

Nissim Kohen's Father Mihael Kohen With Friends



This is a photo of my father Mihael Kohen with friends. I suppose it was taken in Sofia before he married in 1922. My father is first on the left. Second on the left is Buko Levi, who is father of Haim Levi, with whom we were volunteers in the Fatherland War [1944-1945].

My father Mihael Kohen tried many things in life. He spent eight years in captivity during World War I. He was held captive by the French army near Thessaloniki as a soldier from the Bulgarian army. After that he worked as a tinsman. He took part in the construction of the roof of the first building of the Sofia University. He traded with second-hand products. Later, together with an uncle of my mother's Chelebi Haravon, and with the active help of my uncle Mois Haravon, he managed to set up a haberdashery on Lomska Street [present-day George Washington Street, near the central Sofia synagogue], but those were the years of the great crisis in 1929-1932 and he was forced to close it down. Then he started work as a street vendor and walked around the neighborhood with a tray selling elastic cords, tights and haberdashery. Then he made a warehouse selling coal near our house. At that time people could not afford to buy a lot of coal and came to buy 5-10 kilos. In this way my father was able to support us and helped the people in the neighborhood. That continued until the passing of the anti-Jewish laws when he was forbidden to work.

Our neighbors in Sofia were mostly Jewish families. On our street 'Gyueshevo' there were Bulgarian families too. Most of the people were traveling salesmen and Bulgarian families. There were a number of grocery stores, some barber shops, cafes and pubs. Iuchbunar was like a hotel for many people. They came here only to spend the night and spent all the day working as salesmen, or workers in factories and tobacco warehouses. Almost none of the Jews in Iuchbunar worked as clerks on a state or municipal position. I do not remember knowing such Jews, except for a cousin of my father's who became a director in the Bulgarian Post. I started work as an electrical technician, but after an illness I experienced, I started work in a trade company. After the adoption of the anti-Jewish laws I went to work in the enamel factory producing dishes.