

## INTERVIEW WITH LUNA NADJARI

By

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Q. We are interviewing Mrs. Nadjari for the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Center in San Francisco. And today is October 29th, 1988.

A. Hi. This is Luna Nadjari and I was born in Greece in 1925 and in Salonika. I didn't go to the concentration camp because my brother-in-law and my sister -- my brother-in-law first of all, he had very good friends around there, Salonika, and when they heard that they are going to pick up all the Jews, one friend came down with a buggy and horse, one buggy and a horse, and he says, You are not going to Germany. You are going with me.

So. We decide to go, my family, my father, mother, two brothers, and he says, Okay, I will take each and every one of you, but, I don't want to take all together because if they caught me, I don't want everybody to be killed just in one. We'll see what will be. And they decide to take me first, so he took me and put me clothes like an old lady's scarf in my head and -- I don't know, my face, I was like a little old lady.

Q. How old were you at the time?

A. I was fifteen -- eighteen. No, eighteen. Yes. And I went in this, in his house. After two, three days he went down

to bring more of my family. When he went down, in Salonika, he heard my father, mother and the two brothers, they left for, from -- for Germany, because they says the young people will work to feed the old. And my father and mother didn't want to come with us because they didn't know well to speak Greek, and he said, No. I will make a mess.

Q. Could you tell us what language you spoke?

A. Just Spanish.

Q. Spanish.

A. Yes.

Q. Were you very religious in, in your household?

A. No. No. And so, they left and he brought my sister and my son and my brother-in-law and his mother. And after we went all together for the few months we were separate. They were in another village, I was in another village, and the mother -- my sister's mother-in-law were in another place. So in the meantime the months were going. After six, seven months we get all together. And then -- and in the meantime I was sewing there, and I have six, seven girls start giving lessons to learn how to, to make a dress, to cut a dress, and I was working and they was paying me with whatever they have, was it grain, was corn, whatever. We were very very nice. One night two Greek men came in that village. They knew. The whole village, they knew I was Jewish, and, they change my name. My name there was Marika. Everybody was Marika, Marika, that's all. One time those two

Greek mens, I mean, mens came, and I don't know from where they learn we were Jewish. Around midnight they came and knock on the door, they took us and took us to the headquarters. We were there for two, three hours talking and talking and talking --

Q. Was this the police?

A. No. Was Greek people with Germans.

Q. What year was that? Do you remember?

A. No.

Male voice: Nineteen four- --

A. Forty-three.

Male voice: Forty-three.

A. Forty-three, I don't know. I don't remember. So they were asking us, are you Communists? No. Are you -- why you didn't go with the Jewish, I mean, with the German? Because they are going to kill us. So. And they were very nice. And they said, Now it's too late. We want to go to next door to sleep because we knew the whole village, was a small village. Okay, say, No. If you leave this house they will shoot you. So they put us, my sister and I, we were sleeping in one bed, and my brother-in-law, they open a little bed and sleep. So. The next morning we came home, was around 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and that's it -- we told the Mayor of the village so and so they did last night. And he went to them. He was very very mad. And he said, What for you took this lady, these people are very nice, they are helping the village and they are helping everybody in

here. So he said, I'm sorry. I don't know what we did. So, and so on and so -- that's it.

Q. All of the people in the village were Christian?

A. Yes.

Male Voice: Yes.

A. Were -- they were -- Kafkas.

Male Voice: [Sounds like: Roosh. Rush.]

[Tape off]

A. So every Saturday night the thing was in this village is to go dancing, and I learned the Russian dancing, I was dancing with them, I was speaking their language, and we were very nice; very comfortable there. And every house you go right away they would put you in the table, bring whatever they have. You have to eat. If you don't eat it's a very very -- oh. They get mad! So, one day one guy says, Do you want to marry me? Oh, say, No. My brother-in-law. He said. Just get married. Get big Greek. So, I don't know, maybe they will kill us so you can -- No, I said, I born Jewish, I will stay Jewish. I won't do these thing. And these people, they are very good friends of my sister, my brother, they still come in at home and -- is like a, a family, because my sister was working there for housekeeping, cooking and washing, whatever work it was.

Q. Do you remember the name of the village?

A. Was it Kil-keech. Every Saturday you take all -- whatever you have of the week, eggs or butter or flower,

whatever, you go to this place, it's like a bazaar. You sell -- flea market.

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. You sell everything there and buy whatever you need from there and bring it home.

Q. But you did not have any food shortage during the war?

A. Oh, no. It wasn't food shortage. Because they have too much eggs, too many eggs. Too much butter. Bread, they used to make their own bread. They sell the butter, they sell the eggs, they buy shoes they buy clothes, whatever they need. They buy things from the house, you know. No.

Q. When the Germans came didn't they confiscate the food? Or didn't they?

A. The German -- the German never came in the villages. Never come.

Q. How far was that from Salonika?

A. Was about three hours' ride. And before start going to, I mean before going to this village, I was going there for two, three days sewing and get bread or whatever, bring it home for the family, for my mother, my brother, and I lost my father, my mother, two brothers, which, if you see my brothers, oh, my goodness, I -- tall. Handsome. Beautiful. They're -- they were -- we were very close family. My father and mother started crying. If you don't come with us, who will work for us? So my two brothers says, we have to go. And they went. When they

start to come back from Germany people, every day you have to go to the Jewish Center because they put a list who there are coming back. So every day I was reading my brother, name of my brothers wasn't there. So I was asked for their names. They never see my young brother. My saw my oldest brother working in one place, like my husband says, they were -- when they, people start coming in Germany they used to take all their clothes, leave it there and put their pajamas, whatever they give, and the job of my brother was to see the seam, the rip everything and take all the money and give to the German.

Q. Oh, your brother was taken to a concentration camp?

Q. Oh, yes, they all --

A. They went -- they went with my mother and father.

Q. To Auschwitz.

A. I don't know where.

Q. Did they all go together?

A. Yes. Yes, because my sister was there.

Q. I see.

A. And, people, they were coming, they said, if you see your brother there, he was a millionaire. He was giving money to everybody, because he -- I don't know, he was keeping some money for hi- -- I don't know. And he was working with 300 people. And they heard the German -- that Russia was coming to liberate them. Those people, they were -- the 300 people, they were very strong. The German got scared. And they says, they will kill

us, those people. They took the 300, put it against the wall and tick tick tick. They went.

Q. They shot them.

A. They killed them, because they were -- very strong. Because they had everything.

Q. They were also --

Q. They were nourished and they had food.

A. Yes. They have everything. Food. Because they had money.

Q. They got it from the clothes they had to sort out.

A. Yes. This -- that's what people say, I don't know.

Q. Yes.

Q. Who brought you word of your family?

A. Everybody that come. They knew my brother. My youngest brother, nobody saw, I don't know what happened to him. And in Greece we have an aunt and uncle. They were very wealthy. And they have two daughters. They say if they are married, they won't separate. So. She got. My sister was saying this. I didn't see nothing. And she came, my aunt came at home and says if my youngest brother can marry one girl, not really marry, just marry it "blanc," we said, I know, in French.

Q. A marriage of convenience?

A. White. Yeah. Marriage white. So he did. My youngest brother married one girl, my aunt, and, they says where they left the money, nobody knows, where is it. We got this

house. We sold this house, but we don't know where they kept the money. They make holes in the big yard and they -- everything. I have a -- another aunt, my mother's sister, and she have two daughters, the one was married, the one was engaged. He have some gold bracelets from here to her, the Greek they use like a robe. She had two, one in each hand, and the mother have two. They had a hole in a yard, they put there. I don't know what happened. Nobody knows.

Q. Did you ever hear anything about your parents?

A. No. Because we know, they, they took them far away to the crematorium.

Q. How long did you live in that village now, in Greece?

A. For three years.

Q. Where did you go from that village? To Salonika?

A. When the Germans left, right away we came back with my sister, brother-in-law and his mother and myself, to come home.

Q. And how long did you stay in Salonika?

A. Since we came was 1943 was '44, I don't -- I don't remember that, what year.

Q. After the war. After.

A. Yeah.

Q. [Inaudible].

A. Yeah. The war had been finished in Greece. When the Germans left we got back and we didn't have home, we didn't have nothing. The Jewish Community Center give us a little home, and

we live there. After the underground people were the people in Greece, the Greeks.

Q. Yeah.

A. It was the Jewish and Greek all together, they would fight together. Each other, I mean, because one won something, the other was --

Q. You mean the Jews fought --

A. With Jews.

Q. I don't understand.

Q. You mean among the partisans they were fighting each other?

A. Each other, the Greeks. Yes.

Q. Oh, the Greeks were fighting --

A. The Greeks --

Q. -- against each other.

A. -- were fighting one -- each other, because the one were Communist, the underground, and the other one was just like the [inaudible].

Q. Yeah.

Q. So when you went into hiding did you have to bring money with you to pay these people?

A. No. They didn't take us a penny. No. They -- they, my job was, they were going every day to work, I suppose to clean the house, make the dinner, keep everything like housekeeper.

Q. What were the living conditions in the house?

A. They have one room for ten people. We were in one room, ten people. They have a -- they did the best they could. We didn't have anything to say because the people try. But they have just one bedroom. He have three daughter, daughter's was -- one son and two daughters. Husband and wife and mother. And after the three of us -- the four of us, it was ten, eleven people in one room. That's it!

Q. So you didn't have to remain indoors, even though you were hiding.

A. No. No.

Q. No.

A. No.

Q. The village was sympathetic.

A. Very sympathetic. Every Saturday night they have a dance, we wish to go -- all day the young people there and dance until 1:00 o'clock in the morning, and everybody will go back.

Q. Mm. You didn't find anti-Semitism in this village.

A. No. No. Mm-mm. [Pause] That's my story.

Q. But when did you come to America?

A. In 1956.

Q. Well, you got married over in Greece.

A. In Greece, yes.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. Oh, yes.

Q. I understand.

A. We got married there and after we -- I got two children and -- who came to [sounds like: Greece or grief].

Q. So it seems to me that it's unusual that you met no anti-Semitism in this village, because I understood that there was a lot of anti-Semitism in Greece.

A. We didn't have any.

[Tape off]

No, it wasn't. They knew three, four villages, we were Jewish and we were hiding from the German. But no anti-Semitism, no, nothing. They were in their own business, they was watching their businesses and we were in our business. That's it. Nobody. Nobody said a word.

Q. What was unusual about this village then?

A. Nothing, because the -- you know, those people, they were all old-fashioned. They didn't know what Jewish mean or Greek means or -- they didn't know we didn't have -- we didn't believe in Christ or -- they didn't know this kind of thing.

Q. 'cause there weren't any Jews around there, were they? in this -- in this neighborhood?

A. No, no. And the villages were all Russian immigrants.

Q. Ahh.

A. And all the, the village around [sounds like Kil- kich].

Q. Oh, Russian immigrants.

A. Yeah, Russia immigrants, yes.

Q. I see.

A. And they --

Q. So that was different. They weren't native Greek.

A. When -- the kids, they were native Greek, but they didn't make any difference to them. Nothing. They were very happy I was there and sewing and do things for them, they were very very happy.

Q. Were other Jews hidden in this way, in the villages?

A. I heard, yes. One or two families in different places. They were, and I think that one family's in New York.

Q. Were these villagers risking their lives to have people hide with them?

A. Of course! Of course they were risking -- if they came, the Germans, and pick up us, they will pick up the people who brought us there. Sure they would.

Q. So they were very brave to do this.

A. Yes. Yes. Again, is because they were -- they were -- how can I say? Not -- intelligence, they were more than intelligent, but they didn't have any schooling. They were very very strict.

Q. Simple also.

Q. Yeah!

A. Simple people.

Q. I think that's a -- but took a risk.

A. They, they did took a risk, yes. Three years ago we

went to visit my sister in Greece, and my sister said, Do you want to go to see the Kafkassia, we call it. Oh, yes, I say. And we went there, all came with their arms open, and kiss us and start dancing in, in the streets. It -- they are very' very nice people.

Q. So do you think it was their, their morality? Their religious belief? or what, makes them take this risk?

A. They -- no, they weren't religious. Their morality I will say. They were -- they, they didn't go to [Sounds like: Roos] Church, I didn't see people go to church. Just the old old ladies. That's it.

Q. Do you know of other people, other Jewish people who were hidden, personally?

A. Just two families. I don't know none.

Q. So it was difficult to hide in Greece, I presume.

Q. Of course.

A. Yes. It was very difficult. Very very difficult. And you didn't know. You -- you left Greece in a buggy with a horse, you didn't know if you will arrive safe and Kil-kich, wherever you will go, because the Germans come and -- [sounds like: control.] What do you have in that thing? They will find me, because I was laid down all day long, three, four hours, with a blanket in my face, I mean, covered.

Q. Did you have to wear the yellow star in Greece at all?

A. Yes.

Q. You did, too.

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. When the Germans came.

A. Yes. Mm-hmm.

Q. For how long?

A. Well, I -- maybe I did wear mine for three, four months. Because they came right away to pick up some.

Q. Did you live in a ghetto too?

A. No. I didn't go to a ghetto at all.

Q. What about any relatives? Did they go to ghetto?

A. Yes, all my relatives went to ghetto. All my relatives. Aunts, uncles, many many people. We have many relatives.

Q. I'm still not clear why your parents refused to go in hiding.

A. Because. You know, hiding -- what language they will speak there? They didn't have any language.

Q. Oh.

A. Just Spanish. And they says, If we go there, will be too bad for you and your sister and your -- whatever.

Q. They didn't want to go.

A. They got scared.

Q. They would give them, to have -- away by just opening their mouth, right?

Q. Yeah?

A. Yes.

Q. In Spanish.

A. Yes. They never learned Greek.

Q. No?

A. No. They were still -- my father, my mother speak Turkish. Because --

Q. Turkish?

A. Yeah. They used to speak Turkish in Greek. Turks.

Q. Where were your parents born? In Greece?

A. In Greece. My parents, my grandfather, way way way back. Way back.

Q. Mm-hmm. So you went in hiding first and then your sister and brother-in-law?

A. Yes, and after, my brother-in-law-mother.

Q. And they came by buggy, being hidden, too?

A. Yeah. Of course. Mm-hmm.

Q. Did they do work while they were in hiding also?

A. Yes. My sister was maid in the mayor's house, and my brother-in-law was doing things there. One day I have a -- money, I have corn and I was laughing with my sister and brother and said, What we are going to this? Can we buy a little cow? So. My brother-in-law give everything, whatever we have, we bought a little cow. And, when the cows were coming home at night, my sister ran away to take food to the cow, and the man was saying, "Lucha!" is my sister's name. No. Elene. That name

was Elene. You forgot -- forgot to take the napkin for the cow, because she was looking after this cow, taking the napkin, take fork and knife, because she won't eat. We were laughing, we were --

Q. So you -- you said you had to change your name --

A. Mm-hmm. Yes.

Q. I guess, to not have a Jewish-sounding name, right?

A. That's right. That's right.

Q. You didn't have to pretend to be a Gentile, did you?  
Did you have to pretend to be Christian?

A. Yes. Yes! Oh, yes. When I was -- and something, they made my identification, I had [Marika Monotiedo], is Greek name, and [Belassna]. I have to.

Q. Did you have to go to church, too?

A. No, I never go to church. No. I went one time to church because there was a wedding. I went there. But the young people, nobody was going, so what hurt do have. If the people was going, the young people was going, I would go too, but they didn't.

Q. Was your last name in Greek Jewish?

A. What?

Q. Your maiden name? Your maiden name was --

Q. Was it Jewish?

A. Sure. [Sah-veen].

Q. And did you have to change that, too? Or did you just

have to change your first name?

A. The first name and the second name I changed.

Q. Ahh. You did change it.

A. Yes.

Q. I see.

A. Yes.

Q. And how -- who fixed up your papers?

A. My brother-in-law, he have so many friends, Greeks. He did -- I don't know what he did. He brought me the, the card. Like a green card will have here.

Q. Identification card.

A. Yes.

Q. Yes. Very interesting.

Q. So it sounds like the worst part of hiding for you was worry about your relatives.

A. Yes. My -- we knew my mother and father went right away to the crematory. But, what it was bad is waiting for my brothers. Every day I have to go and see the names, the -- they were coming back, and never they came back. Never.

Q. Before you went to hiding, had you finished school in your home town?

A. No, I didn't. Because. I want to go to school to learn -- I was learning -- I was taking French and Greek. But my father -- I was in a private school, and my father, he cannot afford to send me again to finish the school. He says, No, you -

- one thing is in Greece. They say, You girls, you don't need schooling. You will go learn at home and finish, do housework and whatever work.

Q. Marry?

A. Yes. Got married, get kids and so on and so forth. My youngest brother, he wants to finish school, and he was going -- we were going in the same school. And my daddy says, I cannot afford to send two. And he send my brother and they send me to start learning how to sew. Yeah.

Q. With the tension and so many people in one room, how did you all get along over those years?

A. Just fine. Nobody was -- we didn't do, nobody. Just fine.

Q. Amazing.

A. Yeah.

Q. Did you have enough water to go around? How did you do it with the washing and --

A. Oh, yes.

Q. -- and did you get bathrooms?

A. No. You don't have bathrooms. No. They had to go where the stables is.

Q. I see.

A. No. But water you have -- you have to go a block away and bring water with two buckets, two, three times a day you have to bring, the [sounds like: hod-wah]. Once a week you have to

take a shower, because they -- they don't have -- they put the fire like a, a fireplace --

Q. And heat the water.

A. They heat the water and then the bath was Saturday, the day who, we have to go to dance. We have to take a bath that day. That's it.

Q. Do you remember what your impressions and feelings were when you returned to Salonika?

A. Well, no. I was like nothing happen. I didn't know where I was. And after I came to Salonika, after four days, I have a malaria. Very very bad. And I was going every day to sew. In Greece they used to take you one day -- you call me one day to come in home and finish -- whatever I will start I have to finish. I, I used to have so many customers and they -- I have the week full. And one lady, Jewish lady, she used to come every day. When you will -- Luna, when you will have time to come to me? If you don't have time for one day, come two. I say, I don't have time this week, maybe next week. And if I was okay, I was working all day long. Many many days I was working. During the day I start the malaria coming. I was shaking. I leave everything where it was, I went home. They put me blankets and so many things they give me, those morphines, all kinds of things.

Q. So you got the malaria in the village?

A. No, I got in Greece. In the village I didn't have

nothing. After four days I came to Greece and Salonika. I got it. I don't know. Maybe I got it before, and it shows when I came back. I don't know.

Q. How was your health during the hiding period?

A. Fine. Nobody was sick. Nobody, with snow, with [sounds like: een]. Go with some cheap shoes, going back and forth, nobody would have a headache. It was amazing, because -- you think other things. You don't think that you are sick today. You -- I have to stay in bed.

Q. Did -- was any of your family or friends returned from Auschwitz when you returned to Salonika?

A. No family. No one family. Friends, yes. Many. But we didn't have any family back.

[End of tape at 4130 on Sony counter.]