

Anna Tsemani-Galani

Anna Tsemani-Galani, born on May 14, 1932 in Kastoria, North Western Greece, describes her experience as a Greek Christian during the Italian/German occupation, 1941 – 1944. Her family comprised of her father, mother, two brothers, older sister and her. The family lived in an area with Jewish homes. Her father was a doctor; he had studied in France and spoke fluent French. As such, he had a lot of Jewish patients and friends, who spoke French to him. Anna's first and closest friend was the Jewish girl Lilika Konfinou, The two families were close and the girls were inseparable. They went in the same school grade.

The Konfinou family were well-off and had a large house close to the Christian Cathedral, almost next to the Tsemani family. The girls were going to the Synagogue on Saturdays and the Church on Sundays. The religious holidays shared by the two households. The Jews were the nucleus of commerce in the city. They lived peacefully with no distinctions among their Christian neighbors. The Jewish and Christians kids were playing together in mixed neighborhoods.

At the beginning of the occupation, Italians had administrative control of the area. Anna's father, being a doctor and fluent in French, became friends with a Mr. Vogel, President of the Swiss Red Cross. Vogel told him that when the Germans come, it will be difficult for the Jews, and suggested they should run away. Her father informed his Jewish friend, but unfortunately they did not listen to his advice. They had too much at stake in the city, and also were convinced that they would be relocated to Poland to make a new home. Anna remembers Lilika getting new warm clothes and shoes for the trip. When the Germans came, they ordered the Jews, about 900, to wear a yellow star. After two to three months, they gathered them all, put them in army trucks and shipped them out. Anna remembers how devastated she felt losing her friend.

Anna's father was not in favor of the partisans. He believed they were not patriots and all they really wanted to eventually separate northern Greece, Macedonia, away from Greece. Because of his stance, his presence in the city became rather precarious, Two to three weeks after the arrest of the Jews, he had to leave Kastoria to hide in Athens. Shortly after, the rest of the family joined him. Because of that and her young age, Anna does not remember what happened to the Jewish homes and stores. After the liberation, on October 1944, the father returned and eventually became the Mayor of the city. The rest of the family stayed in Athens for good.

Anna learned later that very few Jews of Kastoria survived, member(s) of the Eliaou and Kalefi families, and Rita, Lilika's older sister. Rita eventually went to Paris and then to Brazil, where she got married. She died recently. Lilika and the rest of her family perished in the concentration camps.