

# Avram Moisey Pinkas As A Student In The Jewish School



On this photo I am a student in the Jewish school in the town of Ruse, 1937.

I attended a kindergarten a year before I became a schoolboy - the kindergarten was at the Jewish school. I started studying Ivrit there. We had a teacher who couldn't speak Bulgarian, because she had come from abroad. At home, my mother and the maidservant looked after us. We had a big yard where we used to play. The 'Maccabi' organization also had a big yard and we used to play football there. On Sundays, we used to go to the gym hall. We had a sports community and we had plans for building a gym hall. It was almost constructed, but never finished, so it had neither baths nor changing rooms. However, the gym hall had all the required equipment - parallel bars, horizontal bars, wall bars and we used to go there to play from the early age.

There was an Itzko Aizner who later made of us members of the Union of Young Workers - he was in charge of looking after children at the gym hall on Sundays. He had an amateur cine-projector, and managed to find from somewhere silent films and showed them to us. He explained them and as a whole he made fabulous performances. I liked Ivrit at the Jewish school, although I didn't understand everything. I also liked Bulgarian language, grammar and the novels from the readers. I got an especially strong impression from the novels about Levski. We used to study Ivrit and Jewish history, which was called Toldot. There are some people who think that the name of the Spanish town of Toledo comes from Toldot - and that it had been a Jewish town. We used to study the Old Testament in Ivrit, and we studied Ivrit from the Old Testament. There was a teacher who had

taught my uncle, too. His name was Bucco Delarubisa and he used many Turkish and Ladino sayings while speaking. There was one Jewish school in the town - with between 20 and 25 pupils in a class. It was a four-year primary school and a three-year junior high school, after which the pupils had to attend the Bulgarian high school.

As a young boy, I didn't feel any anti-Semitism. There were several jokes of course - you go to the cinema and somebody would banter with you. Among the Jewish organizations, 'Hashomer Hatzair' was very active and every year they used to organize 'hashara' - they went camping, where they were marching and getting prepared for emigration to Israel, to cultivate the land there. They would usually go to Obratzov Chiflik ['model farm'] near Ruse. Some of the poorest people and more educated intellectuals used to attend their gatherings. Most of us, however, were members of 'Maccabi'. On 6th May, St George's day, the day celebrated by the Bulgarian Army, every time we had representatives of the Jewish school, or 'Maccabi'. We marched in white shirts and blue trousers. Everybody marched this day - Ukrainians, scouts, Armenian organizations, even legionnaires in their brown uniforms. We were all together on St George's day. There was also a Spanish ambassador, Aftalion was his name, who appeared in a three-angle hat, white feathers and a rapier. The Italian one also attended the ceremony. The teacher in gymnastics at school used to start a patriotic song and he made us marching while singing. I was seven years old during the putsch of 1934. Ruse was all blocked - that I remember very clearly.

I was never a victim of anti-Semitic reactions from the part of my teachers, but from pupils - yes. When I was at the high school there was a small legionnaire that tried to banter with me, but we had a Bulgarian friend - strong and well-built member of the Union of Young Workers (UYW) - he just took him by the armpits and lifted him up after which the boy ran away. Later we became very close friends with this Bulgarian boy who helped me then. In the third grade of the junior high school I took private lessons in Bulgarian grammar. I was not good at all at this subject and we had a very refined teacher in grammar, a Bulgarian woman, who agreed to give private lessons to me. When I studied at the Jewish school, my friends were Jews. Even in our group of UYW we were Jews only. But at the high school I had one or two Bulgarians for friends. We still meet with them now. Apart from our school responsibilities, we regularly went to the cinema. There was a cinema in the neighborhood, called 'Odeon'. We often watched films there. There was a total of four cinemas in the town. We used to watch American films, but I liked the French ones, too. There was an American sequel series 'Andy Hardy'. Mickey Rooney [a popular American actor] was playing Andy Hardy and he was starring in each of the films in the series: 'Andy Hardy in New York', 'Andy Hardy...' - God knows where... He was a very good actor.