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Oral history interview with Nikolaos Athanasios Papachristodoulou

Summary

Nikolaos Papachristodoulou, born in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, in 1924, describes his experience as a Christian during the German Occupation. His family comprised of his parents, two sisters and himself. His father originally worked at a Refrigeration and Beer company and later opened his own machine shop. The family was well off. They lived in the area Zografou which was close to a, mostly poor, Jewish neighborhood on the other side of Lagkada Street. The family generally did not have close social interactions with Jews. His father had Jewish work friends, his mother a couple of acquaintances and he had Jewish classmates, one of which, Michael Sevi, became close. Michael's family was his parents, grandmother and two sons.

Jews, Christians and others lived well together without any distinctions. "They were all Greeks and fought the war together". There were stories that the Jews were putting children in barrels with nails to extract and drink their blood. The children were scared, but the adults were not giving credence.

The Jews were controlling the commerce in Thessaloniki. They were very good businessmen, and were always helping a fellow Jew in a time of need. That sometimes generated jealousy among other merchants, but it was a natural reaction rather a serious behavioral pattern.

The arch-Rabbi of Thessaloniki has been convinced by the Germans and in turn, convinced the Jews, that by giving money to them The Jews will be allowed to establish their own state in a different place in Europe. As a result, a lot of Jews stayed in town and became an easy prey. Also, the Jews had very strong family ties, and it made it almost impossible for family members to separate and leave town and save themselves. Nikolaos had suggested many times to his friend, Michael, to escape, but he did not want to separate from his family. The whole family was taken to a concentration camps, and only the two sons survived. They returned to Thessaloniki, sold their house and migrated to Israel.

Before the Jews left, they tried to hide their household goods and stores merchandise by giving it to friends for safekeeping. Mr. Mentezis, an acquaintance of this family, asked his father to hide his merchandise to Nikolaos's house basement, but his father refused. Michael knew of others who accepted and, since very few Jews returned, became very wealthy. Also, their stores were taken by Christians, mostly German collaborators, and their houses were appropriated by the town and distributed to local citizens. There are stories of gold hidden and found and people becoming very rich. Nikolaos did not want to name names

Michael remember seeing Jews loaded in trucks on their way to the train station, loaded to transport wagons and shipped out.