

My Older Sisters And I



This picture with my older sisters Sara and Fortune were taken in our house on the island.

My older sister Fortune who was born in 1917 in Kuzguncuk, finished elementary school and because my father was a visionary, became apprentices to a tailor along with my sister Sara, and became tailors. In this way both my older sisters were able to financially help their spouses for a long time. With time, the small sewing jobs that my older sister started in Ortakoy developed into a large clientele, so that one of the rooms of the house became a workshop. In this workshop, along with a few young ladies, the biggest helper of my sister was her sister Sara. Every Monday, new orders would come in, Friday before noon, the last ironing would be applied to the orders and hung on a rope that was stretched from one wall to the other in the room and delivered to the customers. The room would be cleaned up for the Sabbath, at the end of Sabbath, it would be converted back to a workshop.

My brother Davit took my older sister Fortune everywhere he went, in this way she fell in love with a member of the group, Sabetay Farsi. Sabetay, even though he felt close to my sister, considered her only a friend because she was the sibling of a group member. In the meantime, a family from Ortakoy asked permission from my mother to match a young man to my sister, however my sister did not even want to meet this young man, she was seriously in love with Sabetay. This situation continued for a while as a one-sided crush, finally my sister's mood, her lack of appetite, her lack of interest in everything, started to upset my mother and father. They said to my sister: "My dear daughter, what is it? We notice you are more down and sad every day? Let us take you to the doctor, so he can examine you well, what do you think?".

My brother Davit understood the problem since he knew my sister so well and went to Sabetay and said, "Look, my dear Sabetay, my sister Fortune likes you a lot, yet you pretend like she doesn't exist. Do you find her so repulsive that you do not approach her?" Sabetay: "How is that possible? I like her too but because she is your sister, I could not approach her and open up the way I wanted

to. Of course I would like to get to know Fortune better". When everything was out in the open, my sister dated Sabetay who was a typesetter in a small printing house for a while. (Unfortunately I do not know his education level) My family accepted Sabetay immediately, because he was a very good, honest, humble and pleasant person. When I say dating, don't think about the dating that goes on today, there was no such thing. Only once a week, in general on Sundays, there was a gathering place called "Hemla" in Balat (a Jewish neighborhood on the European side) that the community owned. My older brother would play there every Sunday with his friends, dance, chat and eat and drink the cakes and lemonade that were offered. The young couple got to know each other this way.

My sister Fortune was engaged to Sabetay, who was in a typesetting job in a printhouse before my brother-in-law went to the military; on his return, they opened up their own printshop with his older brother on Kumbaraci Yokushu (Piggybank Maker Hill) [A neighborhood on the Europeanside]. They would print invitations, cards, signs and bulletin boards in this printhouse.

My older sister Fortune married Sabetay in the Zulfaris Synagogue (on the European side, where today the Jewish museum that is known as the 500th Year Foundation is situated) probably around 1942, even if I cannot remember the exact year. My sister worked as a tailor for long years in Galata [A neighborhood on the European side where Jews lived together], since my brother-in-law did not earn too much money from this printhouse, that is how they managed to raise their children. As you can see, my sister's family barely made ends meet but despite everything the spouses adored each other, they protected each other throughout their lives and always treated each other with respect. My brother-in-law Sabetay was a very easy person to get along with, he was optimistic and pleasant and yet he always took his family under his wings. My brother-in-law Sabetay unfortunately developed cancer and died in 1977, and my sister Fortune in 1991 due to a heart attack. We interned both in Ulus.

My sister Fortune had Beki in 1944, Meri in 1947, and because they always wanted to have a boy, their son Niso was born after a long period in between, in 1965. My sister had her daughters at home with the help of a midwife, and her son in the hospital.

Their older daughter Beki attended elementary school in "Alliance Israelite" and then went to Saint Benoit; after graduating from junior high married Sami Hakim who was 15-17 years older than her in 1962 in the Zulfaris Synagogue. Beki had sons named Ariel in 1964, and Sabi in 1967. These young people are now married and have two children each. My niece Beki always gathered the whole family on the Sabbath or during holidays. Because her daughters-in-law both worked, Beki helped raise their children as much as she could but unfortunately we lost Beki in 1995 due to a heart attack when she was only 52 years old. We buried Beki in Ulus, next to her mother and father.

Her husband Sami showed us his ring finger after the death of his wife and said to us: "Look, I put a ring on this finger only once, I will never put another one on it again'.

Truthfully, he has never dated or married anyone since then, he is still a widower. In winters he takes care of his life, and he spends the summers with his younger son Sabi.

Their daughter Meri finished elementary school in Alliance Israélite and quit Atatürk Highschool for Girls before graduation. Meri was always a very active girl. After meeting Sadik Pishan whose mother was Jewish, father Persian, and who later became her husband, the young people married in 1970 at the Hilton Hotel with a wedding fit for royalty even though the families were opposed. Pishan family is a seriously wealthy family. They had their son Onur in 1972, their son Ugur in 1976 and their daughter Sibel in 1978, from their marriage. All three of the children completed their education out of the country and returned to Istanbul. Now all three of their children are married. They even have a grandchild around a year old from their son Ugur, and the wife of Onur is 5 months pregnant. Their daughter Sibel is newly married (August of 2006).

Their son Niso was born as a result of an accident. But he has brought so much joy and love to the family, I cannot put into words. Just as they say he became "İjiko de vejes" (child of old age) for my older sister. He became a more hardworking, capable and studious child compared to his older sisters. After graduating from Sankt Georges Austrian Highschool, he finished Istanbul University, Faculty of Economy successfully. While he was attending highschool, unfortunately he lost his father and started thinking about earning a living both for himself and his mother. He was attending school on the one hand and looking for job opportunities on the other hand, and he started working as soon as he graduated. What a pity that his mother passed away in 1992. Exactly 9 months and 10 days after his mother's death, during a period where he was able to take care of himself, he checked himself into the hospital because he was not feeling well and we learned from the test results that the cancer that had originated from his testicles had infiltrated his whole body. How sad it is that the cancer had spread to his whole body and there was nothing to do. In fact, he died the day after he entered the hospital. Unfortunately we buried Niso next to his mother, father and older sister.

My older sister Sara who was born in 1919 in Kuzguncuk, finished elementary school (at the time, girls helped their mothers at home and were married at very young ages) and upon my father's advice, became apprentices of a tailor along with my oldest sister Fortune and after mastering the skills, they started sewing dresses, skirts, blouses for the ladies in our neighborhood; in this way, they earned their pocket money and they contributed to the budget of the family. (They used their profession all through their married lives to help with their families' expenses).

Izak Saylag, who was Sara's spouse, has a very sad life story. Izak's father Albert Baruh Saylag was a very famous French teacher. From his marriage to a lady named Viktorya (I do not know her maiden name) they had one girl, Fortune, and two boys, Izak and Mordo. This gentleman was so influential in spreading the French culture in the country that he was rewarded with the "Legion D'honneur" honor. Atatürk⁵ took advantage of the vast knowledge of Mr. Albert and proposed opening a French school in Samsun (a city in the northeastern part of Turkey) and this school has been opened there. After the birth of the republic, he opened a French school in Istanbul, Beshiktash, with the encouragement and financial support of Atatürk. But regrettably the relationship between husband and wife was not good due to the philandering of Mr. Albert. When the mother saw that her husband was in a relationship with another lady named Klara, even though it is pretty unbelievable for the times, she only took her youngest son Mordo with her and went to Venezuela, leaving the other children (probably it was fashionable to immigrate there then) Their father on the other hand, never took care of the children. Such was the situation that when Izak was 12-13 years old, they were alone with his sister Fortune who was 2 years older. The father

settled them in an empty room over the workplace of a tailor, where there wasn't even electricity. From then on, Izak had to struggle on his own. What illuminated the house was the streetlamp, he would do his homework with this light. If I am not wrong, Izak was attending the Kabataş Highschool in Ortaköy; (Ortaköy was such a place that everyone knew each other, and helped each other). Izak was hardworking and very mathematically inclined. After school he started tutoring kids in younger grades on any subject they were struggling in and started earning money. Later he became a boarder for a widowed Jewish lady in Ortaköy.

A couple of years later, when one of our neighbors mentioned Izak to my father (my father was so humane and compassionate), he immediately took him into our home for an insignificant amount for rent. In this way, we rented the top flat of our house to Izak Saylag (I do not remember his birth date) who later became my older sister Sara's spouse (at the time he was a very young boy still in highschool). That flat belonged to him, we were never involved in anything, there was no laundry, or cooking or cleaning his room in our agreement; he took care of all of these on his own, yet Izak was so well-behaved, so down-to-earth and level-headed that we warmed up to him as a family, and in this way my mother started doing Izak's chores from time to time and inviting him to our dinner table.

Izak was continuing attending school, but at the same time, he started making a name for himself as a tutor, and his students increased. There were students that he tutored one-on-one and he was also able to teach 4-5 students from the same grade level the same lesson. In the meantime he was growing closer to our family. After graduating from highschool, Izak completed his education in the Istanbul Medical Faculty, passed his residency exams and graduated from the Department of Gynecology.

In the meantime my older sister Sara was very good friends with the daughter of a family named Katalan who were our close neighbors, one day this girl said to my sister: "Would you like to meet my older brother?". My sister accepted the proposal and after a while, they were promised before this young man went to the military. Izak on the other hand, while continuing attending school and tutoring, liked my older sister Sara, but could not open up. Even though she was promised, he approached my sister and stole her heart and my sister broke up with her fiancé and decided to marry Izak. As I mentioned before, my sister had become a good tailor and she had a good clientele, she was able to help Izak in every way. My brother-in-law finished medical school and served his military duties in Istanbul Balmumcu barracks since there was no place in the specialty he wanted. In the meantime, his father came to look for his son Albert at our house for the very first time. When my sister who went to visit Izak in the barracks told him, Izak immediately gets permission to come home and says to his father: "We will come to visit you, you will not come to this house again".

My older sister Sara and Izak married in 1948 upon his return from the military. Even though my brother-in-law wanted to become a gynecologist, he writes to his mother that he cannot find an opening, and the young married couple decided to start their life in Venezuela upon an invitation that they receive from his mother. Izak could not find an opening in the Gynecology department over there too, so he did an internship on cancer research and returned as an "Early cancer diagnosis" specialist back to our house. He did his military service in Van (a city in the eastern part of Anatolia, close to the Iranian border), even though I do not know the exact length, it probably

lasted around two years. On his return, again due to a lack of opening in the obstetrics-gynecology department, he went to Ankara (capital city of Turkey) to fulfill his obligatory service for 3 years and became a Pathology specialist there. During this time, my sister was with us along with her children. Finally, he started his gynecology residency as they wished to do, upon finding an opening, in the meantime their daughter Viki was born in 1953, and son Albert in 1955. My older sister Sara started raising her children in my father's home, working as a tailor. After my brother-in-law graduated successfully, he started working as the official surgical gynecologist of the Ankara Public Railroads with the help of his father's acquaintances and only then did he bring his family to be with him in Ankara.

My sister Sara became a housewife in Ankara, she could not work as a tailor which was her profession since she did not know anyone in Ankara. My brother-in-law's older sister Fortune helped them a lot in Ankara, she took my sister under her wings. After working there for a few years, my brother-in-law was appointed to Yakacik (a neighborhood in Istanbul) and when they returned they settled their home in Moda (on the Asian side) to be close to work. The financial situation of my older sister Sara's family was always moderate. My brother-in-law would do his official duties on the one hand, and accept patients at his home in the afternoons. They converted a small room in their house to an examination room. My sister would take care both of the house and children, and work as an assistant and nurse with my brother-in-law too. For example, when patients arrived, she would do the preconsultation, and then take them into the room. I think the difficult youth that my brother-in-law endured, made him more cautious than necessary, almost cowardly. In reality my brother-in-law Izak was a very good doctor. He was very knowledgeable about infertility which very few gynecologists knew about. He had a lot of infertile patients. My brother-in-law would cure them and help them conceive. He even had patients all the way from Bursa. However, since he was a government employee, he could only get to his clinic around 3 p.m., if he could only be brave enough to cut ties with government departments, his financial situation could have been brighter. He worked in his clinic fulltime after retiring from Public Railroads.

My brother-in-law Izak became aware of the tumor in his brain too late even though he was a doctor and unfortunately passed away in 1991, he was interned in Istanbul, Kuzguncuk cemetery. My older sister Sara left her flat in Moda as it was after Izak's death and spent the winter months (until June) in Israel, with her daughter Viki. She took advantage of the rights given by the Israeli government to the elderly. Of course she had some infirmities due to her age. They checked her up very well in Israel, they would provide her with the necessary care and medications. My sister was very happy there, that is why, she would come to Istanbul two months a year, see us, go to the south or the Aegean coast for vacations. She passed away in 2003 in Israel, transporting her body to Istanbul was a hardship for us economically, so she was interned there, I try to visit her as much as I can, once a year.

My older sister Sara's daughter Viki graduated from Istanbul University School of Business Administration, and her son Albert from Pharmacological Faculty. Viki married Israel Yanar in 1969 at the Haydarpasha Hemdat Israel Synagogue. After the wedding, we celebrated by dining and having fun at a local place, but unfortunately I can not remember where. Viki is a very hardworking and giving person like her mother, my sister Sara. Her husband Israel was an employee at a private firm, and Viki worked as an accountant in a private firm for long years so as not to be a

burden to her husband. Their daughter Beti was born in 1974. Even though Viki did not work for a while after this birth, she returned to work again as an accountant at a different firm when her girls grew up a little. In 1980, they entered a search because Viki's husband Israel was unhappy where he worked, and because he observed religion more than usual. As a result of the decision they made, first Viki's husband went to Israel. When he was able to stand on his own two feet, that is to say he prepared an environment where they could manage without having his wife Viki work. He found a suitable job in one of the branches of Discount Bank in Batyam, bought their house, furnished it. After this, Viki and their daughter Beti who was around 10-12 years old, went to Israel, and they started a new life happily as a family. During the time they lived there, Israel who was already excessively religious became completely orthodox and they had two more daughters there, Sarit in 1981, and Suzi in 1988. For the oldest daughter in the house, Beti, who had immigrated from Istanbul, the education and social environment she experienced in Istanbul became one of the factors in the delay for her adaptation to the new arrangement. Because of this reason, along with the fact that it took Beti to adapt to her new surroundings a long time, it caused her to pass her puberty years as a rebellious young person. Beti did her military service after highschool. She did not want to attend university upon her return, she preferred earning her living by working at different jobs. Today, Beti is a down-to-earth bachelor young woman going on her thirties, her troubles with her family are over.

Even though her husband Israel did not want Viki to work, Viki read to the elderly, took them around, took neighbors' children to and back from school with her car in order to help out with the family budget while raising her daughters, since the salary of her spouse was not sufficient for the livelihood of her family.

The other daughters Sarit and Suzi were raised in ultra-religious schools and became "Datia" (orthodox). The middle daughter Sarit married an orthodox young man in 2001 before she turned 20, and had three children, she probably will have more. Sarit earns her living working as a preschool teacher, her husband who spends his life in the Yeshiva, only helps out with the government subsidy he receives.

Their youngest daughter Suzi is still a highschool student.

My older sister Sara's son Albert who is a pharmacist married Tuna Coyas in 1977 in Neve Shalom Synagogue. We celebrated the evening in the Tarabya Hotel as a family. Since my nephew was raised in Moda, and his spouse Tuna in Kuzguncuk, they preferred to settle in Caddebostan after getting married (neighborhoods on the Asian side). Albert did not work in his profession, he became a manager in a private firm and is currently still working at the same job. Tuna also has a university degree but did not work, yet she has been working as a volunteer since 2003 at the Shalom (This newspaper published by the Turkish Jews has one page in Judeo Espagnol along with news and events in the community and also publishes a Judeo Espagnol magazine once a month). She became the editor for the arts page. In 1980 their older daughter Selin, and in 1984 their younger daughter Lysa were born. Both of the girls are very hardworking, ambitious and smart. Selin graduated from the Technical University, Faculty of Architecture in 2001 as valedictorian of both the Faculty and the department. She returned to Istanbul after a 6-month internship in France. She worked in very well-known architectural firms while pursuing her master's degree in her school. Their younger daughter is also as capable as her older sister. She now finished the third grade in the Faculty of Chemistry at the Technical University successfully. Albert's daughters

worked as "madriha"s (Hebrew word for counselor) after receiving their education in Talmud Torah since their home was very close to the Caddebostan Synagogue. Both served as youth group presidents at the Goztepe Cultural Home (on the Asian side, founded by our community, where our youth receives Jewish education in many forms), they took youth groups to Israel for a couple of sessions, their younger daughter is still currently in the folkloric group. The girls are currently single.