

## Mayer Rafael Alhalel With Friends



The photo shows my classmates and I wearing the disgraceful yellow stars. It was taken in 1942 in Kaleto. Kneeling down on the photo from left to right are: Jacques Koen (he died a long time ago, I know nothing about him), Haim Paparo (he was my closest friend, he still lives in Israel where he immigrated during the Mass Aliyah in 1948). Standing from left to right are I, Isak Benaroyo (he is now a famous doctor in Israel) and Marko Primo. At the moment only Marko and I live in Vidin. The other boys from the photo either died or moved to Israel. We were in the same labor camp in the village of Mikre. All of us except Jacques, who was suffering from tuberculosis and was released, escaped illegally from the camp in September 1944. Around 29th August, all of us, around 300 laborers, already felt that our freedom was approaching. In other words we anticipated the coming of 9th September 1944. And that feeling strengthened when we saw the German troops

withdrawing from Bulgaria along the road near our camp. They were going to Yugoslavia to take part in the fighting there. When we saw them, we stopped working right away. What's more, a group of 30-40 people, mostly from Vidin, decided to escape from the labor camp. We were Jews, members of UYW, from various cities: Sofia, Plovdiv, Vidin, Ruse, Pleven, etc. From them I remember my friend Marko Primov, Simcho Kohenov, also from Vidin, but I don't remember any other names. At that time I wasn't a UYW member yet, but I was a follower of their ideas, unlike Marko Primov, who was a member. Those of us who escaped went first to the village of Sokolovo, which was near the camp. We weren't afraid of getting caught, so we weren't hiding, and we didn't move only at night. We hired five to six men with carts to drive us through the mountain roads to Lovech. We paid them with the money we had collected, which had been sent to us by our relatives. The food in the camp was never enough and we had to buy more food from the people in the nearby villages. We usually bought hominy, potatoes and cheese. Thanks to some of those villagers, who sold us food, we received news on the political changes in the country. We moved fast across the forest and reached Lovech. From there we couldn't get on a train so we hired a truck to get us to places close to our hometowns. I personally, wanted to go back to Vidin.