Ester Josifova With Bulgarian Children

This is a picture of me during the internment in Kyustendil from 1943-1944. The photo was taken in the yard of the house where we lived then. I was photographed with some Bulgarian children with whom I got along very well. They were our neighbors and I used to spend a lot of time with them.

Our family had to leave the house in the center of Sofia after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was accepted in 1939. We had to move to the Jewish neighborhood of Iuchbunar. The law said that Jews didn't have the right to live in the center of Sofia. Boulevard Hristo Botev marked the border. I didn't know the district of Iuchbunar before then. We rented a house on Nishka and

Sofronii Vrachanski Street. That's how we became neighbors with my future husband Menahem Josifov's parents. My mother found a relatively big house, and we lived with Uncle Josif and his two children. We were interned in the town of Kyustendil in 1943 from where we were to be sent to concentration camps.

Our landlords during the internment in Kyustendil were Sabbatarians. They got along very well with my father, who was a very well-educated man and had many common topics to talk about. These people were very polite and friendly to us. They got up early in the morning to bring us a newspaper and a loaf of bread. We were forbidden to go out ourselves before 9 o'clock. We were only allowed to leave home for two hours - between 9 and 11 in the morning. There were days when we couldn't go out at all - we were in a terrible situation, but our landlords did their best to help us. I became friends with the neighbors' children. My mother made tasty pastry as a sign of her gratefulness, and I sewed clothes for them.

Our relations with our neighbors and landlords during the internment in Kjustendil were fine, but trouble was awaiting us on the street. I remember that one night my younger sister and I were waiting on the street for our father to come back from the synagogue. He was wearing a yellow star, which he managed to hide discretely. Suddenly two youth stopped us on the street, one of them was the son of the well-known Bulgarian army general Zhekov. They were Branniks and acted in a hostile manner. They stopped us to check if we were wearing the yellow star. One of them even took liberties with my sister. Then my father got angry, caught his jacket lapels and shook him. He explained to them that he had fought in the wars for them and that they didn't have the right to behave that way. My father was very proud of his war medals and put one of them next to the yellow star. He showed them the yellow star and the medal and told general Zhekov's son that he had fought side by side with his father in the war. When we went home my father felt really bad because of the humiliation he had had to experience.