

Aron Alkalai's Family Near The Rila Monastery



This is a photo from an excursion to the Rila Monastery with my father Nissim Alkalai. It was taken in the middle of the 1930s. My father is second on the left. First on the right is my sister Riri Alkalai, now Kalo. My mother Regina Alkalai is also on the photo (first on the right). My father had many friends who were Bulgarians - Todor Zahariev, who is third on the left and who had a saw-mill, and Lilyana Pipeva - second on the right. My father Nissim Alkalai had a lot of jobs. He had a hard life. At one point he was even a bartender and a cafe owner. When the water-conduit for Sofia was being constructed, he had a small canteen in the Rila Mountain. He cooked for the workers, who were around 150 people. But my father was a very good man and often gave them food on credit. That is why, he did not get rich from that job. There were some Italians who owed him a lot of money. At that time our house was mortgaged. My father had taken a loan from the Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' [Brotherhood] to buy the house, in which we lived. My mother told me that once my father threw in the stove some papers issued to him by a judge and with which he had to collect the money he was owed. He had won a trial against the people who owed him money, but at the last minute he reconsidered. My mother asked him why he was throwing those papers in the fire. He answered that the people had no money to pay him back. For example, one of them had only one cow. If he took it, what would the man have to eat? So, my father was very considerate about the others. The fact that there were five of us and our house was mortgaged was in the background. Because of that nobility and kindness my father was much respected man. My father was a cashier in the Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' in the years around World War II. It was a local bank governed by the Jewish municipality in Dupnitsa. In 1941 under the Law for Protection of the Nation the bank was closed and my father was left unemployed. I was in the labor camps then, but when I was at home I tried to do some work to help them - as a cobbler or in the tobacco warehouses. When I was a child, my father could not afford to take us on vacation. We went on excursions in the mountain (Dupnitsa is in the foot of the Rila Mountain). Once I remember that we went to the Rila Monastery with four other Jewish families. Every family had three or four children. There was a special tent for cooking and a tent for sleeping. There was a Bulgarian Aleksander Pilev who

transported beer from Samokov and bottled it in Dupnitsa. He had a pub in the town. The beer was left in a well to get cold. A boy, Kole the Blacksmith and I were sent to get them. But we decided to drink secretly and fill up the bottles with water. But the people found that out and criticized the pub owner. He could not say what had happened. In the end the people found out the truth. Another time, once again during an excursion in Rila, we had taken a keg of wine. We sat in a meadow above a river. There were trees around the river. The keg slid, fell down and crashed. My parents went on excursions in the mountain every summer for about 10-15 days. My father was much respected and had a lot of friends among the Bulgarians. We went on those excursions both with Jewish and Bulgarian families. I do not remember if we sang songs. They were more of daily excursions in the open.