

-TITLE-ELIAS AELION
-I_DATE-SEPTEMBER 19, 1989
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-HEAVY ACCENT, DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW SPEECH
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-1 HOUR 12 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

1:01:00 Elias was born in Greece in 1918. He had one brother and one sister. He was in a very observant Jewish family and went to a private Jewish school. He was drafted into the Greek army in 1939 at age 21 to fight the Italians. After being stationed at the Yugoslavian border for some time, the Greek army lost to the Italians and Elias returned to his hometown of Saloniki in southern Greece. His whole family was there.

1:04:40 At first Greece was occupied by the Italians who, according to Elias, didn't harm the Jews. The Germans came in 1943, and much of his family was caught and taken away, including his parents, his brother and his sister. One of his uncles was caught and beaten to death by the Germans. Elias and several others went into hiding in the mountains. The Germans discovered their hiding place, but they were able to escape back to Athens.

1:08:35 At first they hid out with an Armenian family, then moved with a larger group to another house towards the end of the war. One day while Elias was out for a couple of hours, the Germans discovered their hiding place--everyone but Elias was taken away. He hid in different places for the next few days but then moved in with another uncle.

1:13:30 Greece was liberated in September and October of 1944. The Greek Revolution immediately followed, and the streets remained very dangerous. Elias and others were locked indoors for about 30 days. Finally conditions eased up, and Elias got married. He and his wife went to the United States in September of 1951. His wife had suffered many illnesses throughout their marriage and, after bearing two children, died.

1:15:45 Elias' experiences have made him very afraid that he is going to lose someone else, after having lost so many people close to him. It has made him very protective of his children. He describes the biggest problem during the German occupation in Athens as having very little food. When he and his wife came to the U.S. they had almost no money; he describes his various work experience here.

1:20:05 Elias does not know where his family was taken. He heard (although he was unable to verify) that his brother died of typhus; he believes that his mother and sister went "straight to the oven." He says he experienced some discrimination for being Jewish while working in Athens, even after the war-- e.g., by the government. He remembers pogroms in Greece in 1932 in which houses were brought into the synagogues and Jewish compounds were burned.

1:24:25 Elias recalls experiencing some anti- Semitism as a child in Saloniki, which he attributes to jealousy because the Greek Jewish community was so wealthy and possessed a lot of power in the city. He mainly remembers his childhood as very happy.

1:29:20 Elias' family goes back many generations in Saloniki; his father was in the liquor production business. During the war, Elias lost most of his money and property and was unable to regain any remaining possessions afterward.

1:33:20 Elias remembers his childhood in Saloniki very fondly, but says that (as the war approached), "the fear was always there." He describes his time hiding out in Athens as rough but not always so bad. He wonders if he did enough for his family, because he was essentially the "lucky" one that wasn't taken to a concentration camp.

1:39:20 Elias says that most of the Jews in Saloniki did not know or understand what was happening until the Germans came; some people did know and did not warn anyone. He tells how if one was brought in for questioning, the person did not come out alive. There were many beatings, and the Germans were taking everyone to the concentration camps--even the people housed in mental institutions.

1:44:00 When Elias returned to Saloniki after the liberation, he found nothing there--no relatives, friends, etc. Since he has moved to the U.S., he has returned to Europe, but not to Greece. He is still bothered often by dreams of concentration camps, and of what happened to his family and how he was the only one not taken away. He discusses various dreams and premonitions and feelings of uneasiness he had during all of these experiences.

1:55:00 Elias says his feelings about being Jewish have not changed and that he is still proud of it, except that maybe he "lost a little faith." He tells various stories about being treated unfairly while in Greece for being a Jew. He talks about his children now and what they do; he talks about what his brother and sister and parents were like.

(This last section is roughly 18 minutes long and is all in a very casual and unconnected format; often it is difficult to follow.)
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