

Nissim Kohen With His Sister Sofi Komfort, Nee Kohen



This is a photo of me and my sister Sofi Komfort, nee Kohen. My sister is probably two years old on the photo and I am wearing the badge of Hashomer Hatzair. The photo was made in a nearby yard of a family whose family name was also Kohen but we were not related. The photo was taken in 1939 in Sofia.

My grandfather's house was on 12 Slivnitsa Street. Later the street was renamed to 7 Gyueshevo Street. Our house was made of adobe and at first it had only one room and an entrance hall. Later another room was added as well as another extension, which was the house of my uncle Rafael Kohen. My father's elder brother Eliya Kohen also lived in that yard. His house was the most solid one. My father Mihael Kohen took a half of one of my grandfather's rooms and enlarged it. He also built another room with a small entrance hall where he lived with his family. There were some inconveniences. The toilets were outside and we had no running water inside. There was a tap on the street which we used. We had electricity. Later we had running water in the yard, but not in the house. The street, on which we lived became all muddy when it rained. And so did most of the streets in the Jewish neighborhood.

My sister Sofi is much younger than me. She was born in 1937. She was interned to Dupnitsa with us. She studied in the Jewish school which after 1945 became a Bulgarian one. She graduated the Pedagogical Institute and was a teacher in a primary school in Sofia. She was a respected teacher in chemistry and maths. In the 1990s she left for Israel but she came back. She lived on the upper

floor of our block until she died. She married Rahamim Komfort, who was born in Dupnitsa. He was a machine mechanic. They have two children - Mihaela, who left for Israel and Nissim who lives in Sofia.

In August 1937 I had my bar mitzvah. I made a promise with a speech towards my parents. While the other children had the speech made by a chazzan or a rabbi, my speech was written in Bulgarian by the Ivrit teacher in the Jewish school Mr. Benmair. The bar mitzvah was done at my uncle Azarya's place. A lot of guests with many presents came. My grandfather was still alive and was also present.

The Jewish school was the focus point of all Zionist organizations. Those were Hashomer Hatzair, Betar and Maccabi. Other organizations such as Akiva and Akara gathered in the Jewish People's Home. I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. All organizations educated their members during meetings, marches, gymnastic exercises. In Hashomer Hatzair they focused on scouts education, cultural activities and preparation for leaving to Israel as pioneers in the new country. In Maccabi they focused on exercise and Betar - on military discipline. There were neverending disputes between the members of these organizations.

Political issues were seriously discussed in Hashomer Hatszair. There was the so-called 'Court of War'. That was in the beginning of 1939. Each of us took the position of a certain party in a conflict, which was controversial at the time and we discussed the issues of war and peace. I represented China, others represented Germany or Russia, England, France. Everything was like a game. We invited all members of the organization and we sat on a table in front of them as judges, prosecutors and defenders. The idea was to defend peace and condemn war.

In Hashomer Hatzair we raised money for the Jewish National Front. There were different ways to raise money. One of the ways was on Purim, another - in the synagogue during a wedding. A third one was on Yom Ashekel. On Purim a group of people went from house to house of Jewish families with blue and white money boxes to ask for donations, with which the Jewish National Front bought land. Most of the people in Iuchbunar were not rich. We did not know where to go and knocked on three or four doors. It was harder with the blocks of flats outside Iuchbunar. But we looked at the family names on the doors and knocked only on those with Jewish names. In this way, we raised a little money. There were also funny moments. We made jokes with the expression 'The missis said she was not at home' - that is, there were cases when a maid opened the door, went to announce who was at the door and what we wanted and then returned to say that the missis was not at home.