

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. This evening our guest is Angela Keil, who lived in Greece. And she's going to tell us about the war years and the time before the Holocaust living in Greece. Angela, you were a little girl when the Nazis came to power in Greece but can you tell us something about a more normal time of your life before the war began?

Well, I was born in 1936, and the war began in 1944, Greece. And during that time I was the first child of my parents. My parents-- my mother's younger sister and I-- lived in a tiny little house by the sea very close to the center of the city.

I think we have a picture of that. We can-- we have a map, and you can show us Salonika. And then we have a picture of this little house.

Yes. No, we don't have a picture, I think, of the house.

Of the neighborhood.

Of the neighborhood, yes.

Here is Salonika, and the bigger picture of Greece. What was the population of Salonika?

Oh, I don't know at that time what it was. I would say maybe close to maybe 100,000 people. Now it's kind of like Buffalo. It's probably 300,000, probably close to 700,000 the area.

In the area. Do you want to tell us about this picture?

Yeah. Well, the house that I lived in was kind of on the other side of this. This is the port of Salonika, with the far end of it was the commercial port, and then, on this side, the city, and in the back, on the hills comes-- is the city.

And the house where I lived was-- is not in this picture. But it was a tiny little house. And it was almost like in the countryside, because I was right on the water. And the park, the only one big park that Salonika has, was across from us.

Now were there ethnic neighborhoods? Was there a Jewish neighborhood?

Yes. But at the time, I really didn't know about it. The Jewish neighborhood is kind of east and north of this picture. And in 1936, Salonika was primarily Greek, with the Jewish neighborhood. But in 1912 which is about the time when Salonika becomes Greek-- because up until that time it was in the Turkish, in the Ottoman Empire-- at that time Salonika was considered equally Jewish, Greek, and Turkish, with a good number of Bulgarian and gypsies in the population. And I don't know what the percentage is, but I always think of it in myself kind of one third, one third, and one third.

And it was only after the First World War, and the Balkan Wars, that it came within Greece. Greece's frontiers included Salonika, and were pretty much what they are now.

And then a lot of the rich Jewish people left, because their jobs were destroyed, because their jobs depended on much larger frontiers. And so the cereal trade, was interrupted, and people left. And then the Turks, of course, left, and a lot of Greeks came in. And so it became, between the First World War and the Second World War, it took its present shape, which was mainly Greek with a large Jewish population, that had been there really since-- well, when did the Jews-- were they--

Well, they were expelled--

--they were Sephardic Jews, that they were expelled from-- in the 15th century. Probably it might have taken them kind of half a century to get to Greece. But Salonika was one of their-- of a big Jewish community in Salonika and in Constantinople.

I read that at this time there were about 60,000 . Jews so that's a large population.

Yeah, That was a very large population. And the Jewish-- at the time, when I was a kid, I didn't know that. I learned that afterwards. But it was a very accomplished and kind of an illustrious population, because the Jews within the Ottoman Empire were accepted as guests. And they were doing very important work for the empire. That's how the sultan saw them.

And so they flourished in Salonika. They controlled the cereal, as I said, the export of the central-- concentration of wheat and other cereals. But they also-- a lot of the poor Jews did a lot of weaving. And so they were expert weavers.

Were they also involved with the sea front? With the port--

Yes, yes.

--fisherman, and--

Some of them were. But a lot of them were also involved with just getting the port functioning, the port functioning.

I think before you go further in your story, we had a picture of the symbol of Salonika, white-- that's it. Could you tell us about--

The White Tower?

--the White Tower?

Yeah, well, that comes from-- this is a thing, a Venetian castle that was taken over by the Turks. And it was the end of the walls that all the city from here to the port, that we said, was the ancient-- the part of the ancient city. And the new city really grew up east of the White Tower. And the White Tower is--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--a symbol of. Let's go back to little Angela, and tell us what-- well, you lived very nicely, and you're the older child.

Yes.

And when does this period of happiness and normalcy in a nice home end for you?

Well, one of the things that I remember very well was that there were not-- it was not a neighborhood. It was just a little house there, and there was another little house next to us. And there was an older girl who lived there. I think her name was Karla. And they were Germans.

Now I don't know how they found themselves there. I think they were working there. And I used to idolize this girl. She might have been 10 and I was four, something like that. And she had this very blonde hair that I used to love to look at. I was a kind of a skinny, dark little thing at the time.

And then one day they were gone. And I just couldn't understand it. And my mother said that it looks like there's going to be a war. And they went back to their country.

And then, of course, before I knew it, then, what I remember was my father leaving for war really quickly, because in 1940 the Italians attacked Greece. And even though we had a fascist dictator at the time, whose name was Metaxas, he said, no, and he got into a war with them. And the Greeks were very unprepared, because our dictator, because he was a fascist himself, he didn't expect to be attacked by other fascists. So they were really very unprepared.

And I remember sitting. Like, the little house was by the sea. So the sea was behind. And the big road was in front of me. So I would stand there and look at these trucks of all shape-- not trucks.

Tanks?

No, the trucks were very small trucks. But they were not army trucks. They were just regular trucks that the government requisitioned. And the guys, including my father, would just jump on them, and the trucks would go slowly down the street, and the men would jump on them and go to war. And of course, we didn't know what to expect.

But very soon, the British, I think-- I'm not very clear. I think the British. It could have been the Italians that were trying to soften us up. But I think it was the British. They were trying to destroy the port. So they were bombing. And their bombing was not very accurate. And we were close enough to the port.

So my mother left with me. And my aunt decided that it would be better if we would move away from the port. So we left that place.

And then my aunt-- and then, with another aunt, who had the kid, and all the guys-- you see, my father, my uncle, my father's brothers, who were not married, they were all till the war.

And you see, my father was kind of old at that time, because he was a young man at the First World War. He went as a 19-year-old to the First World War. And he went as a 40-year-old.

And they took him.

And they took him. He got caught kind of on both ends. And so they were at war.

And so we all went to-- one room. So there were three women and two kids, because I had an cousin in one room, at the edge of the city. And we were there the night that the Germans broke through, because the Greek army, unprepared as it was, stopped the Italians by-- up in the mountains in Albania, near Albania. And so then the Germans decided that they couldn't have this defeat. I think Churchill at the time-- I read, afterwards-- that he said that was the first turn. The little Greeks managed to stop the Axis forces. But of course, Hitler could not really have that stand. So the Greek army could not stop the German army.

Do you remember when the Germans came?

So what I remember, the Germans coming in-- because all night long we stayed up, and all night long we could hear the German tanks and German cars, trucks, and German motor scooters coming in. And we just had never heard that sound before. Vroom, vroom, vroom, all night long. And we said, oh my god, there must be very many, because it lasted all night long.

And then we moved from there, and we went to my aunt's house, which was very close to what used to be the Jewish neighborhood. And that's where-- then, the Germans came in. And they set a curfew. So I--

A curfew for you, or for--

For everybody. They set a curfew for everybody. And so I used to spend a lot of my time-- and I assume other kids also-- kind of waiting and looking out the window, because we were not used to curfew. So we used to run around in the cities as kids. We used to play outside. So I spent a lot of time looking out the window.

And that's then when I became aware of the Jews, because I can't remember really what the order was. But at some point, they issued an order for the Jews to identify themselves with a star. And that's the first time that I became aware that there were people--

Who were different.

--that were different, that there were Jews. And--

Did your father have any dealings, or your mother with the Jewish population?

Well, my father did, but at the time I didn't know it. And then my mother did. Well, we did, because we had a woman and her daughter. And I don't know the story how come she didn't have a husband. But they would come and help us wash, because at that time there were no washing machines. So we had the place in the yard, kind of a little shack where it was the washroom. And it was a big production. So they would boil the clothes, and it was--

So she would come in the morning. It was kind of one day a week we had to do the wash. And everybody helped. And she took charge of it, and all of us helped.

And she was Jewish. Did she stay with you throughout the war?

And she was Jewish. Well, she was not staying with us. She was staying in this Jewish. I mean, she was--

She continued coming?

Yes. And my mother-- and now that I think of it, she might have been thinking, but she didn't tell me, for I remember her saying, I don't know what's going to happen with Missus-- I can't remember her name now. But I can see her. She was a very scrawny woman, kind of looked older than she was, I think, because she had a young daughter.

And then my mother never mentioned that again. And now that I think about it, this woman kept coming to us, and I don't think she was expelled, because I remember that after the war she left Greece. There was a time of a lot of emigration after the war. And she and her daughter went to Australia.

And I heard that her daughter had married very well in Australia, and this woman was there. And I remember my mother and my aunt saying, now isn't that good that something good happened to these people. But I never figured out how it happened. No, I don't.

And now that I'm talking about it, it's possible that my mother figured out that we shouldn't talk about her being Jewish, because she never mentioned it again.

And at the time, of course, there was a Greek neighbor whose son was taken in a concentration camp, a Greek-- Christian Greek neighbor.

Why was he taken?

Oh, but there were a lot of people were taken, and he never came back. So I remember our main preoccupation was with what happened to this boy, because his mother and his sister would come to our house. And I remember the endless trying to think what happened, where might he be, what kind of news. I mean, those times, people who have not been through them--

Very trying.

Yeah. And that you can't imagine kind of the consciousness of trying to track people, and not knowing, not trusting who, what authority, what are you going-- to trust and trying to just figure out where are they. Are they alive? If this happened, he might be alive. If that happened, he might not be alive.

Well, did you and your family have any actual interaction with the Nazis?

Well, actually, my father was taken prisoner for a while by the Nazis.

Why? Did he do something?

Well, I don't know if he had done something, but I think he had done something that the Nazis did not like. But he was let out after a while.

And I remember, it was a time of great anxiety. We would always kind of run away.

Oh, and the Nazis took over our school, which was in the neighborhood. So what the kids would do, we would go and look at them. And they used the school as a place to quarter horses.

And we had never seen such huge horses. They had this huge, big, m kind of a German-- huge, draft horses.

But you were little, too.

We were amazed to look at those horses. And we would always run away from the Nazis.

And I remember one guy, he used to call us and give us-- he would come out at a particular time. So we would run away. And he used to call us.

So I want to go back to say that one of the images that really stuck in my mind was the curfew, and especially, then, when the Jews were asked to be called early-- had an earlier curfew, that the streets were just so empty. And I think that I kind of had developed a routine of going to the window as a kid, and looking out, and looking at the empty street.

And what I remember, the only Jew that I remember I had identified as a Jew, was this little man that would sneak out at dusk. And he would cover-- and I used to wait and see, did he go by tonight. And he would go by and try to get away-- he was going from the Jewish neighborhood into the rest of Salonika. And he would pass our street.

And I had figured out that he was sneaking to a family. I don't know where he was going. But I always remember that lone figure. He was a little-- and a thin man.

And I remember he was wearing black, a black coat. And he was always trying to hide the star so he can get by.

Do you know if he made it?

I don't know. The likelihood--

[CROSS TALK] business.

Yeah, that's something that I always remember this image of this man going by. The likelihood that he made it is not very good, but that's one of the images that I have.

Angela, what kind of business was your father in?

Well, my father was a merchant. But he also had leases on--

On property?

No, on mines. And that's how he got in prison, because the Germans wanted him to operate the mines for them. And that's, I think, how he was in prison for a while.

Do you remember any activity on the part of your father with the Nazis? Did he have to have the store for the Nazis' convenience?

No. No, they wanted him to write the mines-- to run the mines. But the mines were not in Salonika, so I never saw the

mines.

But my father had a lot of-- later I found out, when I was older-- at the time I didn't know it-- he had a lot of friends from his work that were Jewish. And then, later on, I got to--

Actually, some of them were very helpful to him, because the Second World War was-- destroyed his business. So after the Second World War, when he was trying to start all over, I think that Mr. Nehama, who had a bank-- I think it was the Ionian bank. If I-- no, the Bank of something trust. Maybe Ionian and trust. I can't remember which bank it was. Which was-- it was quite unusual to have small banks in Greece at the time. He had helped my father. And that's when I became-- I became aware that there was a Jewish community.

But it's interesting that a man who survived the terrors of living in Salonika at the hands of the Nazis was able to help your father, who wasn't Jewish.

My father had-- later on, I was always amazed at the lack of bitterness in the Jewish population. My friend Rena, that I told you about, that I met her when I was 12. And by that time she was 12. She could think. She had survived. She knew that a lot of people had not survived. And she was an amazingly, without bitterness, person, so much so that we didn't think anything exceptional about her survival.

Did you ever talk with her parents? Did her parents ever open up and say what happened to them?

No, they were extremely upbeat people.

That's lovely.

Yeah. And Rena, I talked to her when I decided to do this. I called her. And I remember very little, that I think at some point it came up. And she had said that they survived by going to one of the islands, that somewhere they hid. But when I talked to her, she told me that I couldn't have known much, because she never talked about it to anybody, what had happened to her and her family.

And I think three years ago she went to a survivors of the Holocaust group. And since then, she began to talk. So I'm going to talk to her and find out about her story. And they--

She must have had false--

Yes.

--false identification, because 95% of the community was destroyed.

Destroyed, yes. But afterwards, I got to know a lot of the survivors, because-- well, I don't know. The Jews that did survive were very interesting people, and I don't know. And my father knew them, and I was older.

And the family that I got to know a lot were, of course, the Malcho family, because they ran a very, very attractive-- to me, at the time-- book store downtown. And I used to love to go there. And I remember, I was amazed, because I was learning English. So I must have been 13, 14. As soon as I began to be able to read English, they had pocket books. And you could get a pocket book. I think, at the time, they were-- I don't know-- \$0.20 or something like that. Maybe even cheaper than that. I can't remember.

And so I would go there and browse, and kind of put my drachmas together, and I would get pocket books that I could read. And so I got to know the Malchos, who survived. I don't know. I'm sure that not the whole extended family survived. But their family.

Do you know how they survived?

No.

You're going to find out.

Yeah, I will.

And then there were-- there are lots of friends. You see, there were so many Jewish people in Salonika, that I would say if your family came from Salonika, you were bound to have some friends that you knew. So then, when I got older, then I got to know more.

Well, the, Malchos, and the Rekoutis, and the Benvenistes are all old-time names in Salonika. Some of them made their way to Israel.

The Benveniste had-- that's another way how I knew them. Like, my father used to import crystal, and the Benveniste had a crystal kind of a gift shop where they sold crystal and china. And that's how-- but at the time I didn't know that Benveniste was such an illustrious name.

And I guess, in the 16th century, a Benveniste was a famous Jewish philosopher who had started a school, a university in Salonika that ran for a few centuries, and it was a famous school.

Malchos, Abravanel was my friend's name. Rena Abravanel was my friend's--

Well, that back to the Middle Ages, to the golden age in Spain.

There were a lot of names like this. Then Peraha and Nehama were kind of related families, that they were bankers that my father knew.

You don't know how many of these families survived, do you?

Well, I know that Mr. Nehama survived, and his daughter, and who had married a Peraha survived, and then the Malchos family, and Abravanel. Well, Lilly Sciaky survived. But the rest of the Sciaky had already left Salonika.

So I really don't know how many. My impression is it's a very small. I would say maybe 3,000.

3,000 from 60,000.

From 60,000. It was just a--

Tremendous calamity.

--tremendous calamity.

Another thing that happened that I have to-- that I do remember was-- and I don't really what happened. But I think during the German occupation, the Jewish cemetery must have been desecrated, because after a while, Jewish tombstones, which were marble, were used to cover certain sidewalks in my neighborhood. And I remember that I was looking at them, and I couldn't understand what it was.

So I don't know now when that happened, whether that happened during that time--

No, it did. According to the history--

Oh, it did.

--the Nazis did that purposefully. And they use some of the slabs for steps, as you say, and curbs, and some toilets, just

to--

To demoralize--

To demoralize the community.

Yes. Now one of the things that I saw, Shoah, that I was interested in, like I really did not hear how the getting of the Jewish property was passed on. Did Greeks died? How did they liquidate it and make money in order to finance the transportation of the Jews?

You see, Lanzmann says in that film that the Nazis were very efficient in that way, that they expropriated Jewish property. And with that money, they paid for the transportation.

Well, I know in the case of Salonika, and it happened in other communities, each time the Jews thought there would be one more Aktion, and that would be the last. And this Aktion was the same as occurred in Rome, where the Nazis asked for so much [INAUDIBLE], so many drachmas from each family. And promises were made. But, of course, this money was never returned. And that money was used for their own demise, taking them to Auschwitz and other--

So then I really never found out, for instance, how, then, what happened to those houses, because now they are all Greeks. I mean, now all of those neighborhoods have been torn down, and big high rises have been built, and in some ways--

Well, probably, the Nazis gave permission, or without permission. The Greeks bettered their position and moved into vacant houses. This happened all over.

What happened to your family? You were all in one room during the war?

Well, that was during the-- before the Germans came in, when the Italians were bombing. The Italians were very inefficient bombers.

Just like the British.

The British were not much better. [LAUGHS] So it was a high premium for people to find places to hide. And there were no air shelters.

So what we would do is it was a big kind of shopping around for bomb shelters. So we went to this one little room at the edge of the city where there was a huge, maybe a six-story warehouse full of tobacco. And the idea was--

See, very few of the houses had concrete walls or concrete roofs, because the roofs were made out of terracotta tile. So we figured that this was a modern building, so that the six stories of concrete, and the tobacco in between, was going to stop the bombs. And the bombs were not that efficient yet in the beginning of the war.

And that warehouse might have been-- the name of the man was Moscov.

Oh, that sounds like a Jewish name.

--who owned the-- yeah, who owned the warehouse. So that might have been a Jewish merchants.

Now did you spend much time in that warehouse, then?

Oh, every time there was an alarm we would run. We were very close to it. And of course sometimes the alarm was there, and the bombs were right there, and we wouldn't make it.

But later on, when the British were bombing the Germans during the German occupation, we spent a lot of time in air

raid shelters. And sometimes the kids would stay there all the time.

If you didn't have school, this was--

We didn't have school.

This was four years. And how long--

Till '44, '45.

Until 44. So this was eight-- you were eight, nine years old. So what did you do during this time if you didn't have school?

Oh, we played. We had a wonderful time, from that point of view. Outside of not having enough to eat, which we did in '40, '41, and '42-- '42 was a really disastrous year--

You remember that.

--because-- yes, there was a lot of famine in Greece. My family survived, but people were really dropping in the streets. And we could see them. And Greece lost-- I don't know how much. Maybe 1/7th of its population as a whole--

From starvation.

--from the starvation.

So what we would do-- and so what I did was everybody was looking for food all the time. So my mother would take stuff, whatever we had-- any jewelry or anything that seemed to value-- and take it out and try to find-- make contact with villagers who had some food. So there was just this black market. And whatever you found, and you brought it home, and then you tried to make things with it. So that was great for us kids, because for the first time--

You were foraging all the time.

--yeah, we were foraging. We were making food that otherwise would have been bought. My mother, if she found flour, then we would spend days making noodles so that you can have them for a long time.

Or I think once she came in with half a pig. You can't imagine what that was. And then we made sausages, and garlanded the whole house with sausages. I mean, we were really lucky, because at that time most of our food was the whole corn cob. There was no wheat to be left to be eaten anywhere, unless you were very lucky, and you found some villager to give you some wheat. So the food that was rationed and was given to everybody was pieces of this thick and very moist corn bread that was done not only with the kernels, but with the whole, with a cob also, in order to--

To give more sustenance.

--to give more sustenance and just bulk. So we were really-- we were famished, but those of us that didn't die, we had a good time, because we didn't have school. We were completely unruly and unregimented. The only thing we knew was to hide from the Germans and to hide from the air raids.

Were any of your friends, ever-- children-- caught by the Germans, taken away?

Well, that was in '44 that the Germans burned the whole village right outside of Salonika. And that's a story that I remember, because a kid from our neighborhood, he was nine. Was visiting relatives up in KhortiĀtis. And the Germans were kind of weakening at the time. So the partisans killed, I think, two doctors maybe, or a doctor and a chemist, two Germans who were testing the water for the whole city that came from this mountain where the village was.

And so the Germans went, and very secretly. And they surrounded the village and they turned on the-- they turned the fire in the ovens, and they put everybody in the ovens, anybody that they could catch.

And I remember I remember the day that the whole neighborhood, as far as I could hear-- this crying started when the news came down that the village was burning. And we could see it from our-- we could see the village from our neighborhood because the mountain rises right behind Salonika. And that this particular kid was in there. And so when--

Oh, he was in the village.

Yeah, he was burned. And that was-- I will always remember that. That was a catastrophe that I could understand, that it was-- otherwise, it was a kind of knew that things were tough, but--

It's interesting. The Germans were losing, and yet they were putting so much effort into all their conquered nations.

Well, they were just trying to-- I don't know what we're doing at the time. But that was kind of one of their methods of-- Demoralization [CROSS TALK].

Demoralization, and such terrible reprisals, that the people would avoid attacking them.

But they were attacked [CROSS TALK].

They were attacking, I'm sure.

Now do you remember liberation?

Funny to say, but I don't. [LAUGHS] And that probably has to do with the fact that my father at the time was--

Was he still in prison?

Well, then we were liberated by the communists. And then he was picked up by the communists, and he was imprisoned again. So I don't remember much of liberation, because, you see, as the Germans retreated, then the civil war starts in Greece between the communists and the-- so I don't remember much of liberation, really.

How did your father [PERSONAL NAME] come back from the war and from prison?

Well, when the Germans broke through, the Greeks could not really put much of a fight against the Germans, because the Germans were-- the modern miracle of that war were these motorized columns that the Greeks could not really stop, because they would put this Panzer in the front, and then they would follow. The German infantry was on scooters, which was the first time we ever--

An infantry on scooters is strange.

And so what they did was they came down the Vardar valley from Yugoslavia, and most of the Greek army was kind of bypassed. They were west of that, up on the mountains. And so then, after a while, the men found civilian clothes, and one by one would show up, in their homes.

And I remember my father and his younger brother coming. And we were suffering from so much lice and skin diseases, because everybody-- everything was disrupted. We didn't have much soap. Everything was really--

So then my mother would just line us all up-- my aunt, herself, in a little room, boil the water, scrub everybody down, put this terrible thing that really burned--

Kerosene?

--on our heads. We didn't have kerosene. There was some herbs, some seeds that she used to-- some kind of--

How long did that cleanliness last?

All night long, she would do that to us, boil the clothes so we will have new clothes. And then, in the morning, the lice were all over the population. Then we get loused up again.

And then, when the guys came, they were just--

They were filthy, yeah.

--completely filthy, and lousy, and full-- well, my uncle-- also the big problem was that they also had frozen feet. That was the other thing of the war, that we all had chilblains. We were chilblained all over--

Probably frostbite too.

Yeah, they had frostbite. But the kids, we were all cold, and chilblains, so.

You had no heat in your apartment.

No heat, no. Well, Greece was never self-sufficient, really, in food. And there was never too much fuel to begin with. And so the Germans taking for themselves, and not importing anything, it just set up for famine and that kind of deprivation.

Did you, by any chance, read the book Elena, Eleni?

Eleni.

Eleni?

Yeah.

Are the facts presented accurately, as far as you know?

Well, that--

What was happening in Greece?

Well, she's talking about '44, '45, which is the Germans were not even up there, really, anymore.

So it was just a civil--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--just a civil war at that time.

Yeah, she's talking about the civil war. I would say that those facts are presented accurate, from what I have heard, that during the end, when the communists were really desperate, they would commandeer children. And so there were lots of-- after the Germans left, there were lots of Greek children that ended up across the borders.

It's so sad. It was such a disruption for everybody. Did all the relatives come back safely?

Yes. Our family was very lucky that way. Well, one of my uncle got tuberculosis. All of us had mononucleosis, all the kids. After the war, when the relief came, all the mothers would really stuff us with whatever food items from this country came, bacon and in cans, and UNRRA food, and the mothers would stuff us so that we would not get tubercular.

But we all were in pretty bad shape, and it took a few years before we--

Till you were rehabilitated. Also educationally, I presume, because you had--

Well, since then, I always think that kids should not go to school the first. [LAUGHS]

They learn from life's experience.

You learn, anyway, so essentially I went one year to grade school and then on to high school. And I was never really the worse for it.

Did you have schooling at home during the war years?

No, no. No. We just had to catch up.

But that's a lot of catching up. That's four years of catching up.

Yeah. Well--

The basics.

Yeah, we did it. Well, that's why I'm kind of-- I have ideas about schooling. [LAUGHS]

About doing it yourself.

Yeah, I think you could-- yeah, you really-- I mean, once you learn to read and write, and some arithmetic. Essentially, we are all did that in one year, and kind of went on. Two years, maybe. Two years.

During this time, you were a little girl, and you didn't-- you were growing fast. Now there were no stores operating. What did you do for clothes if you were one size and needed a snow jacket?

I tell you, my feet were permanently crippled because I didn't dare tell my mother that my feet had grown beyond my-- [LAUGHS]

Because there were just weren't any shoes.

--my shoes. No, I didn't. I remember my youth was a permanent torture because I never dared tell my mother that my shoes had-- I had outgrown my shoes.

Well, it was kind of different. Like, we would take, for instance, tires from-- that was something that got traded, because you could make sandals, and shoes, the soles, from tire-- actually, it was very good. It lasted forever.

And another thing, the black market was really amazing, because everything got traded. And of course, you wore one dress in three or four different styles. I mean, you never get rid of it until it fell apart. And so that's what we did.

And if you're a teenager, you were growing fast. You were five, six, seven eight, nine.

Sure. Sure. And, well, when I was growing up, and especially during the war, if you had clothes, you were fine. So our values were very different. We did not think of ourselves as deprived because we didn't have the latest fashions.

Because you were all in the same boat.

Yeah, we were. That's the other thing. I never understood how terrorized I had been during the war, or how much the war had affected me, until maybe a few years ago. Somebody said, that must have been a terrible experience. And I never thought of it as a terrible experience, because everybody was in it.

Everybody was experiencing--

OK. And so I thought, well, what else is there? That's what life is, yes.

But you also had support systems. You had your aunts, your cousin, your mother.

Yes. And that was, like, we all lived very--

It must have made you even closer than you were before-- at least your mother and the sisters, or sisters in law.

Yeah. We were all kind of-- whenever somebody had something to eat, we--

You shared.

--we shared it. Everybody was involved in food preservation, because whoever got something, then we had to preserve it.

And then the biggest find in terms of clothes was parachutes.

Where did you get the parachutes?

Well, I don't know, but the black marketeers.

Oh, they found the parachutes.

I get the British parachutings. So I don't know where they found the parachutes.

They had real silk, then.

So that was tremendous.

Well, what didn't do-- I mean, it was just amazing. Because the parachutes were two, maybe are three colors. One was this orange color that you can see very easily at dark--

Iridescent.

--that kind of iridescent orange. And the other was a green, a very nice almond green.

But then people would bleach them. They would make them pale pink. I mean, it was amazing. So everybody was dressed in parachute-- if you had the money and you could get it. Or people would embroider them. It was amazing what--

It made for a much creative--

Yeah. And we never--

--activity.

Or you had that one dress. And then the new season you would put a new collar to it, or you would change it around a little bit, or you could dye--

Or add something to the hem for you.

Exactly. That's what you would do. That's what you would do.

It's amazing.

And survive. And--

That was a survival kit unto itself.

That's right. So that's what-- [SIGHS] how it went.

But do you remember after the war, at liberation, do you remember anybody talking about the defunct or nonexistent Jewish community?

No. What I remember is people talking about people who didn't come back, and also, Greeks who all of a sudden had money, and people would say. But you don't know about that, you see. But there were all these rumors about this person was given the money by a Jewish person that never came back. So you would hear about this sort of thing. And people really being horrified by what happened to the Jews.

But since at that time I didn't have any friends-- and I think, to that extent, that the communities, in terms of living, we were separate enough that we did not have that contact. So to me, as a kid, I was not aware, really, of that.

Were the Grecian children are not touched, for the most part? They weren't taken away from their parents, as you hear about in other countries?

No, except in cases like this village where the kids were burned. And kids died from malnutrition more than usual.

So the big story in our house was this neighbor who never came back, you see, who was taken and never came back. And I don't even know why he was taken.

He was in the army in the--

I'm not so sure. He might have been in the-- I don't know. He was a young man, 24 maybe. And that was kind of the big thing.

I remember night after night really trying to figure out what happened to this guy. And his mother and his sister would come with every bit of new information.

So you never found out.

Yeah. So after the war, then, I told you then that I came on a Jewish boat to this country, didn't I, even though I was not Jewish.

No. What is a Jewish boat?

Well, an Israeli boat.

Oh, an Israeli boat. A boat that was used, I suppose, to take refugees from Marseille or other ports.

That was the story. But at the time-- yeah, that was the story. It was an old boat that was used to take refugees from

Marseille to Israel. And then, right after the '50s-- I left in '55. '55, it had already been christened Jerusalem. And it was the only ship that Israel had crossing the Atlantic.

And so I had a scholarship to come to this country, but my father did not have the money to buy my ticket. So he went to his friends. And I don't know which one-- maybe it was the Peraha family. And he told them.

And he knew that they were agents for these Israeli--

Shipping lines. [INAUDIBLE].

So they gave him-- yeah-- so they gave him a very, I think, a half-price ticket that they had as a courtesy for what-- to give to their own people. And that's how I came to this country.

So the boat was almost full with kind of an international group of Jews that were coming from Israel. Some of them were young people who had-- I left in September.

Coming from--

From Israel to this country. And so a small group of Armenian people left from Athens, along with me and a few Greeks. And then we stopped in Malta, and we picked up other people from Malta, that they were going to Canada. And then we stopped in Canada, and then to New York City.

Were you on the boat by yourself? I mean, from your family?

Yeah, I came--

With no friends?

Yeah, nobody.

That was very courageous.

Well, I was 18, and--

This was an opportunity for you.

Yes, I could do it. That's right.

Before we close and sum up, is there anything else that you wanted to say about the war years, about the Nazis, about the liberators, about the Jews and their community?

Well, I can't think of anything, except that that war was really a terrible thing, and that in some ways, though, I'm glad I lived through it, because it makes it very clear for me that war is just no good. And it also makes me very upset when I see all this violence on TV, because the people on the other end--

Are not horrified.

--don't know how to interpret it, and to be horrified. To me, it's never like this. It just never. War is grungy and awful and slow. It's not quick like that. So that's what I want to say. Slow and awful.

Do you remember being frightened?

Well, I think I was frightened all my life. I really did not-- and I think, in some ways, I still carry that fear. Like to me, borders are not easy. The Canadian border, it's a border to me. It's not easy to cross. And that has always been true.

What about food? Because of your deprivation during the school year, during the Nazi years--

I don't know. I guess we just-- don't know.

Do you think the value on food itself-- can you throw away food?

No. And I think it's a disgusting thing that there is-- that people treat food like-- [LAUGHS] I never throw away anything. [LAUGHS]

That's what most of the survivors say, that to the last peel they can't throw them away.

Yes, that's very important.

Do you have a message that you would like to give?

Well, I feel ashamed that I don't know more about the Jewish people that were my friends. And I consider myself kind of open to-- so I guess what I want to say is that historical, and racial, and national, and ethnic identities separate us, or have been separating us up till now. And I think it's important to break those barriers with accurate knowledge. I really think that.

And that once we do that, I think we have a better chance, and a more interesting life too.

Well, it's more open and honest.

More open and honest, yeah. And it's not easy to remember this stuff. But you don't, unless you're traumatized internally, you, on the surface, you don't seem to be depressed or traumatized. You seem to have overcome these bad years.

Well, I think what has happened is what those years have left me is with just a tremendous empathy for people who are suffering. So I think I kind of got-- and I found myself in places like this. Like in Africa-- yeah. And I can see the stuff coming. I was in Nigeria during the Biafra thing.

So I don't know. I think that, in some sense, I spent a lifetime both trying to put the history of Greece together. Forgive for personal sufferings of my family.

My father essentially died a very bitter man from his experiences, essentially, in the two world wars.

Because the normalcy was taken from him?

Well, for a variety of reasons. So I kind of-- I have been spending a lifetime, in some sense, trying to overcome that. And ultimately, I think what I'm finding finally is that the best way to overcome it is by living well, and by loving people.

It's all very positive, isn't it?

Like I spend a lot of time ruminating, or were reading about it, and stuff like that. And I think that the best way, finally, is just being as creative as you can, and living well.

That's a very strong philosophy. It's very positive.

But I'm not sure that it's all gone. Like I think I am-- my husband, who is a Yankee, and never had any of these experiences, always kind of calls me a Cassandra, because the moment something happens, I can see the implications from A to Z. All the bad outcomes are right there for me. No problem at all. Right there. So I think that that kind of

comes from--

From living a trauma.

--living through the war. Yes, through the war. And as I said, for me it was not a trauma. That was my life.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Angela. I know some parts of this testimony were not easy, just bearing unpleasant facts. But it will help. It will help others.

I hope so.

And that's the important thing.

I hope so. I wish I knew more.

Now you have an incentive.

Yes.

Thank you. Thank you very much.