

Matilda Ninyo



This picture was taken in Sofia before the internment. I remember I used to wear short stockings even in winter time. I don't know why, but surely it wasn't because I had no long stockings.

At the time we lived at Antim I Street we had no problems about the fact we were Jews. Shortly before our internment, however, we already had to wear the yellow stars. I wore a star while we were living in Kyustendil, where we were interned to. However, all my friends were Bulgarian. On the day when I had to leave for Kyustendil, my closest friend from the neighborhood Lily Lazarova came to see me off. She was with her family and they gave us food for the traveling. They were all filled with compassion for us. We were friends as children, later we didn't keep in touch.

We had wonderful relations with the other neighbors, too. Generally, the Jews in Bulgaria have never had major problems. There was one absurd situation at school when there was this so called 'Brannik' organization, and Jewish children weren't allowed to participate in it. At first, we didn't know that this kind of organization was against us. So we used to cry, because we didn't understand why we were not accepted as members. There were no other Jews in my class, but I knew there were some at the school. I had very good relationship with all my classmates. My teacher in Bulgarian was Mrs. Tsankova, who was the mother of the famous Bulgarian theater and film director Vili Tsankov. I will never forget her. In those years, we used the old Bulgarian alphabet. My handwriting was very beautiful and there were lots of exercises on writing and spelling at school. I had difficulty in writing one of the vowels, nevertheless I always had the highest marks in the class. The teacher usually chose me to read aloud my homework in front of

the whole class. There were many other good teachers and I never felt discriminated because of my religion.

Until we were forced to move to Kyustendil my family had the support of our relatives. We had that special sense of unity and mutual help. The Balis weren't rich but they always shared everything they had with us. There is one proverb in Ladino: 'The most important thing is the smile on your face; you can deal with the rest.'