

RG-50.855.0043

Oral history interview with Eleftheria Fiotaki-Kolomvou

Summary

Eleftheria Fiotaki-Kolomvou, born in Chania, a town in Crete, the most southern island of Greece, describes her experience as a Christian during the German occupation, 1940-45. Her family comprised of her father, mother and two sisters. Her father was a teacher and principal of an elementary school. Their house was in the area of Nea Chora, close to a poor Jewish neighborhood. The wealthier Jews lived close to the Castle in the Old Town. Eleftheria did not have Jewish neighbors except one family, the Minervas (father, mother and two daughters, Jennie and Julia. They were not very friendly at the beginning, but later, when Jennie and Eleftheria started taking piano lessons together, and the Minervas moved closer, they became pretty close. Julia fell in love with and was dating a Christian man, a violinist, the Director of the Conservatory. That was unheard of at that time. Eleftheria knew of two Jewish girls in high school, one's family name was Ishaki. She also had a Jewish piano teacher, Mrs. Ventoura. In multiple occasions she visited the Minervas and Ventouras households to practice on their pianos.

When the Germans attacked Crete with paratroopers (end of May, 1941), a lot of Cretans went to the battlefield and fought them as they were coming down. The Germans won the battle and occupied Crete. A lot of Cretans, including Jews, joined the Resistance and went in the mountains to fight the occupiers. Eleftheria did not see atrocities by the Germans in Chania. but she knew of a lot them in the country side. There was hunger a misery all over Crete, but her family did not suffer much because they had a farm in a surrounding village. They had a large house in Chania, so a German came to stay with them. He was a doctor from Vienna, he was a nice person, and did not cause them any difficulties. Indeed, he was kind to them and took care of their health needs.

The Jews in Chania were both poor and wealthy, but all their houses were clean and neat. Their relationships with the other citizens were excellent with no distinctions. They had heard of the fait of the Jews in other parts of Greece. They could have escaped to the mountains. Some did, and survived, but not enough. Mr. Minervas and his daughter Jennie went every night to a German club to play the piano. That was very peculiar and generated a lot of gossip.

One night at 1:00 am, Eleftheria's family heard cars and voices outside. They looked out of their window and saw the Germans capturing the Jews of the neighborhood, including the Minervas family. They carted them away and eventually transferred them to the port of Souda, east of Chania. They put them on a boat and sailed them away. Soon after, the boat sunk and all on board perished. Eleftheria still does not know who did it. The Germans out of spite or the English by mistake. Julia's boyfriend also boarded the ship with her, but was discovered, thrown overboard and swam ashore to safety.