

Josif Kamhi At The Time Of Internment In Kyustendil



This is a photo of my internment in Kyustendil. The photo was taken in May 1944, shortly before we were sent to the concentration camp in Kailuka near Pleven. My future wife, Venezia Kamhi (nee Konorti), is first from left in the first row. I met her in Kyustendil, where she was also interned from Sofia. Behind her is a mutual friend of ours, Perla. As far as I know she left for Israel at the time of the Mass Aliyah. I am the second from right to left wearing a hat of the 7th Men's High School in Sofia. We arrived in Kyustendil by train and we were accommodated in the Jewish school. We slept on the floor on blankets which we brought from home. We ate from a big cauldron where they prepared some food for us. Shortly after, I started work. At first I was a waiter in a cafeteria for the meager sum of 20 levs a day – the price of one loaf of bread. Each evening the interned Jews gathered in the Jewish school and once I was told that I could go and take part in the digging of a river path, which was much better-paid. So, I started working there. The first day I was so tired, I could hardly walk. Then I got used to it and even dug much more than the others. My father also came to work with me. We could afford better housing and rented an apartment. My brother was in a labor camp and came back at the beginning of 1944. He escaped at the beginning of May and became a partisan. At the beginning of June 1944 our whole family was interned to Pleven, the Kailuka area, where a concentration camp had been built. We were shut in a wooden shed. They put it on fire during the night and my mother was burned alive. My mother had a long dress which got stuck between the boards of the house and she could not get out. I tried to pull her out, but I could not. We were released on 21st August 1944. We went to Pazardzhik first, to Liza's place. Liza was my mother's sister. My father was sent to a labor camp in Enikioy. My sister and I waited for our father and our brother to return. My father came back at the end of August 1944 and we celebrated 9th September 1944 there.