example that the great violinist Bronislaw Huberman was a Jew. [Huberman, Bronislaw (1882-1947): a great violinist of the 20th century, born in Poland. He was highly acclaimed for his strongly individual interpretations.] We learned which famous people were of Jewish origin, he used to tell us about the Jewish lifestyle and traditions. He was a great man, a great pedagogue; for us he was not only our teacher in mathematics. His classes were exceptional. Later, every time I was in Ruse after the war I visited him until he passed away.

I haven't had private lessons in music, nor in foreign languages; I studied French at the high school. My friends at school were Jews and Bulgarians, especially after I entered the Union of Young Workers (UYW). That happened after the war on the USSR was declared on 22th June 1941. I was in the sixth grade in the high school two years before graduation. However, the next year I was expelled from school. We were locked up within the Jewish neighborhood and we didn't have any out-of-school contacts. We used to gather in Tahir's confectionery before the curfew hour. At weekends we gathered in someone's house - we used to organize jouts [i.e. youth parties] then as we used to call them. We gathered boys and girls, danced a little, but most of the time we discussed things and had arguments - we were already members of the UYW. We didn't drink alcohol, we listened to music only if there was a gramophone or a radio at the place where we gathered. We used our free time to study and read.