

## Interview with Madame Josiane AZOULAY, née Dayan in Blanquefort , France November 8, 2011

### 1 hour 16 minutes 23 seconds

Josiane Dayan was born on May 3, 1933, in Sétif, Algérie, in her grandparent's home, but was raised in the coastal city of Bougie (Béjaïa), where her father, Prosper Dayan (born July 3, 1905), and her uncle had a butcher shop. Her mother, Jeanne Dayan (born on September 10, 1906), née Atlan, was from the town of Amsilla. An older sister was born on March 26, 1931, and a brother was born on November 6, 1936.

Bougie was divided into the upper (*la ville haute*) and lower (*la plaine*) parts of the city. The wealthier people lived in the upper part, which was built after terrible flooding occurred in the 1880's. She attended a secular public school where she was an excellent student. The family spoke French at home, although the grandparents spoke Arabic to each other.

Although the family kept kosher, the father's butcher shop was not kosher because there already was a kosher butcher shop next door. Her father and uncle supplied the French army, the navy, and the local police force, among others. This was important because this gave them special status, even though they were Jews. Under the laws of Vichy, Jewish businesses were assigned Aryan administrators, but in the case of Josiane's father, none was appointed.

Josiane tells of an incident which occurred during the war. Right above the butcher shop was the local headquarters of an anti-Semitic ultra-right organization called *les Croix de feu*. They kept a close eye on everything her father and uncle did. One day, they followed him in his small truck when he went out to the country to bring back beef. His gas tank did not hold much, so he kept a 3-liter jerrycan of extra gas in the back. The members of the *Croix de feu* held him up and beat him severely, accusing him of black marketeering in gasoline. Josiane's uncle screamed so long and hard, he ruptured his vocal cords and was speechless for quite a while. When the militia dragged her uncle to the local police, since he was well-known and respected, he was released right away. However, he never regained full use of his voice. The family lived in fear.

When the anti-Jewish laws came into effect in 1942, Josiane and her siblings were expelled from school. They then attended a school run by a Elie Sfar and his sister. It was not a school which gave religious instruction, but a general education. The students were also kept busy with handicrafts and other manual tasks. They later attended a similar Jewish school in Sétif.

In the fall of 1942, there were frequent air raids. According to Josiane, the Italians were responsible for this. The port and the residential areas were intertwined. No air raid shelters had been prepared. When the raids occur, it was too far to go to the closest shelter. It was at this point that Prosper Dayan fell ill with a heart condition. The family moved to Sétif and purchased a small grocery store.

Josiane remembers that one of the men who worked in her father's grocery store was a Jewish refugee from Benghazi (or Ben Ghazi), in Libya, when the Germans took over<sup>1</sup>. A group of Libyan Jews had been sent to Sétif, where they were housed in the local synagogue. She also remembers some Alsatian refugees named Dreyfus, who disappeared at the end of the war.

Josiane has a very vivid memory of May 8th, 1945. There was to be a celebration of Victory in Europe, the end of the war. All the school children came out to march in a parade and the *goumiers*

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, Libya changed hands five times during WWII, between the Italians, the English, and the Germans.

or the indigenous troops of sharpshooters (*tirailleurs musulmans*) were the only French troops present to parade.<sup>2</sup>

The Muslim population also was part of the parade, the women and children in the front. Under their ample robes, their *ghandouras*, they hid machetes, knives, and firearms. They came from the *rue des Bains Maures* where the Coranic School was situated, and turned right on the street where Josiane's father had his grocery store, heading toward the avenue Georges Clemenceau. Her father sensed something and made his way across the throng to the family apartment on the other side of the street. He did not allow his children to go out. The Muslims went on a rampage, brutally attacking non-Muslims, French *colons* and Jews alike<sup>3</sup>.

It was not until three days later, when the French Foreign Legion arrived, that order was restored. Groups of Muslims were lined up on the edge of a near-by dam and executed. Their bodies fell into the water and were carried to the sea, so no trace was found. Madame Azoulay repeatedly says that the Legionnaires saved them.

The time-sequence of events become a bit confused and Madame Azoulay recounts massacres that seemed to have occurred during the war of independence, in the early 1950's and also, events connected to the massacres in Sétif . One of her father's brothers died in the war and his wife and little 2-year old son took refuge in Lafayette, with her family. Apparently, the baby was hidden, but the grandparents were tortured and their throats slit, and this seems to have occurred in 1945.

Josiane married Maurice Azoulay (January 10, 1924 - April 15, 2005) in 1957, at the age of 23, at the local synagogue. They had a daughter, Nicole, born april 6, 1958, and a son, born August 18, 1961. In 1961, Muslims kept pressuring her father-in-law to sell his food import business and he refused. At one point, the family left precipitously for France. Luckily, they were able to fill a *cadre* (a large container used to move household furniture and belongings on ship) and Josiane's father made sure that the dock workers did not throw it into the sea, not an unusual occurrence.

The family took a plane from Constantine to Marseille, where they did not stay long. Maurice Azoulay had been offered a job at a biscuit factory in Nantes, but that never worked out. The family settled in Nantes and Maurice became a taxi driver. The family had lost their commerce and real estate holdings, although they received a small compensation from the French government.

Both of her children seemed to have successful careers: her daughter in advertising and her son as an executive in the French company Total, where he specializes in electrical power.

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<sup>2</sup> Madame Azoulay prepared a diagram beforehand, to which she refers during the interview, so that I can see the layout of the streets where she and her family were, right in the heart of the action. (See "Croquis Azoulay")

<sup>3</sup> Madame Azoulay mentioned that most of the Jews were not wealthy land-owners like the European Catholics, with the exception of the Levy's and the Zermati's.