

I took it upon myself to take it apart.

So it was illegal to own a radio, and you took it apart.

Yes. But at the end of the war, I learned how to make radios. And in fact, I have one there, one of the first radios made-- anyway. So we did have radios at the end of-- after the end of the war.

OK. So let me go back to my-- I assume that you would have heard about the beginning of World War II over the radio. Do you remember how you learned that the war is starting on September 1, 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland?

Oh.

Do you remember?

Well, that was newspapers, you know? There was-- up to 1940, I knew-- I had all the news. We had all the news from whatever it means. There was radio for those people who had radio, but most of the news came from newspapers.

OK. And did people talk about that? Did they talk about the war?

Of course. Yeah.

OK.

A lot.

And what kind of conversation was going on? Do you remember?

Well, everybody was wondering whether it would hit Greece. And we thought that we maintained-- Metaxas maintained a fantastic neutrality. No-- they're not part of anybody. If Mussolini had not attacked Greece, nothing would have happened. But of course, people were wondering. And the Italians in August of 1940-- that is, a few months before they actually attacked-- torpedoed one Greek navy vessel.

And we-- nobody at the time-- the official thing the government says, we don't know who did it. Obviously, it was the Italians because there was nobody else that had ability to torpedo. And that was an early warning sign that a war might be coming. But you know, we didn't know until the 28th of October that war is here.

How did you-- how did it happen in your life? That is, how did you find out?

On the 29th of October, I went to school, as I did every day. And the teachers were outside the school, telling us, go back home. We are at war.

And that's it?

And that's it. And when I went back home, a neighbor had a radio, and he had it up there, and the radio was playing marches, and-- you know. I went home and said, you know, hey, you know, we're at war. By that time, everybody had found out. But I learned actually outside my school. I went there with my bag, books, and expecting to have another class.

And was there mobilization?

Yes.

Who was mobilized?

Well, there was army, as it always was.

So was your brother mobilized?

My brother was not old enough to be mobilized for the war yet. But people who were of age were immediately [INAUDIBLE]. I went to the army later myself, and you know--

But this is after the war.

Aye, after the war. But the 29th of October, you know, the people who started gaining ground to the Italians were the ones that were already in the army, because every male in Greece has to serve a certain time.

OK. It was a--

And then, of course, they brought people who had-- were in reserve, you know? So within a few days, weeks, they had enough people to support the counterattack. But that's how it started.

OK. And then for the next-- how long was it? The next half year or so, there's no German presence at all from October to spring of 1941.

No, May. May of 1941.

1941.

The Germans came.

Do you remember that?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit about-- what was the first things that you saw?

Well, the first thing that I remember is that during the Italian time, the Italian planes would come and bomb Thessaloniki. And we had trenches dug up to-- when the sirens went. [SIREN NOISES] We were going to the trenches. But pretty soon, we found that the Italians really were dropping bombs wherever, without any particular--

Target.

--target. Some of them fell in the sea. And some just anywhere, and then went back. So we didn't go to the trenches anymore. But when the Germans came, I had to say at that time, I admired their-- they knew what they were doing. They came and went and bombed the electric-- the power--

The power plant.

--plant, the port. You know, I could see why they were doing it. The Italians, they didn't know what they were doing. But anyway, that was the beginning of saying, hey, what's coming now is serious. [LAUGHS]

Yeah. Yeah.

And then they came-- after they went through the countries that I mentioned before, they broke the Greek-- the Greeks could not possibly do the same thing to the Germans that they did to the Italians. And the Germans marched to Thessaloniki, and it took them a month to go through the whole Greece. That's added to the time that he lost to attack the Soviet Union.

So were they in Thessaloniki by June 1941?

I think it was late May. I don't remember the exact date, but I mean, thereabouts.

And then another month until they got further south.

Yeah.

OK. And so he has two attacks then, one onto Greece and the other onto the Soviet Union, because that happens in June-- late June 1941.

Late June. Exactly. When he cleared up what he wanted to clear without going there, he attacked Greece, the Soviet Union. Obviously, he would have done it in March if Metaxas did not die. And I don't think he died of whatever they thought.

Not natural causes?

No.

[LAUGHTER]

Two prime ministers in three days is--

It's quite a coincidence.

Quite a coincidence.

Yeah. So do you remember the first time you saw a German soldier?

No. And I don't remember whether they had a parade or anything. I don't remember.

What was going on in your neighborhood-- by the time the Germans come in late May 1941, what's the mood like in your neighborhood?

Anxiety, because I don't know that anybody knows what to expect after the war starts. You know, for Americans who fought World War I or World War II long distance, it's different. But if you are in the country which is actually engaged in the war, you don't know what's going to happen. So the Germans came and life continued as well as possible, but with a lot of difficulties.

Such as?

Well, food became unavailable.

Mm-hmm. No more fish bladders?

No more fish bladders. Because the Germans would take the food. And there was no-- they were controlling all transportation, so goods did not move. In the villages, people were better off because--

That's right. Food's right there.

But going to Thessaloniki or Athens was difficult. And back then, the Greeks ate a lot of beans, which I suppose all southern countries do, you know, like the Italians, the Spanish, you know. Bean soup was the most prevalent food.

I ate so much bean soup back then that I told my mother after the war, if things are getting better, I don't want to ever have beans again. And it's a very interesting thing that I got so hooked up to the beans after a while. I can't do that, having beans.

[LAUGHTER]

Anything-- because I got hooked to the thing.

So instead of it being something that you had too much of and it repelled you, you became addicted.

Exactly.

[LAUGHTER]

OK.

So anyway, we suffered as well as everybody else, but not as well, because you could look down on Main Street here and you see people just dropping dead of famine. And you could see people, you know, down dead. And the municipal cart would go and pick up the bodies.

It was that bad.

That bad. Now, we were lucky, because somehow we were able to have something to eat most of the time. Not every day.

So there were days that you didn't eat.

Yeah. There was no bread. Bread is the number one thing that-- eat. There was no bread at all, because the Germans were taking all the flour. My father had some friends out in the country, and they would send us oil, which is important in the Greek cooking, and beans.

And in fact, my father had a friend in the postal service in Athens, and he would send postal package to that guy who was high up in the postal service in Athens as a gift. And it was the most-- it was like giving him diamonds.

And it was-- in Athens, they were worse off than Thessaloniki, because Thessaloniki is surrounded by agricultural villages that produce agricultural stuff, and it was relatively easy to-- relatively-- to smuggle them in. In Athens, much bigger city, doesn't have the same situation. So food getting to Athens was a heck of a lot more difficult.

So anyway, these packages that my father sent of the little that we had to him was-- that guy after the war was thinking that my father was the greatest. But anyway, that was one part of the Greek occupation.

That was one of those differences, one of those things that became more difficult.

Yeah. Then, of course, there was a curfew. You couldn't be out after a certain time. I don't remember. The trolleys were more or less working. Sometimes yes, sometimes not.

But there were two trolleys, one where the driver was and another one in the back. And the Germans ruled that the first one was for the Germans only. The second car was for everybody else.

Well, [LAUGHS] I remember this strongly, that the very few times it was able to move, there was just one or two Germans in the front, and everybody else, the whole down--

Packed.

--back inside and out the second. I wish I had a picture of that.

It must have looked bizarre.

And one time, I remember I ran and grabbed the first car, because I wanted to go there, and I was kind of young. And there was a German soldier that saw me, and he just kicked me with his boot and kicked me out of the--

Trolley.

And I still remember that.

Was there much military, German military presence in the streets?

No. What happened is-- there are two things that I think are interesting. One is that many Germans soldiers in the garrison of Thessaloniki who were working on this part of-- this is--

You're talking about the main part of town. Downtown.

Downtown by the water. That was a street that had been-- the houses had been burned in the big fire in Thessaloniki in 1917 and rebuilt. And those were the best houses in Thessaloniki. Plus, the beautiful view, because it's the bay.

So a Greek-- I mean, a Greek-- a German captain would go by and see an apartment there that it is-- that's good. He would go and say, OK. I'm coming in today to take charge of the apartment. Just get the hell out of here. Some were even more-- I'm coming in 48 hours. Get out. So many of them-- I don't know how many-- just confiscated houses.

On the other hand, close to where I lived in Charilaou, there was a maintenance store for the Germans. And I don't know what maintenance they did, but you know, there was-- obviously, they were dealing with machinery and stuff like that. And I had a gramo-- we had a gramophone. And the spring of the gramophone broke.

So a neighbor of mine and I took the gramophone apart and found out that the spring had broken. And we took the spring apart and we-- the two pieces, we joined them with a nail. I mean, that is really as rudimentary or elementary or whatever as you can do.

But the spring worked, so when we put it back in its case, it was working. But in the process, all the grease that was in the box that contained the spring had gone. So my neighbor said, you know, we need grease. I said, no, I need grease. He said, yeah, we do. I said, well, [INAUDIBLE] where can we buy grease? He says, let's go see the Germans.

So we take the box of-- or the spring. We go to the maintenance store. There's a guard there. And we did something that is so totally stupid, and yet it worked.

We went there and the guard was, let's say, maybe 20 feet away. We show him the box with the spring and said, [NON-ENGLISH]. And the guy comes back with his gun on his shoulder. He comes here. He understands what we're saying. He takes it, goes inside, and a few minutes later comes back with the thing all greased up and gives it to us.

Now, a few years later, I go into the army. And you know, if you're a sentry, as he was, and first of all you speak to anybody, let alone leave your post and go and do something for a stranger is high crime in military. So that guy really did something very bad for-- there were bad Germans and there were good Germans.

Was this an example of a good German?

Yes.

Were there others that you saw?

Once the Germans of the neighborhood, like that maintenance and [INAUDIBLE] others, in one of the winters they had some athletic games among themselves. And I and a bunch of other neighbors went up on a hill to watch them.

And after they're finished and they had something to eat, and there were leftovers. And they looked at us up there, and they invited us to the leftovers. We were too afraid. We didn't go. But the guys were very, I believe-- what am I trying to say?

They were sincere.

Sincere. You know? They really wanted to-- come on. But we were afraid. And one time, another time that is worth saying I think that Duffy heard this story many times.

It was towards the end of the war, and what happened is people in the barracks-- I keep calling them barracks, but there's units-- in the summer would go out, because it's hot. There was no AC or anything like that or a fan. And so they hide in the house. They would pull out chairs and sit in front of the houses. And so would the people from--

The other side.

And well, that was this particular time. It must be 1945. I don't know. We're sitting there, my father and people from the neighborhood. I would say about a dozen people. And I was there, and I believe my brother.

And we see from the corner a green uniform. Green was the uniform of the Germans. And everybody freezes, sat up. It was-- there was no other German that everybody came through that street. But when he comes close, he's a kid. He's 14 years old. Maybe 15. I mean, he's a kid. Didn't have any--

No beard yet.

--any hair yet. So my father gets up and says, Anastasia, bring me the cognac. My mother hears this, says, are you crazy? He sees the kid. Brings out the cognac. He used to make cognac.

And she gives it to the kid. The kid is given a chair. He sits down. He speaks no Greek, of course. We speak no German. But you know, there is an international language that develops. And then he begins saying, Hitler no good. And we couldn't agree more. But--

You don't say it.

--you don't say it.

Yeah.

It's a very interesting situation. Now, he was a good German. I mean, he saw families out there. And remember, his family is in Bavaria. And you know, he came for comfort, but he didn't wear the right uniform. [LAUGHS]

Yeah.

So anyway, that's--

That's what-- so what happened-- tell me now. Let's turn to what happened to the Jews.

Well, I cannot really say too much about what happened early on. I know that there were people who were-- downtown Jews were occupied. There were some pictures that you showed me.

Nancy showed--

Platia Eleftherias. That's the Liberty Square, the biggest square in Thessaloniki, where they rounded up Jews there. And they actually beat them. You know, physical--

This is stuff you saw or stuff you heard?

No. Stuff I heard.

OK. Was this soon after the German occupation?

I don't remember.

OK.

But sometime before the main event. And the Jews of my neighborhood were not particularly happy, but nobody was happy, you know? They were not, let's say-- my recollection is they were not unhappier than we were, because they didn't know that anything would happen to them in particular.

OK. That's what I was after. That's what I wanted to get a sense of. Was there more anxiety, more fear, or as much fear as everybody was having?

Yeah. The latter. But up until November-- October 28, 1940, we knew what was going on in the rest of the world, because you know, the newspapers were covering news as usual. But after that, you only got news that were coming to you from the German information. And of course, it was nothing-- we knew nothing of what is happening elsewhere.

But somehow, things have a way of trickling down, and we knew that the Jews in Poland had been taken away. How that thing came down, I don't know. But as I said before, there's no way ever you can stop the flow of news and information.

So what happened to Poland-- in Poland was known. And in fact, there is a big question as to what happened in Thessaloniki, because if you saw the film *The Pianist*, which described pretty well what happened in Warsaw, it's exactly what happened in Thessaloniki. I mean, exactly the same technique, the same everything. Even the uniforms were the same.

So describe it. Describe it.

That was known to the rabbi of Thessaloniki. Must be [INAUDIBLE] 17 synagogues. They have a lot of rabbis, and plus the head rabbi. Because they went-- the Germans went to the head rabbi and told him exactly the same thing that they told the rabbi in Warsaw.

Look, you know, we Germans don't like you guys. You know, we want to sort of keep you at arm's length. So I want you to do the same-- this thing. Just move all the Jews in one place, so we don't want you mixed with the rest of the population.

Now, they had done the same thing in Warsaw. You know, the guy in Thessaloniki knew it. And he said, OK, I'll do it. That was stupid. Some people say it was treason. I don't know what.

But in fact, the chief rabbi in Thessaloniki agreed to the Germans to actually organize the Jews in sort of an almost military fashion that enforced the movement of the Jews from the various spots in the ghettos, in Charilaou, 151, and the one up in Vardaris. Put them in one place.

And where was that place?

There was probably one in Vardaris. There were two places, perhaps. And one in 151.

So not in Charilaou.

Not in Charilaou. The guys in Charilaou went to 151.

Did you see that?

Yeah. You know, there was the people like one of my neighbors became one of those Jewish--

Was he a policeman, like a Jewish policeman, or a Jewish guard, or--

Yeah, whatever you want to call him. That actually enforced this movement of everybody to go to one place. And when that was accomplished, then those guys no longer had any power or any strength or anything. They were just-- just like any other Jew. Then the Germans came with their trucks and put everybody in the trucks, took them to the train station, and boom. Out.

Did you see any part of that?

No. That's-- before they were taken from Charilaou and taken to wherever they were taken, that's when I said earlier the incident happened when my mother asked Rachel, hey, give me [INAUDIBLE]. And then Rachel just says ah, says, you know, they are taking us there to work and they are bringing us back. That's what they were telling them, of course.

So how is it that your family would have known more?

More what?

More that that's not what it's going to be, that it's going to be far more dangerous than that?

We didn't know, but we thought. Are you kidding me? You're taking a family, including babies, under bad work conditions to Germany to work and they will bring you back? I mean, that's stupid. That doesn't happen. I mean, it was clear. And also, we knew that the people in Poland had been taken to Auschwitz and killed. That-- as I said before--

You knew this.

As I said before, that's the kind of news that you didn't read it in the paper, but somehow it came.

OK.

So if we knew it, they knew it. But they were hanging on. On the other hand, what else could they do?

So you're saying they were--

They themselves were convinced by the Germans to police themselves and put themselves in one place where they could not get away.

So your neighborhood emptied out.

Yes.

Did anybody come back-- come in there and lived in those houses?

Yes. Yes. But I wanted to say one more. This thing happened in Thessaloniki and it also happened in a town maybe 100 miles-- I don't know-- north of Thessaloniki, Kastoria. And that is where we met Nancy where they have a fantastic documentary.



Did you see that?

We're talking about-- you're referring to Nancy Hartman who was with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Archives. And there was a documentary shown at the museum, the name of which was-- what was it called?

The name of the town?

No, the name of the documentary.

I don't know.

He's going to tell you.

OK. All right. We'll come to that name. But just so that someone in the future who listens to this knows what we're referring to.

It was fantastic.

But this is a town close to Thessaloniki where there were relatively many Jews as a percent. I don't know what the percentage was. But enough for the Germans to go there. It was an insignificant town. And they picked up the Jews there before they did in Thessaloniki.

And what I'm trying to get to is that why it happened in Thessaloniki and in Kastoria, that little town, because the concentration of Jews was high. As you can see in that map, there was 20% of the population. That's a high percentage. In Athens, nobody happened-- nothing happened. Nobody-- no Jew was ever bothered-- was bothered, or-- no-- in Athens, because there were relatively few Jews.

So are you seeing the percentage of Jews in Thessaloniki was about 20% of the total population?

I-- yeah. Don't put that-- I don't know. But looking at the--

The graph that you made.

And you know, and just-- I would say that's about right.

OK. Hang on just a second. The name?

Trezoros, The Lost Jews of Kastoria.

Trezoros, The Last-- The Lost Jews of Kastoria is the name of the documentary that you saw that talks about the Kastoria Jews.

But it is such a beautiful, beautifully done thing. I would love to own it if it ever becomes available. And it gives-- the guys who did that documentary did a great job finding even films before the war. I didn't even know there was actually a film made.

That they were make-- yeah, that these things were done.

And-- yeah. Anyway, it was--

OK. So are you saying there was no roundup of Jews in Athens?

No.

Uh-huh. Because they were more dispersed, there weren't as many?

Yeah. I mean, the Germans are great organizers, very efficient people. They did it Thessaloniki, because Thessaloniki was a joke for them, as well as Warsaw. But there were other cities where the Germans were-- where the Jews were not taken away, because it was difficult.

But in Thessaloniki, not only was it that there were a lot of them, but they were also in one place. So even if the rabbi did not cooperate, if the Germans had to do it all by themselves, it was relatively easy. All they had to do, go to Charilaou, go to 151. And if they didn't get everybody, they would get the lot. But in Athens, there was no such thing.

OK. But when they left your neighborhood, there was no German military presence. It was all done by who the rabbi had appointed within the Jewish community? Or was there a German military presence?

No, there was-- when everybody was taken into the--

From your neighborhood.

--from my neighborhood, there were no Germans there. But the Germans came-- after the-- everybody was going there immediately in 24 or 48 hours, then the Germans came.

Oh, I see. So they didn't stay there long. It was only for a day or two before they're put on trucks.

Yeah.

I see.

And they were-- talking about the Jewish people, once they did their job, then they would just let everybody else. They didn't have any authority or anything. So that was a very well done job, I would say, if I were to do it, you know. And there is a--

Well executed, you're saying.

Very well-- I admire the Germans. And actually, there is a theory that the guy who did that is the guy who did it in Warsaw as well, Waldheim, who ended up being the second or one of the secretaries of the United Nations before--

You mean Waldheim?

Yeah.

Oh. You think that Waldheim organized the Thessaloniki roundup as well?

There are some people who say.

OK. I see. I see.

But whether that's true or not, I don't know. Of course--

Let me come back to-- let me come back to that part where you say I admire the Germans. Let's make sure that we understand what you mean by that.

Well, I think the Germans in general are very well-organized people. Very efficient. They do things well. Look at them. They lost the war. Germany was in troubles after '45, and they were able to become again the number one industrial power in Europe.

OK.

So I mean, what's right is right.

OK. But you're not necessarily approving.

No.

Oh, OK.

No, I'm not.

I just wanted to make sure that that's on tape.

I mean, you know, somebody may kill me-- kill me. And if he is a good shot, I would still say--

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

OK. That's a good shot.

Yeah. Facts are facts.

OK. OK. So your neighborhood empties out. Then within a few days, Thessaloniki empties out of its majority of its Jews. What happens then? Who moves into your neighborhood?

Well, at the same time, there were all kinds of things happening in the country. A lot of people lost their homes in the villages because of German activity. And there was resistance attempts in a lot of parts of Greece. Some of them good, some of them not. But whatever had happened, the German reaction was always to destroy the village where that happened.

So all of a sudden, those people in the villages found themselves without a house, and many of them went to the larger civil areas like Thessaloniki. And they had to stay somewhere. And all of a sudden, you know, there are a bunch of houses which are available. So our neighbors changed from Jews to refugees, Greek refugees.

By the time you mentioned that incident close to the end of the war where there is a young German boy, about 14 years old, and he comes by and all of the neighbors are outside on their chairs because it's hot, and you know, you're chatting with one another, was the neighborhood completely filled up again?

Yeah.

OK. So was there any sign that there had been Jews there?

I don't know how to answer that. The synagogue was still there, I suppose. I don't remember. But tragic as that the event was, it was not the only thing that was happening. There was a war going on. There was-- all of a sudden, the resistance became a major problem because the resistance was a good idea, but it turned out that it became a political thing. It was not so much resistance against the Germans as the resistance A against the resistance B. Became a political thing.

So they weren't able to unite against resistance to the Germans.

No.

And who were the forces-- the various forces within the Greek resistance?

Well, there were a number of them which were more or less OK. But unfortunately, there was one that became very prevalent and very well organized, and it was communist. And it was helped by the Russians, and they got supplies from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. All supplied by [INAUDIBLE]. Like today, where the Axis gets their various forces outside, supplies, the things-- they find ways to--

To do it.

--to do it. And that is one thing. I never liked Roosevelt in this particular instance. He's the one that did it. When he went to Yalta, when the Yalta--

Conference?

--Conference took place-- and actually, we took once a cruise and went to the room where the--

In Yalta.

In Yalta. And we found out that Stalin and Roosevelt stayed in one very nice house, but Churchill stayed in another one several miles away. So after the work was over, Churchill went to his house, and Churchill-- and Stalin and Roosevelt stayed together for the evening and in the morning for breakfast. So Stalin had all the time to do his talking to Roosevelt without Churchill being there and keeping him straight.

And what they did in Yalta was, to my way of thinking, a treason, because they gave a big part of Europe to Soviet Union, which they didn't have any-- they shouldn't, you know? All the neighbors of Greece were given. You know, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania. [CLEARS THROAT] Excuse me. Certainly wouldn't agree with that. I mean, I'm sure he didn't at the time, but then it was two versus one.

But Churchill put his foot down on Greece. He wanted Greece [INAUDIBLE]. So what Stalin did, after he got in Yalta what he got, he wanted to take Greece anyway. So he used this Resistance Army, which became less and less appealing to the Germans, and more intending to establish itself as the next power--

In Greece.

--in Greece. And in fact, it wasn't until Churchill sent some troops in Athens that they might have done it. But Churchill saved Greece. And then the Greek army began.

So it's interesting. From your story, we have both British betrayal and British support in that Metaxas disappears and the other prime minister disappears, and you suspect the foreign office in their demise.

Well, of course, because that was a specific reason. The British found the attack of Mussolini to Greece to be something that they needed to help. They helped. And then they understood the Germans wanting them out. But for them, it was a way to--

Get into--

Get into it. So when the prime minister said, OK, we're going to go along with the Germans, we're going to ask you to go away, they didn't want to go away. So it was-- it was not against-- something against Greece, I don't think. It was that this man, Metaxas, held the power at the time. He was a prime minister and he was a dictator. He could say to the Germans, yes, I'm sending the British home or not. And he said not. And the British said, no, we want to stay here.

And we will stay here.

And we will stay here. Well--

And it's--

And that caused the Germans to have to go and do it. So I understand the British doing it. I mean, in the war, you have to do bad things. Would I do it? Would I kill Metaxas? I don't know. But I'm glad I didn't have to make that decision.

So let's go back down to a more personal level now. You've painted this picture of more was going on in Greece after the deportation of the Jews, and particularly the resistance-- the development of the resistance movements, the forces behind that, and their fight amongst each other as well as against the Germans, and the rise of the communist underground supported by Stalin. How did that play out in your life, in your family's life, in your neighborhood's life? How did that affect you?

Well, it didn't last long, because fortunately, as I said earlier, the British managed to have a confrontation or a fight with the guerrillas. And at the same time, the Greek army started getting organized. So the guerrillas were not that many, but they had the power, because they were the first ones. Nobody else was around almost. But the Greek army was-- it was possible for the Greek army to organize itself enough to begin pushing them back.

Was there support in Thessaloniki for the guerrillas or the Greek army?

Well, it was a political thing.

OK.

And that was part of the answer to your question, is that it polarized people. OK, the Germans left, but now who is going to run the country? One of the various political parties. The communist party was very strong.

Are we still talking--

But there were other parties as well. And you know, the communists were strong, but not that strong.

Are we now talking post-war years?

Post-war.

OK. I'm still within the war. I want to get a sense of, was there anyone in your neighborhood, for example, who supported the communist guerrillas against the Germans?

Yes.

OK.

Because-- but that continued and was documented after the war.

Let's stay within the war, though. We'll go after the war. I want to find out about that. But I want to know-- let's say if the Jews are taken away-- when? In 1941?

No, they were taken in March of '43.

They're taken away in March of '43. So until March of '43, they live in their own communities and there aren't any particular restrictions against them. And it's only then when they are told to move into that one location that the change happens.

Yes.

So for about a year and a half under German occupation, there is no anti-Jewish regulation that's put in place that you

remember.

That I remember. I cannot say no. But if there was any serious, I would remember it. There may be things that would not clear-- There were a lot of things happening at that time, you know? The Jews is one thing, but the guerillas was another.

Did people have to wear yellow stars? Do you remember them wearing yellow stars?

Not until the rabbi started cooperating with the Germans.

OK. So this is very soon before the actual deportations, to be able to identify who's Jewish.

Yeah.

All right. So in 1943, they're taken away. When did you say it was in '43? March?

March of '43.

March of '43. And so we've got another two years of the war left before it ends. Just over two years.

Yeah.

During those two years, how did those resistance activities that you're talking about, how did those manifest themselves? Did your brother, who's now 22, 23 years old, did he join anything like that?

No.

Did your parents support any one underground over another underground?

No. Well, I myself towards the very end joined one of those non-communist things, but I didn't really do anything other than just take a piece of paper here to there. But my family had no involvement of any consequence.

OK. Either the larger family with your uncles-- and did you have cousins or anything--

No.

No.

No.

No.

But politically, we were positioned very much against the communists, you know? There were other emerging resistance forces that represented political factions other than communist. Those continued, of course, after the war. They became political parties. But that sort of thing was started in-- in fact, not even started. I would say continued, because there were political parties before. So we were among the extreme right, you would say, in the right in the sense of anti-communist.

OK. OK. Did I understand that you helped rescue some Jews? Your family helped rescue somebody?

Hide.

Hide. Tell me about that.

OK. My uncle--

Irini's husband.

Irini's husband-- had a--

What was his-- excuse me. What was his name, your uncle? Irini's husband?

Christos.

Excuse me?

Christos.

Christos. And his last name?

Christidis.

Christidis. OK. So Christos--

Christidis.

Christidis.

Had a cousin. And the cousin was an officer in the Greek army. I think he was a colonel at the time. And he distinguished himself during the four months of the war against the Italians. And eventually, he came back. The Greek army, of course, was dissolved.

And he was married to a Jew. Her name was Dolly. And she was a French Jew. And his family-- her family was part of the Jews in Ladadika, the oil--

Area that you talked about. Yeah.

And apparently quite wealthy. I'll explain in a minute what I mean. The officer-- and his name was Archimedes-- left Greece. He smuggled himself to Egypt where there was a small Greek unit, a battalion. More than a battalion. I don't know. And he went there because he was patriotic. He wanted to be with whatever-- his Greek army is in the Egypt, but that's it at the moment.

So Dolly and her two children were in an apartment, downtown Thessaloniki. But see, because she was not in the ghettos of Charilaou, 151, she happened to be like my aunt, a Jew, but she was not--

Known.

--known, you know. So the Germans did not go to give her a yellow star because they didn't know-- they didn't know her. So she lived there for a while with her children. And one day, she went out with her children to do shopping or whatever. And she went back. She was on the third floor of that apartment building. And she was going up. The two children began going-- being children, ran up the stairs.

And the neighbor on the first floor opened the louvers and said, Mrs. Angelopoulos, the Gestapo's upstairs. Now, I have no idea how the Gestapo found out about her, but they did.

And she runs up the stairs and grabs the kids and says, shush. And pulls them back and gets out of the building, goes to the corner. And they begin running, and they went to Aunt Irini's house. Was this the house, you know, they were relatives of. And there is a family council, what to do with these people?

OK. So your uncle is related to the Greek officer?

Yes. His cousin.

His cousin. OK. Got it. OK. So what to do? Yes.

What to do. And my family-- and I don't even know who else was there. But I was there. And-- what to do? And the suspicion was that if the Gestapo found them where they were-- and we have no idea how they found. But if they for whatever reason wanted to re-investigate further, cousin is a perfect place that anybody would start with. So that was not a good place for them to stay.

With Irini and her husband.

Irini-- yeah. So at that time my father said, you'll come with us. To this day, I find this very extraordinary, because my father-- yeah. Yeah. He was a guerrilla at one time when he was young. He was not really a person that you would say he's a risk taker. And in fact, he was a very conservative person. And him saying all of a sudden, no, come with us, was rather extraordinary, then and still now.

So they came with us and they stayed in that little apartment that we had in Charilaou. And the kids were about my age, a boy and a girl. And they stayed in our house for about six months.

And then there was-- an association-- I don't know-- that was following people like Dolly [INAUDIBLE] know was Jewish or not Jewish, probably Jewish, that was trying to take care of Jews that were--

Hiding.

--hiding. And the idea was that sooner or later, those people would be found in our house. And I'll tell you why. And it would be safer in Athens where they can really hide. But going from Thessaloniki to Athens at that time was not very easy, but they did it. So one day, they just left and went to Thessaloniki.

To Athens, you mean.

I'm sorry, to Athens. I'm saying why it was not particularly safe to be in Charilaou. That is because, as I described earlier, where we lived was open. You know, there are all the neighbors, small units, everybody pulling out their chairs, people visiting them, people visiting us.

And one thing about Dolly is the minute you saw her, you knew she was a Jew. I mean, she had the classic Jewish physiognomy. I mean, they could put her on Israel's coins. So it was easy to spot her.

And in fact, another big question in my mind is they stayed there for six months. A lot of people came to visit us, to visit our neighbors, were visiting-- you know, staying outside in the summer. How come one of these guys didn't go and claim the bounty? I don't know, because there was a bounty to turn them in. We were lucky. But anyway--

They were lucky.

Everybody was lucky.

Everybody was lucky.

Everybody was lucky. Yeah.

There was a severe punishment if you hide-- hidden Jews. It was like Anne Frank, you know? My family would be in trouble. Anyway, eventually, of course, when the war was over, the officer who was in Egypt by now is a general, and



he became chief of staff of the Greek army. And the family had some gratitude for us, because we took some considerable risk, as a matter of fact.

And-- ah. The connection to Ladadika. I think Dolly was-- I don't know that for a fact, but I'm piecing things together. She was so wealthy, because her family was part of the owners of those oil--

Olive oil.

--stores. And also, she was from France. Her Greek was a little bit so-so. She had a lot of jewels. I know that because the family lived a long time out of bracelets and pendants and stuff that had value. But I mean, they lasted years, so she must have had a lot of them.

So this is how she kept themselves fed during the hard times is by selling the jewelry.

Yeah. And then my niece has been asked by the two children who inherited whatever she had. She goes to Ladadika and some of those stores which still exist and collects rent and sends them to the kids.

No kidding!

One of whom lives in New Orleans and the other lives in Paris.

OK, hang on just a second.

[LAUGHS]

I'll go back to where we were. So at any rate, the children survived? They survived? And after the war, they felt gratitude towards your family for how you helped save them.

Yeah. And their father being a big wheel in the Greek army, when-- my brother was in the army before I was. But when I went, for example, I was in a training school outside Athens, quite a bit outside Athens.

And one afternoon, an officer comes and says, I have orders to take you to Athens. I said, what? [INAUDIBLE] you better go. It's an order. OK.

Well, my-- we call ourselves cousins, you know? Dolly's-- Dolly's children and we call each other cousins. My cousin had a party, and he wanted me to be at the party.

This is Dimitri.

Dimitri.

OK.

He told his father, hey, get George here. So his father called the-- he is the big [INAUDIBLE]. I need him, and he didn't have to tell anybody, because he's--

The chief of staff, yes.

[LAUGHS]

So I went there. but part had-- part of the party. And then they took me back. It was quite a bit. It was at least an hour and a half. You know, back then, an hour and a half on a truck was a long time. Anyway, that has nothing to do with anything else, but that's--

Well, it's your connection after the war. It is the kind of connection that you had--

Then my so-called cousin Dimitri who worked for the-- ba, ba, ba, ba. [CLICKS TONGUE] International Bank.

The World Bank?

The International Monetary--

Fund. Mm-hmm.

And then he started a mutual fund of his own that was only open to United Nations personnel, and he made some money that way.

Did anyone who was taken away from Charilaou come back?

No. Not that I know. Chances are not.

OK. Do you remember where you were when the war ended?

I was in Thessaloniki exactly that minute. And I don't know that it was a minute when it ended for us. But right after the war, Thessaloniki was occupied by the guerrillas, the communist guerrillas. And I lived for three months under their regime. It was terrible.

Tell me about that.

Well, we had-- we didn't have the Germans. Now we had the Greeks who were wearing the Greek communist uniform. And they had all kinds of rules and regulations about living, but I don't remember exactly, but they were not really [INAUDIBLE] pleasing, because they were real Bolshevik kind of communists, you know? I remember the mother of a friend of mine who was sympathetic to the communists, saying, they say they are going to outlaw combs, because combing is a luxury.

I see. So no more combs.

Well, I didn't see-- live-- well, they didn't live to impose such things. But I'm telling you that they were not only communists, but they were real--

Kooky.

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

So on the more serious side, though, was there any kind of political fear during those three months? Were there were people who were arrested? Were there any kinds of controls that you would feel in your daily life?

Not that I remember. I'm sure it happened. It didn't happen close enough for me to remember. We thought in our family that this was a bad-- another bad chapter in a history that was not too pleasant so far.

But we didn't think that that would last. We thought that the communists were there. They had the power. But the power was not enough to keep them there given the fact that the new army was possible to be organized quickly enough with the help of the British and the officers who only four years ago were trained officers who were able to do what they did.

There still was an army corps. There still was a military.

Yeah. Once the army was able to get organized and going, it was possible to beat the-- But it took a long time. We are talking here about-- let's see. When I went to the army, which was 1950, it was still going on.

Oh, really? There still was a partisan war going on?

Yeah. Yeah. The Greek army cleaning up parts of where the guys-- those guys had established themselves. And in fact, I probably would have gone there, because I was in the army at that time, except I was chosen to become an interpreter, and I spent half of my military life in Athens being a playboy, you know?

Not bad.

Not bad.

[LAUGHS]

But other guys who had been to the military school with me were up in the mountains fighting.

What language did you-- did you study languages in that you became an interpreter?

Well, I spoke some English.

And you spoke-- and where did you learn English?

Oh, a lot of places. It started with--

Your mother.

My mother.

Your mother spoke some English?

No. She didn't speak English. That's another question in my head. One day she said-- incidentally, back in those days, everybody who was educated spoke French. And one of the things you learned in school was French. My mother spoke French.

And one day, she comes to me and says, you're a smart guy, smart boy. And she said, I think you ought to learn a language. And said, you have to learn English. Now, why she said that, I have no idea. Why did she choose English? I don't know.

She's smart.

She was prescient. As far as the language, the world language, that was the one. It was no longer French.

You know, it was very unusual.

Yeah. Yeah.

And she hired an Armenian lady who started teaching me English. And I remember a book that she brought me. The first thing, sitting, standing, and bowing.

[LAUGHTER]

And that's how you learned--

That's the three first words that I learned.

[LAUGHTER]

So-- and then I took it upon myself to continue. I went here and there and I more or less convinced people that I can speak English with maybe an interpreter.

And this was in-- what years were you in Athens as an interpreter?

Early '50s. In 19-- I cannot-- I don't remember the exact year, but I say maybe '52.

So you're, like, 20, 21 years old.

Yeah. To '54. Then finally, it was time for me to be released from the army. My service was three years. And then I was an interpreter attached to the American military mission. There was a bunch of officers sent by the Pentagon to train Greek officers, and they knew weaponry. And there was about 30 or so of them. And that's where I was attached as an interpreter. [INAUDIBLE] about 4 or 5.

So that's your first American connection.

Yes. And when I was discharged from the army, the [? admissions ?] offered me a job as a-- continue as a civilian.

And you did.

And I did.

When did you come to the United States?

1959.

So not so-- not so late afterwards. I mean, you didn't stay much longer in Greece.

Well, that's when things get complicated in a different way, you know? I met an American lady there who actually was working on the sixth floor. We were-- the American military, which was on the fifth floor, and CIA was on the sixth floor.

Oh.

Nobody-- everybody knew that that was CIA. That's where my former wife used to work. But she never said CIA. She always said, when I was working for the government. [LAUGHS] Anyway, so--

And that's how you got--

I was teaching her Greek, because she was a Greek scholar at the school, and then just, you know, how it happens. We got married and I came here.

OK. But did the rest of your family stay in Thessaloniki?

Yes.

Including your brother?

Yes.

OK.

In fact, we've traveled a lot. My brother has traveled almost not at all.

But he came here.

But you say he came to the United States.

He came here-- who was the president of here?

Reagan?

Bush, the first Bush.

Yeah.

So in the 1980s. He came in the late 1980s. OK. Well, I think we've come close to the end of our interview, but I'd want to ask, is there something we haven't talked about that you think is important for us to capture?

I'm sure it is, but it'll probably occur to me the minute you leave.

[LAUGHTER]

That happens. Let me tell you, that happens all the time. But hang on just a second. In a second, I'll introduce this. So Nancy from our photo archives is here with us today, Nancy Hartman. And she recalls a story you had told her before about an incident that happened during the time that you were hiding Dolly and her two children. Could you tell us that?

Well, during that time, my brother was-- [INAUDIBLE] he was 20 years old. So he went out with Dolly somewhere. I don't know. Now, Dolly was hiding, but he was going out, you know? And there was a curfew in town, 8 o'clock. And she went with my brother. I have no idea where they went. A store? A store wouldn't-- I don't know. Maybe they went to visit somebody. And they were walking back to Irini's house, but it's after 8 o'clock.

And lo and behold, there is a German patrol. Clunk, clunk, clunk. Halt. And-- oh my god. They look at their watch. It's after 8 o'clock. And they stop there, and the German patrolman shows with his finger the watch, obviously, the time. And my brother was kind of a different person from me. He was a very extroverted person. He grabs Dolly and says, [GERMAN].

[LAUGHTER]

And I don't know what she said, you know? She was probably peeing in her pants.

[LAUGHTER]

I mean, what a time to hide from the Germans and [INAUDIBLE] your coat for curfew violation. But anyway, the German was I guess one of the good ones. He looked at them and says, ah! Moved his hand like, get help. Go, go, go, go. And they ran, you know? And they got out.

It was a close call.

I can remember my brother coming and saying, [GERMAN]!

[LAUGHTER]

To his mother.

[LAUGHTER]

But it was some quick thinking on his part.

Yeah.

OK.

Well, obviously, the family became very friendly with us after that. They were coming to our house not only for my mother's cooking, but because you become close under those conditions.

Yes. Yes. OK. Again, if there is something else that you will remember that you think is important, you can get in touch with us later and we'll try and make a second brief interview to add that part. So this is not necessarily the end. This can be just for right now.

There's one thing that's interesting. It was-- it was important not to say anything about the Jews. You could say it, but you could not write about it. And there's things. When I was a--

And you're talking about which time? During the war?

No, after the war.

After the war.

During the time when the Jews were taken away, which was March '43, and the end of the war. When I was at that age, I was publishing a handwritten magazine.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

And there is all kinds of stuff here.

During the war years?

In 1943.

Oh my.

Oh, jeepers.

This was in October, I believe, of '43. It was all handwritten. And it was circulating in the neighborhood.

Your work? Your-- oh my goodness.

Yeah. So there was all kinds of things here, written by a lot of people, but mostly by me. And it is comments about the war. And that was OK.

But I did not put anything here that had to do with the Jews, because this thing was circulating in the neighborhood and I didn't want anything there that had to do with the Jews, because that would put me in trouble. I could say anything-- well, more or less anything, more or less acceptable, and an analysis of what's going on in the war between the Germans and the-- that was OK.

Really?

But you couldn't say anything about the Germans or the Jews. And there is nothing in all this book, which I know covers a couple of years, that says anything about the Jews. For fear.

For fear. Did you know of people who had said something and who were not Jewish, who suffered some repercussions?

I cannot-- I heard, but I do not remember. I cannot-- I cannot make up any story. But yeah, there were penalties to people who--

Who helped.

--helped.

This is an amazing work. This is an amazing work. Well, I will want to talk to you about this book, because it is a very important-- if it's contemporary, that is, contemporaneous for the time, there are few things that are as good witnesses. But for this point, at this point what I will do is I will say, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview, unless you wanted to say something else right now.

No. The date of this particular issue, was one of the first issues, was 29th of October of 1943. That was three years after Mussolini attacked. But that date is even today celebrated as a national day in Greece. And it's called the Ohi Day, the no day when Metaxas told Mussolini no.

Oh.

And you know, this issue was dedicated to that. And here's the picture-- or not picture.

Oh, caricature.

Caricature of Mussolini.

Amazing. Just amazing.

Is that your drawing?

No. I can write, but I cannot paint. I had a friend who did all the paintings-- all the--

Drawings, the illustrations. Well, as I say, we will talk about this book now after I record. But for right now, I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. George Ftikas on September 15, 2017, in Falls Church, Virginia. Thank you again.

And in Charilaou.

[LAUGHTER]

And I must say, you are--