

## Mayer Rafael Alhalel As A Student



This is my future husband Mayer Rafael Alhalel as a student. The photo was made in Vidin [port city on the right bank of the Danube in Bulgaria, 220 km. away from Sofia] in the distant 1938. On this photo he is studying in the third junior high-school grade, which is equivalent to present-day eighth grade (i.e., he has passed four primary school forms and three junior high school grades). At the time the photo was made he was 15 years old. He had already been transferred from the Jewish

primary school, which had only four grades and he was studying in the boys' high school in Vidin 'Tsar Simeon Veliki'. I was studying in the girls' high school in Vidin, and although we were neighbors and had studied in the same Jewish school, we did not know each other well. At that time there were not any anti-Semitic reactions in Vidin yet, although the Law for Protection of the Nation [A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941] was about to be adopted in Bulgaria. I remember that the political climate in 1938 was still calm.

After our marriage in 1948 my husband Mayer Rafael Alhalel told me that the Jewish men in his first and second labor camp were about 300-400 people [ Labor camps were established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions]. They were divided into groups: a Vidin one, a Vratsa one and a more general one including workers from Jewish origin born in Northwest Bulgaria. The Vidin group had a 'seemed-to-be' vicious and cruel supervisor: that is he cursed the Jews and made them do hardest work in front of his superiors, but as soon as those superiors went away, he started playing belote with the Jewish men. It was only after 9th September 1944 [The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government.] that my husband learnt that their strict supervisor was also a UYW member [The Union of Young Workers was a communist youth organization, which went underground after the coup d'état in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned and fought against the fascist regime]. But he had become a supervisor in a Jewish labor camp, because he was very poor and he needed money.