

## Interview with Lucia Eugenia BITBOL on July 17, 2019 in Paris, France

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1 hour 12 minutes 33 seconds WAV  
50 minutes 43 seconds

Lucia Lumbroso was born on September 21, 1926 at her family's summer residence in Le Kram (which means fig tree), a little commune outside of Tunis. Her father, Ugo Lumbroso, was a well-known ophthalmologist, who had worked with the Nobel Prize winner, Charles Nicolle. He had his own clinic on the rue Es Sadika, not far from the avenue Jules Ferry (now the avenue Bourghiba).

Her mother was from the Cardosa family. Her brother Marco was 3 years older, her brother Bruno, 6 years younger, and a third brother, 8 years younger.

The Cardosa and Lumbroso families were part of the elite Italian Jews from Livorno, called "la grana" in contrast to the native Tunisian Jewish population, "les touansa".<sup>1</sup> They numbered about 3,000, at the most. Until the age of 13, Lucia only spoke Italian, which is what was spoken at home. She attended the Margh rta da Savoia primary and elementary school until the age of 12. She does not remember the family being too observant.

Lucia recounts that every summer, the family vacationed in a little farm outside of Fiesole, near Florence, with her grandmother, Eugenia de Castelnuovo. (Eugenia's father was personal physician to King Emmanuel II of Italy and was one of the rare Jews to have been ennobled.) One day, in 1938, she and her father saw the newspaper "La Difesa de la razza" in a bookshop window. He wondered what that was. Soon, Eugenia received official census forms, asking how many Jews lived at her farm, including foreigners. Dr. Lumbroso told everyone to pack up essentials, closed the house, and everyone left for Tunisia immediately.

When Lucia showed up at the Italian high school she was to start in October and she maintains she was 13, but that would have been in 1939. She describes how she and several other Jewish students were not allowed to study there. Her father enrolled her in a French high school, but she did not speak French and they placed her in a class of students younger than her. She mentions how several of her teachers humiliated and taunted her – they were anti-Italian and anti-Semitic. Despite her father's plea for leniency, she was expelled, and finally found a place in a vocational school (Coll ge Paul Combon) for French-speaking students where she received a general education and also learned to sew.

Her older brother Marco and her father were not obliged to perform forced labor. They reported to the Italian authorities, but according to Lucia, they hoped to take over Tunisia after the war and wanted to preserve those who were best-educated and capable of helping them rule.

She remembers rationing, but never went hungry.

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<sup>1</sup> Several of her cousins have already been interviewed for the USHMM – Dr. Guglielmo L vi, Dr. Mario Bensasson, Dr. Giacomo Nunes

Once the Allies arrived to liberate Tunisia, she remembers a romance with a young English officer, Kenneth Smith, who later died in the battles at Montecassino.

A young Tunisian Jew, the lawyer Charles Haddad (who later became President of the Jewish Community<sup>2</sup>), denounced Lucia's father as a fascist and promptly kicked the entire family out so he could take over their apartment.

Dr. Lumbroso was sent to prison, then to a camp in the southern town of Gafsa, where he set-up a make-shift clinic and treated all the prisoners. After a few months, he was released and came back to reclaim his home and belongings.

Lucia met her future husband, Gaston Bitbol from Sousse, in her building. He was 15 years older, but won her heart, and she defied the customs of the Livornese community and announced her engagement to her family. They were married in 1952, but Tunisia was heading toward independence.

She describes how her father purchased an apartment for the couple in Paris, perhaps with the help of her cousin, Oscar Ghez, a successful factory-owner and art collector who was living near Geneva.

Gaston was reluctant to lose his job at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, but while visiting Paris in 1961, Lucia insisted that the family remain in France and not return to Tunisia. Their son Michel, born in 1954, would have no future in a country where all education was conducted in Arabic. They did stay on and despite economic hardships in the beginning, made a new life in France. Her parents and one of her brothers settled in Italy.

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<sup>2</sup> His archives were willed to l'AMIT (*Association Mondiale des Israélites tunisiens*) in Netanya, Israel, after his death in Marseille in the early 200's. The USHMM has reproduced much of this, in cooperation with Dr. Victor Hayoun.