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Summary

Rina Hason immigrated to Israel in 1949, with the Youth Aliya, and was sent to Kibbutz Shefayim. After High School Rina studied Law and, while in school, he was the main secretary of Israel's Industrial Aviation. She worked as a lawyer for over 20 years in the area of Family Law.

Rina was born in Proti (?), the second city in importance in Bulgaria. She stayed there until the age of 13. The Jewish community was composed of middle and working class people. The city managed to found a synagogue, but Jews were also very active in the Zionist Youth Organizations (there were 6 of them,) and everyone was affiliated with one. Her parents were Zionist as well. At the age of 9, immediately after 1944, she joined Hahalutz Hatzair and upon her arrival to Israel she continued her leadership activities with the Youth Aliya. The grandparents were very religious, though. They would take Rina to services where she became acquainted with that side of Judaism. Grandmother was very active in an organization "Dvorah" that was very involved with charity work and grandfather was also involved in communal work. The synagogue was central to the Jewish community. In the mornings, men came to pray, on Shabbat entire families came but during the High Holidays, the entire community came together and, since there was not enough room inside, many prayed in the courtyard. Rina's fondest memories are of the Passover celebration at home, holiday that was celebrated according to all the rules. Many a time, parents of Rina's girlfriends would send their daughters to her Seder, because it was done in great fashion. The Haggadah was read in both Hebrew and Ladino. The family continues to celebrate Passover even in Israel, for 2 days, even though the custom is only one night. The family also celebrated other holidays like Purim, Succoth, etc. On Purim, there was a costume parade organized by the elementary Jewish school. The latter was very important to the community. The educational program included Hebrew, History, Bible and Talmud, so that upon arrival to Israel, the Jews had a basic knowledge of Judaism and of the Hebrew language. The students though, communicated in Bulgarian. High School had a mixed population. At home, the family spoke Bulgarian, but Ladino with the grandparents.

Rina benefitted from her knowledge of Ladino, which was the door through which she learned other languages, like Italian and Spanish. When she was in High School in Israel, she toured the new immigrant villages with a Ladino Theatre group founded by the editor of El Tiempo, Shimon Ben Rubi, or Shimon Shimon, a Jewish Greek immigrant. The plays, which he himself wrote with his wife Miriam, were broadcasted on Kol Israel radio, in the Ladino hour. The plays had to do with situations the immigrants were faced with, and were approached with humor. Many an immigrant could find solutions to their real problems that way.

Hason is the last name of the father, whose family came from a city in the Black Sea. It's a name originated in the Sephardic diaspora. There are other Jews of this name in Turkey, North Africa, Safed and Jerusalem. who arrived to Plovick from Karnovat.

Rina knows that 4 generations of Hasons in Bulgaria arrived from Greece and Turkey. Mother's name was Kuyumzinsky (?) meaning goldsmith, from Samukov. It is a large family many of whom arrived in Israel and became communal activists. Since the name was difficult to pronounce, they changed to names like Shemtov, Zohar, etc. Victor Shemtov is a relative. He was a member of the Knesset and government minister. Some branches of the family went to Spain and France.

Even though Rina's grandparents received a religious, traditional education in their childhood, they sent their children to schools where they learned other languages and subjects, and as a consequence the new generation was more involved in the Bulgarian community at large. In that way, Judaism became the traditions and the past.

In Bulgaria, the family got along well with their non-Jewish neighbours and, many a time, they invited them to their celebrations, explaining the customs and vice versa. This did not prevent the anti-Semitic expressions of some during the Nazi regime...

Rina's Zionism originated one winter, when the Nazis were already in power, and the mother had an appendix attack. She was 6 years old, and did not need to wear the yellow star (which was required only from age 12) so that she was sent out to obtain some ice, from the stalactites formed in the gutters. On her way, children, with whom she had played in the past, (who in the meantime had become members of the Youth Fascist organization,) attacked her with snow balls. She vowed to herself then and there that her children would never be subject to the same. And she feels that Israel is the safe haven for all Jews, who don't need to succumb to the temptation of material things.

On the other hand, there were some positive revelations during the war. The grandfather's non-Jewish partner continued to manage their business, and at the end of the Nazi regime, he didn't hesitate to recognize him as the rightful co-owner of the business, and to give him his share.

At the beginning of the war, the family rented a house owned by a Catholic priest, but when the Jews were forbidden from living in Bulgarian-owned houses, he allowed them to stay. For the sake of staying together with the family though, Rina's family they decided to move to the grandfather's house.

On March 10, 1944, the Nazi regime had decided to expulse all the heads of the Jewish community so that at 5 in the morning, and without warning, policemen came to Rina's house

and took the grandparents and a teenaged aunt with them. They were only allowed one set of clothes. All the Jews in the lists were sent to gather in the courtyard of the Jewish School until the afternoon. Rina, who was not wearing the yellow star because of her age, was looking from the fence and saw, with her own eyes, when the Bulgarian Patriarch Kiri declared that if the Jews were sent out, he would go with them. By the evening, the Jews were released...This is the impression Rina carries with her, even when so many years later, they celebrate in Israel the release of the Jews of Bulgaria, thanks to the Patriarch's intervention. The event happened close to Purim and the Bulgarian Jews called the holiday the Purim of the Bulgarian Jews.

Rina had learned to read at age 4, so in 1943-44 when the Jewish children could not go to school, she would read the newspaper that grandfather brought to the house, and she learned about the killing of the Jews in Europe. They also listened to the BBC, and when the radios were confiscated from the Jews, the family managed to hide one in the basement. That way, they could compare the Bulgarian news with the Allies news.

Rina's father was taken in 1942 to work in a forced labor camp in the mountains. In those camps, they paved roads and laid railroad lines, but in the winter, they were sent home. He was there until 1944; he was 39-40 years old then. The family received a postcard from the father every 2-3 weeks. In those years, the family was only allowed to go out to procure food for 2 hours in the morning and, since there was no school, it fell upon the relatives to educate the children.

The maternal grandfather, with whom they lived, imported textiles.

In 1943, there was a lot of anxiety. They saw British planes over Bulgaria. Bombs were falling, houses were destroyed, and basements were inadequate refuge. Darkness prevailed, kids were afraid; they could play outside between 10-12 in the morning. The Bulgarian gendarmes were cruel, and Jewish commerce was not allowed; many Jews from Sophia were brought in to live in the school building; many cargo trains passed by Rina's town, transporting Jews from Macedonia and Trakia to the Danube and from there, to the death camps. All the latter information was passed on secretly from one person to the other.

Bulgarian King Moritz death: the official version was that he returned from a meeting with Hitler, and that on his way back, he fell ill on the plane, was taken out unconscious and pronounced dead shortly after.

When Rina was a High School student in Israel, she met the Israeli Parliament member, Bulgarian-born Benjamin Arditti, who wrote a book about the king's role in saving Bulgaria's Jews. Through that she learned that the king had been poisoned with gas through a mask...

The end of the war: On the 9th of September, the Red Army entered in the main road of the city...

Immediately after, Zionist organizations sprung up, and the Jewish youth started working with enthusiasm and, with the help of Israeli envoys, they learned about Judaism, Zionism, and the new country that had just been declared. The immigration of Bulgarian Jews. Rina immigrated with Aliyat HaNoar on a ship with other regular immigrants. The ship was over-crowded, and the passengers slept in three-story bunk beds....

They arrived in Haifa in January 1949. It was evening, and they were welcomed by Bulgarian Jews who had preceded them and that regaled them with oranges, chocolate and fresh bread. The most vivid memory Rina has of her road from the port to Pardes Hanna, where her parents went, was the citrus scent from the orchards.

Rina knew and spoke basic Hebrew. In Shefayim, those 13-14 years old, learned singing, Math and Hebrew and were given work in the vegetable garden, in the dining room and in the children's rooms. There was discrimination that Rina did not to get into in the interview but she explained that while the Aliyat Hanoar youth worked in the morning, and studied 2 hours in the afternoon, the kibbutz-born children studied in the morning and worked a couple of hours in the afternoon. This was one of the main reasons Rina left the kibbutz after 6 months: she wanted to study.

Rina's final words in the interview are in praise of the Jewish community of Bulgaria, and their mutual aid and care for each other, the common interest groups they had formed, the celebration of the festivities, and more.

Rina mentions that even in Israel, the Bulgarian community continued celebrating the Bulgarian holidays, like Sylvester (or New Year's Day) few other people knew about.