

RG-50.855.0049

Oral history interview with Vassiliki Avaropoulou Athyridou

Summary

Vassiliki Athyridou, born in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, in 1911 describes her experience during the German occupation. Her parental family comprised of her father, mother, her and her sister. Her father was a distiller. Vassiliki was married when the Germans came to Thessaloniki. She had her husband Marcos, a dyes merchant, a daughter and a son. Her immediate family and parents lived on Miaouli Str. until April of 1941, when the Germans appropriated their house for a hospital. At the time, all the houses, but two, on Miaouli street were Jewish. After the Germans took their house, the family moved to Gravias Street, also among (pretty wealthy) Jews. Vassiliki had a number of Jewish schoolmates, but her or her family did not have any social interactions with Jews. Her husband and father had business dealings with Jewish merchants.

Before the war, Thessaloniki had about 60,000 Jews. Everybody lived in harmony without any differences and problems. Commerce was primarily in Jewish hands. The Jews were considered capable merchants but close-fisted. The Jews were always afraid and suspicious of the Germans because they had heard what happened in other countries. The Germans did not bother the Jews at the beginning. Starting in the summer of 1942, they imposed restrictions (wearing a yellow star, etc.), humiliation, and selecting them for forced labor. The Jews started selling or giving away their possessions because they expected to be moving out of Thessaloniki. Vassiliki's mother bought a Christofle fine china set.

Vassiliki remembers a Jewish father pleading with her father to take his two small kids and save them. Her father asked the nuns of the Catholic School for help. The nuns said they would take them if they converted to Catholicism. Finally, a doctor (friend of a friend) agreed to hide them in his house among his own kids. They were saved and at the end of the war they moved to Paris. She also remembers the Kounio family; the father had a camera store, and were speaking German; they survived

One night, in the Fall of 1944, they heard a knock on their door. They opened and saw a neighbor, Mr. Asael with his son Freddie. He pleaded to let his family take refuge in their home. They were on the run for about a year and did not know where to go. Her husband agreed, although they were directly across from a house with Germans. Mr. Asael left and came back with his wife and two daughters, Janine and Janette. The Asaels stayed with the family for about two weeks until the Germans left in October.