

Interview with Madame Jasmine LASKAR on January 5, 2014, Paris, France

WAV file M4197010

38 minutes 17 seconds

RG-50.030*0728

Notes from the interviewer are in parentheses.

Summary

Madame Jasmine LASKAR, née TEBOUL, was born on February 28, 1929, in Bou Saâda, Algeria, a desert oasis about 250 kilometers south of Algiers, the 9th child out of 11 born to Albert TEBOUL and Nejama NEDJAUI (spelling?). Her parents were married in 1905 when her mother was 15. The family spoke the local Arab dialect and French. She thinks that the family obtained French citizenship in 1870 because of the “Décret Crémieux”.

Her father fought and was injured in WW I, in the Battle of the Dardanelles Straits.

Her father was “grossiste colonial”, that is he ordered food and fabric from Algiers and had a wholesale business in Bou Saâda. The large home where they lived was next to and above the family’s warehouse and offices. The father worked with two of his eldest sons. Apparently, the Teboul family also possessed all three of the major tourist hotels in Bou Saâda¹, greatly appreciated by Americans and Scandinavians for long winter stays. There were dunes, an oasis and camels, as well as local handicrafts.

The Jewish community of Bou Saâda is one of the oldest in North Africa, partially Judeo-Berber. It was a resting place for caravans going south. Madame Laskar maintains that her ancestors arrived from Spain, expelled during the Spanish Inquisition. There were about 200 families, according to her, among 1,500,000 Muslims in the city and surrounding communities.

She and her sisters and brothers attended the public schools, run by French civil servants from the mainland. She said that the school was “mixte”, that is, boys and girls both attended, but she later qualified that by saying that the boys were in one section and the girls in another. She was about to pass her “certificate d’études” at the age of 13 in 1942 when she and other Jews were expelled from the school because of the application of the Vichy anti-Semitic legislation. Algeria consisted of two “départements” of France. It was not a protectorate, like Morocco or Tunisia.

She never returned to school and there was no instruction at home. The family practiced a very liberal form of reform Judaism. They attended the one synagogue there, on the rue de Rouville. Most of the butchers were Muslim, but sometimes, someone came to slaughter chickens in the Jewish ritual manner.

Madame Laskar did not really explain what she and her brothers and sisters did when they were sent home. She did not seem to receive further education and there was domestic help, so she did not seem to have to help with housework.

She mentions the arrival of Jewish families expelled by the Italians from Libya and later, American troops stationed there on their way to fight Rommel at El-Alamein.

She also mentions how her father’s business suffered because the Muslim population did not have the means to pay for goods. She recounts an incident where her father was “set-up” by black marketeers, paying for coffee and grain with numbered bills, with the complicity of French

¹ Madame Laskar’s family was present during the interview. It was in a post-interview conversation with her daughter that she mentioned that her uncles owned the hotels, *Oasis*, *Beauséjour* and the *Transatlantique*.

officials. Her brother spent three months in jail when the police arrived and found the numbered bills in the cash register.

She met her future husband, who had been a POW in Germany for 4 years and escaped. He was an Algerian who was living in France before the war and was 18 years older than Jasmine. They were married at the synagogue and also at the town hall in Bou Saâda in 1952 and moved to Paris right away.

It seems that the year was 1956: one of Jasmine's brothers, serving in the French army, came home on a Friday night on leave and was calmly reading a newspaper, seated on a bench with his parents. A Muslim with a scarf covering his face came up and shot him before his parent's eyes. The next day, three other Jews, in civilian clothing, were knifed to death. That was the sign for the Jewish community of Bou Saâda to leave. Some moved to Algiers, some went to France, some to Israel. Jasmine helped resettle most of the family somewhere in France and returned only once to Algeria to repatriate her brother's coffin to the mainland.

Her parents left quickly, abandoning all of their possessions and never returned. They never got over the loss of their son in such a brutal way.

Monsieur LASKAR and a brother had business in the garment district of Paris, selling ties. Their offices were in the building that has been re-appropriated by the City of Paris and has become the Museum of Jewish Art and History on the rue du Temple in the Marais section.

Madame LASKAR maintains, during the interview, that she really did not try to connect with the expatriate Algerian Jewish community and did not attend services or get involved with Jewish organizations since her immediate family was so large. They lived in the Parisian suburb of Antony. However, one of her three daughters was present and explained that her mother was quite an entrepreneur – selling ties, selling real estate and running a dress shop in the Latin Quarter, first selling to the Jewish former Algerians.