

Frances, Rula
RG-50.426*0005
One video cassette
In Ladino
Recorded June 18, 1996

Abstract

Rula Frances was born in Volos, Greece, where over five thousand Jews lived before the war. The Jews of Volos got along very well with the Greeks in the community. Her family lived a good life in Volos. In Volos, an Italian officer warned the Jews to avoid Nazi deportation to Poland by escaping to the mountains. The mayor of Volos also protected the Jews and encouraged them to escape. Some members of Rula's family went to Thessaloníki. Rula's mother was taken in by Gennadios (head of the Metropolitan See of Thessaloníki) who disguised her as a nun and helped Rula and her mother escape to Athens. Rula's brother and his family also escaped to Athens. In Athens, the family hid in various houses. Rula worked for the Red Cross until the end of the war, while the rest of her family was in hiding. All of her immediate family survived, but her grandmother, cousins, uncles and aunts perished. Rula got married in 1953.

- 1.01** Rula was born in Volos and lived in Volos until 1932(?) with her family. She had two brothers and a sister. The family moved to Thessaloníki. They had a very good life in Volos and her father had a very good job, but he got sick and could not work anymore. Volos had more than five thousand Jews at that time. Very few of those Jews spoke Ladino, mostly they spoke Greek. They lived very well with the Greek people. They did not have any differences. The Jews from Volos did not come from Spain. They all had Greek nationality. The first years Rula went to a private school and then she went to a business school. Her parents were not Sephardic Jews – her father was a “true Jew.” They had a wonderful rabbi whose name was Moise Pesah. They had only one synagogue.
- 1.05** Rula did not work anywhere before the war, nor did her sister. Rula studied violin studies and got her diploma, and she also took piano lessons. Her older brother, Samuel, is a lawyer and the youngest one, Rafael, finished the university, where he studied in the School of Commerce. Her brother got married in 1935, and her sister, Rachele, got married in 1937 and had two children. They all survived.
- 1.07** Volos was occupied first by the Italians and then by the Germans. The Italians treated the Jews very well. Rula's sister got sick and Italian doctors came with medications. They took Rula's sister and her husband to Athens to take better care of her. But when the Germans arrived everything changed. When the Italians were occupying Volos, there were no restrictions for the Jews. They were not afraid of anything. They all worked, and life was normal for them.
- 1.08** One of the Italian officers, whose name was Mario Massotta, was buying food from Rula's brother-in-law's store to send to Italy. The officer told Rula's brother-in-law to leave Volos because his name was on a list of those to be deported to the concentration camps. He also worried that all Jews should leave because on his way back from

Thessaloníki, he saw the trains filled with people, and was told by a German that they were Jews who were being transported to Poland. Officer Massotta told her brother-in-law not to sleep at home that night because the Germans would come and fetch him, and the next day he found a truck and sent him to Athens to save him. Officer Massotta learned that the Germans were planning to deport the richer Jews first. At that time the Italians and the Germans were still on good terms. They were friends, but when the Italian government fell and Mussolini surrendered, the Germans captured the Italians and put them in a camp.

- 1.12** After a few days the family left from there(?). The Germans went to the city hall and asked for the names of the Jews. The mayor said he did not have any special lists of the Jews, since they were all Greek citizens. Then, they called the rabbi who also said he did not have a list of the Jews. The Germans told the mayor that if by the next morning he did not provide a list of the Jews, they would blow up city hall and kill everyone inside. So, the mayor told the rabbi and all the Jews in the town to leave and go up to the mountains. The mayor also went up to the mountains. None of the employees of city hall went to work the next day, so when the Germans came in the morning they did not find anybody there.
- 1.15** As to what happened to Rula's family, her mother was in Thessaloníki with her two brothers. Rula and her sister were in Volos. Then Rula's sister, her children, and one of her brothers went to Athens. Rula went to Thessaloníki to be with her mother.
- 1.17** Rula's mother was taken in by Gennadios (head of the Metropolitan See of Thessaloníki) for seventeen days. He made her get dressed as a nun and sent her to Volos, and then Rula and her mother went to Athens in a truck. The chief of police in Volos gave them Greek identities, and they also had a friend who accompanied them on the trip. Rula's older brother, who was married at the time and had a son, was warned by an Austrian who lived in their house in Thessaloníki to leave for Athens, because the Germans were rounding up the Jews and deporting them to Poland. The whole family escaped to Athens, and there they separated. They were all hiding in different houses. Rula was taken in by the chief of police (Tagaris) of Kifissia, a suburb of Athens. This was about a year before the war ended. Mr. Tagari had a cleaning lady who knew that Rula was Jewish and she betrayed her. So, Rula left that house and went to join her mother. Then she started working in the offices of the Red Cross until the end of the war. She describes how the rest of the family went into hiding for the rest of the war.
- 1.29** All of Rula's immediate family survived, but her grandmother, cousins, uncles and aunts perished. They were taken from Thessaloníki. After the war Rula's brother and her mother returned to Thessaloníki. Her mother had given all of her jewelry and many gold coins to a Greek merchant, and he did not give anything back to her.
- 1.30** Rula got married in 1953. Her youngest brother got married to a Greek woman and had a son. Rula's mother did not wear the yellow star, since they did not have an accent they could pass for Greeks.
- 1.36** Rula explains that she lived with the chief of police Tagaris for one year.