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Oral history interview with Stella Simomokiou

Summary

Stella Simomokiou, born in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, in 1932, describes her experience as a Christian during the German occupation. Her family comprised of her father (Giannis), mother (Paraskevi), two daughters and a son. Her father had a good size machine shop, and the family was well off. They lived on Apolloniados Street, close to the intersection of the main streets of Agiou Dimitriou and Lagkada. Her street did not have Jewish families, but the area across Lagkada street was a big Jewish neighborhood. Her family did not have social interactions with Jews, except a friend of her mother's (does not remember the name) who lived close by. Italy declared war with Greece on 28th October, 1940. A couple of days later the bombardments started. The family moved to the village Galatista, east of Thessaloniki, and stayed there until the Germans occupied Thessaloniki in October, 1941, and the bombs stopped,.

There were a lot of Jews in Thessaloniki before the war. They were excellent merchants and controlled the commerce. They were good and peaceful people, and everybody lived together in peace without any distinctions. Their houses were clean and well kept. There were cases, however, where mothers would scare their children that if they were not quiet, "they would give them to the Jews". The Jews were known for their jewelry of a distinctive style. They, even the poor ones, would give their daughters sizeable dowries, including many jewels.

Everybody was scare of the Germans. The way they behaved and looked caused fear and anxiety. They had no consideration for the occupied population, and would take whatever they wanted without hesitation or discussion. They wanted to take over her father's machine shop, but their Greek interpreter asked and got gold coins and averted the situation. Two rooms of their house were appropriated by a German officer, who happened to be the director of the prison Pavlos Melas. He was quiet and did not create any problems.

It was common knowledge that the Germans hated the Jews. About a year after they arrived, in the middle of 1942, they forced the Jews to wear a yellow star on their breasts. The Jews became progressively scared and had decided that they would be sent to labor camps, but eventually they would return. Many Jews asked Christian friends to safe keep merchandise, jewelry, and even their children. Stella's mother's friend asked her to keep their son; but her father refused. Another friend, Mr. Mentezis, a textiles merchant, asked her father to keep his merchandise, but her father refused again. Also, she knows of a Greek family, Oikonomou, who kept a lot of jewelry given to them for safekeeping, when the Jewish family never returned. When the Jews left, their shops and houses were burglarized. Stella remembers seeing carts with Jewish household goods carted away.