

Nissim Kohen In The Jewish School



This is a photo of our graduation of third junior high school grade, or present-day seventh grade - the last grade of junior high school. It was taken in 1938 in Sofia. The photo shows the commission made up of members of the Education Ministry. On the second row is my classmate Zhak Alkalay. Next to him is the teacher in geography and Bulgarian Mrs Stefanova. To her right is a member of the commission, then another member, the headmaster Dembovich, the history teacher Danon and another member of the commission.

On the first row first on the left is Sofi Fachi, nee Mashiah. Second on the first row is Sarika. She left for Israel. The third one is Nuni Eshkenazi, now Benmayor, who left for Palestine with the youth aliyah in 1938-39, followed by Mati Amar, who now lives in Israel. Next to her is Sheli Eshkenazi, Mati Levi. I am the first on the right on the second row, with the white shirt. Behind me on the first row from above is Isak Daniel, who now lives in Israel, next to him is Asher Geladgi, who was a radio journalist in Israel, Yako Kohen, who was also a member of a UYW group [The Union of Young Workers, a communist youth organization]. Next to Yako Kohen is David Alkoser, Sami Mashiah, Haim Levi, Isak Levi, Menahem Levi. At the end on the last row is Menahem Alkalay who died on the boat 'Salvador', when 360 Jews tried to reach Palestine illegally in December 1940. More than 200 people died then. The boys standing highest of all are Miko Papo, Isak Ninyo, Leon Levi. The teacher in white is Stefanova and behind her is Misho.

The teachers taught us to be honest and fair. In the third junior high school grade we had to write an essay in Bulgarian on some topic. We started writing but the teacher turned to one of the boys and asked him not to copy from the textbook. The boy stood up and said that he did not do it, it was Miko Papo who did the copying. The teacher spent the next class talking to us about honesty and fairness. That was a lesson I still remember, although more than 60 years have passed since then.

I learned Ivrit at school. We studied the Torah, Jewish literature and history. We were obliged, but also willing to talk in Ivrit. My parents knew only a few words in Ivrit. My mother knew more than my father because she had studied four grades in the Jewish school. She could read in Ladino in

Rashi. She read books in Ladino.

I graduated high school in 1938. In 1937 the son of King Boris III was born - Simeon II and then all our marks at school were raised one point. No one was expelled for bad marks. There were also students who received the mark of 7 [6 is the highest mark in Bulgarian schools.]