

Oral history interview with Eleni Synozi Kipourou

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Summary

Eleni Synozi-Kipourou was born on June 1, 1927, in Thessaloniki (Salonika), Northern Greece, on Theagenous Charissi Street, in the area of Agia Triada. She describes her experience as a Greek Christian before and during the German occupation. There were a lot of Jews living in Agia Triada. Eleni had a number of Jewish neighbors and friends. Their house was two storied and they always rented the first floor to Jewish families. The first to rent was the Bensasson family (father Sasson, mother Douda, daughter Marika and son?), but she does not remember them because she was too young. She remembers madam Reveka, her husband (?) and her daughter Margo; she doesn't remember last name. They were very close and considered them as relatives. Eleni's mother Fani spoke fluent Ladino. Later, during the occupation, their renters were the Nahmias Family (Pepos and Gilda). Other Jews in the neighborhood were: Madam Stella (?) the Algava family and Madam Rachel (?). Eleni had Jewish classmates: Paula (?) in the elementary school, who was very good, student and was always helping others, and Ninetta Pinhas, who was very pretty. Her father owned two movie theaters (the Pate and the Apollonio) and had a big house with a beautiful garden and an impressive marble internal staircase. The Jews were not doing anything on Saturdays, and Eleni was helping them turn the electricity on, start the fire, etc. She remembers a very beautiful synagogue on Mizrahi Street.

On Monday, October 28, 1940, the sirens started wailing noting the start of the war between Greece and Italy. The bombing of the city started on Friday. There were no shelters, and the families used their basements. Their basement had two unfinished rooms; her family took one and the Nahmias the other. Next Wednesday, the two families left Thessaloniki together, and went east in the area of Halkidiki, where they stayed for about 6 months. When they returned, they found Germans in town. They were very rough and mistreating everybody. People were fearful. The Germans took all the food for themselves, and the people were hungry. From time to time she saw small children on the street dead from starvation. All food (bread, vegetables, fish, salt, even matches) was rationed; the quantity was hardly enough and the quality was terrible.

Before the war, her mother Fani noticed that a small Jewish grocer was taking his little girl, Matika, with him at the store, because her mother was also working. Fani felt sorry for the girl and suggested to keep her during the day. They agreed, and Matika spent her days at Fani's home helping her around the house. As the time passed, Matika started spending fulltime at Fani's home. When the Germans asked the Jews to register and wear the Star of David, Fani got a fake Christian ID for Matika, through a friend

Chief of Police (Mr. Moushoutis), and sent her to stay with some other friends. When the Germans captured and transformed the Jews, Matika was moved again to a different house, and stayed there until the end of the war. Her mother and father perished, but her brother came back. Eventually, they migrated to Israel. Matika got married to a well-off Toy Manufacturer; she became Mati Pilo, and had a good life in Israel. She returned in Thessaloniki in 1993 and 1997 to see her adopted family.

In general, the Jews of Thessaloniki were either very wealthy or very poor; there were not too many in the middle class. Before they were captured, they gave a lot of their things to Christian friends for safekeeping. They believed that will be taken to another place to build their own new country, and eventually will return to claim their belongings. There are stories of finding containers full of gold (pounds sterling and other valuables). One such discovery happened in a restaurant owned by Ioannis Vougioukas. Eleni also remembers a container with two sets of porcelain cups and saucers found in their basement; she assumes they were left by the Nahmias family. The few Jews who came back and went to reclaim their belongings were surprised that some of their friends refused to even acknowledge they had accepted anything (Dr. Christopoulos).

They were a number of traitors who cooperated with the Germans. One such a person was Kostantinos Papacostantinou