

Summary of Oral Interview with Jacky Zenouda RG-50.647.0025

Jacky Zenouda was born October 14, 1925 in Algiers, his father in 1899, and his mother in 1906. They divorced when he was 5 years old and his father subsequently moved to France. Jacky saw him 20 years later. His mother remarried and had a daughter. As a child, he lived mostly with his maternal grandparents. Antisemitism was always present, but people lived in different “clans” based on religion—Jews among Jews, Moslems with Moslems, etc. Jacky had Catholic and Moslem friends. In some ways, he had more affinities with the latter than Christians. His friends sometimes slept at his house. His grandparents had a store that sold household goods, and had good relations with Moslems.

He has fond memories of his childhood in Algiers. The family celebrated major Jewish holidays, such as Passover, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashanah, but were not particularly observant. Too young to have been interested in events occurring in Palestine/ Israel, he mentions friends who went there, and now live in the United States. He didn't leave because he was studying and living with his grandparents. He has family in Israel. Jacky Zenouda describes his school on the Boulevard Gambetta and his classmates. He participated in boxing matches.

He was 14 years old when war was declared. As a result of the Crémieux Decree under the Vichy government, he was not allowed to attend his high school. This was one of the worst times for him. He discusses negative experiences, and blames a teacher and issues at the school for his inability, as well as that of his friends, to pass the baccalaureate exam in 1943. Eventually, they all passed! None of them liked the Vichy government, and hoped the Americans or the British would come and liberate France. Moslems were neutral during the Vichy era. He felt more Jewish than French at the time, although he didn't become more observant. Jacky Zenouda was not political, and considered politics a dirty business. He had no interest in Communism, although some of his friends did. He noticed a change in attitude among his non-Jewish friends during the Vichy government. He was too young to have known the stories about a cache of weapons in the area, hearing about the Allied landing in Algiers on November 8, 1942 from friends. He was happy when Francois Darlan, who had served in the Vichy regime, was assassinated. He left Algiers for France in 1949, upon completing his studies. Among the Moslem population, there was talk of independence. Things became more difficult in Algiers, and Jacky has negative stories of events during this time as told by friends. French soldiers behaved badly against the population when they came to Algiers.

Jacky says that although he is very French, he would sacrifice for Israel's survival and that of the Jewish people. He identifies as both French and Jewish, but later states that he is Jewish first. He went to Israel once. He tells the story of a Catholic friend who visited Jerusalem and from the plane could see the green landscape on the Jewish side and the arid dessert on the Arab side. This helped his friend understand the different mentalities of the Jewish and Arab populations.

In 1944 he was mobilized. In Rabat, he contracted an infection that required surgery and a hospital stay. He was ultimately discharged and received a military pension. His lack of promotion was due to religious discrimination. After demobilization in Algiers, he continued his studies in pharmacy until 1949. He talks fondly about his professors during this time. There were not many Jewish students who studied to become pharmacists. Upon completing his studies, he left for France. His grandmother joined him in 1962. He has numerous Catholic friends, just a few Moslem contacts. He desires peace between Arabs and Jews and elaborates on the Arafat period, including the corruption of Arafat's government that prevented the improvement of conditions there.

He had a son with his first wife, who was Catholic. They divorced and he met his second wife, a beautician, in Paris. They have no children together, but she has two children from a previous marriage.

He concludes by discussing his involvement in volunteer work since his retirement. As an advocate for the rights of handicapped people, such as those with multiple sclerosis and polio, he helped draft a charter of their rights. He also volunteered with UNICEF and other organizations. On the first Tuesday

of every month, lectures by well-known women are held at the Café de Flore, including Simone Weil. He helps arrange these lectures, the latest one on sexuality and the handicapped.

Translated by: Felicia Berger Sturzer