

The Future Famous Theater Director In Bulgaria Leon Daniel With A Jewish Star



This is the future famous theater director in Bulgaria Leon Daniel with a Jewish star. The picture was taken in the town of Ruse in 1942-43.

[During Holocaust] the anti-Semitism in Bulgaria came from the institutions and the laws that were adopted. The Law for Protection of the Nation put restrictions for us. My father as a trader had to pay a one-off tax that swallowed his capital. He had to close his shop, because no Jews were allowed to run stores in the main street. However, the students who were studying at the high school were not expelled from there. But the Sofia students who were interned to Ruse from Sofia were not let to study in the high school. We were not allowed to walk in the town's main street, we could only stay in our neighborhood. We used to go for walks in David Street which was the central one in our neighborhood. Our group of friends had chosen another street where to walk - it was a smaller one. We were around ten of us and the writer Dragomir Asenov was one of us [The real name of Dragomir Asenov is Jacques Melamed (1926-1981): a writer and playwright. Dragomir Asenov is a literary pseudonym and not a changed name. He spent six years in an orphanage. He graduated university after World War II. In the early period of his work he wrote a lot of pamphlets, articles and features for the press. The late works of the writer are devoted to Bulgaria's history and the modern times. His most famous works are his plays 'Birthday' (1964), 'Roses for Doctor Shomov' (1966), 'Hot nights in Arcadia' (1970), which were staged in Bulgaria and abroad] - he used to lecture us; there were other interesting people, too. We used to gather at somebody's home, mainly at the houses of two of the girls. At our gatherings we didn't only have mere talks.

Our parents approved of these meetings because they could see we were serious people. We had to wear those yellow stars. The curfew hour was set to 9 p.m. By that time in the evening we had to be back home and we couldn't go out after that. The so-called legionnaire boys came to our neighborhood to have fights with us. Some more strict nationalists used to curse us at school. We continued studying at the high school, but in 1942 the high school was dismissed and we were sent to our houses to hide from the bombardments. I had then only two years before graduation. And we resumed our studies yet in 1944. They didn't change our names - we had, however, four names. Instead of Avram Moisey Pinkas I became Avram Moisey Mayer Pinkas. They just added our grandfather's names to the three we already had. We had yellow identity cards, where the four names were written.

[After 9th September 1944] when I graduated from the high school I tried to start working something, but I was an amateur. I changed many jobs when I finally decided to apply for the theater school in Sofia - there was still no VITIZ (Higher Institute of Theatrical Art) these days. [In 1947 The Theater School, following a decree of the National Assembly, was transformed into DVTU (Public Higher School of Theater), later known as VITIZ (Higher Institute of Theatrical Art) during the communist regime and as NATFIZ (National Academy of Theater and Film Arts) after 10th November 1989.]. I used to prepare myself for admission together with Leon Daniel with whom we were friends from Ruse - we had lived in neighboring houses there. I applied for the school in 1947 and I was admitted to enroll in the first master class of Philip Philipov [a famous Bulgarian theater director]. I did not receive scholarship, because D.B. Mitov (journalist and intellectualist) had called the Jewish boys and told us (we were 12 of us) 'Turn your scholarships down, so that more students may get scholarships, the Consistory will give you money anyway.' So we agreed with him, but later the Consistory stopped our money - the other students could afford to buy watches and we lived in poverty - I have had tea with bread for supper. My friends and I were living in a nice rented flat - but we couldn't pay the rent - actually we bilked the owners with the rent for three or four months. After that, I failed my exams and I had to go back to Ruse, because there were no make-up exams these days. I took up amateur artistic activities with a company in Ruse. After a while, it became a paid position with the Dimitrov's Youth's Union .