

## Berta, Haim And Stela Pando



I with my husband Haim and my daughter Stela at the seaside in the village of Chernomorets near the town of Burgas during the 1960s. It was a habit of ours to go on holiday there every year. That lasted until 1989 [on 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]. Afterwards there weren't the right conditions for that and we couldn't afford it. There is neither a stamp of a photo studio, nor any other inscription on the back of the photo.

We didn't have children for nine years. My relatives started wondering about the reason. I recall that had planted a lemon tree. We didn't have enough room for it and gave it to tanti Soultana – my dad's sister, Albert Sintov's mother [famous opera singer Anna Tomova Sintova's husband] because she was very fond of flowers. It became a big tree but it didn't give any fruit – it was grafted, watered, but no and no. And tanti Soultana said once to her neighbours who were talking before our door: 'Can you see it, that lemon tree, it won't give fruit, like its saibiika [owner - a word of Turkish origin]' Mum had heard that and was extremely angry. And can you believe the paradox – I got pregnant and the tree gave a lemon that same year!

And there was another interesting thing with my conception. I had a friend from Yambol – Milka Godzes. She was a Jew too. Her father had started going blind gradually since the age of ten or twelve. Her father and my father were friends. My dad helped him by reading the lessons aloud to him so that he could finish the third year at school. When Milka was born, he saw and afterwards lost his sight completely. Milka married a Jew, too. We were friends with her because she was only a year and three months younger. Later, when we grew up we both got married. Her husband was a military officer in Burgas and they moved to live there. Later, when they came to Plovdiv, they would visit us. After some years, having been in all towns in Bulgaria, he was transferred to Yambol and they settled down there. We would return to Yambol for the holidays and used to meet them in the Jewish club to celebrate – for Pesach, Rosh Hashanah. Milka gave birth to a son in 1961. He was given brit. By chance I turned out to be in Yambol at that time and was present at the circumcision. There is such a belief among the Jews that if a childless woman takes the part from the brit and

carries it with her all the time, she will have a baby. They gave me the part of his weewee. I folded it in a piece of cotton and was always carrying it in my handbag. I got pregnant in less than a year. My pregnancy was very hard. I stayed in bed for nine months. I was hospitalized three times and was put on systems because I couldn't eat anything. Then I returned to Yambol and decided to give birth there. We were bringing up Stela as a Jew but at the same time didn't want to make her feel isolated from the other children so I painted eggs and made cookies at Easter.