

RG-50.030.1057

Summary

Yvette Carmona Nahmias (née Carmona) was born in Salonika, Greece on May 1, 1922. She was the only child of Marguerite Farraga and Albert Carmona. Her mother's parents and sister and brother lived nearby in Salonika. Her father's mother and his sister (a brother died in WWI) lived in Paris, France, where her father Albert was from. Her father was born in Turkey and had Spanish citizenship. This would prove to be very important for the family's survival. The parents met through an arranged marriage. Although Yvette and her father went to synagogue on important holidays the family was not religious. She lived in a large, modern apartment facing the Mediterranean, and her well-off family included a German nanny, who largely raised Yvette, and a maid. By the time the Nazis invaded Greece, Yvette had almost completed high school at a French lycée.

The family did not talk politics in front of Yvette, and she was uninterested until the Nazis invaded Greece to help the Italians. She said that the Italian invasion did not interfere with her life. It was not clear whether her family's life changed when the Nazis first came in 1941 or when they started deporting Jews in 1943. In any event, the Spanish embassy assured them as Spanish citizens they would not be harmed. Her father went to Athens to get their Spanish citizenship papers. Then the family hid with non-Jewish friends, but Yvette's father did not want to stay in hiding. Informed by the Spanish embassy that they could go "freely" into the concentration camp, the family joined with other Salonika Jews in cattle cars in route to Bergen-Belsen. While they suffered like other deported Jews on the cattle-cars they were treated very differently once they arrived at Bergen-Belsen. They, and other Greeks who had Spanish citizenship, were placed in special barracks. Although they all had to use the same, inadequate toilet facilities outside the barrack and had to report for the early morning "Appel," they were not otherwise mistreated. Food was inadequate but better than the other prisoners. Once, Yvette, speaking fluent German, was even able to get a special soup for her sick mother. Out of the barrack window she frequently saw morning trucks piled high with dead bodies. But, totally separated from most of the camp's prisoners, she thought that they had died of sickness. In other words, she was unaware of what most inmates experienced at Bergen-Belsen. Mostly, Yvette said of her one-and-a-half years at Bergen-Belsen that she was bored. There were no deaths in her barrack.

In April 1945, Bergen-Belsen was liberated. Yvette's family was put on a train to Belgium. Unfortunately, her father caught typhus and died soon after their arrival in Belgium. She and her mother stayed in Belgium only a short time. They returned to Greece where her uncle met the family. He had survived the war in hiding. They stayed with the uncle and aunt, and Yvette met her future husband there. It was also an arranged marriage. She had a cousin who worked for the Joint Distribution Committee, and she told her that Yvette and her husband could emigrate under the sponsorship of the Joint. After almost two years, now with a young son, they went to Boston, MA and eventually settled in Brookline, MA.

Expressing her final thoughts about her experience, Yvette recommended that people not despair, always hope and pray that life will get better.