

Oral history interview with Demetrios (Dimitris) Korakis

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Summary

Dimitris Korakis, born on Feb. 5, 1933 in Ioannina, Central Western Greece, describes his experience as a Greek Christian during the Italian/German occupation, 1941-44. His family comprised of his father (Nasios) his mother (Eleni or Lego), his brothers (Costas, Nikos, and Giannis) and his sister. He was the youngest. They originally lived in a house on Megalou Alexandrou Street. His father was a vegetable grower.

His father was selling his produce primarily to two grocers, a Christian and a Jew, Davi. They became socially very friendly with Davi and his family (wife and three children). Dimitris does not remember any other names, except Davi's brother's Abi. Before the occupation, there were no distinctions between Christians and Jews. Everybody lived together. Disagreements came because of business not social reasons. In 1941, to avoid bombardments they moved for about a year to a friend's (Thomas Porkas) house, inside the Castle of Ioannina (old town). There, they met and socialized with more Jews. He only remembers a madam Estir. He went to an elementary school with a lot of Jewish kids

When the Italians occupied Ioannina, there were not any problems, and life continued as before. In fact, one Italian used to work at his father's fields to remember his village. When the Germans came, life changed. They were tough and everybody was scared. There was hunger among the common people because the Germans took all the food for themselves. Dimitris' family did not suffer, because they cultivated fresh vegetables and wheat. They also had a small boat and Costas (Constantine), his older brother, fished in the lake. Davi's family also seems to be doing well.

Sometime in 1943, the Germans asked the Christians of Ioannina to mark their houses with a cross. Everybody got suspicious and worried about the Jews. Dimitris' father suggested to Davi and others to leave town for the mountains, other villages or larger cities like Athens where they could "disappear". Costas was involved with the Partisans from ELAS (Hellenic People's Liberation Army) and was using the boat to transport people on the opposite side of the lake and escape to the mountains. He mentioned he could help the Jews, but very few took his advice, Abi was one of them. It seemed very difficult for them to leave their homes. They were also given assurances from the President of the Jewish Community that nothing will happen to them, because they were giving money to the Germans. The Jews who left survived. Abi came back and re-opened his store. The others perished

On the 25th of March, 1944, the Germans gathered all the Jews of Ioannina in front of the church of Agios Nicolaos, and send them out. Dimitris remembers a lot of Germans trucks full of Jews passing in front of him. In one of them, he saw Davi and his family. Davi called and told him that he had left the money he owed to his father and two sheep at home, and they should go and get them. Dimitris found his father in the field crying. By the time they went to Davi's house the money and the sheep had disappeared. Rumor has it that the Germans robbed the best of the Jewish houses and stores, and their collaborators the rest. Nobody ever penalized.

After the war, because of his participation in ELAS, which was a left leaning organization, Costas was sent to prison and his brothers could not get a government job. Eventually their names were cleared. Dimitris became the Director of the Ioannina Municipal Hospital and later the Hatzikostas Hospital.