

A BREAK AT PYREE



This photo was taken in Athens on June 18, 1934. The ship I was going to Spain stopped at Piraeus for a break. We went to Athens. Then we went up to the Acropolis and that's where this photo was taken. There were people there taking photos, and one of them took this one for us. The young man on the left is the friend I went to Spain with, Jak Behar. He was the friend with whom we were working and then with whom we decided to try our luck in Spain.

I went to Spain when I was 20. How did I decide to go to Spain? Well, when I finished school I started working at an office writing letters in French. This was quite a big firm that was doing 'commission importation'. It was called Rotterman. That was my first job. I was doing the correspondence in French with firms abroad. There was another friend there, Jak Behar, from Kuzguncuk [a district on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus where Jews used to live] who was doing the correspondence in German. One day, we were talking and thinking outloud: "shall we go somewhere? Where can we go? Where shall we go? Shall we go to France? Where?..." We were dreaming of travelling. Then one day my friend came and said: "Shall we go to Spain?" and I said: "Yes, let's go". So we decided to go to Spain, find a job there and settle down. Of course, our families started protesting: "Why do you want to go there? You don't know anyone there etc. etc." But we were decided and did not budge. Then one day my friend came and said: "Hey, look, they are putting a lot of pressure on me at home, let's not go". However, this was the 1930s and everybody was talking about an imminent war and that Turkey would also go to war; so everyone was afraid really, and that's how I managed to convince my own parents. My friend's father did not give up though; one day he came and told us: "My boys, where are you going? What are you going to do there? Come, let me find you a good job. Come with me, there is a tin can factory; I'll buy it for you, and then you won't have to go". We said "No", then my friend's father said: "Come, there is a fabric knitting atelier on sale, I'll buy it for you, don't go". But I said: "No, my mind is set, I'll go". So he had to accept our decision. There was another Jewish family from Kuzguncuk, who had already gone to Spain. We said we would go to them and that is how we were finally able to convince both families. I went to get a passport, but I was a bit scared that maybe they wouldn't give me a passport, but they did.

We left for Spain in 1934. We went to Barcelona. We went by boat. We had the address of a restaurant with us. It was in fact, a kind of café and they served lunch and dinner. The owner of the restaurant was a Jew from Greece, I think from Salonica. So we went to this restaurant and told the owner that we had just arrived and needed somewhere to sleep. He called someone called Joseppe and told him to go and ask a certain lady if she had rooms available. Joseppe went and came back saying that she did, so we took our bags and took the rooms in that hostel. That's how we started to stay there. As for money, I remember that I went to Spain with 50 liras. One peseta was then 50 kurush [100 kurush is one lira], so 50 liras was not a lot of money but it was OK for a while.

At first, we started to sell textile products at open markets and observed what others were doing. Most people were doing this kind of business, so we learned it too, and started doing it. Then I started doing painting work. I was painting ties. My friend couldn't do this work, so he returned to Turkey after one year.