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Interviewer: Svetlana Avdala
Date of interview: March 2006



I do not know this woman, I see her now for the first time.

At first glance – very well-preserved, with delicate and even childlike features. We sit down and we start. In the beginning everything she says seems innocent, especially the parts about her childhood. A discreet smile appears on her lips when she goes back to her memories.

We have been working for three hours already – no signs of tiredness on her part. We start the Holocaust topic. Her face goes pale, her lips purse slightly, but her speech is as rhythmical as before. The facts follow each other like chopped wood.

Her thoughts are clear and focused, without decoration or lyrical deviation. After two more hours she is as unemotional as in the beginning. My respect for that woman is growing every single minute. I get quieter and quieter. I am thinking, 'Do her difficulties ever come to an end?'

As if I am watching some kind of a movie. I remember such movies from my childhood about heroic events from our newest history. Another type of films appeared after that – the so-called action movies.

There is shooting again, chases, torture, but everything seems like a game, they lack heroism, lack ideals, which...'...which...,' I add in the end of the conversation, 'overshadow the rational mind.''But without those ideals, we would not have sacrificed our lives,' she insists.'But do we have to sacrifice our lives? Isn't it more important for a man to be alive in order to keep on the path of life he has chosen?',

I ask.This is a dialogue between the generations or probably a clash of characters, I do not know, but all the people from that generation seem different from us. They were exposed to some other inner light and another type of meaning. Some people would say that they look 'old-fashioned' now, but I think that nowadays 'old-fashioned' is a nice word.

They speak slowly, with some kind of dignity, as if standing on a podium and talking to the masses. Ready to serve in the name of...Our generation doubts heroic actions, as well as everything else. We believe only in the things we can touch, achieve or use, but what kind of people are we? Lonely, headphones on our ears, staring into the screens, playing virtual action games.

- My family background

- Growing up
- During the war
- After the war
- Glossary

My family background

We came with the big group Sephardi Jews from Spain in the end of the 15th - 16th century 1 2. My paternal and maternal ancestors settled directly into Sofia. I do not know anything about their material state. But I remember my grandparents.

My paternal grandfather's name was Yako Azarya Levi. He lived with us. That was the custom those days, the parents of the eldest son lived with his family. My father had a brother, whose name was Azarya Levi, but he died during World War I on the Dobrudzha Front 3.

I remember my grandfather very well. I can clearly picture him in my mind even now. I was around 12-13 years old when he died. He had a beard and mustache like the old Jews.

He dressed very neatly. Every Saturday he went to the synagogue with the tallit and the book. When he returned, my grandmother would be waiting for him with the mastika 4 and some eggs. During the week he went to work. He had primary education.

He had graduated a Jewish school and had a small shop for paints and ironware, in which he worked. He went to work in the morning and came back for lunch because all shops had a compulsory lunch break from one to three. So, he would come home, have lunch and have an hour's nap. Then he got up, my grandmother made him some coffee and he went back to work. When my grandfather died in 1936, my father took care of the shop.

My paternal grandmother and my mother got on very well. Everything at home was in order and they both were kind women. The men went to work, my grandmother cooked and helped with the housework and my mother washed the clothes and looked after the children. Later, when we built the new house, in which we all moved, my mother also worked as a seamstress from home in order to help repay the loan which we took to build the house.

I did not speak much with my grandfather because he was more aloof. I spoke mostly with my grandmother Niema. I remember her long hair reaching down to her feet, which never went gray. My grandmother was not educated. She taught me to knit, to sew, to clean the big pots.

Before she married my grandfather, she had been a housemaid. When our family gathered for dinner, my grandmother would cook and clean the dishes. There were no washing detergents at that time. The dishes were made of copper and tin-plated inside. She washed them with soap and sand until they shone.

We had a tap in the yard and behind the tap - a cherry tree. My grandmother would kneel in the yard, washing and my mother would scold her that she would injure her back in this way. My grandmother also taught me the religious canons, because my parents were atheists.

My grandmother's hair was really gorgeous. She would untie the braids and comb her hair with ivory combs. She often called me to comb her and I loved that. She put gas and water in a small

dish [effective remedy to protect against lice]. When she got up in the mornings, she untied the braids and combed her hair.

Sometimes she had only one braid, but most often – two. On holidays, she wrapped them around her head. She also combed her hair when we went to have a bath. Every Friday my grandmother, my mother and I would go to the City Bath situated at the river on Slivnitsa Blvd and Pirotska Str. When it was cold, we bathed in a wooden tub in the kitchen at home. Then she would call for me to wash her back.

Probably my grandmother was a very beautiful woman for my grandfather to marry her without a dowry. [The typical Jewish dowry – ashugar, included the smallest details from the everyday life of a Jewish family.] I do not know much, but I know that my grandmother remained an orphan very young and married without a dowry, which was very rare at the time.

I also remember my maternal grandmother. Her name was Yafa Sabat Beni (1880-1953) I remember her very well, because I often visited her. She lived on 35 Sredna Gora Str. in a house built by my grandfather Mois Sabat Beni (1878 – 1908), which was later extended by my uncles when they got rich. I remember that it was a solid three-story house – every brother had his story.

My grandmother was not very tall, and a bit overweight, but very energetic. I remember her with gray hair done in a bun. She was always dressed in black because she was left a widow at 28 years of age. She kept the mourning clothes until her death. She loved reading. She would read fairy tales in French and translate them to me.

My grandmother was a housewife all her life and looked after her children but she was a very educated woman for her times. I do not know the origin or the material well-being of her parents, but most probably they were well-off, educated and progressive [i.e. intelligent] people, because they sent my grandmother to study at a French school, which was quite a progressive decision at the time.

But when she got 13-14 years old, they decided to marry her. My grandmother told me that while she was playing ball on the street one day, her parents called her in to introduce her to her parents-in-law and her future husband – Mois Sabat Beni (1878 – 1908), who was a little bit older than her, probably 2 years.

So, he was around 15-16 years old. She left school. She was in the sixth or seventh grade. They did not have children the first years of their marriage, because they themselves were still children. Then she started giving birth to one child every year – five in all. At 28 years of age she remained a widow, because my grandfather died of hernia in hospital.

Their eldest son is Leon (1897 – 1953). In 1898 my mother Matilda (1898 - 1964) was born, next was Meshulam (1899 – 1970), Zhak (1900 – 1980) and last was Vizurka (1902 – 1975).

After my grandfather died, my mother remained an orphan at ten years of age. She graduated the third primary grade and my grandmother to make ends meet sent the two eldest children to work. My mother started work in a carpet factory for Persian carpets on Pirotska Str. owned by a Bulgarian, whose name I do not know.

Leon became a shop assistant somewhere. My mother was a small child and had very tiny fingers. She was given the task to tie the knots of the carpets. In order to reach the upper part of the carpet, she had to use a chair mounted on a desk. One day Maria Luiza 5, the mother of King Boris III 6 went there to see how carpets were woven.

When she saw my mother, she started asking questions about her. When she was told that my mother had lost her father and has four more siblings, she decided to help the family by making a charity. She asked my mother about her name, but when she realized that my mother was a Jew, she turned her back on her and refused to do help her in any way.

My mother worked there for some time and then she went to some Bulgarian tailoring atelier and learned the craft there. Then she started sewing in the houses of the rich people in the town. My mother was very beautiful and had a lean figure. The son of the owner of one of the houses, in which she sewed, fell in love with her and they engaged.

He was a Jew from a very rich family and she was very poor, but he was sick of tuberculosis and his parents could not protest his choice. The engagement lasted nine months. He gave her as a gift a very beautiful small polished chest, made like a jewel, with small drawers and doors and incrustations. He left the engagement ring in one of the drawers.

Later my father did not want to see that chest, but my mother preserved it. The fiance died of tuberculosis when my mother was 18 years old. I do not know his name. He was rarely spoken of at home, because my father was jealous of him. My mother told me the story of their love when I found the chest she was keeping.

When he died, my mother could not overcome her grief for a long time. In the course of time she managed to earn enough money to live better, because the rich people paid her well. Her brother Leon was also successful and earned enough money to enroll in a trade high school.

During his studies my mother also helped him financially together with their other brother Meshulam, who also started working. When Leon graduated, he became an accountant and he and my mother started supporting Meshulam who also wanted to graduate the same school.

Only the youngest son Zhak did not want to study. He became a goldsmith and was sent to France to learn the craft. When my mother became 24 years old, she met my father through her brother Leon. My father had returned from Paris and his first decision was to call my mother's brother Leon to see him. My father and my mother liked each other very much. My father was also handsome. They fell in love and married without any dowry on my mother's part.

My father Morduhay Yako Levi (1896 – 1972) graduated high school and was mobilized as an infantryman at the front. A year after that he was captured during an attack. He said that it was the most horrible massacre that had taken place during World War I 7.

The soldiers ran with the bayonets forward and butchered each other. The battle happened somewhere in France, but I do not know where. My father was lightly injured and sent to a camp in Marseilles where he stayed until the end of the war from 1915 until 1918.

He learned there to do electrical engineering work and the French language, which he had studied in high school. When he left the camp, he remained to work in France, at first in Marseilles, then in

Paris. He worked as an electrical engineer. He also made some big improvement on the mechanism of the electrical bulbs.

And since he knew no laws and he was not a very practical man – he was very honest and guileless – he took the originals to some electrical company to adopt them. They took his unpatented designs and they started using them without paying him anything. He was very disappointed with them. When he came back to Bulgaria, he brought his designs, but the bulbs had already been introduced. He decided to return to Bulgaria and marry a Bulgarian Jew.

After the marriage my parents left for Paris, because my father liked life there. They spent there 2-3 years, tried to make a living. They lived in an attic flat. My mother worked as a seamstress and my father as an electrical engineer, but they did not have regular incomes. When I was about to be born, they decided to return to Bulgaria.

A month after my birth, I was born on 24th March, on the 25th April the bombing of the St Nedelya Church took place 8. Arrests started, people became anxious. My father's parents who had lost their elder son in the war on the Dobrudzha Front insisted that the young family leave Bulgaria.

They also saw that my father had broader views not typical for the Bulgarian style of life. He was raised with the ideas of the French revolution, he saw no differences between the people – black or white, Jewish or Germans. He did not denounce the marriages between Bulgarians and Jews. He accepted people's mistakes lightly, not with the fanaticism present at the times.

My parents left for Palestine. They traveled by steamboat. I was one month old. Leon, my mother's elder brother, welcomed them there. He had been living there with his wife Simha for two years. She worked as a midwife and I do not remember what he did. My cousin Yafa was born in Palestine.

My uncle and aunt remained a little longer in Palestine but eventually returned, I do not know why, probably because of the harsh climate. My parents, however, did not manage to settle. My mother did not work, because she looked after me and my father could not find work as an engineer, because there was no construction at the time.

They lived in a wooden shed and slept on the floor. My mother said that one night she heard me moaning and got up to check on me. She saw that a snake – a boa – had wrapped itself around me and was suffocating me. She panicked and woke up my father.

A short while after that I got a very severe eye infection, probably because of the dirt and the miserable conditions. They returned to Bulgaria and lived in a small brick house together with my grandparents on Morava Str., present-day 75 Zheko Dimitrov Str.

- **Growing up**

I spent my early childhood there, until 1932-33 when my parents built the new house. Until then we had a garden and a yard around the small house. I remember that the house had no foundations and its floor was directly over the ground, covered with boards. We had electricity.

We had running water and toilet inside. But my parents did not like that because the sink was right next to the toilet. So, he made a toilet outside the house right next to it and we did not use the one inside. In 1932 – 33 we built the new house in the garden of the old one, facing the street. The old

house remained in the yard.

We lived in the big house until our internment 9. After my parents died, I sold it. We had everything in the new house – a toilet and a bathroom. It had three storeys and a big kitchen, a large basement, an attic, a toilet and a bathroom. It was not lavishly furnished – we had beds with iron boards, which I thought were very old-fashioned, a three-door wardrobe, a cupboard in the kitchen, a radio.

In the kitchen we had a stove using coals. After 1936 we bought a new Pernik stove. My father had brought the French culture with him. The whole basement was full of his books from France and he turned the attic into a workshop.

We lived in Iuchbunar 10 where there were a lot of Jews, but our neighbors were mostly Bulgarians. The Jews lived on the land between Klementina Str., Pozitano Str., Tri Ushi Str., and we were on the side, on Morava Str. We got one very well with our neighbors.

When we moved to the new house with my grandmother Niema and my grandfather Yakov in 1933 – 34, we let out the old one so that we could pay our loan. My parents insisted that our tenants were Jews. Our tenants also let out one of the rooms. I remember that we got along very well with them.

The people in those days helped each other very much, probably because they were not so overburdened by possessions as nowadays. My mother sewed at home. The woman in the tenants' family worked in a chocolate factory. I remember that my mother lit stoves with charcoal in order to cook because electricity was expensive.

She took the food for the little girls, warmed it, laid the table for them and the sent them home. If one of the three housewives was sick, the others made soups for all the children. They were very united. My mother taught them housework, what to buy, how to sew, how to keep the house clean etc. After all, she was educated, she knew French and had lived in France.

My mother washed the clothes twice a week. On Friday after we took our baths, she washed the underwear. On Monday we changed our clothes and she washed the bed linen. The next Monday she would wash the bed linen of my grandmother. She changed them every 15 days. All bed sheets were starched and ironed.

They were starched with flour. Even nowadays I starch my sheets. Starching keeps bed linen clean for longer. You put to boil some water and when it is ready you pour in it flour, which had been mixed with cold water before that and salt. You stir until the mixture gets thick like cream. Then you filter it and place the sheets in.

The housewives competed whose house would be the cleanest and the tidiest. In the wardrobe my father's shirts were ironed and tied with a blue ribbon. My mother's underwear was tied with a pink ribbon. My mother did not allow us to put or take things out of the wardrobe, only she did that.

My mother knitted and sewed. She sewed curtains, bed covers and a table cover for the new house. I remember that our bedroom in the house was facing the street. Right in front of the street there was an electric lamp post. While we were sleeping, my mother was sewing using the light of the lamp post in order to save on electricity.

We did not have enough money and lived sparely because we paid back the loan we took for the house until we were interned. My mother would take the old clothes of our relatives, wash them, turn them back to front and saw them again. I was always neatly and cleanly dressed.

As I child one day I went out on the street and one of my friends showed me a gorgeous doll and asked me where my doll was. I did not know what to say because I had never had a doll or another toy and now it turned out that every child on our street had some. I came back home crying.

My mother said, 'Don't cry, I will make you a doll.' She was sewing a black satin apron and she cut from the cloth a doll, sewed it, embroidered eyes, a nose and hair with the sewing machine and gave it to me. The next day I showed my doll to the others. But they all said to me, 'What kind of doll is that?

There are no black dolls. People are white.' And they showed me their dolls. I returned home crying once again because my doll was black. But my mother always had an answer for me. 'Go out and tell that that you are the only one in the neighborhood who has a Negro doll. No one else has such a doll. They will surely envy you.' So did I and later black dolls appeared throughout the whole neighborhood.

My mother read a lot in Bulgarian and French. I remember her reading 'Robinson Crusoe', 'Homeless' by Hector Malot, ‘Huckleberry Finn' [by Marc Twain]. I learned to read and write in Bulgarian and French at an early age before I started school. Later I read books to my sister.

My mother got a very serious kidney infection in 1928-29 before she gave birth to my sister in 1930. She had to have an operation. That made our life very difficult, but I think her brothers helped us. They paid her her share of their father's house and we used that money to pay for the operation.

The people who were poor at that time had special documents and could go to free examinations at Alexandrovska Hospital. But my mother was in University Hospital. My father was a proud man and paid the whole treatment there. Professor Stanishev**,** the best surgeon in Bulgaria at that time took out one of her kidneys.

So, she lived a healthy life until she was 68 years old when she died of liver cancer. I remember her going to change her bandages. My father also took me to see her in the hospital. I was three years old. My mother was lying in a narrow long room with four beds. I had a big bunch of flowers.

The professor came to check on her and told me, 'Hey, girl, where are you going with that bunch of flowers?' 'To see mommy,' I said. 'And who is your mommy?' 'The woman in the corner'. My mother started crying when she saw me. Then she got better.

My sister Dora was born in 1930. In 1934 my paternal grandmother Niema died. In 1936 my sister caught diphtheria. My grandfather Yako was also sick and my mother was looking after him. (He died the same year – 1936.) I took care of my sister. I remember that her throat was aching the whole time, she was diagnosed late. Everyone thought it was a throat infection and they prescribed her some creams to be able to swallow more easily.

I fed her. I would try to feed her two or three spoons, but she did not want any. And since I loved sweets, I would eat the rest. My mother and uncle Zhak got also infected from my sister, but my

father did not. Immunity. My sister died in the infections ward of Alexandrovska Hospital.

My mother was admitted to the hospital at Stochna Station – the District Hospital, in the infections ward. But she made it through the illness and so did my uncle. Later, I went to work in the same ward where my mother was.

When my grandparents died, we started to let out their room too. A woman named Sterka took it. She was the mother of Dragomir Asenov [the nickname of Zhak Nissim Melamed, a Bulgarian writer of Jewish origin born on 15th May 1926 in Mihaylovgrad. Playwright and author of novels, novelettes and short stories.

Died in 1981.]. She was a Serbian Jew, a widow with no relatives in Sofia. She had three children. Dragomir Asenov was in the Jewish orphanage in the beginning. He came back every Saturday and we were friends.

Her elder daughter, his sister, lived with her grandparents in the town of Ferdinand [present day Montana, named Mihaylovgrad during Socialist rule]. Later she also came to Sofia to live with her mother.

When my grandparents were alive, we spoke Ladino 11 at home. My grandmother could not speak a perfect Bulgarian. We observed all traditions. We had a patriarchal way of life. We all had lunch and dinner. On Friday we cooked for Saturday – Fritas di praz – leaks balls, potato balls, a hen with rice.

On Friday we all had a bath, changed our clothes and cleaned the house thoroughly. We did not cook on Saturday. A gypsy woman came to light our fire to warm the food.

My grandparents did not touch fire and did not allow my mother to light it too. [A common ritual during Sabbath. Jews were not allowed to light fire and a person who was not a Jew had to come and do that for them.]

We arranged the table for Friday night and had a formal dinner. That was observed until my grandparents were alive. We had special dishes for Pesach.

After the holiday they were washed and were not used until the next holiday. Before the holiday they were boiled in water with soda so that they would shine

Once a year, in the three weeks before Pesach my mother started the great cleaning. On the holiday the whole family gathered at Mazarovi family – the elder sister of my father. She had a big house with four or five rooms. She arranged a big table for all the relatives. I remember that I would always fall asleep while they were reading the Haggadah.

They put a handkerchief full of matzah and boyos on the back of each child. The handkerchiefs were embroidered with gold threads on the ends. In this way we symbolized the aliyah.

The prayer ended with the words: 'This year we are here, but may we celebrate the next in Jerusalem.' On Pesach we ate paschal foods. We ate boyos instead of bread for eight days.

On Yom Kippur we all did taanit. [A fasting obligatory for the healthy and not – for the sick, the children, the pregnant women and those breastfeeding.] We sniffed a quince with clove and went

to the synagogue... Before [Yom] Kippur the whole family gathered in the evening and had a celebration. When the fasting ended, we always ate soup.

Then we read a prayer and the real dinner started, most often a hen with rice. On Chanukkah the first and the last night my father's kin gathered at home because of my grandparents who lived with us. My grandfather lit the first shammash.

[Editor's note: The interviewee makes a mistake – shammash is the ninth candle of the Chanukkah candlestick, with it one lights all the other eight candles.] All the children were eager to light their own candles. And we competed whose candle would burn out last. That depended on the amount of oil.

We also gathered on Frutas 12. The children received purses with fruit. On Purim we put on masks and went around the houses of the relatives. Every one gave us some stotinkas. After that we counted our money and bought something. We loved that holiday because it was fun.

When my grandparents died, we arranged for them a funeral in accordance with the Jewish ritual. We were in mourning. The relatives, parents, brothers, sisters, the wife and children of the diseased, sat on a black blanket on the ground. The synagogue gave small black round tables, who were comfortable for the people sitting to eat.

The more distant relatives brought food to the mourning people for seven days. It was also typical when arriving from the cemetery, to be served coffee by one of the neighbors. Then the women stayed at home, did not go to the cemetery and prepared the welcome of the men and the rabbi from the cemetery.

They put yellow cheese, white cheese, baked eggs and boiled pasta with black pepper, a little oil, lemon and crackers on the table. The rabbi came to the house to make wings – he cut the shirt and the underwear of the wife as a sign of mourning. The mourning people wore black clothes and observed the mourning for a year.

During the internment and after 9th September [1944] 13, since we lived together with other families, we could not observe that ritual. And although we, the children, observed Jewish rituals different from the Bulgarian ones, we did not feel different from the other children and had Bulgarian friends.

My mother had a natural healing talent. She would visit Bulgarians and Jews who did not feel well, put on cupping glasses on their backs and advised them what to do to get better. She also sewed for Bulgarian families. Very often they invited her at their houses on different occasions.

My Bulgarian classmates also visited me at home to help them with the lessons, because I had excellent marks at school. On the street we also played with the Bulgarian and Jewish children. I remember that a Bulgarian family lived near our house and the girl Violeta was my friend. They had a big mulberry tree and we all gathered, Bulgarians and Jews, to pick the fruit.

The first time I felt I was different from the others, was when King Simeon 14 was born. Then as a sign of royal charity, all students got their marks increased by one point and the best students in the classes received awards. I was a student at junior high school at that time. I had excellent marks in all subjects throughout all my school years.

We were invited to the school gym for the presentation of the awards. The headmaster opened the ceremony and I went to the first row ready to go and take my award. I went to the stage, waiting for the headmaster to say my name. There was some confusion among the teachers and students on the stage, I saw that the headmaster was also embarrassed and then he announced the name of a student whose father was an officer.

He had had two 'fours' [In the Bulgarian system 'two' is the lowest mark and 'six' is the highest.] the previous terms. I was shocked at first but that was only for a moment. I was below the stage, I held my head high and went out the side door. I did not cry. I went home. We lived very close to the school.

When my mother saw me, she hugged me and said, 'What is the matter, why are you crying?' I told her everything. 'But, girl, we are Jews. The award is for the Bulgarian heir to the throne. A Bulgarian child should receive it.' Then I realized I was different from the others.

We kept in touch with the Jewish community. Before I started going to the Bulgarian school, I went to a Jewish nursery for two or three months, but not for long because my parents were afraid that I would have to cross the street alone. That is why the enrolled me in a Bulgarian primary school and not in a Jewish one. In order to get to the Jewish school, I had to cross Klementina Str. on which tram No24 was traveling.

The Bulgarian primary school is where the Jewish school is now. There were only three Jewish girls in my class. My cousin Fani, daughter of uncle Leon came to study with me in the third primary grade in the Bulgarian school. Her mother died, she fell into a severe depression and my mother took her home. We studied together from then on. Our friends were mostly Bulgarians.

From the primary school I remember the 24th May parades 15. Fani and I played in the school orchestra. I played the bass tuba. We also had shows in the end of each school year. We organized exhibitions too. We had classes in embroidering for the girls and making things out of wood for the boys. For example, they made shelves for books or clocks. And we, the girls, sewed aprons, skirts, embroidered nightgowns. There were both girls and boys in the classes in the primary school

On the high holidays we were taken to the St Nikola Church in the park. I did not go to church, but I stayed during the classes in religion because it was interesting for me, although we, the Jews, were exempt from that class. They taught us the Bible. My father never restricted me.

He very seldom said no to me and my mother listened to my father. During the classes they read the prayer, but the making of the sign of the cross was not obligatory and I did not do it. They were like classes in history for me and I learned some things about the New Testament from them.

I have wonderful memories from my teachers. They loved their profession. When we were in the third primary grade one of the teachers took us on an excursion to Pernik [a city in Southwestern Bulgaria, 25 km from Sofia] by train. We went to the mines to see how coal is dug.

He must have had very progressive [here the word is used in the meaning of ‘leftist’] views because he made us learn the poem by [Hristo] Smirnenski 'Quarry Boy' 16. That was the first time I left Sofia. In my junior high school we also went on an excursion to Veliko Tarnovo [a city in North-Central Bulgaria, 195 km from Sofia]. .

I graduated the classic high school where we studied Latin and Greek, because I wanted to become a doctor. I was influenced by the movie on Robert Koch, a German physician who discovered the tuberculosis virus. The name of the movie was also 'Robert Koch'. I remember that his style of work, devotion and detailed investigation of the origin of the illness impressed me deeply.

From high school I remember our literature teacher Sakarova, sister of the great politician, the social-democrat [Nikola] Sakarov 17. She was a lean and tall, neatly-dressed woman. She loved her job and instilled that love in us. We all loved her very much.

She also taught us Greek mythology and Greek language. Had gone to Rome and showed us photos. I was much impressed by Laocoon. [Laocoön warned his fellow Trojans against the wooden horse presented to the city by the Greeks. He told them that it was a military trick by Odysseus.

Soon two large sea serpents came out from the sea where Laocoon and his sons were presenting a sacrifice to Poseidon. They strangled him and his sons. The famous statue was made by the Rhodian sculptors Hegesandros, Athenedoros and Polydoros around 175-150 BC.

Now it is in the Vatican museums]. I was much disturbed by this image, probably because of my mother’s story about the boa. I remember that at the time of the internment my cousin Fani Aronova and I took one of the most beautiful flowerpots and gave it to our teacher as a memory from us. She said nothing. She had progressive [i.e. leftist] ideas.

But one day when I was in the fifth high school grade (I was in the UYW 18 leadership of the high school), we disseminated leaflet throughout the school. She was deputy headmaster and she got very angry and started looking for the people who did it. I did not know if she found out that we did it or not, but she did not catch us.

On Sundays my parents and I went out on a walk to some of the parks and on our way home we went to a confectionery. My father bought us cakes, boza 19, ice cream. When we had no money, my mother would joke with my father in Spanish [Ladino], 'You bought me nothing on the way to the park and back.

Why should we bother going out at all?' My parents loved going to the theater and to the opera. My father told us a lot about the theater performances of Sarah Bernardt [1844-1923, a famous French actress] and a play by Victor Hugo he had seen. I remember that the famous singer Hristina Morfova 20 was singing in the 'Magic Flute' [by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart] and we went to see her.

I was around 8 or 9 years old. It was very interesting but I could not understand the plot. I started asking my father. He told me, 'You will see the 'Magic Flute' many times in your life, but only once will you have the chance to listen to Hristina Morfova. Remember that.' She played the part of the Night Queen and I still remember how she was lowered on the dark stage, all illuminated. She was very impressive, a tall, big woman with a scepter in hand...

We went to the cinema regularly – once a week. We went to the movies starring Shirley Temple and I loved her. She is the prodigy child. Although my parents were not rich and highly educated, they had a broad culture. My mother sang very well. Very often she would hum whole arias while cleaning and sewing.

She had a great memory for music and sang long before we had a radio at home. Her elder brother Leon also had such a memory, and so did Zhak who sang in the Tsadikov's choir 21 in Bulgaria and in a choir in Israel. Leon played the guitar and mandolin. They were musical but did not have the opportunity to develop their talent.

My parents kept in touch with the Jewish community – they paid araha [a kind of a membership fee paid by the members of the community in the synagogue] and were members of the community, although they were atheists and did not go to the synagogue.

My mother was not able to take part in the women's organizations of the Jewish community, because she had much work to do and had no time. My father was not a member of any organizations or parties. He was against party membership because he thought that the aligning with one party or point of view led to sectarianism.

He had an open mind. He read a lot of different newspapers and compared information. Most often he bought 'Utro' [Morning] 22, 'Mir' [Peace] [newspaper published by the People's Party from 1894 until 1944. Became a daily in 1906. In 1920 became a newspaper of the People's Progressive Party. In 1923 it was published by 'Mir' joint-stock company], etc.

There were operettas in the town performed on the stage of Odeon Theater at the place of the Musical Theater. We did not go there very often and neither did we go much to the theater. Once we went on an excursion by cart. We were like the gypsies – the whole cart was full of children, relatives, baskets of food.

I think we were heading for Vladaya but I am not sure. I was an obedient child, but at that afternoon, when the horses were released to rest, I decided to mount one of them, he was startled and hurled me to the ground. I was hurt very badly. I remember that everyone panicked and my parents brought me back to town.

But there were no serious consequences from the fall. We went on excursions and picnics very rarely. During the holidays we stayed in Sofia. My mother made me help her with the housework. She had more clothes to sew during the Easter and the Christmas holidays and I had to help her.

I often had to sew the hems and I hated that. But my mother would say, 'You are a girl, you should know how to sew a blouse or a skirt.' And I would tell her, 'I will not become like you, sewing all day on the machine.' I never wanted to learn how to sew. When I finished junior high school with excellent marks, I wanted very much to continue studying although my mother thought it was unnecessary for a girl.

My father intervened. 'She will go to high school and that's it!' So, they enrolled me in the Second Girls' High School, which was private. It was in a number of buildings on Dunav Str. and Iskar Str. The fourth and fifth grade studied on Dunav Str.

A short distance along the street was another house where the sixth graders studied and on Iskar Str in a yellow building studied the higher grades. There were four Jewish girls in our class – Fani Avramova, Linka Natan, Beti Ashkenazi and I.

There were three tramlines in Sofia. Tram No4 passed along Klementina Str. and tram No3 passeed along Pirotska Str. Tram No5 went to Knyazhevo. The other means of transport were carts and

carriages. The people living in a house next to ours had a carriage. One of the brothers who lived there was a cabman.

He would go to the station to wait for passengers. When he came back home from work we, the children, would wait for him on Opalchenska Str. and he would take us all home on the carriage. It was a lot of fun.

Another memory of the way Sofia looked then is from a later period when I was already a member of the UYW. I remember that the winter of 1941 was very cold. The temperatures in Sofia fell as low as -25, -26 degrees C. My friends from the UYW group and I decided that we should by all means buy tickets for 'Carmen' starring Ilka Popova 23.

At four o'clock in the morning and -25 degrees I queued in front of the National Theater in order to buy tickets when the booking office opened at eight o'clock. I was so cold that had no strength to get back home. My aunt Reyna, my father's sister, lived somewhere close and I visited her to get warm. My aunt put my feet in hot water and made me tea. I remember going back along Pirotska Str. and seeing stoves with charcoal placed outside so that people would warm themselves.

I became a UYW when I was 16 years old and it happened through the Jewish chitalishte 24. When I learned how to read, my father took me to the chitalishte because he was not able to buy me books. He showed me how to select my books. The first chitalishte was 'Hristo Botev', next to my school so I did not have to cross the street.

When I was second or third primary grade I became a member of another chitalishte – 'Emil Shekerdzhiiski' 25**.** It was on Klementina Str. between Sredna Gora Str. and Opalchenska Str. It had a number of names before 9th September – 'Aura', 'Shalom Aleyhem' 26, 'Bialik' 27 It also had a central office on Lege Str.

The librarian there was the famous Jewish writer Haim Benatov [writer, lived in Iuchbunar, author of the novel 'This long road...'] The librarian in the office on Klementina Str. was Elena Kehayova, a communist. She used her job in the chitalishte to introduce us to the UYW movement and its ideology.

The first UYW group was at the Jewish chitalishte. At first there were groups of sympathizers at the chitalishte. They were UYW groups. We became members of some of the groups as sympathizers. The first years there were educational groups.

We had meetings before which everyone had to read a book. That is why, I say that UYW educated us not only politically but also culturally. We read Erenburg, Gladkov, Pushkin, Lermontov 28, Tolstoy 29. We discussed their books at our meetings. We had literary debates in the form of trials.

For example, we debated whether it was right for Martin Eden to commit suicide [a character of the novel 'Martin Eden' by Jack London]. We also had discussions about love. Some of the members defended the position of Elena Kolontay [the first woman diplomat of Soviet Russia] on free love, the others were against. Most of us, the girls, were against.

- **During the war**

The anti-Semitic attitudes started around the 1940s. I remember the Legionaries [Bulgarian Legions] 30 and Branniks 31 on Klementina and Pirotska Str. and how they attacked the Jewish shops there [The Night of Broken Glass] 32

[Editor's Note: the interviewee is mistaken – no Branniks took part in that incident because their organization was founded in December 1940]. Then they wanted to attack the houses but the UYW organization consisting of both Bulgarians and Jews put up a resistance. We even had help from the Bulgarians from other quarters of the town.

While I was studying in the high school, I felt the negative attitude of the Legionaries and Brannik girls among us. They spoke loud enough for us to hear them and disseminated rumors that the Jews were the reasons for the troubles because they were rich and ruled the nation and their riches were accumulated in dishonest ways.

Their anti-Semitism was especially strong at Easter. Then they directly attacked us with the words that the Jews drank blood and if a child went missing, we were the first to be blamed to have killed him or her to drink the blood. We, the UYW members, gathered and decided to resist the Branniks by explaining the truth to the Bulgarians who were not against us yet. We used every opportunity to talk to them.

Then all Jewish property was confiscated 33. They started with the manufacturing plants. Then they closed the shops, the factories, the ateliers. My father also had a shop. At first, they forced him to take a Bulgarian partner, then they made him transfer everything to the Bulgarian.

They wanted to leave the Jews without any means of earning money. We were only allowed to practice some craft from our homes, like sewing or mending shoes. The Bulgarians were banned to employ Jews and the Jews were banned to take Bulgarian girls as maids. Those were difficult and hungry years for our family because we were still paying our loan.

My mother kept on sewing. Only the three of us were at home and my father continued to work as an electrical engineer going to the homes of his clients. He repaired stoves, but he did not have much work because there were not many electrical appliances then. He could not make the electrical wirings of new houses – that was not allowed.

Then we had to declare all our property. [In 1941 the Law for Protection of the Nation 34 was adopted and included a variety of documents on the real estate and movable property owned by Jews, including bank savings. Jews had to declare all their possessions within a month of the adoption of the law.]

No one was allowed to hide anything. Using these declarations, they came and confiscated what they wanted. We were left our new house, but they took the rent we received from the old one. They took our radio sets and gave all Jews pink ID cards. We were renamed during the Holocaust. My name Stela was changed to Ester.

My mother's name Matilda was changed to Mazal, but my father's name Morduhay was not changed 35. Then followed the curfew and the badges [yellow stars] 36. The Jews were allowed to live in the Jewish quarter only – between Hristo Botev Str., Klementina Str. and the river. A kind of a ghetto was forming there.

When the orders for internment arrived, we were given only 3 or 4 days before the day of leaving. Pirotska Str. turned into a kind of an open market. The people took out their belongings and sold them on the street. They needed money and they were not allowed to take more than 30 kg with them.

Villagers on carts arrived from the nearby villages and bought a lot of things at extremely low price. I remember that my mother took out the woolen mattresses for sale. I sold one of them for 5 levs – the price of one loaf of bread. My mother was sorry at first that I had sold it for so little but then dismissed it with the words, 'We lost everything, so a mattress is not such a big deal'.

Rumors were circulating that we would be sent to Germany to work there. My mother supposed that since I was young, I would be sent to work somewhere without them. I remember that we had some gold family jewels. She divided them into three parts – for her, for my father and for me and sewed them into the hems of our clothes.

In my winter coat she sewed a gold bracelet, a pair of earrings and a ring and told me, 'Sell these things only if you have nothing to eat.' Those jewels were not found during the arrests and searches later on and I had completely forgotten about them. But when I got home on 9th September, all my clothes had to be boiled in a big cauldron. My mother remembered the jewels and took them out.

We also had silver coins with the image of Boris I from 1942. My father also had a number of them. He took out the threshold board between the kitchen and the room, dug a hole in the ground and buried them in a metal box. After 9th September we found them there and by selling them we survived the first days after the Holocaust.

My parents did not know about my illegal UYW activity. We had a special way of distributing the leaflets so that the police would not find us. Usually we went out in couples – a boy and a girl. The girl would put her back against the wall and glue the poster on the wall behind her. Meanwhile the boy would lean above her as if they are kissing.

One evening my father followed me and saw me with a boy, while gluing a poster. The boy was leaning over me but we were not kissing. My father did not realize what we were doing so we must have been really good. When I went home, he beat me hard and shouted at me, 'Are you going to be a prostitute?' I did not explain to him the truth because that was our secret. My father gradually accepted the new ideas, saw what was happening to the Jews and to us. One event played a major part in his change of beliefs.

It was 1943 on the eve of 24th May [1943] 37. We had already received orders for the internment and a rumor spread among all Jews that Rabbi Daniel 38 would speak in the synagogue the next day. All Jews went to the synagogue to hear his words. According to police reports there were around 10 000 people in the synagogue.

The book 'We, the saved ones' by Haim Oliver [1918 – 1985, a writer, participant in the anti-fascist resistance] includes all police reports on that day. There was also an order to all UYW members to go and participate in the 24th May march. I went with my father who wanted to hear the words of Rabbi Daniel and to protect me.

Not because he supported our ideas. The whole Osogovo Street was full of people. So was the Jewish school because the school and the synagogue had the same yard. [Editor's Note: the interviewee is talking about the small synagogue, not the central one].

Rabbi Daniel sent a prayer to God to help us and then went out of the synagogue. We, the people in the synagogue, heard nothing, but then we were told that we should go on a protest march towards the castle because it was 24th May and everyone was supposed to be in the streets.

The students' march organized by the Bulgarian government started from the [St Kliment Ohridski] University 39. Usually the king watched the parade either in front of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral 40 or on the balcony of the Military Club 41. We were told that we would protest in front of the king against the internment of the Jews.

During all big national holidays the houses were decorated with national flags. The writer Dragomir Asenov and another boy took a flag, which was hanging from the fence of a house and led us marching. Initially we were a lot of people. On the corners of Osogovo and Klementina Streets the elder people would stop us with the words, 'What are you doing? You are getting us killed!'

But we marched forward and the rabbi also came with us. But when we started the protest demonstration not all the people came. Mostly the UYW members joined us – we were probably around 500 – 1000 people. Somewhere before Hristo Botev Blvd the police had found out about the protest and stopped us with mounted police.

The whole neighborhood was blocked for an hour. The police started beating everyone on their way. At that time I had two long braids. I wanted to fight the police with my bare hands. I was that stupid. Then I remember my father taking hold of me by the braids and taking me home.

With the whole neighborhood blocked, everyone out in the street was arrested and taken to the yard of the Fotinov school. The police started going from house to house and arresting every Jew they saw. The arrested women were released but the arrested men spent three days in the schoolyard. We went around the yard trying to give them something to eat but we were not allowed.

The police probably checked everyone in the records and all Jews whose relatives were political prisoners were sent to the Somovit camp 42 and the Kailuka camp 43.

The rest were released with the order to keep the deadlines in the internment orders. That was how the 24th May ended. The protest was very brave. Such a protest in the heart of the fascist power! Of course it cannot be compared to the Warsaw ghetto, but it was a great example of the Jewish resistance.

At the end of May and the beginning of June 1943 we were interned to the Jewish neighborhood in Gorna Dzhumaya [present-day Blagoevgrad, in South-West Bulgaria, 76 km from Sofia]. There were Turks, Macedonians and Bulgarians living in that town and they were all very tolerant and treated us well. I do not remember any anti-Semitic attitudes.

We even lived better than we did in Sofia where the Legionnaires raided the Jewish streets. We were not allowed to enter the Bulgarian part of Gorna Dzhumaya. We were forbidden to rent Bulgarian houses. In fact, we lived in some kind of a ghetto.

Our life during the internment was very difficult. We shared a house with Angel Vagenstein 44 who had been mobilized before the internment and worked in the construction of the railway Blagoevgrad – Simitli. At that time he had graduated a technical secondary school.

His family was also interned to Gorna Dzhumaya and lived in his room – his parents and his brother. The other room was occupied by another family. We did not have a room and lived in the corridor. There was a curtain above the beds made by the torn rucksacks so that we would have some privacy from the people passing through the corridor.

We were starving. There were some shops from which we could shop at certain times. We had rations but the Jewish rations were not the same as the Bulgarian ones. We mostly used the black market. The villagers from nearby sold us their produce. The first two months in Gorna Dzhumaya were calmer. But in June and August when the partisan movement gathered strength, the district police came and the situation got worse.

We were not allowed to work, but my father, who was an electrical technician, was hired by a communist who had an electrical workshop. His name was Tutev. He paid him the same salary he gave to the other employees and that helped us live a little bit better. That also helped my parents pay the lawyers and the expenses of my trial when I was arrested. We also used our savings and sold the jewelery and clothes. There was a curfew.

I was in the 12th grade and I was allowed to graduate high school in Gorna Dzhumaya. My father asked the authorities for permission and the regime was more liberal in its first months. Probably I was the only Jew who managed to graduate.

I enrolled in September. By the end of September I had to go underground. By the end of December all high schools were closed. After 9th September 1944 the school in Gorna Dzhumaya issued me a document that I had graduated their high school.

Despite the bad conditions we got our lives a bit organized. I immediately became a member of the UYW movement in Gorna Dzhumaya. Jacky [Angel] was in charge of the Jewish group and when he became a partisan and left in August 1943 I replaced him. We did a variety of activities there.

Every evening before the curfew, which started at 6 pm we gathered the young people at the synagogue and held lectures on popular topics. We, the communists used these lectures to familiarize them with our ideas. Each Jew, who had knowledge on a topic, could present a lecture. We finished 15 minutes before eight o'clock and since the neighborhood was small we had enough time to go back home before the curfew.

In the summer we organized the children – we divided them into three groups, each of which had a teacher, one of whom was I. We learned songs, folk dances and games. We took them out of the town near the large Bistritsa river which passed near the town.

When I went underground at the end of September I was replaced by Dr Reni Ashkenazi. Then they formed a Jewish school. The children were divided into classes according to their age and the Jews who had graduated high school taught them.

There was no entertainment in the town but the young people started gathering. We sang, danced like all young people. The elderly women gathered on kitas. I do not know what this word means,

but what they did was the following. Four or five women gathered in a yard and knitted, sewed, talked and read newspapers.

We, the UYW members, also had a combat group. Our task was to disrupt the telephone lines of the German troops there. We prepared for attacks but we did not do them. We were taught how to fire a weapon or set off a bomb. We provided food to the partisans.

We collected food and clothes. One of the engineers who lived in the house made a radio set and we gave it to the partisans. We helped them in every way we could. The villagers also helped us a lot.

Our demise was caused by two factors. At the end of November 1943 in accordance with a decision of the Gorna Dzhumaya partisan team, Jacky, Mois Kalev and Liko Seliktar came to Sofia with fake IDs in order to rob a rich Armenian family and buy weapons for the team with the money.

The decision was taken by the team but when it reached the district committee of the party, they rejected it as unfair. But Jacky and the others had already left. A member of the leadership of the team met me and asked me to tell Jacky that the burglary was off and they had to come back immediately.

The meeting was on Sunday evening. I talked with Jacky's parents and we started looking for ways to reach him but could not think of anything because Jews were forbidden to travel. While we were wondering what to do, they did the burglary. Until recently there was a memory plate of Mois Kalev the Mouse there. He died during the action.

The other participants were Niko Seliktar, Ana Valnarova – guarding in front of the building, Jacky and Mois Kalev who went upstairs and broke into the flat. They demanded the money from the family. The daughter who was pregnant faked a fainting and Mois Kalev went to bring water from the kitchen.

Jacky remained with the family but suddenly the daughter jumped and started shouting from the window for help. At the same time a sergeant and a policeman were passing in front of the house. They ran towards it. Jacky and Mouse started running down. All partisans ran in different directions.

Jacky managed to escape but Mouse was surrounded and killed himself in order to escape arrest. Jacky went underground and stopped traveling. Yet, he was found and arrested at the end of 1943 because there were not many people in Sofia after the bombings and internments. That was one of the reasons for our demise.

At the same time there was another failure in our team. During some action in which Kiril Gramenov, Pesho Petrov and Nikola Parapunov, secretary of the district committee of the party [Bulgarian Communist Party up to 1990] 45, took part, there was a shooting, in which Nikola Parapunov was killed, Kiril Gramenov was wounded but managed to escape and Pesho was arrested. He gave the names of the leadership of the city committee of UYW in Gorna Dzhumaya and I was a member of that.

After those two events the secretary of the city committee of UYW was arrested along with a lot of people with whom I worked. The committee decided that I should go underground so that I would not be arrested. I started hiding in the houses. All people from the Jewish neighborhood sheltered

me.

My illegal name was Dunya, because I had nice and long braids then. That was the name of the character in the movie 'Station Supervisor' based on Pushkin's novelette. They said I looked like the actress who played that part. Angel Vagenstein made up that nickname. And since no one looked for me for a long time, the committee decided that I was not betrayed and ordered me to come back and start school.

I was arrested on my first day at school. The interrogations were in the district police station in Gorna Dzhumaya. Fortunately, a lot of facts were already known before I was arrested. A policeman, whose name was Nedyalkov, always came to take us to the interrogation rooms and told us what was already discovered so that we would say it again and avoid torture. After 9th September he was arrested, but we stood up for him and he was not only released, but he was taken back to work.

After the torture, we were taken to the military barracks. The conditions there were very bad. I spent three months in detention in Gorna Dzhumaya and at the barracks. We were three girls – Slavka Kordova, Dobra Andonova and I. Besides the tortures, we were also subjected to humiliation.

There were only young men at the barracks. We had guards of course, who did not admit the boys to go near us, but they were also men. When they let us to go to the toilet in the mornings and in the evenings, we passed by the prisoners. All of them teased us and said terrible things. The walls of the men's toilets were low and the prisoners and the guards tried to peek it.

Tutev, my father's boss, was sent to our barracks to do some work and he told my father to come and see me. So, my father took out the yellow star, came to the prison and found us. He passed along our windows. I saw him and started crying. I felt so relieved. He did not dare stand in front of the windows but passed beside them as often as he could. I cried, he cried...

At the end of January and the beginning of February [1944] we were sent to 5th precinct in Sofia. It was hell. They searched us in the most humiliating way. We had to strip naked and they started searching our clothes. We stood there, naked and dirty because we had not had a shower in a very long time.

My last shower was on the 13th December and my next – on 9th September. We were put in a dark cell where the only light came from the cracks in the door. There were such big cockroaches that I have been afraid of them ever since. They were scuttling on the floor day and night... Hell! My parents did not know where I was.

They found out that we were no longer in Gorna Dzhumaya. While we were at the barracks, they regularly brought us food. My mother washed my clothes and sent them back. But when we came to Sofia no one knew where we were. There was one week when they gave us nothing to eat.

Suddenly the door was opened and a policeman came out. 'Hey, chifut [46], come and clean the stairs. Are you going to sleep all day?' He brought me to the kitchen. He made me fill a bucket with water and wash the stairs.

When I came back, he stood guard around me and when some policeman passed nearby, he started swearing at me. He brought me back to the kitchen to return the bucket. Meanwhile, the women in the kitchen had prepared some bread and yellow cheese for me. 'Eat, girl, eat!' But there was such a friendship and solidarity between me and the other girls that I said that the other girls were starving too.

So, the two women cut the bread in two and filled it with cheese, yellow cheese and butter. That was in the winter and I was wearing the winter coat in which my mother had sewn the gold rings, which no one managed to find. I hid the bread beneath it and the policeman took me back to the cell. After 9th September I did not manage to find these people. That bread, which we divided among ourselves in the cell saved us from death from starvation.

From the 5th Precinct we were sent to the Sofia prison. That happened on 22nd March. I remember that date because it was my birthday – the first day of spring. It was not so scary in the prison because there were no more tortures.

There was a female supervisor Konyarova, a die-hard fascist, who hated the Jews and sent me to the lock up room for the smallest things.

We were led out on a walk for an hour in the morning and one or two hours in the afternoon. We had no hot water and we used the beans soup to wash our hair. After all, it was mostly water with two or three beans.

The UYW organization was also present in the prison. One of our tasks was to bring to our side the criminal prisoners so that they would help us in contacting the outside world.

They were on a more lax regime – they were allowed to write letters and receive food from the outside. On afternoon I was sitting and singing a Katyusha song 'Apples and pears are blossoming', a famous Russian song. [The song is a symbol of the Russian army during WWII, because it is related to the Katyusha weapon and the turnover of the war after it started to be used.]

Then, a girl, about 19 or 20 years old, came to me. Her name was Katya. She had a one-year sentence because when she was a maid, she stole the satin corset of her mistress. She came to me and asked me, 'What are you singing about me?' She learned the song and started singing it from morning until night.

The prison was echoing from her strong voice and we all nicknamed her 'the cock-a-doodle-doo'. I also taught Katya a poem by my favorite poet Nikola Vaptsarov – 'A song of man' 47. She would go around by herself and recite the famous verse, 'But there in the prison he met honest people, became a real man!' She was very fond of me.

We decided to organize a musical and literature performance on the occasion of 1st May [Labor Day] with songs and dances. We tried to keep our spirits up in prison. After the walk, we went back to our cells and without being noticed by the supervisor we gathered in one of the cells...

I had to play a dance accompanied by the rhythm of two clacking spoons. Konyarova found us, started shouting and did not allow anyone to go out of their cells for one week. And since she found me dancing, Sheli, another Jewish girl, singing and another girl clacking the spoons, she sent us to the lock up room.

It was dark and empty there with a bucket for a toilet. Three days passed on without any food or water. Konyarova lived in the prison and used Katya, 'the cock-a-doodle-doo', as a maid – to clean her room and wash her clothes.

While cleaning, she managed to steal the keys for the lock up room. She grabbed some food sent for the prisoners by their relatives and some clothes. She came downstairs, opened the door and threw everything in. But at that moment the alarm went off. Nobody knew that the lock up room was connected to it.

Konyarova came downstairs and saw Katya locking the door. She beat her in front of our eyes and locked her in the next lock up room. She opened our door and took everything back. In the fuss one of my friends managed to open the bucket and put the bread inside. After Konyarova left, she took it out and said, 'See, this piece on the top has not touched the bucket.' And since we had not eaten for four days, we ate it all. In fact, that saved our lives.

Around 5th May the great bombings took place in Sofia. The fences of the men's prison were taken down and we all we sent to the Pleven prison.

The trial was at the end of August. It took place in Gorna Dzhumaya. When we were taken to the courthouse, we passed along the streets – the men were wearing chains and the women – handcuffs. The people in the streets greeted us and threw flowers at us. The end of the war was near.

My lawyer was Cheshmedzhiev. I remember that he said, 'There is no point in sentencing them. In 20 days you will be forced to sit in their place.' When I came back to the prison, I brought a lot of illegal materials – newspapers, magazines.

Since I was underage, I was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for anti-fascist activities. There were two more Jewish girls in the Pleven prison – Sheli and Zizi, a schoolgirl from Pleven.

We, eleven or twelve women were locked in a single-person cell – two meters wide and 3.5 meters long. There were plank-beds in the women's prison and nothing at all in the men's one. In the evening we laid down, sideways, packed like sardines because there was not enough room to lie on our backs.

First, we lay on our left side, and then we all would turn on the right. There I caught tuberculosis because there was a sick woman in our cell. On the eve of the 7th September a Jewish boy who had been sentenced to death was taken out by the guards.

They said they would just interrogate him in order to avoid protests, but they never brought him back. Meanwhile, the people outside heard that something was happening in the prison. The Legionaries and the Branniks surrounded the prison to prevent the Russian army to storm it before the execution.

Our comrades in Pleven heard about that and made a blockade to protect us. They were on watch day and night. On 7th September [Konstantin] Muraviev 48 issued an order for the release of all political prisoners. But the director of our prison refused to let us go.

Then all of our comrades started to force the doors open. It looked like the storming of the Bastille. They brought some railway tracks and started smashing the doors. They opened them, came in and released us. Meanwhile the director notified the police and the doors had been forced open.

We were all coming out of the prison. At first the male prisoners forgot about the women and then came back to unlock us. Meanwhile, we caught Konyarova and took her keys. We rushed outside. Zizi, who had been released two months before, because she was acquitted at the trial, had mounted a door and when she saw me, she rushed to hug me.

We were chased by mounted police and we were being shot at. Some of us ran towards the grapevines. I went to my aunt's place with the three girls and four or five people from the prison. We went to the house of Meshulam Beni, a brother of my mother who lived with his wife Lora, his daughter Fani and my grandmother Yafa.

My cousin Fani Avramova was outside with the protesters. She took us there. Meshulam had been interned to Pleven and brought us food in the prison. Yet, the police managed to take a lot of people back to prison. On 7th September one of our saviors was killed in the shooting.

The next day Muraviev's order for the release of the political prisoners came and they had to obey. In the evening we took a train to Gorna Dzhumaya. On 9th September I heard the proclamation of the Fatherland Front [49] at 6 am at the station in Sofia. We traveled all night together with the political prisoners in a horse wagon on the eve of 9th September. We sang all the songs we knew – 'We will give hundreds of victims, but we will beat fascism!'

I arrived in Gorna Dzhumaya in the afternoon on 9th September. We were welcomed with a ceremony at the station. There was a field, two kilometers and a half between the station and the center. Someone had told my mother that we were back and she met me in the middle of the field. It was such a meeting, such hugs... My mother was crying with happiness that I was alive, I was hugging her and telling her, 'Walk mother, now is not the time for sentimentality!'

After 10-15 days we returned to Sofia. Fortunately, our house was not destroyed by the bombings but had been completely emptied. My mother found some sacks, filled them with hay and we used them as beds. Months after that we received aid from the Joint Foundation [50].

The authorities from Gorna Dzhumaya gave me a document certifying that I had graduated high school there. 2nd Girls' High School also gave me such a document. I enrolled to study medicine because that was my dream. I also started work in the Commissariat on supplies. I issued ration books and clothes.

- **After the war**

In April 1945, just before the end of the war, together with a UYW group I traveled to the front to bring presents to our soldiers. I was in Hungary when Berlin fell. Let me tell you about the fate of the 'cock-a-doodle-doo', who became our friend in prison.

All criminal prisoners were also released with us, but she had already served her sentence. She decided to go to the front line as a volunteer – a medical orderly. In Pecs on my way to the front lines, I was hugged from behind and it turned out that she was there working in the hospital. We

were very happy to see each other.

We had half an hour and then I had to leave with the group. I promised to see her again on my way back. I returned a couple of days after that. I did not find her there. The commander of the base told me that she had been sent to accompany a group of wounded soldiers.

On their way one of the wounded wanted water and they stopped in a forest near a stream. She went down to fetch some water but stepped on a mine and died instantly. When the commander heard that I was her friend, he gave me a packet of her belongings. Among them I found the poem by Vaptsarov which I had given her in the prison.

I stayed in Pecs to help in the hospital until the end of the war. I remember that I had very big braids then and one of the soldiers said to one of the Hungarian girls, 'See, what beautiful hair our Bulgarian girls have!'

After 9th September I worked and studied. It was possible the first two years because the teachers did not check if everyone was present at the lectures. We were 2 000 people, gathering in the Moderen Teatar [Modern Theater] 51 in the hall of the Student's Home – its stage. Then I started work in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I was head of the human resources department until 1951. When my studies at the university got harder, I had to stop working.

My father's shop had been confiscated. During the Law for Protection of the Nation we had to hand it to a Bulgarian. Some of the Bulgarians were very honest people and gave the shops back to their owners. But my father received nothing back and he continued to work as an electrical technician.

Our life was very hard. Our way of life during the internment was very miserable, but it did not get better after 9th September because the whole town was destroyed. The houses which survived the bombings were occupied by two or three families.

Our house was not big. One part was let out even before 9th September but there was no forced accommodation in it. All members of our family came back to Sofia. Everyone was alive. The house of my other grandmother was also preserved. It can be seen even nowadays.

The goldsmith, my uncle Zhak, started working again, but he had no gold, so he repaired jewelery. Soon after that the youngest brother of my mother left with his family for Israel. Meshulam and the two elder brothers remained here. Vizurka also left. So did my aunt. [Mass Aliyah] 52

I never considered leaving for Israel because I was convinced that now was the time to realize my ideals. My husband was even more convinced that we should remain here. He was against the aliyahs. He believed that Bulgaria was our home and we should stay here and realize our dreams and live freely. But a lot of the Jews, especially the richer ones and those, whose shops, factories and workshops were once again being nationalized in 1947, left for Israel. The others, their relatives and friends followed and it was like a chain reaction.

My husband Yosif Hananel Astrukov (1912 – 1996) and I were in the same prison – the Pleven one but we had not met there. He had spent two years underground. He had been district secretary of the UYW in Sofia. He had become a member of UYW in 1936 and he had been much higher in the organization hierarchy than me. His illegal name was Herz, made up by his friends. Herz means heart in German, because he was the soul of every company.

He was an orphan. His father had died when he was a child and he lived with his mother until he was 7 years old when she decided to marry a widower from Vidin and left him with her parents for a year until she got used to her new family and the two children of her new husband. She gave birth to one more child. (Later she left for Israel.)

But the parents and the sister of my father-in-law filed a lawsuit against the relatives of my mother-in-law in a Jewish court because they wanted their grandson back. According to a Jewish law they had to have their grandson. There was a Jewish court, which solved such problems in accordance with the Jewish laws, which were valid until the law. If the mother was to marry a second time, the child was given to the parents of the first husband.

So, my husband was raised by his father's family – three aunts and three uncles. [Probably this is the Spiritual Court at the Jewish municipality. Jewish marriages have to observe the Jewish marital law.

The books by Yosif Karo 'Shulhan Aruh' and 'Even Aezer' focus ont he following major moments – engagement, education, marriage, cancellation of the marriage, divorce, halitza (cancellation of the marriage due to lack of children). A woman's second marriage and its privileges are also subject to Jewish marital law. There was no civil marital institution in Bulgaria before WWII.].

They lived in a house on Strandzha Str. Now the National Statistical Institute is in its place. My husband finished high school, started studying law but he was expelled from the university for his participation in an attack against Tsankov. [Prof. Alexander Tsalov Tsankov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria from 1923 to 1925, terror activities were typical for his governance.]

His relatives collected money and sent him to study in Belgrade. When the Germans came there, he left for Prague. He finished his first and second year of studying there and when the Germans came, he went back to Belgrade. We stayed there five or six months but when the persecutions started again, he returned to Sofia.

He immediately joined the resistance, but in 1941 he went underground. He was underground from 22nd June until 26 November. In 1942 he was caught because he was betrayed. He was sentenced to death. But the jury was bribed – for 250 000 levs his sentence was changed to life imprisonment. In prison he shared a cell with Traicho Kostov 53, whom he much respected. Although Traicho Kostov fell into disgrace later on, he always spoke in his favor.

Until he was imprisoned, my husband had finished three years of medical studies. After 9th September when I started studying I had no textbooks and remembered him. I had seen him on UYW conferences. I remember that he was a delegate at one of them and I was not. In one of the breaks he saw me and told me, 'You see, we have badges and you don't.'

So, he took off his badge and gave it to me. I decided to visit him and ask him if he could help me find textbooks. It turned out that he had none, but he asked me out. So, we started going out, but we did not spend much time together because we were very busy. Those were tumultuous times. He was assistant commander of the armored brigade.

On 22-23rd September he took me to a formal meeting on the occasion of the September rebellion 54. He was suddenly called away because of a fire. It was impossible for me to go home – there was a curfew and he could go around the town because he was an officer. He left me at the place

of a friend of his from prison.

They put out fires all the night and I fell asleep. In the morning he brought me back home. My mother was at the window, pale and very worried because the first days after 9th September were dangerous – a lot of fascist shot at us from hideouts.

They knew that only communist and partisans working for the Ministry of Interior could move around the town during the curfew. We did not see my mother and while we were saying goodbye and lifted my head and saw her. My parents did not know that I was in a relationship with him.

My husband came in and told my mother that his intentions towards me were serious and apologized for the late arrival. 'I have nothing against your relationship,' my mother said, 'but, please, don't do the same thing again, I was going mad from worry.'

So, that week he told me, 'We can't go on like this, let's get married!' He came to ask for my hand and next Saturday we got engaged. His relatives – uncles and aunts – came to meet my parents and we married on 13th October 1944. We were among the first in Bulgaria who married only before the registrar.

Before us there were only religious weddings. We did not have a ritual in the synagogue. We went to live with his family on Strandzha Str. As a bachelor he had lived in one of the rooms with one of his aunts.

Another aunt lived in the next room with her husband and the mother-in-law of the married aunt lived in the third room. When we got married, the aunt who slept in his room went to live with her sister and we occupied his little room with a balcony. We lived there for two years.

On 6th July 1946 I gave birth to the twins Evgeni and Emil.

In any case Evgeni and Emil learned some Ladino from the aunt who raised them. She knew Bulgarian but spoke mostly Ladino at home. My husband and I were very busy. We were both studying. His uncle and aunt opened a small shop on Dondukov Str. and started selling things they had collected even before 9th September.

Since they had no children, they helped us financially so that my husband would finish his education. His other aunt, tanti Ora, also helped us raise our kids. She had remained a widow at 28 years of age. My parents also started work – my mother as a seamstress and my father as an electrical technician. We lived in great misery and poverty.

There was nothing to buy in the shops and we had no money to shop from the black market. I caught tuberculosis in the prison and after I gave birth and breastfed my two kids, I was very exhausted. When they became one year old, the illness struck me down. I went to the sanatorium in Svoge and I had to stop breastfeeding them.

As a result of that, they had a terrible diarrhea... I spent three months in Svoge, I recovered and came back. After that we were given a flat on Dondukov Str. We lived there a year and a half and we changed that flat with one on Ekzarh Yosif Str, which was owned by the famous dermatologist Dr Shailov [Jewish Hospital in Sofia] 55.

He made a private medical office on Dondukov Blvd because it was in the center. Dr Shailov invited my husband to work in the Jewish hospital when he graduated. I was still studying.

The party obliged him to become assistant commander in the army for the second time. The first time he occupied that post was immediately after 9th September during the war but the Defense Minister Damyan Velchev banished all Jews from the army and my husband continued his studies.

The second time he served in the army, he worked with the son of Vassil Kolarov 56. At some meeting my husband ordered to place portraits of Georgi Dimitrov first, Traicho Kostov, second and Vassil Kolarov, third on the walls. Petar Kolarov 57 was furious and found out that my husband had shared a cell with Traicho Kostov.

So, he accused him of being a 'kostovist'. He was expelled and was left unemployed. We were starving again. My husband had pure communist ideals. He never used his position to his advantage. When he was banished from the army for the second time, he received six salaries and as compensation we bought this flat on Lyuben Karavelov Str. In 1951 I graduated medicine with the second highest marks.

I was a mother of two children at that time. That was why I was not sent to work in the countryside and had the right to choose my workplace. I started work in the infections department of the district hospital in Sofia. My first specialty is in gastroenterology and my second, which I finished in 1956 – in infectious diseases. I retired there as chief of the department.

When Traicho Kostov was rehabilitated, so was my husband. He was elected a deputy. He became a chairman of the Jewish cultural and educational organization in 1961. For about 30 years we lived for the first time a calm and financially stable life. My children knew that they were Jews and I have never denied being a Jew.

Even before the internment when some of the Jews changed religion in order to be saved from fascists because the Holy Synod had secured that the Jews who changed their faith would be spared from the Law for Protection of the Nation. I remember that my father put the issue on discussion at home, but we firmly rejected it although I had never been religious.

Later I did not have problems at work for being a Jew. After 9th September we did not observe any special rituals. On Chanukkah or Pesach I told my children, 'Today is Chanukkah, or today is Pesach' but we never went to the synagogue. We did not fast on Yom Kippur. I cleaned the whole house for Pesach.

My parents celebrated the holidays but did not go to the synagogue. My parents kept in touch with our relatives in Israel but we were forbidden to do that when my husband was an officer. My father only wrote letters to our relatives in Israel saying that we were okay. Sometimes I also wrote a line or two in his letter but we did not dare keep regular correspondence.

I buried my parents in accordance with the Jewish ritual. Before one of my husband's aunts died, she came home and said to me, 'Daughter, I want to tell you something. We are not religious, but when we die we want you to make us a Jewish funeral.' I remember that when we buried her, I was a party secretary in the hospital.

The day after the funeral, which was also visited by people from the hospital, some angry party members came to ask for an explanation. I, who was an atheist, told them that when I die, I would have a communist funeral, but when I was burying my parents, I would bury them the way they lived and the way they wanted. No punishment followed.

My children graduated the English language high school. I remember that the students in that high school were the poorest and every year some of them were sent on a free camp. They both have medical degrees. They applied for positions in the ISUL Hospital [acronym for 'Institute for Specialization and Development of Medics'] and became assistants in the surgery.

When ISUL was closed, one of them went to work in chest surgery and the other in 2nd surgery. We are a family of medics. There are 27 – 28 medics in the family tree of my family. Both of my sons are married to Jewish women. I think they met their wives in a Jewish choir in which they sang for some time. Evgeni's wife is Neli Samuilova.

They have two children – Linda and Yosif. Yosif is married to a Bulgarian – Mariana and they have a daughter Sara – my great-granddaughter. Emil is married to Medi Levi, they have two children – Ines and Yosif.

My husband was somewhat insistent that our sons should marry Jewish women. He believed that Jewish girls had different moral qualities than the others, they were more conservative towards life and values and had a better upbringing.

Life was very hard during the first years after 9th September. We did not go on any vacations. Afterwards in the 1970s we often went to the seaside in the summer staying in the resting homes of the war veterans together with our children. We often went to the Hisar mineral baths. We gathered with our Bulgarian and Jewish friends.

For example, Avram and Ester Kalo, Solomon and Rashka Bali, Beti Danon, Apostol Pashev, Gen. Marko Markov, prof. Gancho Savov, Ivan Sugarev etc. Those evenings were very nice because we talked, had fun, sang songs. My husband had a very nice voice and we carried with himself his own songbook. It was known as the Herz' notebook. On Sundays we often went on excursions. We educated our children to be honest, brave and loyal.

I thought that I would always believe in the left idea. My husband also shared my ideas. But that does not mean that we did not see the shortcomings of the times. Yet, we explained them with the mistakes of individual people on positions, which did not suit them.

It was only after the myth of Stalin was brought down that we experienced... I do not know how to say it... When Hrushchov told the congress the truth about Stalin and his attitude towards Jews, it was such a tragedy for us. None of us knew about that. For us the USSR was the Promised Land.

We worshiped everything coming from there. We were hit very hard. I remember that my husband came... We were such fanatics that for our sons' second birthday, we gave them as gifts some of Stalin's books. That was how strong we believed in that ideal then. After we learned the truth about Stalin, my husband came, took out all Lenin's books, tore them all and threw them away.

We had a positive attitude towards the state of Israel even during the cold war with the country. We obeyed the official position, but we believed that our government was not right. My husband

was the first who established contacts after the end of the cold war and invited Mrs Shamir to visit Bulgaria.

The Foreign Minister at that time was Ivan Bashev 58 who was very open-minded. He had met her at a congress in Washington and she had told him that he was a Jew from Bulgaria. When he came back, he asked to see my husband who was chairman of the Jewish organization from 1961.

They both decided to invite Shamir but it could not be an official visit because of the Arabs, with whom we kept warm relations. So, she came as our personal guest. I remember that she came with Ruth Shaul from the president's administration.

During the official welcoming Ruth greeted my husband on behalf of her mother and father. She was also a Bulgarian Jew. It turned out that her parents had helped my husband when he was underground. They had had a workshop for wool textile on Pirotska and Hristo Botev Str.

During the most dangerous period of his illegal activity the locked him with food in the workshop. That was the only place, which was warm because of the wool there. We took them on a walk along Vitosha Str. Shamir was very happy to come here.

She gave me a very beautiful mezuzah as a gift and later sent me a letter of thanks. Later a round table was organized on the topic of the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews and she came with an official invitation. Later she came with Shamir himself. I remember that we got very close.

After 10th November [1989] 59 a wave of rejection destroyed everything created up to that moment in the Jewish organization. In January 1990 a cultural meeting was held in the Cultural Home in the Jerusalem Hall during which my husband was accused of favoring the communist and his reputation was destroyed.

He was accused of all sins in the world, except of moral decay and embezzlement. He was accused of helping the Jewish assimilation. Our closest friends attacked him and no one defended him except Edi Shwarts, who said that my husband did his best in the situation at those times.

One day I will write about that period if I still have the time and strength. He did so much for that Jewish organization. He preserved it thanks to his reputation in the communist movement. He had a lot of connections and could influence a lot of people.

He preserved it as an organization while all the others except the Armenian one were destroyed in accordance with the policy of assimilation. The Armenian organization was preserved but its situation was different. Soviet Armenia was a federative republic in the USSR, so the Soviet State backed the organization in Bulgaria.

Besides, my husband organized an exhibition for the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews, founded the Yearly Book [a scholarly edition issued in Bulgarian and English. [Its full name is 'A yearly book. Social cultural and educational organization of the Jewish in the People's Republic of Bulgaria] containing materials on the Jewish everyday life.

The articles in it were recognized as academic publications. Its editor in chief was Baruh Benvenisti, a very honest man of principle who did a lot for the magazine.

The assistant of Todor Zhivkov 60 at the time, Niko Yahiel also contributed to the start of the magazine. He was in charge of cultural affairs. One day the three of us, my husband, Niko Yahiel and I were walking. He and my husband were talking about the creationg of the Yearly Book.

Yahiel supported his idea and introduced it to the Central Committee of the [Communist] Party. That magazine played a very big part. It was translated into English by Prof. Zhana Molhova and was distributed worldwide. My husband contributed to the creation of movies about the salvation of Bulgarian Jews. He did a lot of other things for the organization because he was a Jew and was proud of his Jewish origin.

After that meeting, he fell into depression. He could not forget the humiliation. He was such an honest and pure man and he was accused of so many untrue things. He died devastated... I cannot find the exact word... It took me a lot to try to bring him out of that depression.

I fought for months but to no avail. Soon after that in 1995 he had a stroke. He was paralyzed for a year and a half and he died in 1996. Shortly before he died I met a friend from the Jewish organization, who firmly believed that my husband was unfairly accused.

He told me, 'Stela, I met Nina Aladzhem, who was chairperson of WIZO 61, they are preparing a big celebration for Herz!' I thought that if the Jewish organization was preparing for a celebration, they should tell me and at least ask for some materials.

I believed him, went home and said to my paralyzed husband, 'Herz, everything is alright now, you are reabilitated, you will be celebrated on 23rd February!' He looked at me and a small tear trickled down his face. Nobody contacted me for a week, the celebration was drawing near.

I called Nina Aladzhem. She said, 'You are mistaken, we are celebrating Yosif Herbst 62, not Yosif Herz.' I realized that I was mistaken. My husband was paralyzed, could not talk or write, the right half of his body was affected. But I did not tell him about the mistake so that he would die in peace.

He died on the 25th April, convinced that he had been celebrated. Even while my husband was alive the medical services in the Jewish organization were very bad, there was much chaos in medicine after 9th September. I had a medical office for a number of years and examined for free everyone who came.

We had some kind of a clinic. I examined the patients were gastroenterologic, infectious and internal diseases and since my sons were working in the Academy, they did the laboratory tests. They did that for free.

Now I am a member of the Golden Age club. I received an aid of 1 000 levs recently and before that some German compensation. I visit the Jewish organization but not very often. I am never bored. Although I am a pensioner, I am always short of time. I examine everyone in our neighborhood for free.

That is how I feel useful. I gather with friends who always increasingly need medical help. I read a lot. I wrote a book 'Memories from my physician's practice' which is not published because I have no money for that. I am very happy when my great-granddaughter Sara is with me.

- **Glossary**

1 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495).

The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

2 Sephardi Jewry: Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion.

A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today.

The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

3 The Dobrudzha Front: Existed during the Second Balkan War in 1913 and during WWI in 1916. The battles on that front were with Romania for the return of Dobrudzha which had been taken from Bulgaria at the Berlin Congress in 1878. The Neullies Treaty also gave Dobrudzha to Romania, which ruled it until 5th September 1940.

4 Mastika: Anise liquor, popular in many places in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East. It is principally the same as Greek Ouzo, Turkish Raki or Arabic Arak.

5 Luiza, Maria (17.01.1870 – 19.01.1899): Daughter of the Parma Duke Robert and Princess Maria Pia Bourbon. First wife of King Ferdinand I. Married the king in 1893 and gave birth to four children – Boris, Kniaz Tarnovski; Kiril Preslavski, Evdokia and Nadezhda. She was not involved in political activities.

She did not accept the change of religion of her first-born son and heir to the throne Boris from Catholic to Orthodox Christianity which took place on 2nd February 1896. She died three years later. Buried in the Catholic Church in Plovdiv.

6 King Boris III: The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces.

King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front.

He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Many Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

7 Bulgaria in World War I: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika).

After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916.

Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria.

On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

8 Bombing of Sveta Nedelia Church: In 1925 the military wing of the Bulgarian Communist Party launched a terrorist attack by blowing up the dome of the church. It was carried out during the funeral ceremony of one of the generals of King Boris III. There were dozens of dead and wounded, however, the King himself was late for the ceremony and was not hurt.

9 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria: Although Jews living in Bulgaria where not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work.

There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

10 Iuchbunar: The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means ‘the three wells’.

11 Ladino: also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portugese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit.

When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th century Spanish.

In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak ‘Ladino’ were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the

time.

Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: ‘Oriental’ Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas ‘Western’ Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese.

The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish.

For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitro. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

12 Frutas: The popular name of the Tu bi-Shevat festival among the Bulgarian Jews.

13 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. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

14 Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Simeon (b.1937): son and heir of Boris III and grandson of Ferdinand, the first King of Bulgaria. The birth of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1937 was celebrated as a national holiday. All students at school had their grades increased by one mark.

After the Communist Party's rise to power on 9th September 1944 Bulgaria became a republic and the family of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was forced to leave the country. They settled in Spain with their relatives. Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha returned from exile after the fall of communism and was elected prime minister of Bulgaria in 2001 as Simeon Sakskoburgotski.

15 24th May: The day of Slavic script and culture, a national holiday on which Bulgarian culture and writing is celebrated, paying special tribute to Cyril and Methodius, the creators of the first Slavic alphabet, the forerunner of the Cyrillic script.

16 Smirnenski, Hristo Dimitrov Izmirliev (17.09.1898-18.06.1923): a classical Bulgarian poet and writer. Lived and worked in the Jewish neighbourhood Iuchbunar. He made his literary debut in 1915 during his second year at college in the satirical newspaper ‘K'vo da e’ (‘Anything Goes’). Hristo first called himself ‘Smirnenski’ in the magazine ‘Smyah I sulzi’ (‘Laughter and Tears’).

His hard tireless work and deprivations undermined the 25 year-old poet's health and he died on 18 June 1923 from tuberculosis, ‘the yellow visitor’, as he called the disease in one of his poems. In the eight brief years of his prolific career Hristo Smirnenski penned thousands of pieces of poetry and prose in various genres using more than 70 pseudonyms.

17 Sakarov, Nikola (1881 – 1943): He joined the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (BWSDP) in 1904. Graduated the philosophy faculty of the Berlin University with a degree in political economics, finance and statistics. At the same time he was secretary of the students' social democratic group in Berlin.

On returning to Bulgaria he worked in the Finance Ministry. From 1913 until 1920 he was an MP. In 1921 he left the BWSDP and joined the Bulgarian Communist Party. He retired from active political activities in 1925. Sakarov is one of the founders of the Scholarly Sociology Association.

Member of Parliament from 1938 until 1943. During WWII he defended the anti-fascist position. He was one of the few MPs who openly protested against the Law for Protection of the Nation.

18 UYW: The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU).

After the coup d'etat in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it.

In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

19 Boza: A sweet wheat-based mildly alcoholic drink popular in Bulgaria, Turkey and other places in the Balkans.

20 Morfova, Hristina Vasileva (24.04.1889 – 1.06.1936): A Bulgarian opera artist and concert singer, lyrical soprano. Born in Stara Zagora, graduated her musical education in Prague. She was an opera artist in Prague, Barno and Sofia. Besides her opera roles, she is also famous for her pedagogical skills.

21 Tsadikov, Moshe (1885 - 1947): Born in a poor family, he started showing love towards music at an early age and drew the attention of the professional musicians. He started taking lessons from Dobri Khristov. On the occasion of the sanctification of the synagogue, the board decided to organize a special choir.

Tsadikov had been awarded a grant from the board and in 1908 he began studying at Wurzberg Academy in Germany. He graduated with flying colors and returned to Bulgaria.

He started work with the Synagogue choir and re-organized their repertoire and changed their manner of singing. At his first concert works by Mendelssohn, Schubert, Brahms were performed. He attracted some extremely talented singers to the choir among which were the eminent Mimi Balkanska and Gencho Markov. He presented on stage his own operetta for children entitled 'Prolet' [Spring] and he took part in the first symphony concerts of Maestro Georgi Atanasov.

After World War I the repertoire was enriched with classical plays by Brahms, Schubert, Handel, Haydn. In 1934 he prepared the performance of the oratorio 'The Creation' by Haydn and the concert was celebrated as a real musical sensation by all the connoisseurs of music throughout Bulgaria.

Eminent Bulgarian composers like Dobri Khristov and Petko Staynov devoted some of their musical works to Tsadikov's choir. At the 25th anniversary of the choir Tsar Boris III decorated Tsadikov with a medal for public service. In 1938 Tsadikov emigrated to the USA where he died on 4th November 1947. The Jewish choir was reinstituted by Bulgarian Jews in Israel where it is known nowadays as 'Tsadikov's Choir'.

22 Utro: Meaning Morning, it was a Bulgarian bourgeois daily, issued between 1911 and 1914. It was founded by St. Damyanov and the first editor-in-chief was St. Tanev. Utro published sensational both local and international news, supporting the policy of the Government, especially during the World War II, as well as Bulgaria's pro-German orientation. Its circulation amounted to 160,000 copies.

23 Popova, Ilka (1905 – 1975): Opera singer, mezzo-soprano, actress since 1951. Student of Ivan Vulpe in Bulgaria and F. Tanaro in Milan. Her debut in the Sofia Opera was in 1929. Immediately after that she went to Paris where she had acting lessons. Worked in the opera house in Bordeaux.

Later became a soloist of the Paris Grand Opera, Milan La Scala and the opera in Cologne in Buenos Aires. Sang on all European opera stages. Returned to Bulgaria in 1940 and became first singer of the Sofia Opera.

24 Chitalishte: literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc.

The first such organizations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival (18th-19th centuries) and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

25 Shekerdzhiiski, Emil Mois (1912 – 1944): A journalist, writer, literature critic, member of the communist movement in Bulgaria, joined the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1932. Studied law in the Sofia University and architecture in Belgrade. Member of the community-house and the temperance movement. During WWII he was a partisan in the Kyustendil partisan squad 'Dragovishtitsa'. He died in battle with the gendarmerie in the Chernevets area near Kyustendil.

26 Aleichem, Sholom (1859-1916): born in Russia as Solomon Rabinovitz, he is a Yiddish literature's clasical writer. He is best known for his unique humorous style, 'laughter through tears'. His works include five novels, many plays, and some 300 short stories. Among them are: 'Adventures of Mottel, The Cantor's Son', 'The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl', 'Tevye the Dairyman', etc.

27 Bialik, Chaim Nachman: (1873-1934): One of the greatest Hebrew poets. He was also an essayist, writer, translator and editor.

Born in Rady, Volhynia, Ukraine, he received a traditional education in cheder and yeshivah. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1901 in Warsaw.

He established a Hebrew publishing house in Odessa, where he lived but after the Revolution of 1917 Bialik's activity for Hebrew culture was viewed by the communist authorities with suspicion

and the publishing house was closed.

In 1921 Bialik emigrated to Germany and in 1924 to Palestine where he became a celebrated literary figure. Bialik's poems occupy an important place in modern Israeli culture and education.

28 Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841): Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it.

His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

29 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910): Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer.

Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including War and Peace, Anna Karenina and The Death of Ivan Ilyich, but he also wrote short stories and essays and plays.

Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as the Sevastopol Sketches, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas.

He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901.

His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

30 Bulgarian Legions: Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. Bulgarian fascist movement, established in 1930. Following the Italian model it aimed at building a corporate totalitarian state on the basis of military centralism. It was dismissed in 1944 after the communist take-over.

31 Brannik: Pro-fascist youth organization. It started functioning after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

32 The night of broken glass: In March 1938 the fascist organizations Ratniks and Bulgarian Legions attacked the Military Club where Metodi Popov had to present a lecture against racism. The next incident is on 12th March 1939 when the same fascist elements attacked Bulgaria Concert Hall where Bensusan was conductor.

At the same time they broke all windows of the Jewish shops in the central part of Sofia and everything that happened resembled the 'Crystal Night' of 10th November 1939 in Germany.

33 Confiscation of Jewish property: The Jewish property was confiscated in May 1943 when the Sofia Jews were interned to different parts of the countryside. In the days of the internment the

Commissariat on Jewish Issues went to all Jewish houses, listed their movable property and sealed their houses.

The process was in accordance with the Law for Protection of the Nation and all decrees of the Minsitry Council from 1941 to 1944 which limited the right of ownership of Jews. The confiscated properties were sold at special auctions.

34 Law for the 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. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories.

Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day.

They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction.

In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures.

The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

Legionaries: (see: Bulgarian Legions)

35 Forced name change during Holocaust: in accordance with a clause of the Law for the Protection of the Nation voted on 24th December 1940, as well as Decree 192/29th August 1942, all Jewish names ending with -ov, -ev and -ich were changed. According to the requirements first names mostly of Ashkenazi Jews were also changed.

36 Yellow star in Bulgaria: According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller.

Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

37 24th May 1943: Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943.

Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

38 Daniel Zion

Rabbi in the Sofia synagogue and President of the Israeli Spiritual Council, participant in procession on 24th May 1943.
39 St. Kliment Ohridski University: The St. Kliment Ohridski university in Sofia was the first school of higher education in Bulgaria. It was founded on 1st October 1888 and this date is considered the birthday of Bulgarian university education.

The school is named after St. Kliment, who was a student of Cyril and Methodius, to whom we owe the existence of the Cyrillic alphabet.

Kliment and his associate Naum founded several public schools in Ohrid and Preslav in the late 9th century with the full support of King Boris I.

40 Alexander Nevsky Cathedral: built by a decision of the Founding National Assembly in Veliko Tarnovo in memory of the victims of the Russian-Turkish Liberation War. The fist stone was laid in 1881 but construction started in 1904. The initial design of the cathedral belongs to the Russian architect Bogomolov, but it is later changed by Prof. Pomerantsev.

The construction finished in 1912 but because of the start of the mobilization for the Balkan War its consecration was delayed. It is officially consecrated on 11th, 12th and 13th September 1924. Its interior design was conceived by Russian and Bulgarian artists. Its proximity to the National Assembly and the Castle make it a suitable venue for all official celebrations.

41 Military Club in Sofia: Built in the center of the capital in 1895 – 1898 designed by the first architect of Sofia, the Czech national Adolf Vatslav Kolar. It is located on the corner of Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd and Rakovski Str. next to the Italian and the Austrian embassies, near the Russian diplomatic service and the Russian church.

42 Somovit camp: The camp in the village of Somovit was a Jewish concentration camp created in 1943. The camp was supposed to accept Jews that didn't obey the rules and regulations decreed by the Law for the Protection of the Nation. It existed until 1st April 1944 when it was gradually moved to the 'Tabakova Cheshma' [Tabakova's Fountain] terrain following an order of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs.

Afterwards, after a fire had occurred, it was moved to the 'Kailuka' terrain, which is 4 km away from the town of Pleven. After a protest demonstration of the Jews on 24th May 1943 against the attempts on the part of Bogdan Filov's government to deport the Jews outside the country, about 80 Jews from Sofia were sent to the Somovit camp.

43 Kailuka camp: Following protests against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews in Kiustendil (8th March 1943) and Sofia (24th May 1943), Jewish activists, who had taken part in the

demonstrations, and their families, several hundred people, were sent to the Somovit camp.

The camp had been established on the banks of the Danube, and they were deported there in preparation for their further deportation to the Nazi death camps. About 110 of them, mostly politically active people with predominantly Zionist and left-wing convictions and their relatives, were later redirected to the Kailuka camp.

The camp burned down on 10th July 1944 and 10 people died in the fire. It never became clear whether it was an accident or a deliberate sabotage.

44 Vagenshtain, Angel (1922): A classic of Bulgarian cinema. He graduated in cinema dramaturgy from the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. Author of some 50 scripts for feature, documentary and animation films, as well as of novels published in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Russia, and the USA.

Since 1950 he has worked in Bulgarian and East German cinematography. His 1959 film ‘Stars’, dedicated to the fate of Jews in WWII, and directed by Konrad Wolf, won the Special Prize of the jury at the 59th Cannes International Film Festival. Among Vagenshtain’s most famous films as a scriptwriter are: ‘Amendment to the Law for the Defense of the Nation’, ‘Goya’, ‘Stars In Her Hair, Tears In Her Eyes’, ‘Boris I’, etc.

45 Bulgarian Communist Party [up to 1990]: the ruling party of the People's Republic of Bulgaria from 1946 until 1990 when it ceased to be a Communist state. The Bulgarian Communist Party had dominated the Fatherland Front coalition that took power in 1944, late in World War II, after it led a coup against Bulgaria's fascist government in conjunction with the Red Army's crossing the border.

The party's origins lay in the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Bulgaria, which was founded in 1903 after a split in the Social-Democratic Party. The party's founding leader was Dimitar Blagoev and its subsequent leaders included Georgi Dimitrov.

46 Chifut: Derogatory nickname for Jews in Bulgarian.

47 Vaptsarov, Nikola (1909-1942): born in the town of Bansko, Vaptsarov ranks among Bulgaria’s most prominent proletarian poets of the interwar period. His most well known volume of poetry is ’Motoring Verses’. Vaptsarov was shot in Sofia on the 23rd of July 1942.

48 Muraviev, Konstantin (1893 – 1965): A politician and journalist, member of the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union. As a party member he took part in a number of governments.

He was minister of war in 1923 in the government of Stamboliiski, minister of education from 1931 to 1932 in the government of the People's Bloc, minister of agriculture from 1932 to 1934. In 1944 he was prime minister and foreign minister. His office lasted only six days – from 2nd to 8th September 1944.

During those days the USSR declared war on Bulgaria (5th September 1944) and Bulgaria declared war on Germany (8th September 1944). Some articles of the Law for Protection of the Nation were mitigated and partly changed during Muraviev's office.

49 **Fatherland Front**

A broad left wing umbrella organization, created in 1942, with the purpose to lead the Communist Party to power.

50 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish aid committees, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation.
It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported the establishment of cultural meeting places, including libraries, theaters and gardens. It also provided religious supplies for the Jewish communities.

The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from European and Muslim countries.

The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

51 'Moderen Teatar' [Modern Theater]: the biggest cinema hall on the Balkan Peninsula, opened on 4th December 1908. This, as a matter of fact, was the second cinema in Europe. It is situated in the center of Sofia, on Maria Luiza Boulevard between Luvov most (Lion Bridge) and Halite (the central market place). It still exists today.

52 Mass Aliyah: Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions.

Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous.

More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

53 Kostov, Traicho (1897-1949): born in Sofia. After he graduated from the high school he enrolled in the National Service Academy. Later he started studying law at Sofia University. He took part in WWI.

He made friends with officers who were narrow socialists under whose influence he adopted socialist ideas.

In 1920 he became a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). After the anti-fascist September uprising of 1923 he joined BCP's apparatus. In 1924 he was caught and convicted to 8

years imprisonment.

He was granted amnesty in 1929 and immediately after that illegally left for the USSR. He worked at BCP's foreign office and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. He returned to Bulgaria in 1931 to direct the ideological activity of BCP and the Workers' Party parliamentary group.

For the period from 1932 and 1936 he emigrated to the USSR three times. He went underground in the summer of 1940. As a secretary of the BCP's Central Committee he was one of the initiator's and leaders of the armed resistance led by BCP during WWII.

In 1942 he was arrested and convicted to imprisonment for life.

He was released on 7th September 1944 from the Pleven's jail. In 1945 he was elected general secretary of the BCP's Central Committee. In 1949, following Stalin's example for seeking enemies among the party members, he was accused of anti-party and anti-state activities and sentenced to death after a public process. He was posthumously rehabilitated.

54 September Rebellion in 1923: a rebellion that started in 1923, organized and led by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), together with the leftist forces of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, with the aim of taking down the government of the right-leaning Alexander Tsankov, which was in office after the coup d'etat of 9th June 1923. Leaders of the rebellion were Vassil Kolarov, Georgi Dimitrov and Gavril Genov.

The rebellion started first in the town of Muglizh, in the region of the towns of Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora.

The beginning of the rebellion was declared during the night of 23rd September in the town of Ferdinand (now Montana). In the next days it spread on the whole territory of Northwestern Bulgaria. Sofia and other big cities did not take part in the rebellion.

The shortage of weapons turned out to be fatal and in the end of September the rebellion was over without having achieved any success. Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov immigrated to Yugoslavia, followed by hundreds of other participants in the rebellion. Some of the ones who remained were killed, others – put in jail. At the beginning of 1924 the Parliament passed the Law for the Protection of the State by the force of which BCP was officially banned.

55 Jewish Hospital in Sofia: Built in 1922-23 on an area of 70 sq.m. It had four stories and 60 beds. No state subsidy was received for its construction. Its patients were of various nationality and religion. The initial idea was to build a monument commemorating the participation of 8 000 Jews in the Balkan, Inter-Allied War and WWI and the 900 Jews who died. The money raised was much more so they decided to built a hospital – monument.

56 Kolarov, Vassil (1897 – 1950): Politician and statesman, joined the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party in 1897. Born in Shumen.

A Communist, participated in the international socialist and communist movement. In 1922 he was elected secretary general of the Comintern. He took part in the preparations for the September Rebellion in 1923.

Until WWII he lived mostly in the USSR where he was head of the Village International and the International Agrarian Institute. He returned to Bulgaria on 9th September 1945 and took part in the political life.

He was elected Speaker of the 26th National Assembly and when Bulgaria was proclaimed People's Republic on 8th September 1946 he was elected interim prime minister of the republic. Until 1949 he was deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

57 Kolarov, Petar (1906 – 1966): Son of Vassil Kolarov. Born in Plovdiv. A politician and statesman, a physician. A Komsomol member from 1922 and member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1933. He took part in the Spanish Civil War from 1936 until 1939.

During WWII he was commander of the medical support forces in various units of the Soviet army. After the end of the war he returned to Bulgaria and became commander of the medical services in the army. Minister of health and chairman of the Bulgarian Red Cross.

58 Bashev, Ivan Hristov (1916 – 1971): a Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) member and statesman, a diplomat. Member of the UYW from 1934, member of the BCP from 1946 and member of the Central Committee of the BCP from 1962.

He graduated law in the Sofia University 'St Kliment Ohridski', editor of the newspaper 'Narodna Mladezh', deputy prime minister (1961) and foreign minister from 1962 until 1971. He died during a tragic incident on the Vitosha Mountain.

59 10th November 1989: After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party’s name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov.

Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the ‘Union of Democratic Forces’ (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

60 Zhivkov, Todor (1911-1998): First Secretary of the Central Committee of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (1954-1989) and the leader of Bulgaria (1971-1989). His 35 years as Bulgaria's ruler made him the longest-serving leader in any of the Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe.

When communist governments across Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, the aged Zhivkov resigned from all his posts. He was placed under arrest in January 1990. Zhivkov was convicted of embezzlement in 1992 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

61 WIZO: Women's International Zionist Organisation; a hundred year old organization with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. The history of WIZO in Bulgaria started in 1923.

Its founder was the wife of the rabbi of Sofia, Riha Priar. After more than 40 years of break during communism WIZO restored its activities oi 1991 with headquarters in Sofia and branches in the countryside.

From that moment on it organises a variety of cultural and social activities and cooperates with other democratic women's organisations in the country. Currently the chairwoman of WIZO in Bulgaria is Ms. Alice Levi.

62 Herbst, Yosif Yakov (1875 – 1925): a journalist and publisher of Jewish origin. Born in Odrin. Graduated the military school in Sofia but became a journalist. Editor of the newspapers 'Vestnik' [Newspaper], 'Svobodna Tribuna' [Free Tribune], 'Dnevnik' [Diary] and 'Vreme' [Time].

In 1907 he was elected chairman of the association of Sofia jountalists. He took part in the Balkan War in 1912 and 1913.

From 1913 until 1918 he was the first director of print media. After the demise of the September Rebellion in 1923 he stood against the repressions of the government of Tsankov and took part in the activities of the committee which helped the victims of the September events.

He knew a lot of languages and published materials in German, Austrian and Romanian newspapers and magazines.

He also translated articles from Russian, French and English. He took part in the founding of the Association of Bulgarian Writers and Publishers. He was arrested after the bombing of the Sveta Nedelya Church on 16th April 1925 and later went missing.