

Interviewee: Tina Pardo

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Interviewer: Ilana Solowiejczyk

Tina Pardo Roesti was born in Monastir (Bitola), Macedonia, in 1937. Life was like the normal life of a child in her early years. She was an only child. Parents were Leon and Esperanza. They lived in the Christian neighborhood, where the better off people lived, separated from the Jewish neighborhood by the river Brar (Vardar?). In the Jewish neighborhood there were all the Jewish owned stores. The house was large, had a big yard with hens. She played outside with other children. Paternal grandparents lived nearby; maternal grandparents lived in the Jewish section. Tina visited all of them often. She loved the maternal grandfather. With her maternal grandmother she did not interact, as she suffered from tuberculosis. The paternal grandparents had a huge house, with 3 floors. The top floor contained the kitchen, and that was the grandmother's realm. Tina's mother had two younger brothers, and her father had a brother and a sister, both younger. At age 4, Tina was sent to a preschool ran by French nuns. She was taken there by a sled drawn by a dog. Tina learned French from listening to the nuns. Father had a textile store. His younger brother went to Milano to study textile engineering. Upon his return, he opened a business to sell pure silk.

Changes because of the war: Tina could not go out to play after 5 p.m. Also, some people arrived to the house and took away the radio. In addition, Tina was told that a German guest will arrive to live in their home. Tina was excited to think they will have a guest. In the meantime, parents had to wear the Magen David. She demanded (and got!) one also, even though she did not need to wear it. The guest never materialized. Tina's father was friendly with the chief of police and the mayor. They devised the "guest is coming" strategy so that the family will not have to give up their home. Nevertheless, the family made preparations to leave, by closing the house and sending their belongings into a ship called Apatria. The lift was accompanied by a friend and partner of the father named Aron Pardo (no relation.) Mother, Tina and the wife of the partner were to follow. Their guide took the wrong turn to get to the ship, and the ship sailed without them. Returning home, they managed to stay for a few days until they were ordered to move to the Jewish section. Grandparents and other relatives were also sent there. Tina did not go back to school. Parents were always worried and unavailable to Tina.

Father decided to leave the house. They made a small bundle with clothes. On the way out, father knocked at every door warning the Jews of the impending tragedy. He encouraged them to leave. They all thought he was crazy. The family left in a brooms truck, together with an aunt and her family. They went to Ohrid, and ended up in a stable. The next day, a group of 4 partisans/fisherman, came to take them to Albany. The four had been drinking in a pub, where also German officers were drinking. They overheard them saying to "let them go for a few more hours, as there was no way they would escape." The four plied the Germans with drinks, tied them up and managed to find the address of Tina and her family, the Germans' destination. They came and saved them. There were 2 boats to take them away. Upon departure, the Germans arrived and started shooting at them. Tina remembers the bullets falling in the water. It was snowing. They adopted new identities, and had false papers: Maria and Velian Andrea were the new names of the parents, their religion was Christian, and they were refugees from Italy. Tina was given a little pendant of a virgin and she was happy to finally have one like her friends at school. Arriving in Podradetz they were allowed to disembark. The Italian police was waiting for them. Father could not get up because he was frozen. They had to carry him to the police station. Papers were

accepted and they were sent to a pension. Some of the relatives failed the interrogation and were sent back to Monastir.

Arrival in Tirana, to the best hotel. Looking for an Albanese client, and asking him for asylum. He was single, and had a huge house. He accepted them in exchange for housework. Eventually, they rented a house. Ekrem , Vera and Pramvera Stermasi were the owners of the house: the family rented the bottom floor. During an important holiday, Tina's mother and aunt cried bitterly for the absent other family members. The Stermasi came to them to tell them they knew they were Jews, and that it was their holiday. In addition, they told them they will protect them...and they did. The Royal Air force bombing Tirana by mistake occurred when the Pardos were hiding there. From that day on, the war came to Tirana.

Tina was sent to a nearby school. She learned to speak Albanese. She had many friends. The Stermasi considered that the Pardos had lived with them for too long, and it was dangerous. They found for them living quarters next door, in the house of a relative of the king. One day the Germans came looking for documents. The father did not go to the door, and they left, but the visit alarmed him who then, together with a landsman who was living nearby, Solomon Comforto from Skopje , decided they had to leave Tirana (because they were probably under surveillance by the Germans.) They went to the mountains, in Brar. Only donkeys could make the way. It was a small village, and very primitive. They stayed about 2 months. Tina played with Yveta, the Comforto's girl. The men did not sleep at night. They had to stand watch because of the huge rats. When mother started suffering from an excruciating back ache, they went back to Tirana. They were afraid to call a doctor, but one who passed by and heard the mother crying in pain, offered his help and treated her. The war. Father manages to help the partisans. After another month, father went back to Monastir looking for surviving relatives, and his belongings. He couldn't find anyone alive, and his belongings were denied to him (the Communists were already in charge.) Return to Tirana.

Father decided to go to Italy, declaring himself Italian to the Red Cross. They flew to Italy, arriving in Bari together with many immigrants. From there, they went to Rome. They spent a couple of months there. Tina had a good time. On to Milano. They rented a couple of rooms at a spinster's named Virginia. Tina learned Italian with her and forgot her Albanese totally. Tina thinks that their economic survival was due to the fact that they had sewn gold coins in their vestments. The family spent 4 years in Italy.

Father decided he did not want to live in Europe any longer. They wanted to immigrate to Palestine, but the British did not allow it. Mother knew that a paternal aunt lived in Chile. They sent them visas. Their friends the Comfortos, wanted to come too but Chilean president then denied them entry for being Jewish. (The Pardo family appeared as "with no country".) They went to Uruguay. Tina managed to acclimatize and adapt, but the parents never did because they could not overcome the loss of their family and their country.