

**RG-50.647.0032**  
**Summary of Oral Interview with Marc Fellous**

**Born:** August 19, 1938 in La Marsa (a suburb of Tunis), Tunisia

**Profession:** Physician and geneticist

**Father:** Emile Fellous, born 1900, physician; **Mother:** Sarah

**Paternal grandfather:** Maurice Fellous, grocer who sold eggs and tobacco; **Grandmother:** Esther Constanza; **Great-grandfather:** Solomon Fellous, Rabbi of the La Hara ghetto

Marc's parents and grandparents were born in Tunisia. He is constructing a genealogical tree of his family. His grandparents had eight children, four boys and four girls, and the family was poor.

Marc's father studied medicine in Paris. He began his education at the Alliance Française. The Alliance noted his intellect and sent him to the Lycée Carnot before WWI. Marc's grandfather had a brother, Victor, with French citizenship and a job at the port of Tunis. Victor encouraged his brother to send his children to the Alliance Française. Thus, it was his great-uncle who brought his father to Paris to study medicine. Marc's father subsequently returned to Tunisia to start his practice. He wrote his thesis in 1922 on sexually transmitted diseases. It is thanks to this uncle that his father studied in Paris, becoming a French citizen in 1931 and marrying in 1934.

His mother was a very modern, attractive woman, which Marc Fellous emphasizes throughout the interview. She was a mixture of two different cultures, since she was of Italian origin and spoke Italian, a language Marc learned because his mother hired an Italian maid. They built a beautiful house in La Marsa, which became a second office for his father. During the day his father would work in Tunis and in the evening in La Marsa. He had two different patient groups. In La Marsa most were Moslem, while the city dwellers were in Tunis. He had a very good reputation since he was educated in the best schools in Paris. He became the doctor of a certain group in La Marsa. Marc's parents had four children: 1936 (sister), 1938 Marc, 1940 (sister, artist), and 1942 Michelle (sociologist) —three daughters and one son.

La Marsa was bombed in 1943 and Marc was very affected by this. He doesn't remember much contact with other children except his cousins, some of whom were well off. Their own house was near the ocean. He also had Moslem friends in high school. He attended the Lycée Carnot and then Lycée Carthage. The Lycée Carthage consisted of 2/3 French Christians, with the rest divided between Moslems and Maltese Italians; Jews were a minority in the minority. The Jews were mainly in Tunis. La Marsa and the surrounding region of the Lycée Carthage consisted of primarily a French population. The school was French, not Arabic, and had boys and girls. He received his baccalaureate degree in France and left Tunisia in the 1950's.

In Paris, he went to the Lycée Montaigne and Lycée Charlemagne, where he studied medicine and hospital work. He became a professor with a specialty in genetics. He proudly taught a whole generation of Tunisian geneticists and was invited to Tunisia after he became known in his field. His family kept the beautiful house in La Marsa, and his mother would return to it in order to maintain it. Marc returns to Tunisia every year. He discovered a large cemetery and

formed an association in 2007 to care for it. He spends a week with friends and family when he goes. The cemeteries were in disrepair and they worked to fix them.

**WWI:** The family didn't talk about the war. Both his grandfathers were Tunisian. His paternal grandfather didn't participate in the war, but perhaps his maternal grandfather did. He isn't sure.

**WWII:** His father was mobilized when Marc was 5 years old. Since he had become French in 1931, his father was mobilized as a Frenchman. But his father, a doctor, remained in La Marsa because the Bey (Tunisian monarch) needed him and exempted him from leaving. His entire battalion was decimated on the Northern Front. Dr. Fellous had a diverse patient population. Marc discusses his father's military service as a doctor to French officials, such as Jean Mons, the French representative in Tunisia. Marc remembers the bombings. The Americans and British bombed the German encampment below their house on the beach. There were military jeeps, tents, helmets, etc. He remembers a pair of binoculars at home to see what went on below. He has a picture of an American parachutist hidden by his parents in the Arab cemetery and then with them. It's rare to have a camera but an uncle had one and took pictures. Marc discovered the box of pictures, which his sister has, containing the photo of the American soldier. When he found the box, he asked his mother to identify each picture with names and dates. (He shows the picture of his family with the soldier).

His father had good relations with the Moslem population—he was their doctor as well. Doctors did everything—vaccinations, exams, deliveries, etc. He also had the privilege of having a car and was the doctor of the Moslem aristocracy, the French residents and the Italian community of La Marsa. Marc accompanied his father on calls. His mother was very cultured and their home was open to artists and intellectuals. It was a diverse community.

Returning to **WWII**, Marc states that the Americans bombed from very high and in March, 1943 there were many wounded in La Marsa. Their house became a hospital and his mother a nurse. The house was requisitioned by Germans so his family lived in the basement. They were nice to the children. The house was large and his father's office became a hospital. About ten German officers lived in their house and wanted to take his father's car but weren't allowed to do so by the authorities. His family was protected so his father could work. Since the Jewish community of La Marsa was Italian, it was protected by Italy. Thus, they could keep their houses and property. However, there were Jews forced to do hard labor, as was the husband of one of his sisters. There were casualties from the bombings in the Jewish ghetto near them, as well as among Moslems. Their house was spared damage. Those badly wounded were brought to the house, where some died. He has letters, donated to the U. S. Holocaust Museum, detailing some of these events, including a letter from Gen. LaBarthe of the French aviation service asking that his father be the doctor for the aviators. The Germans left in 1943. The Americans and English liberated them and the defeat of the Tunisians was the beginning of the end—the first time they had lost the war. The most important battles were in Algeria.

**Journey to France:** Marc Fellous came to France in 1952 and attended lycées in Paris and then studied medicine. He talks about the privileged life they had when he had to leave for France: a beautiful house by the sea, servants who worked in the garden and the house, etc. They had to leave everything and start over. His father left 6 months earlier to organize things, and found an office in Ivry. He remembers their epic journey to join his father—a boat trip during a violent storm at sea, sea sickness, arrival in Marseille exhausted, a train with many suitcases, etc. They

left their family dog behind. His family nevertheless was privileged in the Tunisian Jewish community, allowing his parents to help other members of the family. His mother took everything she could when they left, including furniture, pictures, etc. They also had a country house and were collectors. Other Jews were of modest means. His father took care of artists who paid him with paintings. He tells the story of a Jewish painter, Solomon Nardus, whose painting collection was taken by the Germans—they took everything. This occurred in 1943. Marc's grandson continues to search for these stolen art works. The Germans didn't steal from the Fellous family since they didn't have paintings of value and the Germans had to leave quickly. When Germans were in their house, the cook for the Fellous family fed them as well. They also took advantage of the excellent wine selection in the cellar. Since his father was the doctor for the Christian community, the Archbishopric produced very good wine that was exchanged for his father's services. Since Dr. Fellous was the Bey's personal physician, ministers such as the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Justice came to their house. His father travelled with the Bey. They all liked his mother, who was a good hostess. It was his father who certified the death of the Bey. He tells the story of how his family received a special ring from the next Bey.

**Summary:** Marc Fellous's father was a doctor who cared for the air force and the Bey of Tunisia. His grandfather was a grocer. Marc Fellous has no children but many nieces. Most of them are not interested in this story but he has a sister who is a sociologist and is writing their history. Her daughter interviewed their mother and the interview was filmed. He hasn't seen the film but is reuniting the family for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and his niece is coming. Michelle Fellous, his sister, has the family information.

Marc shows documents and pictures that he identifies. He notes the mixture of cultures: Turkey, Europe, Istanbul, etc. The pictures were taken by his uncle, a photographer. Among the documents and pictures are the following:

- 1) copy of his father's medical thesis in 1922
- 2) his mother wearing a bathing suit on the beach in Tunisia (She was the first woman there to do so. It was revolutionary.)
- 3) his parents' engagement picture
- 4) their house in La Marsa
- 5) letters from the Bey
- 6) certificate exempting his father from military service
- 7) the Bey and his father
- 8) ministers of the Bey and his entourage, including his father
- 9) ring his father received from the Bey
- 10) picture of the painter, Solomon Nardus
- 11) letters in German, French, etc.
- 12) his mother's permission to be a nurse in his father's practice
- 13) letter from commander LaBarthe of the Tunisian air force
- 14) thank you letters for his parents' services

He talks about setbacks in his father's medical career in France when they bought a grocery store to survive. He mentions the Marshall Plan, hard times, and antisemitism. Life was chaotic

but interesting. Fellous considers his family privileged, since they were protected by the Bey and the authorities. However, he also talks about the slave labor of Jews and those killed during the bombings. The Germans in their house showed some humanity, while brutalities were going on elsewhere. They weren't all monsters, perhaps because they were far from home and conscious that it was the end for them.

**Translated by:** Felicia Berger Sturzer  
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