

Moshe Burla

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Thessaloniki

Greece

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The Burla family originates from Volos. Not only my grandfather, but also the grandfathers of our grandfathers all originate from Volos. I don't know how we fell to Macedonia, what I know is that when we came to Naousa, we found there our grandfather [Moshe Burla] and one of my father's brothers. We settled in Naousa where we lived together for seven years. Seven years later, due to my father's gambling habit, which ruined us, as they say, the whole family, completely penniless, went down to Thessaloniki in 1926. My mother was the only one running around and cleaning after other Jewish families to get a piece of bread to feed us, as we were four children.



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In addition to the one brother who was with Grandfather in Naousa, my father, Leon Burla, had another brother in Larissa, Minas Burla. He was my father's youngest brother and he was an upstanding young man. The whole of Larissa, everyone used to talk about him, for his achievements. He was a very generous, good man, he and his wife were very good people.

My father had yet another brother, Daniel Bourla, who wasn't so close to the family, but he was mostly involved with his son's life, his only child, who wanted to become famous and in fact he had written some poems: 'Why is the world joyful' and 'Smiling Father', were two poems by my uncle's son. He had a special story: he had been taken by the partisans, who had possibly saved him from the forced labor [1](#) that the Germans were about to take him to. They brought a woman, who turned out to be a German spy, and he fell in love with her and abandoned us and became Christian. In this way he stained the good Burla name and is not a Burla any longer, as he has changed his name.

He was famous for his achievements and until today he lives at a house close to Agia Sofia [Church in the center of Thessaloniki]. I don't want to meet him because of what he did, and I even said that when he dies I won't go to the funeral because I don't accept him as a cousin, as generally I

didn't like his attitude. This was the last part of the Burla family. The mother and the father had given everything to this child and they were taken to forced labor, and never came back.

The eldest son of my grandfather was called David Burla, while my grandfather's name was Moshe Burla, and I was named after him. I didn't meet any of my grandmothers. The only woman that I met was my uncle's wife, who lived in Naousa, and her name was Reina. She was very calm and sweet and nice. She really took care of us like a second mother, she loved us very much. She also had many kids, seven kids, among them a girl, who is the mother of Alberto Eskenazi.

One of her children was in France and we weren't in contact with him, and he died without us even knowing. She had another son, Minas, who got married in Thessaloniki, the father of his wife was a carter and they worked at the harbor. The whole family was deported and nobody survived.

She also had another son, Jackos, who got married to a woman whose father was a tobacco specialist. He was very well known and everyone respected him among the tobacconists. He didn't have a great life with his wife, as his wife always asked for more. They divorced and he left for America and he now lives with his second wife.

My uncle David had one more daughter who was older than the mother of Eskenazi and another one, even older, named Sultana, who was married to the son of Colonel Frizis [2](#). Colonel Frizis had a son exactly the same age; he was an upstanding young man, fearless, but he had a tragic death. While they sent him up the mountain to be saved the people there had found him a small house, a hut. One day the Germans came to the village and they requested all the men to assemble in the square. The villagers told him, 'you don't come out, hide at your hunt, no one knows where you are and what you are doing, and you will be fine.' But he didn't listen and he went to the square, and as soon as the Germans saw him, this big lusty man being dressed not as a villager, they claimed that he was in charge and took him and he was gone. His children are now old, one son is a rabbi, and there are many other Frizis in Larissa. In Thessaloniki, we have a Doctor Frizi whose mother is in the old people's home here with us.

We didn't know anything from my mother's side of the family, because the marriage of our mother and father came about in such a way that we simply didn't know. That's because my father was sent, while serving in the army, to Chios to buy some things for the army, and he fell in love with my mother, dropped out of the army, took my mother and went to Egypt. My mother's sister lived in Egypt. She took care of them, helped my father to get a job, and we were born in Egypt, three children. We only knew that her father's surname was Suhami, Esther Suhami, that's what my mother's documents said.

My grandfather Moshe Burla was a simple man, and he was religious. There, in Naousa he had made a small room with all his kit and every morning he would get up, put on his tefillin and say the prayer. He made sure to help us, children, as his job was very simple. He had a small loom where he would weave garters for the Evzones; he would deal with needles, thimbles, eggs, with money, with the world. I mean, he was aiming high, to get rich.

When we came to Naousa, his eldest brother, who had many children, helped my father. At the shop that was there, my grandfather opened a studio, put there some fabrics and worked just fine. Us, the children, all the teachers loved us there in Naousa. We had settled at school, we even took part at a school play, I and the mother of Alberto Eskenazi had the leading parts in a Greek play.

Growing up

When we came to Thessaloniki, Grandfather came with us. He suffered a lot because of my father. After Naousa, supposedly, he was a communist and he was hiding, behind and under the beds so he wouldn't get caught. Before he had been a merchant in Naousa, and now he had become a communist and Grandfather was losing him. He used to tell him, 'Think like a man, go find a job to make a living for your family and children.'

When he found a job and became a baker, we were pleased. I went every morning and they would give me one loaf of bread and that was food for the whole family. Plus the fish we got from the fishermen. About 400 meters from our house there was a group of fishermen working, and we, the four children, would go there and help them pull the nets with the fish, and they would give us fish that my mother and one of her sisters adored. The main part of our family's meal was this fish. Besides, we had a maid of a very rich family living next to us, not Jewish, and she loved us, the children, and she would bring the leftovers for us to eat. Well, and this is how we lived.

When we arrived in Thessaloniki, after this place where we lived close to the sea, we went to the '151' neighborhood [3](#). There, the girls went and signed up for classes at the Greek school. We didn't know any other language, my father and mother spoke Arabic when they wanted to communicate, but we didn't know Arabic, we spoke only Greek.

My grandfather wanted me to go and learn Hebrew. Next to our house now, is the kindergarten Agios [Saint] Stylianos, I think, and it is there that the Jewish school of the '151' neighborhood was located, and that's where my grandfather signed me up for me to learn Spanish [4](#) and Yiddish. But I was in the fourth grade when my grandfather decided that he wanted me to do all this, I had attended four years, at the Greek lessons I was the first in class, the others didn't know the alphabet. I spoke with my relatives and I told them about the situation: that I was going to sign up in a Greek school to continue my studies, and if my grandfather, who was religious, wanted to, he could teach me the language after school for me to learn.

We agreed on that, so I went to an elementary school, but not the same one as my sisters: they went to Italia's road, while I was at the Theagenio [where the Theagenio Cancer Hospital is located today]. My grandfather would grab me at the hair, not the ears, and would sit me down to learn. That's how I managed to graduate at the age of thirteen, with the help of my grandfather, not my father or anybody else; my grandfather was the only one that sorted it all out.

Everyone in the family spoke Greek, and no one knew Spanish. The Spanish language, we only came across at the '151' quarter where we went and lived with all the other Jews of the area. It is important to say that all our Jewish neighbors thought that we were Christians, because how it is possible that Jews don't know one word of Spanish?

I have written this in my book: that the other Jewish neighbors took me and my brother and pulled our pants down to see whether we were circumcised. And after that they were convinced that we were Jewish and started treating us as Jews in order for us to pick up a word or two of Spanish, of which we know today, and speak a little.

Besides my mother and father, who had lived in Egypt, when they wanted to say something between themselves, so we wouldn't understand them, spoke in Arabic. They didn't speak any

other languages.

In the Jewish families it was the French language that was used widely then, , more so among the rich Jewish families. I remember in high school an incident that the French teacher asked me to read and when I took the book, I started spelling out the words. 'But how is this possible?' another Jew called out. 'Sir, he is from a wealthy Jewish family.' I replied, 'I come to school wearing my sister's shoes. I am poor, I cannot be part of the French speaking elite, as all the rest of the Jews of the school.' You see, in my class there were only two of those. I know both their names, and they both spoke French. They used to live at Egnatia Street or at the large street of Agia Triada, while we were living in a poor neighborhood.

I can narrate something that I admit was tragic in the family. Where I lived with Grandfather, I was the chief of a gang of ten children, from ten to twelve years old. We used to play ball, a cloth ball we used to play with, we would go for a walk etc. My smaller brother didn't like to give in to my things, he would always put traps and he would get beaten up a great deal by me in return. I remember it was New Year's Eve and we were out playing, me carefree. When I came home, as soon as I crossed the threshold, my father, who sat at the table, took a bulk of [...] and threw it at me. Just imagine, at New Year's Eve, when the whole family was seated at the table to eat, I was out in the streets playing!

When I saw the situation I ran away. I said to myself, 'He's going to kill me.' And, indeed, he took the knife and came running out into the street. I was shouting for help and he was shouting, 'Kill him!' The neighborhood was all Jewish, and all the people were seated at their tables, heard the noise, came out and caught him and told him, 'What do you think you're doing on a day like this?' Upon which my father said, 'But don't you know...' And they said, 'Whatever happened, he is your child, take him home, to get him cleaned up and sit at the table to eat with everybody, on this holy day.'

My father at that moment forgave me, and we sat down all together to eat. From that day, when the neighbors saw that my father was going to kill his son, the punk, I became a 'girl,' so good I became, that I was under my mother's skirts, helping around the house, helping with the cooking, potato cleaning, the house, etc.

My grandfather's father I didn't get to meet. But in Volos, that is at the Community of Volos there was a great big sign that had the names of the Burla families engraved. They were religious people, people of the synagogue. What I know from my mother is that he used make and sell brooms. He lived in comfort and helped his children. He was a person that loved the Jews and made sure that the synagogue blossomed and helped financially with his sales from the brooms.

My grandfather was a peaceful man, religious, and he didn't have special likings with regards to food, but he liked everything that my mother prepared. He was fond of Mother and loved her very much. And when my father was not treating mother as he should have, because he was fearless, he used to take Mother's side and told him, 'You should love the girl, she is the brace of the family, while you are a bum.' He would say that to him sometimes.

Father really had an unstable life. Later he started working at the security, he became a security henchman, along with one of my cousins, and they caught me too, and beat me up, even though I wasn't involved, but I was a member of the union of the metal workers. They caught me and

blamed me, and in fact my cousin and father threatened me, 'If you don't stop we will kill you with our own hands.'

My grandfather was dressed simple, he always tried not to draw attention to himself, he was wearing trousers and a jacket. Only when he went to the synagogue would he wear what they traditionally put on, otherwise he was a simple citizen; he didn't stand out in any way. He went to Volos, there was a Jewish school there, and all the students studying there were Jewish. They have written about the great work that this school in Volos did, as there was no other school like this, and other students would go to Greek schools.

He kept the tradition as much as he could, all the holidays; he had all the prayer books for each Jewish holiday, and he helped the children from other families that didn't know of these things, so he helped them out.

He was a regular at the synagogue, every morning. For the preparation of my bar mitzvah at the age of 13, we would go together, every day he took me there, and wore all the accessories until this came to its end. After that, when I came back home there were all the people we knew, the brothers of my father came, my aunts. And after this experience I started avoiding my grandfather. At the time I was more interested in playing games than in religion.

My grandfather learned Greek history from us, from what we were being taught at school and we used to come home and tell him this and that, about the Greeks and the Bulgarians, and the Turks, and he really liked it. He loved it. He wanted to learn the history of Greece, the history of our nation. And he was a real Greek, Jewish but Greek, he loved Greece, he loved the Greek people.

He had friends who he couldn't invite over, because of the situation. But back in those times, people weren't involved with politics, my grandfather wasn't involved, he didn't read the newspapers, he didn't know the news, what was happening. What he would hear from others he would simply also say himself. There were many political changes in Greece, one of which was Pangalos [5](#).

There were many changes that he didn't follow, as an old man. Only the ones in command, the ones who were involved in the issues of Greece, were the ones that lived through the events. The crowds were simple, and they wouldn't follow through the political issues, which were many at that time.

I remember that at some point they cut down our money allowance, this and that, then Pangalos came and cut the skirt. The one that was more influenced by this situation, especially the economic changes, was a sister of my father that was deaf mute, Esther. She was a kind person, a person who would spoil all my uncles, once in a while, give them coins, which she kept them aside in her trunk. And when we grew up and started working she used to come and we would give her coins.

One thing that really upset her was that when the Germans came and took all her money to see how much money she had, she opened her trunk and only had enough for half a loaf of bread. Then she started crying and kept saying, 'Saving all your life for half a loaf of bread.' She became very emotional over this matter and cried, as all her life she had saved money from her children and grandchildren, and then she just had merely enough for half a loaf of bread.

We don't remember much from Grandfather's house because we met him in Naousa. They had previously left Volos so we didn't know at which house they used to live. We only knew my grandfather's house in Naousa where he used to live with one of his sons, David, and his seven children. My grandfather's house was a two-story building, quite big. The houses in Naousa back then were solid, because under the houses, in the courtyards there were running waters, where the lavatory of each house would empty into the river that would pass and take all the dirt from each house's lavatory.

The houses also had storage rooms, for their wine and ouzo, and all the food provisions for winter were kept there for the winter; the first floor was like a warehouse. I remember the following incident: a neighbor had a barrel of wine, of must, and I stuck my mouth at it, and went to school drunk. This barrel was on the first floor.

This is how the spaces of the house were used at the time: the first floor was a warehouse for the food, and that's why they built two-story houses then. The second floor of the house was big with many rooms, because, as I mentioned before, he had four daughters and three sons and there was my grandfather and grandmother. This house had five rooms.

The wife of my uncle David was goody-goody; whenever she would speak to a man she would close her eyes, very sweet; with so many children of her own and so many other people in the house, she would still manage. And right below their house, they had a little shop with fabrics, I mean Grandfather did, my fathers' brother had a donkey, and he used to load it up with fabrics from each side, and go around the village all day and sell fabrics.

As I told you, my grandfather was a merchant, he would sell needles, thimbles and buy eggs, nuts, whatever was on offer. I have written in my book that one day they had spread the nuts up on the roof to dry, and I climbed up there and I ate a whole bunch of nuts and I got sick, my throat felt soar. Luckily the doctors understood straight away that something was wrong with the nuts and gave me the right medicine.

In Naousa the Christian residents of the town appreciated very much the Burla family and used to shop at grandfather's shop; they had good relationships. He was a peaceful, quiet man who never had any trouble with strangers. Grandfather had friends and wanted to invite them over to our house, but our house was usually used as a gambling club.

My father used to bring his friends around the house to play cards, when there were already six of us. And our mother would go crazy trying to take care of the children and show hospitality to the card players at the same time. Because many times they would stay up until the next morning still playing cards. Grandfather wasn't forgiving in these occasions, but what else could he do. Father was the Prince. And with this crowd, Father would not only play cards and gamble, but he would also go hunting and do other things with them. They got to know him there, and they took from him all he had.

Besides Naousa, where we stayed for seven years, the city where I grew up was Thessaloniki. I went to the 9th elementary school, close to the Theagenio Hospital, and then went to the 1st Boys' Gymnasium at Vasileos Georgiou & Agias Triados Street. There I finished school. I was an average student; I wasn't among the best students. A son of another uncle of mine, who was also called Moshe Burla, went to the same school. I was a bit weak at school, throughout the six years that I

attended, I didn't do well in the ancient Greek class, and I had to sit all summer to study so I could go in September to take exams to pass to the next grade. Every single year, my father and mother used to tell me, 'You sit for one day and study hard, so you can go to the sea afterwards,' and I would sit there to study, and I always used to think, 'What do I need this for?'

From the very beginning when we first came to Thessaloniki, in 1926, I loved the place, it won me. And even after we came back from Russia and I got an offer to return I didn't. You see, I had friends there, one family, four kids, three were doctors. We lived at their house, they were inviting me over to continue teaching their children, because they came from there, and their children had to go to school and wanted my help. And I told them, 'Guys, I love your families very much and you, who are my friends and who helped me very much in the years that were difficult, but I cannot leave Thessaloniki, no way.'

I first visited Athens on the days of the occupation. Then father and I, or rather Father worked for a German firm that was buying metal, that is, cases, old iron and such stuff, and he used to collect metal and sell it to the Germans. He used to send me to the villages of Gravia, to the mountain villages where there was fighting going on, and I would pick up the cases in a truck and then bring them to Athens. There, he would take them and sell them to the Germans. That was my experience from Athens. In Athens I was staying for one or two days, the exchange would take place and I would be sent back to the villages again.

Until the last visits, which I wrote about in my book, I met a group of partisans on the mountain and while we were picking up the cases, they told us that what we do is against the people because the iron that we are collecting we could have picked for Greece instead, for the ELAS [6](#) and not for the Germans. And when I saw it his way, I went to my father and I told him, 'Listen, I'll stop doing this work. I don't want to be involved not only because what I am doing is wrong but I could also get hurt by the partisans because they don't kid around, and they told me: be careful, don't carry on with this work, because something bad will happen to you.' So I quit and went back home. That was all my life in Athens.

Thessaloniki I loved with all my heart and I still love today. Yesterday an Italian was here writing a book about the Jews of Thessaloniki and asked me if I was thinking about any other place to go and settle, if I had Italy in mind, for example. And I replied that Thessaloniki is my pride. I grew up here, and here is where my friends are.

It is very fortunate that after the war we created a team of five, five friends, old partisans, exiles etc, leftists, and every week we gathered at a small tavern to have a glass of wine. This was happening for years. Now, one is ill, the other has his foot hurt, but still something is going on between us, the company remained. We were the five of us, all from Thessaloniki, all residents of Thessaloniki that love the place, feel for it like a homeland. One of them was, in fact, from Chortiatis Mountain [a village near Thessaloniki]. He was a partisan from ELAS and after that he went to the People's Republic and he died somewhere in Romania, I think.

We moved a great deal. The ten or eleven years that I was in the '151' neighborhood, a Jewish neighborhood, I was playing with other children, who were all Jewish. We were playing, fighting with each other, playing 'long donkey,' etc. That was the first ten or eleven years. Then we left and moved to Agios Dimitrios Street, and there I started becoming an adult and Father sent me to work, to learn a craft.

At the beginning he sent me to a shop of a Christian, whose name was Laskaridis, and I didn't know this at the time, but my father would go every week and give him two coins, and he would give them to me at the end of the week as my pay. So I learned the business. I didn't know, and closer to the end he told me, 'You should know that these coins are from your father and not from me, all I give you is my craft.'

After him, I went to another one, because it was more convenient for me, because at the Ifanet factory I had an uncle, who was my father's cousin and who was an engineer there. He would arrange the order at machine works and I learned many things for my craft. My uncle put me there and told them to take care of me as their own child.

In this factory I really learned many things about my work. In fact, when I went to this factory Axilithioti, a father with two children, was making cars for spraying the roads and I started working as a trainee, but I knew my craft, so I had to be paid as a worker. When we came to terms with the management regarding labor issues, they called him and told him, 'This man you should pay as a regular worker and not as a trainee.' After that I got a fair amount of money with which I helped my sisters to get married and have their dowries and I, as a young man felt better, could dress better etc.

With the Jews of Thessaloniki I wasn't very friendly, because the Community of Thessaloniki, had a group of aristocratic Jews that were giving balls, parties etc. We didn't have a place there, we were simple folks. All the friends that I had who were Jews were people who went together to the political party clubs of three, we would form clubs of three people. It happened that I was in a club of three from Rezi Vardar, another neighborhood, that were not people from the city, but of another poor neighborhood.

If you remember the events that happened on 9th May in Thessaloniki, when they were killed, all the names of the Jews are written at the back of the memorial statue. These were people that we were in groups of three with. They got killed and I remained alive, and those are the same youngsters that we spent every day of our political life with. We would go and get coupons for the crowd, for the workers, the factories, when we tried to change something it was all of us together.

The poor Jews, and the majority of them was, lived in big neighborhoods. The Rezi Vardar close to the railroad, the '151' and the number '6.' The middle class of the Jews and the wealthier ones lived between the grounds of the International Fair [7](#) and here in Depo [neighborhood in the east of the city]. It was mostly the area of Evzonon and Karaiskaki where we lived. At the time after the occupation, when the Jewish Community had moved from Sarantaporou Road, we went and lived there as a family. From there I left and was sent to the front.

There were about sixty synagogues back then in Thessaloniki [8](#), in many different areas, and that was not because of the Community, but because every family, every group of Jews would build their own synagogue. I remember there was a great synagogue at the road that goes up from the seafront, where a large building stands today, which was built by the Jewish Community and was once a Jewish synagogue.

Of course, the Germans demolished it, and on its spot the Jewish Community built a large building, with a great deal of money. One day I went to the manager of the Community and told him, 'So many people came to this place to pray. Couldn't you put up a sign, saying it was a place of prayer,

a synagogue?' 'Your idea is good,' he replied, 'but the times are unstable and we cannot risk it.' That was the answer of the Community for a synagogue that indeed was once a pride of Thessaloniki, in the wealthiest area.

I didn't have much to do with the Community. A long time ago they knew that I was a member of the Community, but I wasn't really, I only started to live the life of the Community when I came back from Russia. I was then in a situation that I had to ask for help, in order to survive. I came back from Russia nearly naked, not alone but with my wife. And when I went to the Community asking for help the chairman, Mr. Benmayer, said that I should write an application, for me to become a member of the Community. The reply was: 'Now that you have come to apply to be a member of the Community, you will receive your reply within the next six months.'

Meanwhile, as I was waiting, Mr. Benmayer gave me ten drachmas from the cashier's desk, as a help from the Community. All this time, I had a friend living in Kalamaria area, who supported me, gave me and my wife a room, we went to the street markets, we had then brought some things from Russia and we sold some to get a few coins. We were getting paid rotten fruit from the Modiano market [9](#).

We reached the point where my wife told me, 'If you want to die from starvation in your country, fine. I have no intention to, I have my brothers in Russia, and I'm sorry, but I will pay for my ticket and I will leave.' She abandoned me and left for Russia. We sold all we had, rings, dresses, etc., and she got enough for her ticket and left. And there she didn't spend a long time with her brothers, as they were Jewish too, and they found her a fine young man, married her again, and today she lives in Haifa, the same city where I used to live. I don't know her whereabouts.

There were many brothels in the neighborhood of Vardari, and many aristocratic bordellos, were run by women. There were various streets with small houses, and usually at their doors, ladies sat, well dressed, and they used to go for walks etc. with the ones that wanted. There were also better and larger houses, at Irinis Street, again in Vardari, where this area starts and goes all the way down to Agiou Dimitriou Street. This whole street had brothels, the best ones, and the rest of the brothels were spread. They gave a part of the money to the girls and kept the rest for themselves. Thessaloniki had a bad reputation then. In these areas, the pimps used to live, and they got together in large groups with bouzouki, and they would make a lot of noise, the neighborhood of Vardari was getting known.

I can say, that part of the music and the songs of Tsitsanis [10](#) were from there. We, as children, teenagers, avoided these girls. However, one time my father gave me money so we would go. But I couldn't, you know, because I didn't like her breasts. She asked me: 'What's wrong?' and I said, 'Since your breasts are hanging, mine are hanging too [...].' So I gave her the money and left.

Usually these girls were from villages, from islands, girls that didn't have a home. Many of them were victims of people taking advantage of them, like pimps. They would make them work and take the money they earned. And because they needed love, to have someone to care for them and love them, they would give all their earnings to their pimps.

There was a lot of trade in the city, especially on streets like Vasileos Irakliou, where the Modiano market is, that street was full of Jews who were advertising themselves, and had a variety of professions. This street was buzzing with Jews. At the start of it, close to Venizelou Street, there

were two large bakeries, one belonged to Benveniste and the other to someone else – I’ve forgotten the name – and they were competing with the other bakeries in town and used to lower the prices by one drachma.

Benveniste, for example, had a simple Jew dressed up in white caftan and a funny hat and had him shout, ‘Come and get cheap bread, one drachma cheaper than all the rest.’ This competition lasted a long time, one wanted to outdo the other. Then the Benveniste family left and went to Israel and opened the first bakery in Jerusalem and you still come across their name there. The same ones don’t live any longer today, of course, but their children and their grandchildren are there. The other Jewish baker didn’t want to compete any longer, quit and later he went to forced labor.

In general the Jews at the fish market were old. It was where the Modiano market is today, most of them were Jewish fishermen, and one could go there and find any fish one wanted, certainly at higher prices than in other shops, but there you would buy the best fish.

There were other professions too: there were those that were selling bread rolls, round bread, and those that were selling things from a bucket, like milk for example, and then there were those that were selling bread with a piece of cheese and salami, the so-called ‘hunger doctor.’

So, you see, there were various professions. Many Jews were dealing in fabric. They had in their shops many Jewish youngsters as employees. If you went to Venizelou Street, there were mostly fabric shops there, and you would see the youngsters at the entrances of the shops inviting people to come inside the shop.

Where I lived in Greece we didn’t have anti-Semitism, that is, if you leave out the Campbell events [11](#), where a whole neighborhood got burned. It was a bunch of punks. These kinds of incidents used to happen in general in the Jewish areas. They threatened the Jews that the same things that happened to Campbell, could happen there too. I remember in ‘151,’ as youngsters, we were armed. One had a large piece of wood; the other had something else, so if anything happened, we could defend ourselves. Thankfully, a street was keeping us apart from the youngsters of Tumba, so that we could get organized and attack them, should they attack us. But in the end we remained calm, and there were no other incidents between the two groups.

From my high school days I remember that we used to take part in parades with the school. What I have to underline is that in the first year of high school I was in the school choir. It was a large choir. Professor Cameliery organized this choir, and it was good, and we always took part in all the contests of the schools of Thessaloniki. In fact one year, we won the first prize with a song for a donkey: ‘A donkey was grazing, he wasn’t asking for anything else, the poor one, than to stay strapped there, the poor one.’ We got the first prize with this song, which became very famous, and Professor Cameliery took the prize and hung it up in the school as a symbol of superiority.

I loved to watch the parades, I always used to go to places where I could see it well, I loved the Greek army, the Evzones, and generally the festive climate, and later, when I was of the age to take part in parades, I was one of the first ones in the row. I was the flag bearer of the ‘dead resistant fighters’ in the Kalamaria area, after the war, because I then lived in Kalamaria.

Even though I was very close with the trade union, we didn’t have any interest for the political parties, apart from the people that we had in the union, who we respected, whether they happened

to be communists or not. I was a member of the union of the metal workers, at the Workers' Center of Thessaloniki, and I was active. We used to go to all the metallurgical factories, we would go around Apostolidis, and other shops that were close to the station, and distribute leaflets and coupons for the union. I was such a close member of the union that when I came back as a partisan to see Thessaloniki, my curiosity dragged me to see the workers union. When I went there, the secretary looked at me and said, 'It's impossible, you can't be Burla, come let's go upstairs.' On the third floor, there was a big bulletin board and a photo that I was lost in the war, dead. I replied, 'Well, this is me.'

My father was from Volos, he grew up in Volos. I lived with him when I was a child, because until then my father had been in the army at Volos, but he was sent on a military mission to Chios Island. As I mentioned earlier, instead of him completing his military mission, he met my mother, took her away from her parents, and they ran away to Cairo together. My mother's sister lived there, she helped them, found them work etc. We were born there, and there I met my father. From my mother's side, we knew nothing, since she was taken away from her parents.

My father was born in about 1900. I don't know when he went to do his military service. They never told us how he 'abducted' Mother from her parents. My father wasn't very educated, he had finished only two classes of elementary school, but he thought that he knew a great deal. As far as the little world of Cairo, Egypt, was concerned, he started socializing with people and he wanted to make something for himself. Since my mother's brothers were helping him, he also opened a workshop, and was doing really well: he had thirty workers, who he was friends with, Jews and Christians, but unfortunately this company of people led him again to gambling, playing cards, which resulted in the loss of all we had, and so we left Egypt penniless.

My father's parents didn't want to hear anything of us since our father was such a bum, who lost all his savings and left his five kids with no home. Before that he had been a merchant and when we came back he became a baker, and he worked for many years making unleavened matzah at the Floka factory. Right next to them was the baker of the Jewish Community. My mother, Esther, was a simple woman. Many said that she had gypsy roots; she had black hair, and when she died she didn't have one white hair. She was a very good mother, she loved all of us. She loved mostly the boys, me and my younger brother, even though she was teaching the girls what to do in order to become decent ladies.

My mother helped my eldest sister a lot, by teaching her how to sew at one of the best dressmakers of Thessaloniki, who was later taken to the camps. Her customers were the richest women of Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, this woman died in the camp. She was a great woman, a gold mine, who taught my sister the art of sewing.

My second sister was a teacher, I was a turner, and my fourth sister was a worker at a biscuit factory. Her boss was Jewish, his name was Manos, and my sister fell in love with the son of the factory owner, and they left and went to the camp together. This sister of mine has an interesting story. When she was about to be deported, we had organized to leave for the mountains. I arranged things with a friend that worked in the regiment and he went into the ghetto, got her out and said, 'Let's go home to see your mother and father.' When she came, we told her that we were planning to go to the mountain, and that since she was part of the family, she should come with us.

However, my sister wouldn't hear any of it, left and was deported in the end. She was a very strong woman; my mother used to say that she should have been a man and I a woman. After what happened with my father, I had become a 'girl.' My sister survived the camps. Some friends of ours, both her and my friends, saw her. They told us that when they left from the concentration camps and passed through an area which the English had occupied, they got help there, at the English camp. My sister got a lot of food somehow, and she died from over-eating. Everyone knew her as a very strong woman, and she survived all this horror for three years, and then she died of over-eating! She left us with a full stomach.

Of course my mother with six children wasn't working, but she helped every one of us. When I worked at the metallurgy factory, it was difficult for her to prepare food for me, so I had to come back home in the afternoon to eat: leave from the harbor and go up to Agiou Dimitriou, eat, and be back at work in an hour. That was happening every day because Mother wanted me to have warm food to eat, and not to take the food with me. For me it was very hard to have only an hour break during which I had to get home, eat, and then go back to work.

My father had thirty workers. Except for one or two mechanics, who were helping him, the rest were women, simple women, Jewish and Christian, and they respected him. He was very nice to women, a bit of a womanizer, too, and, of course, when they sensed that something was wrong, that he might lose the business, they didn't really appreciate it.

My father dressed normally, as they used to dress in Egypt back then. My mother lived like her sister. Her father had a big company of wealthy Greeks that wanted to show off.

After my mother's siblings turned us away we came back to Greece with them paying for us. And we came to Greece and didn't know where to go, and then my father decided that we would go to Naousa where his father and uncle were. So we went to Naousa from Cairo, and lived there for six or seven years. The brother of my father helped us and he opened a small place where he worked as a small dealer.

We changed many houses here because when we left from '151' my father wanted to show off, since all of us were working. Our first house was at the beach, where we had fishermen as friends. Our house was an old horse stable. We cleaned it and lived there. It didn't even have a toilet, we used to go outside. The whole family lived there. We were leaving the door open so it would get aired out, because there was still the smell of the horses there, and most of our time, weather permitting, we would live in the courtyard. We were helping the fishermen.

After that, this Arabatzis took us and we went to '151.' There were long huts, and in each one there were four families: two families at the sides, where the large rooms were and you could fit more than four people, and two in the middle that were small and could fit two to three people. In the middle there was a kitchen that was being used by everyone. They used to cook there and smoke. We lived there for many years.

When we left from there, we went to Agiou Dimitriou. We all worked by then and thus could take care of the economical matters of the house. The house there was a home. It had two floors; we were on the second floor. We had two rooms and a lounge, where we lived our life. We were very close to each other as a family. Sometimes you would see people where our house was in Agiou Dimitriou, sitting on our balcony, listening to a song we would sing in chorus. It was a good life, and

we, siblings, were very close. Each one of us had their own friends.

Mother and Father didn't read. My father only finished the second year of elementary school, and Mother knew how to read, and she wanted to read, and many times she wanted to help us with our home work, but in the end she didn't. It was only when I was working at the workers union, that I started buying the workers' papers, but other newspapers we wouldn't buy. Makedonia [12](#) is a very old newspaper, but we weren't reading it.

Our family wasn't religious. When my grandfather was alive, my father was forced to keep all the religious holidays, because Father didn't care about religion, but didn't want to break Grandfather's heart. Grandfather wanted the festive table, the gatherings of the family, and so everything was happening as he wished. But my father was not religious. And when my grandfather died all this passed away along with him. Perhaps once a year, on some holiday, we went to the synagogue near the neighborhood where we lived. But we went with Mother; Father wasn't involved at all.

We didn't have many friends that were Jewish. Most of our friends were classmates from our school: boys were friends with boys and girls were friends with friends. That was our crowd of people. All my sisters and brothers would sit together and spend the nights together, and on Saturdays we would gather for a glass of wine or a cake and pass the time. Our parents had only Christian friends. I started getting in the company of Jews only when I first asked for help. Until then I had no relationships with Jews; I didn't really want to know them.

I cannot tell you whether there were political conversations in the house. I had my position at the Union, and there were also the parties. My father was a supporter of the political right. He even had a brother in Larissa who was a fanatic right winger. He came to our house one day and said, 'Where is the grave of this Venizelos [13](#)? I will go and do my thing there at the grave.' When he found out that I was a member of the workers union he said: 'What do you need this communist in the house for? Kick him out.'

So I left the house because of my uncle. My mother lost me, my sisters were looking for me, asking around what had happened and where I was. Then my mother took my uncle aside and told him, 'Look, you might be right wing, and have your beliefs. Fine! As for my son I want him as he is, and I want him here, not go looking for him out in the streets.' And after that he left and went to Larissa. My sisters came to the factory where I was working secretly, so that the bosses wouldn't know that I was working there. I did that to make sure that if my parents came looking for me, they wouldn't find me. One of my sisters and a friend found me while I was having my lunch at the canteen and took me home, and my mother calmed down, happy that she had found her son again.

That political influence generally came from my father's brothers: the one that was in Larissa, Minas who was making trunks and quilts, and the one in Naousa. Less so from the one that was here in Thessaloniki, and who was an employee at the town hall. The other three were writing to each other, when one would visit someone, that they should stay joined in the party etc. You could see that they were right wingers. They didn't like liberalism, Venizelos, who was highly regarded at the time. My father and his brothers always voted for the right. Only the one that was employed at the Town Hall because he was scared to lose his job went and voted for the liberals, because the Town Hall was in the hands of the liberals then.

The brothers wouldn't go to political gatherings. When we came to Naousa, Father wanted to be called a communist for a while because he was looking for work and it seems that where he went the others were communists and helped him. He became a member of the communist party and he was hiding, scared that he might get caught by the security police. He came from Naousa naked and when he got to the union the others were communists and they told him, if you stay at the party you will be with us and you will work. So he was kind of forced to do that. He was scared and hiding, he knew that they were chasing the communists, and he was hiding.

The political discussions at our home started when Greece got in the war with Italy [14](#). When Italy started to be openly hostile to Greece, then we took position and shared our opinions in the house as a family. Because apart from me, who was a soldier and fought while serving in the army, all my sisters were working for the army, making woolens for the soldiers. There were teams, groups, of Jewish women and of Christians, that got woolen material to make things for the army.

I remember the following incident: I was an escort at the time, for a car that was bringing food for the military unit that I was serving in. Because of my frostbites, they gave me the position of a driver. We went to a city in Albania to get food to send to the men of our unit, and we found a huge ball of woolens, so we asked for this special bunch of woolens to be sent to our unit. They told us that they had to wait for the committee to come, and they would decide how these woolens would be distributed. Can you imagine how long this situation lasted? People were making woolens for the soldiers, and the soldiers were dying from the cold before the woolens were distributed.

Did we have time for holidays? We had family problems; we didn't have time for holidays.

My father's older brother was David, and he could have been born around 1895. They all came from Volos, in Naousa he had his family and his seven children grew up there. David was killed by the Germans, the Germans got him. They were together with a big group of Jews that were hiding in Vermion [mountain range in the Greek region of Macedonia]. Along with Uncle David there was also a sister of his, who was deaf-mute, there was a daughter of his, the sister of the mother of Alberto Eskenazi, the mother of Eskenazi was with the partisans and she had a gun, and another family of Jews that lived in Veroia. They were all hiding in a gorge and the Germans found them and took them, and we don't even know what happened after that. They found them after September 1943.

As I said, David had seven children: the eldest was Yashim, then came Joseph who was the husband of my eldest sister and went to forced labor, the third one was Minas, Nikos, Sultana, Fani and Sarika. David was a shop assistant at a shop and he was doing a great job. In order to help them, and become independent from my father, he would take his baggage every day and he would go to the neighborhoods with fabric thrown over his forearm, and sell it so that he would be able to make a living of his own.

My father's second brother was Minas in Larissa, who was a fanatic right-winger. He was making trunks and quilts, he was a good technician, and the whole of Larissa loved him. Until today his name is famous. The women from Larissa worshipped him like a God, he was helping the people a lot, but he was with the right wing. His wife was called Roza; they didn't have any children of their own. They adopted a poor girl, who they sent to America after the war, and she lives there down to the present day. Every now and then she calls the family and we hear her news. She is called Gratzuela. Minas died one year before my father Leon.

The fourth brother, Daniel, lived in Thessaloniki and was working at the Town Hall. He had a son that left with the partisans, with his wife, changed his name and became Christian. His name was Moshe. Daniel died in 1940 or 1941.

I was born in Cairo because my parents had left Chios Island, run away and gone to my mother's sister. For the first three years of my life I lived there. I cannot tell you many things about Egypt, because I don't remember. All I remember is that when I was three, I went with my older sisters for a walk along the banks of the Nile. There was a large bridge over the Nile that was a mechanical one, they would raise the bridge for the boats to pass, and then they would lower it again for the cars to cross.

We used to throw stones in the Nile, because we thought that the river was the reason that we had problems with our eyes, and for that reason, we were throwing stones, because of the bad that it was causing us. When we later went to the doctor to ask him about our eye problems, he told us, 'The problem was not Nile, but the climate, this wet climate of Egypt, and that's why it would be best for you to go and live in a mountain area.' That's probably why my parents decided to live in Naousa, for it to serve as a 'prop' for our good health.

The truth is that Naousa became a solid part of our life, with its cold and snow and its frosts. We lived there and we loved it: its frosts, its goodness, its large amounts of water, its springs, its forests, and its fruit. There were a lot of trees, forests of chestnut and walnut trees that were royal property. I don't know which king these forests belonged to, but the state was guarding them, on the king's behalf. And when the ordinary people wanted to go and pick some walnuts, they wouldn't let them. But when the guards left, then the locals got together and were picking walnuts, all together as a team, as a union. They were selling them, and they had a better life.

We, children, loved chestnuts. The roads from Naousa to Agiou Nikolaou where the springs were, is where the chestnut trees had been planted. All the roads were full of chestnut trees. For us, children, it was quite a thing to pick chestnuts, to fill our pockets, or a little basket with them. Then we would return home happy, to celebrate and eat all these chestnuts, of course not alone, but with our parents.

After we moved to Naousa, we went to a Greek school. When we got to the sixth year, from the sixth to the seventh year, is when we started going to the Greek school; there wasn't any other way. Together with my sisters and the children of my father's brothers, my cousins, we had a lively life at school. I remember well when we performed in a Greek historical play: my first degree cousin and I were the leading actors of the play.

We were many: there were four of us older siblings and two younger ones, six all together, and the seven children of my uncle David, so we had a lively company at school and we would hang out together. The Christian children from Naousa loved us; we had made friends with them. I remember well one of my sisters, the one who later became a teacher, had a friend who used to sing a lot, and she was very beautiful. She was called Lisimachus, and everyone was jealous of her beauty. And believe it or not, but she remained an old maid, such a beauty, and yet she never got married!

When we went to my uncle's in Naousa to spend the summer there, we used to go to visit her. And we would see the beauty, yearning and yet not being able to find a husband. This is how she grew

up, and she died without having found her other half, a woman who we envied, not ever finding what she was looking for. Every human being is on this quest in life, to find his/her other half. For many years we used to spend the summer together, for one week or a whole month. We were neighbors as the house of my uncle was next to her house, and we could even speak to each other through the open windows and talk about our life.

In school I loved geography and I wanted to explore the map and learn things. Significant was the time that I wanted to take the exams to go to high school. You see, back then you had to take exams in order to enter high school. The teachers that were there to test us were all together and each one would ask a question. There was a student before me that was being tested in Mathematics and they asked him, 'Write us a number for five centimeters.' He forgot, couldn't write it. So I raised my hand and wrote five fractions by one hundred.

Then the geography teacher came and said to me, 'You are a Jew.' I reply, 'Yes.' He says, 'Do you speak Spanish?' I answer, 'I speak a little bit of Spanish, which I learned here in Thessaloniki.' He asks me, 'What language do they speak in Spain?' I say, 'Spanish.' Upon which he says, 'Do you know any words in Spanish?' So I tell him a couple of words. Then he asks me, 'Do you know the capital of Spain?' I replied and gave him the correct answer. He continues, 'Do you know where it is?' 'Of course,' I say and he goes, 'Show me on the map.' [...] So that passed easily.

The hard part of school was Ancient Greek for me; I didn't like it. I finished the 1st Gymnasium, all six years, and every year I was referred for Ancient Greek. Every year! So every summer, while I was working, I was reading Ancient Greek in order to pass the exams in September for the next year of school. And many times that would cause trouble at my work-place, because I had to work, because Father didn't have the capability to feed and maintain us. That's why in the summer we, the children, used to get a summer job, to earn the money for our books, and to cover some expenses, in one word, to help out.

I remember I used to go to a café that was owned by a Jew, and he would serve coffee to the shops around. It was in the Ladadika area. My job was to get the orders, the coffees and teas on a tray and take them to the customers. That was my job.

I can't say that I had many friends at school. I had friends in the neighborhood where we used to live, in '151.' There were about ten of us, all between 10 and 14 years old, and I was the captain. They were all Jewish, a company of Jews. We would play with a cloth ball, and other games, and we would so pass our time pleasantly. The only obstacle was my younger brother, who was always against me; whatever I said, he would turn against me, and many times I would beat him up, but he simply wouldn't change.

There was no problem at school due to the fact that I was Jewish. The problem was that as soon as we came to '151,' my grandfather wanted me to learn Spanish and Hebrew. And they put me in a school that exists even today and is the nursery of Agios Stylianos. This was the school that was right opposite our house. And, because we were so close, my grandfather said, 'Since you have this chance, go learn something else too.' Fair enough, but, you see, when we first came to Naousa, I was in the fourth grade. In order to go to the school and learn Yiddish and Spanish, I had to miss out on four years of regular school, and that really hurt me. My sisters were advancing in the Greek classes, and I had to remain behind.

So I decided that I simply have to speak to my father and mother and told them, 'Listen, this thing is not convenient for me. Can't you ask Grandfather to retreat from his stance, so I can go to the Greek school like the other children? Instead he could spend the nights with me, since he is Jewish and wants me to learn, and teach me what he wants in Yiddish.' And in the end we agreed on that.

So I got into a Greek school, but not the same school that my sisters were going to. They were at a school on Italias Street, while they put me close to the Theagenio, the 15th elementary school. It had a very good director and good teachers, who I loved, except the teacher of the geography class. This teacher was a shrew, and she had a stick. She used to say, 'Lift your hand,' and then she hit it ten times. She was called Miss Elpida, which means 'hope,' but we just used to call her 'Miss.' No hope there! Even though she knew that I was one of the best students in class, she was very strict and used to beat me a lot, she would get the stick out and start hitting my hand.

In the '151' neighborhood, there were two clubs. One was called APOEL; I can't remember the name of the other. In APOEL there was an old boxer, who was Jewish, Dino Zir, [Ouziel] he was named, and I used to go to this place to learn boxing. I remember specifically a friend in Russia that loved drinking. He was calling me 'Byron,' which was my pseudonym, and he used to say, 'What a good build you have, it pleases us to see you walking around.' I used to tell him that it wasn't the build, but the boxing that I was learning, because my teacher used to tell us that when a boxer walks by, he should be noticed by everyone.

In this club, teenagers from the age of 20 to 25 used to gather. This was a big part of Jewish life then because many of the members of the club were living in '151.' Apart from boxing, the club also had ballet training for the girls, and other activities such as drawing, mountain climbing. All these things were organized at these clubs. The teachers of these clubs were very nice, they used to live in areas nearby and they took good care of us.

At the time, the Jewish Community didn't have a summer camp yet. When we were children we didn't go to a summer camp. Only when we were a bit older we started to go to my uncle's house in Naousa. I remember vividly what a good time I had there with my sisters and brother.

We spent our time with a great bunch of people and would gather almost every week, Saturday nights, at midnight, at Eptapyrgio [lit. 'the castle of seven towers,' built in the 9th century, used as a prison from the end of the 19th century until 1978]. We brought along food, glasses and some tsipouro [Greek pomace brandy] and we would walk up to Chortiatis mountain. This walk would take us about three to four hours, both ways, up and down the mountain. When we reached the top of the mountain in the morning, we drank some hot milk that the villagers would offer us, we would sleep for a couple of hours, and then we would celebrate all day. We used to have a great time.

From this company of people only a few are still alive today: two sisters of a good friend, the one that helped my family during the occupation, a brother and a sister of an old school friend of mine, the sister of another school friend, and a school friend of my sister that we were very close friends with. Generally, this company of people was very close to each other and we remained friends after the war; one of the families, that is, a brother and a sister, visited us and brought us things that we had given them when we were leaving for the mountain.

There was another good friend of my sister, who had taken a big stove that we had then. Her husband didn't want her to return the stove to us, because by then she was married, and it became

an issue in the family: she was saying that they ought to return it, but he was arguing why should they return a piece of furniture like this. In the end they spoke with my father and he said that if it was a matter of money, we will give them some money so they bring back the stove. It was a nice ivory stove that remained in our house as a relic.

My eldest sister Regina was a dressmaker. She had a group of girls that would gather in the house and sew. Of course they knew us, and loved us. I used to tease them when I was at the workshop; I used to say to them, 'Girls, the one that can shout loudest, will get married first.' And they would all shout, so they would get married first. Or I would say to them, 'The one that speaks with the lowest voice will get married first.' And all of them 'but what are you talking about?'. We were teasing the girls working for my sister.

This elder sister of mine was the one that got married to a first degree cousin, the son of my father's brother David, who was in Naousa. They were among those that went to forced labor and never came back. They left with the first train, and as they got there they didn't even have time to think about going to a 'lager' [camp] to work. As soon as they arrived there, they were taken to Auschwitz. My sister left together with her husband. They didn't have any children.

My second sister was my favorite one, Yolanda. I have picture of her here, the one with the white hair, that's her. We were very close and the only two of the siblings that resembled each other a little; the rest of the children were like strangers. We were similar, in a way that you could tell that we were of the same parents.

Yolanda helped me a lot with my homework. I remember a year that we had to write an essay on our homeland, and I stayed up until two in the morning and I simply couldn't think of anything nice to write. She got up and told me that the following day, with a clear mind, I would be able to write something good. I said that I had to write something that night. And we sat together and wrote the essay.

I remember that when I brought it to school the headmaster read it and really liked it, and asked all the classes to read my essay. He said that it was very well written, and was about the homeland, only it had many spelling mistakes. You see, I hadn't asked my sister to help me on that. Everyone at school thought that the essay was written by the other Moshe Burla, my first degree cousin, the son of Daniel, who was in the same grade, but one of the other children in class said, 'Mr. Teacher, this is not written by the Moshe of Daniel, but by the Moshe of Leon Burla.' They were pleased because it was the first time I had written such a successful essay.

In high school I was distinctive in sports. I was doing broad jump, triplex and height. We had a gymnastics teacher who was from Pontos; I think he was called Anastasiadis. He was well built, he was a wrestler, and he was helping me and I was taking part in many school activities. Especially at the triplex that was my weakness they would give me a diploma or praise.

When we were living under the supervision of Grandfather, we would celebrate every holiday because he would organize everything. We knew that every Rosh Hashanah all the family would gather, and we would do the reading that we had to do, eat the things that we were meant to eat, and similarly on Passover when we ate matzah. When Grandfather died everything was forgotten because everyone had their own family, the family gatherings would happen less often and not on religious terms as such. We would rather gather for entertainment than a religious feast.

My grandfather organized my bar mitzvah for me, and it seems now that my grandfather taught me everything that the rabbi teaches: He also taught me how to give a speech about what I was going to do when I was going to grow up. That was after the ceremony in the synagogue, after my bar mitzvah. I went to the synagogue with my father, and all the relatives were there. There was another uncle of mine, the third son of Moshe Burla, and his family also came to my bar mitzvah ceremony.

Anyway, shortly after my bar mitzvah, my family left '151' and we went to live in a house on Agiou Dimitriou Street. We got a two-story house and we were doing well because all of us were working. My older sister had her little sewing business, my sister Yolanda was a teacher, I was a turner, my younger brother made trunks, and Father became a different person than he was before, forgot the gambling and the games, and made sure to keep the family together. We had a good family life because we loved each other and were very close. Sometimes, I remember, people would gather under our balcony to hear us sing all together, the whole family.

In the summer, I used to work as an apprentice at a café. The real work started when I finished high school and got in the metallurgy of Laskaridis, in the harbor area, between 1933 and 1934, in order to learn this craft. Laskaridis was a very good technician but he was mostly involved with machines for the bakery trade, machines for making the dough of the bread, the pots. That was his job. He would pay me every Saturday two drachmas as pocket money, which I later found out that my father was giving to my boss in order to pay me. So in reality, I was working for free.

Later, I got another job in a factory in the center of Kapani, where the vegetable market is today. There, the machine-works of the Ioannidi brothers was located. They were dealing in knitting machines and their best customer was Ifanet. Ifanet was here in our neighborhood, and hundreds of people were working there and all the machines were made at this factory where my uncle found me work. My uncle was a mechanic at Ifanet and he was in charge of all the orders for the machines, so my bosses were nice to him, as they knew that he was giving them the work.

It was there I learned my trade, and when I got to the point that I thought that I was a technician, I went to a larger factory, the one of Axilithioti. We were making street-sweeper vehicles as well as lathes and milling machines. The factory was close to the municipal cemetery, and hundreds of workers worked there.

It got known there that I was a leftist and the Security Police got me. One day they came and asked me to go to the police headquarters. On the way I understood that I was going to have problems, so I bent down to tie my laces, and I swallowed all the coupons that I had from the Workers Party, worth about fifty drachmae. When we got there, my father was already there and he was friends with the Security Police, and one of my first degree cousins was there as well; he was a fascist too.

They started questioning me, so I told them, 'Listen guys, let me clear things up. I don't belong to any political party, I am a metal worker, I belong to the Workers Union and I am an active member. I go to the factories and incite the workers, when we are about to go on strike.' They started looking here and there, so I said, 'Ask the municipality where the secretary of the union is, ask the union of the tobacco industries.' In the end they said, 'Alright, we will let you go.' And then this cousin told me, 'If you carry on being involved in things like that, I will kill you with my bare hands, you will not be on this earth anymore.'

At this factory I was getting paid as a helper and not as a technician, so I had to go with my father to the work inspection. In the end they punished my employer, and made him pay me the appropriate rate from the moment that he had hired me. Then I got a substantial amount of money and had the chance to help my sisters to get enough money for their dowries, and to dress a bit better myself.

Yes, I did actively participate in this demonstration [in May 1936 in Thessaloniki] [15](#), which was a big demonstration. We were coming from Vardaris, we passed Dioikitirio [Government House], and then we went down from Dioikitirio to Egnatia Road and further. As soon as we got to the corner of Venizelou and Egnatia, I don't know why but there were military cars and people were throwing stones. They said that it was the demonstrators that were throwing the stones and started shooting. But the people that were killed were people that were stigmatized from the balconies, because the informers were up there who knew the left wing and the majority of them were Jewish in Thessaloniki.

If you go to the monument of Venizelos you will see at the back that they have written the names of the ones that got killed there, most of the names were those of Jewish youngsters, we were together in teams of three. I was then working in Axilithioti and from there we left all the workers and went to the demonstration.

During the war

My father and I didn't go to Eleutherias Square [in the summer of 1942] [16](#). We were hiding at home. We urged others not to go either, but the Jews were following [Rabbi] Koretz, who was telling them, 'We are Jewish, and we should go.'

Yolanda was a teacher, she remained loyal to her family, and she came up with us to the mountains, to the partisans. She was a very good person. She was baptized in the name of Maria, because we always had a pseudonym. Yolanda came to the mountains with Father, whereas I had gone earlier. That happened because I had a great problem with the rabbi, who had a gathering at the synagogue and was urging people to go, and was saying to people that they were going to live in a different country, get money, new clothes, tools to work, and he was deceiving people to go there. Me and about ten others that could see that this wasn't the real situation, and had heard about Koretz's dreams, turned against him that day and we nearly got in a fight with the residents.

The ten of us went to the rabbi's office on another day and asked him to go and be in charge of the people and leave with them to save them from the Germans and not to chain them down. He treated us really cruelly, telling us, 'If you don't get out of here now and leave I'm calling the Gestapo.' And he had the button in his hand to call them.

We didn't take his words seriously, but we were kicked out and when we got out, we had to find a way to leave, because they knew us - now that this had happened - the 'rebels.' Each one of us had to find his way out separately. I got in contact with the youth organization, OKNE [17](#) then, and I was getting ready to leave. I had with me all I needed - clothes, shoes, flask, pan, in short, everything that a soldier needs - and my main concern was to go with the rest of the youngsters to all the Jewish homes, to recruit them to go to the mountain. We did a great job, and we visited 56 Jewish houses, where young people were living.

However, the results of our work weren't so great in the end because the rabbi had done a great job to hook these families in a way that they didn't want in any way to be separated from each other. Where will Grandfather and Mother go? And why should we go separately? One reason was this: that the families were so close to each other that they didn't want to separate. The other reason was that these children, in order to leave, had to get the approval of their parents, fathers, grandfathers.

As I said before, we went through 56 Jewish house and we convinced 13 people to come up to the mountain. Three people came back from the mountain alive. I don't know who they were; they were total strangers to our family.

In fact, when we left, we found a way that the Germans wouldn't understand where we were going. We got together at a friend's house, close to here, in Agia Triada, at the end of the line of the tram [on Vassileos Constantinou Street]. We agreed that we would go out 50 meters to the left, and then one of us would follow 50 meters behind, and in this way, the one would watch the others' back. In case anyone noticed any Germans, he would give a sign and the rest would have time to leave. Thirteen of us got out of the house, and everything went well.

We got to the last guard, and were then sure that we were free citizens. One of the 13 at the last moment turned back. We got him, me and a friend of mine, and told him, 'Where are you going? We are free citizens now!' But he said, 'I'm sorry but I don't have the guts, so I will return to my parents.' And he left. So instead of 13 there were only twelve of us who went to the mountain. We had a driver that took us to a village nearby, so we would stay completely out of sight, and he told us to stay there until the evening, when people from the union would come and bring us food and water. It was a summer day, and from there on they would take care of us.

I had a sister, who was younger than Yolanda, Sarika, who also went to forced labor. She had a different problem. She was working at the biscuit industry of Manos, at the Kapani market, and she fell in love with the boss's son. It was at the gatherings of the Jews where they got them both, and they took them to the military camp that they had here, next to the train station. When I heard about the situation, I had a friend of mine, who was working at the regiment, which was a team of gendarmes, sneak into the camp to get her out, and bring her to us. She came home and we discussed the situation, and she said, 'That sounds fine, only that I've devoted my life to this person, and with him I will even go to death.'

She got up and left and went back to forced labor. She was one of the strong children in my family; many times my mother would say that she should have been a man and I should have been a girl. All these years that she stayed in forced labor, she managed to stay alive; she was let free, and got out to a camp that was liberated by the English. They were calming them down, gave them more food than they needed, and she died from eating too much. That was my sister Sarika's fate.

Then there was Dorika, the youngest, who is still alive and lives in Israel. We nicknamed her 'Tarzan' because she was climbing up the mountains to look out if any Germans were coming; she was fearless. The last one was my brother, who they called Nikos, even though his real name was Slomo, I named my son after him. He died in one of the last battles with the Germans at Stavros of Veroia. There, about 120 Germans died, 20 trucks were burned; what I mean to say is that the Germans suffered a great loss.

In the end the forces came and attacked us, and there my brother got killed by a mortar. My father went the next day, and couldn't find anything, only body parts of people. It was the day of his 20th birthday. He was a fine kid, a good worker, he worked in a factory that was making chests, and he was praiseworthy. He didn't have many friends, he was more of a family person; he loved all of us.

They came from another route to the mountain. I left earlier with the 13 others, so they wouldn't catch me, it was February of 1943. This friend of mine that was working at the regiment, when the announcement came out, for the neighborhood where my family was living, on Syggrou Street where the 4th Gymnasium is, when they put up the posters that the Germans would come and everyone should gather the following day at the square, he took a piece of paper saying that this house has been occupied by the Germans and he put up this piece of paper at the front door of the house. The whole family was in the house, my father and mother, my two sisters, my brother, my aunt, the one who was deaf-mute, and my grandfather.

When the Germans conquered the neighborhood, they started confiscating furniture, and pianos, and other things, took all these things from the houses of the poor people, and brought them to their warehouses. They saw the paper and thought that it was a German house, and they left. The second time they came down, my family could hear the noise on the stairs, and they were trembling with fear, but again the Germans saw the paper and left. The third time they saw that the things were still in there and they didn't come by again. Our family watched time go by, and things got quieter as they were picking up people from neighborhood after neighborhood, until they had picked up everyone. At about three o'clock the whole place was empty. Then this friend went and opened for them and said, 'You are free but don't move from this place, leave the piece of paper on the door, and I'll arrange to get you out of here.'

He didn't manage to do anything the same day, but the next day he went around with a truck of furniture, got all the family in the middle and managed, with a German admission, to bring them all the way to Naousa. Because in Naousa everyone knew our family, they helped them and took them up to the mountain. That's why they were in Vermion, while I was at Paiko.

This friend of mine, who saved my family, was called Anastasios Trichas. Until today - it's been about three or four years that he passed away - his children and grandchildren are very fond of us, every time there is a memorial, they invite us. They would invite me to his son's house, which is far away in a village, to marriages, and so on. They consider me as part of their family. Every year at the name-day of their mother, annunciation day, the whole family gathers and I am the first one to go visit them.

The Germans at the beginning wanted to show their human side, that they were treating people well; they would even show it sometimes. For example, one time when I was walking from Syggrou to go to Egnatia - it was at the time that they asked the Jews to wear the stars, but I never wore it because I wanted to walk freely, to get in contact with people - I passed by a hotel at the corner of these roads, and a boot fell down from a balcony. I picked up the boot and went to the entrance, where they told me to go upstairs and give it back to the owners. I went up to the fourth floor. A girl came out, I gave her the boot and she told me to wait, and three minutes later she came back with a bag full of fresh and dried fruit. You see, these were years of hunger in Greece, and she gave me such a present! I thanked her in German, 'Danke, Danke,' and left.

Or another incident: one night I went with my sisters and friends to celebrate, we were getting ready to go to a tavern. As we went down from Aristotelous Street, before Ermou Street, the Germans wanted something from the girls. I pushed my sisters aside and grabbed one of them by the neck, ready to hit him. Another one got in the scene, there was noise, a crowd gathered, and then the German police turned up, whom I told that family matters were highly regarded in Greece. So the Germans wanted to hurt the girls, and we were well prepared. The German police asked the others standing around and they agreed that we were right. So they took those Germans, put them on the jeep and left. This gave us the impression that we were the bosses and not the Germans.

That was at the beginning. After that they started, not as separate people, but as a German organization, to intrude in Jewish things, confiscating the shops of the Jews, breaking in Jewish houses and taking pianos, televisions, in short, anything valuable that they could find with them. That's how they slowly started intruding in every neighborhood. Every neighborhood had its own ghetto, and they were gathering them there and from there took them to the trains. This was happening in different places at a time, and one of these places was where we were living.

There were Greeks that helped the Jews and not the Germans. There were also Greeks that were already collaborating with the Germans, from the organizations that the Germans had set up. I remember that afterwards they created order battalions who helped the Germans in any of their actions against EAM [18](#) or ELAS [19](#).

They had great power; they covered the entire valley of Giannitsa, and the part that was Turkish speaking. There was also the area of Kilkis that was regarded as blacklisted. They were helping the Germans to do their thing. We from EAM/ELAS would go and disarm whole villages that were theirs, like the villages of Kria Vrisi, around Veroia. We went one night and got all of them with the gendarmes. Some wanted to leave, to be set free, and other gendarmes wanted to come up the mountains and stay with the partisans. They held a good position - helped, and really turned out to be fine men. There were others that followed because they didn't know what else to do. We carried out many such attacks in villages where we knew people were thinking like that.

I took part in an operation when the Germans wanted to eliminate the people of Paiko, where I got injured by a German mortar. A serious attack by the Germans that took place in 1943. A group of German officers, who were hunters, came up to Paiko to kill wild boars. It seems that they had been told that up in Paiko they would find wild boars. They stopped exactly at the point that I was guarding. When I saw the strangers - in order to give a warning, I couldn't shout but I had to give a signal - I had to throw a stone, for someone to come and ask me what was happening. After that they organized a team of five men to go and check what was happening.

When the Germans understood that our men were around, they got up and left. There were three Germans and a driver that brought them up. Our men didn't think of surrounding them but they started shooting from one side, and the Germans started running away. They passed through many villages and they could see them running towards Edessa and our boys running after them to catch them. The only good thing that came out of this situation was that we got the driver and we took him up the mountain to interrogate him.

Coincidentally, he was from Pontos and a resident of Ardea just like our captain. He was terrified. They told him that he shouldn't be afraid because we were all brothers, 'What we want from you is to help us. You will go to Edessa and tell you friends what we will tell you to say.' He found the

three of them and said that after they left, he got caught and was taken to a camp up at the mountain, where he found the partisans dressed in the best clothes, girls, nurseries and nurses dressed in white coats, food, the best meat, in short, a good life. 'The partisans have a kingdom up there, with women working in basement workshops,' he said. They asked him whether they could really believe him, and after his confirmation, they told him to return to his work, and not say a word to anyone.

And immediately the work started for the villages of Arcadia - there were about 40 villages -with the locals: to inform them that there were partisan units and they should support them with food and guns. And really, the villages became the food supplier for the partisans of Paiko. On Easter we even had Easter soup. In the meantime the Germans had decided that they had to eliminate Paiko and they started going to the villages in groups of 100 to 200 and conquering them. From the one side, then from the other, and they slowly started surrounding Paiko. Paiko is a mountain that can be surrounded by four sides, because there are villages all over, starting from the river Axios up to the city of Giannitsa. So they started taking the villages.

We knew that we would have to fight them in a battle one day. As we could see them getting closer to Paiko we knew that this day was drawing closer. They came up with their armor and started shooting. We were over 300 and had many people that didn't have any armor as they had left their villages because of the Germans, and came to the mountain without anything. We were moving positions so it would seem to them that we were more than 300. This lasted a whole day. They were shooting and we were shooting back, until it became dark and they couldn't see anymore, so we decided to leave.

Our captain, Captain Petros, commandant of the 10th division of Vermion-Paiko-Kaimaktsalan [mountain range], had a plan. A group of about fifteen Englishmen had arrived with a wireless and it seemed that they were helping the Germans and the Security police. Our captain went to speak with their group leader, who knew Greek well, and told him to call England and ask them to provide us with explosives so we could do our job, and the Germans would find themselves at a dead end in the morning. The captain told us his plan which was that if England accepted we would blow up the springs. So when the Germans would arrive in the morning to get to Paiko, blow them up and the panic that would arise would be for our benefit: to chase them and kick them out to the river Axios. If they agreed it would be a successful move, and all the village people would run and help get the German equipment.

So we were forced to attack at dawn towards the side that we knew that they were weak. We left and passed the valley of Ardaia and went to Kaimaktsalan where we found snow, a very rough mountain, and from there we moved on to Vermion. Vermion is one of the most quiet and easy mountains in Greece, it can be accessed from many sides and its easy to conquer, which is the reason why the Germans were always doing little excursions. So we got together with groups from Vermion and talked about what we could do because Vermion can be easily surrounded and they could reach us at any point.

The good thing was that it was raining all day and all these people, partisans and civilians, were caught in the rain. So the committee got together to decide what to do next. There were unions from villages that showed us a way to leave without getting on the site of the Germans. They took us down the mountain from places that only eagles can reach. Us, others with their rustic shoes,

others barefoot. We managed to get out of the encirclement and go towards the valley of Siniatsiko.

It kept raining and most of the unarmed were Jewish. They were victims in the sense that they were human, and they didn't have the force to fight with the wild animals of nature, but were quieter people. They found a place to sit to find shelter from the rain, fell asleep and when the Germans came, found many skirmished. Only few followed the route to the valley of Siniatsiko to the end. I was the only machine gun shooter in the group. We were drenched, barefoot, and when we got to the foot of the mountain, we started climbing because we knew that the Germans were following us.

We got up and got in our war positions, drenched and full of mud and waited. And the Germans started showing, who were fighters and would fight standing up, which was convenient for us because this way we had clear targets. When they started climbing to the top we were aiming at them. One here, one there, they were dropping down, and I was pleased. I was pleased because I was thinking that here is being judged the luck of the Jews against the Germans. That's why I was saying, 'For us the Jews, for Greece, for our homeland.'

At some point I realized that I was running out of ammunition, I told the boss and he told me that I should shoot every now and again and stay put until they bring me some more. And we continued fighting, only that when the ammunition came, I wasn't in a position anymore to hold a gun as the Germans had shot me with a mortar and hit my finger. The captain saw the situation and told me, 'Leave, they will take care of you at the surgery.' They took me there and dressed the wound.

A little further on was a village, where they were accepting all of us that were not active, and they would give us food, hot water, and so on; the women worked there. They took us there, gave us shelter and a blanket, we gave them our clothes to get cleaned, and we had a chance to get dry there and spent the night there.

The Germans suffered a great loss in this battle, even though they had mortars and could shoot. The groups from Siniatsiko managed to surround the Germans and teach them a good lesson. In the history of the partisans this battle counted as one of the most aggressive ones.

Colonel Frizis had a brother that came up the mountain in Vermion. The villagers of Vermion were very supportive to all the Jews that were coming. They would help to find a place to hide, food, a glass of water. When he went to the village they found him a good hiding place, food etc. When the Germans came to the village they asked all of them to gather at the village square. The villagers told him not to come out because he wasn't dressed as a villager and the Germans would understand that he wasn't one of them. He didn't listen and as soon as he appeared, a fine young lad, the Germans saw him and we lost him. We never found out what happened to him.

Then, at a gorge in Vermion, the Germans found out that there was a group hiding there. My uncle David was in this group, my aunt that was deaf-mute, a daughter of my uncle, Fani, and another family of Jews that were from Veroia or Naousa. The Germans saw them and said, 'You are Jews,' and took them all. That's all we know; we never heard anything again, they all disappeared.

In general, the position of the Greeks in Thessaloniki was patriotic, they would help where they could. At least when I was getting ready to go up the mountain, a friend from far away came to find

me. He was a pastry cook and during the occupation he was working on the trains. He begged me to let him take me out of Thessaloniki. 'Michali,' I said, 'I thank you very much. I know you mean well, but I'm ready to leave for the mountain.'

When I came back from the mountain, I went to his place. He had a younger sister who was a secretary of EPON [20](#) of Ifanet, her father was an iron man in Axilithioti, we worked together, him with the red iron and the hammer and me with the turner. They were all good friends.

This is an issue: The Jews didn't believe the Germans, they believed the 'chief of Judaism,' Rabbi Koretz, and he was the reason that they got all the Jews. At this big gathering at the synagogue he was telling them, 'We will go to another country and live there, and be free. We will have our professions, so take your tools with you. Take good clothing because it is cold there, and take some money to live.' These were the principles of the rabbi, and it was him that the people believed, the Germans were not in contact with the Jews.

There were people that would go up the mountains as we did, and we were begging them to come, but there were also other families that wanted to stay together, grandfather with grandson etc. These were the two main issues that forced the Jews and this entire Jewish crowd to go where they went. It was the destruction of the Jews in Greece. And this situation with the families being so close to each other, was a big hit for the leftists too, because we were passing house by house to ask people to come with us, but many wouldn't.

We were supporting the left wing and that's why we went up the mountains. At the beginning of all this, a man from the youth of OKNE approached me with the request to help to recruit youngsters. This was our organizing work, my group would go from house to house trying to recruit people. The man that gave us a boost was handicapped, walking with two sticks, and he was a fighter. His name was Stergios. One of the guys in our team was a very brave fighter; a little later they sent him to another team that needed people that were educated. He went to Mount Olympus. He was called Benveniste, and he could have done many things for the youth, but he died young. He fought on Mount Olympus and we were fighting on common grounds, until Kilkis; that was the X division.

My family were partisans. My father was a partisan; he used to fight up on the mountain. Mairy and Tarzan were fighters; they were not people that the Germans would catch, because they were partisans. My mother was on the mountain but she was hiding in the villages, no one gave her in and as she was dressed as a villager, she stayed there until the end. Whenever I was passing by Vermion I would go and see my mother, because we had good contact with Vermion from Paiko and Mount Olympus.

With my team we gathered in Oraiokastro, and we were ready to take part in the parade for the liberation of Thessaloniki. That same day I asked the captain if I could go with the rest of the lads down to Thessaloniki by foot and return in the evening. He gave me his permission and I went down, and first thing I went to the police. I asked about a family that lived in the Dioikitiriou area. They replied, 'Yes, there are two siblings and they are both gendarmes and they are serving at this gendarmerie, and they are well, they are fine.' I asked if I was allowed to go and visit, and they agreed. I went there with their permission and the kids were not there, but the mother, when she saw me, was so pleased, she went crazy. We had been friends since we were children. 'We are so pleased to see that you are a partisan, we thought you were a dead man. Don't worry, our children

are fine and we will pass on your greetings.'

Then I went down to the workers union, which was our haunt [...] When the secretary saw me he said, 'Come I want to show you something.' He took me up to the third floor and there was a big poster, with all the portraits of the ones that had been lost in the war, and a big picture of me. He says, 'You are not dead.' So I say, 'Well, my picture up here implies I am, but I am not. As you can see, I am here.' He replied, 'We are glad that you came out alive.'

The same night I met up with my father who had come down to get food, we had a chat, and I went back to my place. We didn't go to the parade because as we were getting ready to go, an order came that we should walk to Athens. In Athens the war had started between the English and ELAS [21](#). Scobie [22](#) had then come to Athens and the war had started against ELAS with boats and planes.

So we had to go and walk all the way to Athens to help our comrades. The road was hard, we got up to Atlanti and a notice arrived that the war had ended, the conclusion of a treaty etc. and the English would remain as bosses, so we took our wet things, and got back to our places.

Exactly after these events, we were caught in a big battle in Kilkis [23](#). There all the majors and the security chiefs of areas like Giannitsa, Veroia, Kilkis were armed and wanted to become the kings of Greece. They had gathered there and got a mountain that was called Agios Georgios. All the teams from Macedonia got together, from Paiko, Olympus and Vermion. We surrounded them and a battle started. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon we hadn't managed to catch any of them. Then, and I don't know how they managed, but they brought us from Olympus four mortars, which saved us: we started to attack the mountain that they were on, with their machine guns, and one after the other they were falling so we knew we could go up. We started going up and we finally conquered the mountain that was called Agios Georgios.

The same night we got many prisoners, except for a big team of Papadopoulos, who was a chieftain then, they managed to leave and go to Yugoslavia. We caught many and held them captive in a village that became a camp, and the next day the court martial was held in that village and they were tried. We partisans went to a village to get some sleep and the next day the captain said to me, 'You have walked on foot enough, it's time you go back to the warehouse, where they have all the horses and other animals. Go and make sure you pick a good horse.'

I went and chose a horse but didn't understand that it had asthma. I managed to ride it, but it couldn't run a lot because it would get this cough... However, I loved that horse and decided, 'I'll keep you. You are mine.' So we stayed together until the end. I gave it to a villager when we resigned, and told him, 'With this horse you can plough your land.' We don't know what happened to the prisoners of Kilkis. The political leadership of EAM decided what was going to happen to them, we didn't know as we weren't involved.

From my family, I was the last one to come back to Thessaloniki. I was the last to return because I went to Naousa, where they had told me that my mother lived, in the house of an old school friend of mine, who was now a major in the army and had come from Egypt; Mr. Oikonomou his name was and he was a captain in Naousa. He was not treating the villagers well, because Naousa was a village of partisans and he was a major of the army.

When I got to Thessaloniki, in the neighborhood of Agia Triada, I got a trolley to put my things in, and I was heading for home. It seems that one of the people that I met while arranging things had nailed me and they came from the Security Police to catch me. They took the trolley, and took me to their main offices. They asked, 'What have you got here?' 'I have some blankets, some bullets and some other things.' They took the blankets, I had five for the whole family, but they also took other things that had fallen out. And this anti-communist in Thessaloniki, the well-known Koufitsa [24](#), the head of the secret police said, 'You see, Burla, everything has come back to us.' I replied, 'As time will go by and in the years to come, we will regain what has been taken from us. As soon as he heard that, he and a few others fell on me, and beat me up badly.

Anyway, so I got to the house wounded. When my mother saw me, she was shocked. They all had come down from the mountain, they got a house of an old Jewish family that now lived in Switzerland. This house was left empty, we let ourselves in, us and a few other Jews that later moved to Israel. So that was our haunt. And that's how the whole family got back together and we started all over again.

The house was in Faliro, on the spot where the monument of King George stands today, to its left. It was a nice, spacious house, with many rooms. It had a nice courtyard looking out on the seaside, where we used to go swimming.

I was never an official member of the Communist Party. When I was with the partisans, I used to say that I was a communist, I would take part in all the meetings, but I never became an official member. I remained in this position because when I was in the Soviet Union and I saw the positioning of the KKE [Communist Party of Greece], it really didn't make a good impression on me. The KKE were the ones that were taking part of the wages of the refugees from all these countries, Soviet Union, Romanian, Poland, etc. That's why I didn't want to become a party member, and that's why even today I am a member of the Coalition and not of the KKE.

This connection with the left wing [with KKE] was because I was in the metal workers union and all the people around us were communists, so we simply had to be part of this, too, since all the members of the union were communists. Then I joined a group to raise money, they would give me fifty drachmas. The money was raised for the workers union. And when we did find someone that would give us money; we would take it and give him coupons in return. Those were the same coupons that I swallowed when the Security Police came to get me.

When with ELAS, as partisans, we were dressed and ready to go to the parade of Thessaloniki, they took us, and we walked to Athens to fight the English. We thought that ELAS was going to set Greece free, at least Macedonia, that we were going to predominate and that we would have elections for the mass to come out and vote the party. But England got in the way, and ruined it all for the future of the Greeks. For us it was a major hit because after that arrests and deportations started - to camps, Makronisos, Ai Stratis, Ikaria. [Editor's note: Islands in the Aegean sea that were used mostly during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) as lands of exile - for deportation of the members and the supporters of the Communist Party of Greece.]

[After the war](#)

I was never able to see, what Thessaloniki looked like right after the war, in what condition the Jewish Community found the city, because as soon as we turned up, they started chasing us. I was

getting ready for the second time to go to the mountain as a partisan. I got out of the house one day, well dressed and shaved, and an officer from the 2nd Police station – and the officers from there knew us well because the 2nd Police station was the one that was in our area – arrested me. They sent me to a tobacco shop, close to where Avez was, the spaghetti factory, in Agios Dimitrios area, and they shut me in there with others. Many of us were from Azvestohori, others from Thessaloniki. My family didn't know where I had gone. They started looking for me; my sisters looked everywhere, and no one knew where I was.

They arrested me in May 1945, we passed through the military police and in fact, we were a team that got out on 9th May 1945, liberation day [25](#). We got out on the streets and started ringing the bells of Agia Triada, and we were calling people to come and celebrate the day of the defeat of the Germans, the day of the victory of the Red Army. We used loudspeakers and sound boxes.

The 2nd Police station was informed and they came and surrounded us in order to catch us. And they took us to the police station. They took us and had us line up in a column to move us close to the White Tower. The union got a note that we had been caught and they sent us their lawyer there. His name was Kefalidis, he was from the party, a good guy, and he came to defend us.

And when he got to the trial he stood in front of all the judges and told them: 'Gentlemen, I am really sorry to see this happening. The guys were out on the streets to celebrate the liberation of humanity, for Russia that put an end to the German occupation, and put up at the Reichstag the flag of the Red Army. With these men, you should be out on the streets celebrating and not judge them as you are doing today.' The verdict was that we were innocent, the gendarmes got afraid and left and we left singing, going home to our houses. So that was that.

And after that they caught us and first put us in the tobacco shops and deported us to barren islands. I was sent to Limnos, others were sent to other islands. There I found many good friends: a family from Kilkis, where I did my military service, sisters and brothers and children of the guys that we were at Kilkis with.

I also found someone from the village of Azvestochori, old lime kiln worker that used to make furnaces there, and he said to the committee that he should be the leader to guide the political exiles. My family found out the last minute where I was, and brought me a piece of bread, a blanket, and some other things just before the boat was leaving, so we said our goodbyes and we set off. This was the last stop.

They took us first to Limnos Island and gave us a big school, as a residence. There we didn't stay long because the people from Limnos were very friendly with us, and started bringing us all kinds of goodies. We had anything we wanted every night. When they saw that the people were bringing us lots of stuff every night, they changed their minds and took us on another boat to Ikaria Island. And from there it went on: from Ikaria to Ai Stratis, then Makronisos, from Makronisos back to Ai Stratis, from Ai Stratis to Israel. And this is how this story of a Jew called Moshe Burla ended.

My younger sister who we used to call Tarzan, Dora, had gone to Israel earlier. She managed to get the attention of the Israeli government and have us detached from the islands that we had been sent to, and bring us to Israel. The consulate of Israel arranged that then. They said that they wanted to take us to Israel to fight against the Arabs, and we stayed there to live for a few years.

I went to Israel in September 1952. Until then I was on Ai Stratis Island. Ai Stratis was the last island for the ones that survived Makronisos. Half of those that came back to Ai Stratis, were partly handicapped, with broken necks, hands, feet, another one with a bandage around his waist, another one in a wheel chair; they were the remnants of the military police in Makronisos. Seven years in exile. I have a friend who I know spent twelve years there.

The worst thing of all, the hardest part of this situation, was that in Makronisos they were asking the deported people to sign a paper saying that they regret. Of course, no one would agree to and that's where their game started. In all this abuse, I was lucky because one night that they barged in, as they used to do, in the pitch black dark, they would take us to a gorge, and they would do all this [...] It happened that in my position there was a writer who was handicapped. Lountemis he was called, he was in the line to get beaten up. They told him to take his clothes off and the guy from the military police told him, 'What else can you lose from your body? Your body is already like bad shape 8, there is no part that is balanced.'

When he left and my turn came, I got it for him and me together. That night they hit and wounded my head and left me nearly handicapped. I had to run to doctors and get treated for days to feel a little better. And then the same guy, I mean one of the guys that were after us, came and told me that the best thing to do was to go to the headquarters and tell them that I was a baker's apprentice so they can send me to the ovens, because by then they had made ovens to send food supplies to Makronisos. I went to the headquarters, I filled in my application, and fifteen days later, when I felt a little better, they sent me there. From there on, my life was calm, I would get my bread, each worker would get one loaf of bread, and we would also eat what everybody else got.

In Makronisos a group of us, six or seven Jews from many different parts of Greece, met up. I have a picture of us in my book here. Two were from Volos, both were called Cohen, one was Salvador Ovidia and the other Zaharias, two were from Thessaloniki, me and Alberto Zahon, whose wife lives here at the old people's home, one from Kefalonia Island and the last one was Raoul Moslino, who was a photographer and whose wife's sister lives here with us. After Ai Stratis they sent us to Israel. They got us on a boat to Pireus and from there to boats heading for Israel. They had us chained up on the boats until the moment we were leaving for Israel.

As I mentioned before, back to Ai Stratis came only the ones that had survived the abuse in Makronisos. One had lost his voice, another one his hand, the other one had no leg, all the 1200 people that had come from Makronisos were quite shaken from the situation there. For us Ai Stratis was an infirmary of sorts, for us to recover. Another good thing was that on Ai Stratis life had taken such a pace that it was like a school. We opened classes for accounting, for foreign languages, a workshop for shoe-makers, hairdressers. We had a team to take care of the garbage because the problem was that there were so many of us. We had patches of land to grow our tomatoes. We made many tents; one tent was for 14 people. We made nice complexes, we had educated people working.

We even had a dancing group that Giannis Ritsos was leading. We had the theatrical complex that was nice, and where we staged a play every month, not only for the prisoners but also for the villagers. At the beginning the police would not let them come, but when they realized that the plays didn't have a political context, they let them. Actually, they weren't plays, they were rather sketches.

At Ai Stratis we had written songs about how we lived. As one poet wrote: 'In front of the trough, the doctor questions himself how to start the laundry. The lawyer seated in the corner is trying with the sewing all morning. A teacher messes with the mud, as he works with the trowel. A professor and an old guy lay down from tiredness and the poet instead of writing lines watches people. In exile, everyone learns to be tidy. With sewing and washing you can win a prize [...] You laugh in your sorrow.'

And another poet, nineteen years old, a medical student from Thessaloniki, wrote a poem on bean soup. You see, when we came to Ai Stratis the government did take care of providing us with food, but what happened was that they gave us pocket money and we had to go and find food on our own. And, of course, from the land there wasn't anything to take. There was only a small shop, which we had already ransacked. We got some fish; the villagers would give us the small fish. As for the rest we had to look around to find something. Now, the major of Sykies later went to Limnos for food and he found a large amount of beans, and they took it all and brought it to us, and it became the basic food in Makronisos: white or red bean soup.

Anyway, so this medical student wrote the following poem on bean soup: 'Oh bean soup how tasty, from the legumes you are the antique and from honey you are sweeter. Either as a soup or as a salad or with tomatoes you are over the marmalade, you have pride, you have mincing, from all foods you are a pearl, bean soup, bean soup.' This poem has become legendary.

From Thessaloniki they took us to Limnos Island, to a luxurious school, where they gave us milk and nice rooms. But we didn't stay long on Limnos Island because the people were very leftist and they all came to bring us the best things in the world. Companies of people would come together from one neighborhood or factory and they would carry all kinds of products and things. The police saw what was happening and thought, 'Well, are we going to have them well fed now or what?' Well, of course that was out of the question, so they had to bring a boat to send us to Ikaria Island the next day. We stayed there for a long time and afterwards they took us to Makronisos and from there to Ai Stratis.

We didn't have any assets, whatever was left from my mother when the family left for the mountain, we gave to friends. At one house they had taken a stove that they didn't want to return, at another a light bulb; we had given away whatever we had. The furniture was either taken or broken. So we didn't have property. What we had was what we lived from.

My wife [Matilda Burla, nee Kapon] was a comrade at the party; we got in contact at political meetings at the party. We would meet, she wanted to get married, but I didn't really like her, and it was not the looks. Even so, the Israeli communist party got in the way and said that this marriage should be happening. And they married us; whether we liked it or not, they got us married.

Well, our life wasn't calm, especially after the first child was born: my wife wanted him to become a scientist, while I wanted him to be a worker like me, to go out and work. All the problems that occurred in the family made me get up and leave. My wife was called Matilda and she was from the Kapon family, a well known family in Thessaloniki. They were two sisters and a brother. And they were well known in the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki because the brother of my wife had a shop with fabrics and her elder sister was very pretty; Sarah Kapon her name was.

I don't have anything else to say about my wife. She was a simple woman, she was a bit older than me, she was born in 1916 and that's why she was in a hurry to get married, and the communist party got in the way and did the job for her. Of course, the political party was sorry for what they had done because I was an activist in the communist party of Israel. I was breaking new grounds where the factories in the city of Haifa were concerned. After Tel Aviv, the industrial area was Haifa, and I was the main link for the workers' demands for better living conditions. I was arguing with the bosses to get better conditions for the workers' living conditions and their wages, their rights, even for getting the milk; I was working on these rights, pushing them to change things.

We got married at the beginning of 1953. All her siblings were together in Israel. I don't know her parents or if any other members of the family were lost in the concentration camps. The eldest sibling, Sarah, was egocentric and a beautiful woman. My wife was a good nurse; she worked in one of the best hospitals in Haifa, the Carmel. There I had my first operation, there my mother died, the sister of my mother, the one that helped my mother go to Cairo. My wife now gets a good pension and helps her grandchildren. When I lived in that area, the whole family would get together at the hospital restaurant to eat. She was jealous because all the nurses would look at me, this good-looking young guy, whereas she was older and fatter.

My sister Yolanda came to Israel when I was already there, with two babies in her arms, and brought with her my mother and my brother-in-law, he had been an old baker's apprentice, and then he worked with my father at the Kapani furnaces.

This was my first and only marriage. We never got divorced; we are still married. The other day my son wrote to me that he is going to Jerusalem to get my marriage certificate. It is something I need because I have filled in forms from an English company that is involved in getting back compensations from Germany for those who had been wounded. And with this paper, the marriage certificate, I will have all the paperwork done in English. I've paid a large amount for the translations of all these documents and with the marriage certificate all the paperwork will be complete now, in order to get the compensation. Now what exactly will happen and when, that I don't know? I have a neighbor here that has always believed that we will get the compensations. He is just worried about who will get the compensation if this only happens in ten years' time, if he isn't alive any more. He will turn 93 soon.

I started working in a company where Greeks used to work, in a village in Israel called Tandura, at the beach of Haifa. All the citizens there were Greeks, I mean Jewish Greeks. They had created companies of fishermen and they took me on as a mechanic on their boat. Our job was to get the nets ready and put them up in the boats, and afterwards we headed out to the sea for fishing. Usually we would go fishing in the night, we would drop anchor where we thought there'd be fish, we would turn on the lanterns, and in the morning we would pick the fish and take them to the company for sale.

As you can imagine, you cannot always be lucky with this kind of job, so we were linked with a company that was paying us a certain percentage, and if we didn't bring any fish, they would give us a minimum in order for us to have money to live on. And when we had fish, depending on the quantity of the fish we would get our wage. It was hard work, we would be up all night and in the morning we had to spread the nets to get them dried and mend them if they needed mending. Many times, at the moment that we had caught some great fish, a dolphin would appear and ruin

everything.

After that, when I felt that this job wasn't good for me, I went out again as a turner. I worked in many different places there, especially in the industrial area of Haifa that is called Nifratz, which means gulf, that's the area where most of the factories were located. There I started working as a turner, at one factory, and then at another because as a communist you didn't last long in any position. They took me on because they had heard that I was a great turner, but as soon as the time came when you'd become irremovable, they'd kick you out and you had to find another job. From a financial point of view, we lived well, as my wife had a job as a nurse at a good hospital and she would get a wage too and so we were doing fine.

Because, as I told you, my wife and I had a few problems, I had to leave Israel and that is how I got in contact with a Russian girl that worked as a librarian. We decided to leave Israel because this woman really looked like a Russian, and in Israel they didn't have good relationships with the Russians since Russia helped the Arabs in the war. As communists we didn't stand well either, so we had to pay to the Israeli state a certain part that anyone that gets help from the Israeli state had to pay, plus some percentages. That's something that we couldn't imagine to come up with. That's why we had our papers done and left as tourists.

We went from Spain to France, to Greece, from Greece to Bulgaria and from there to the Soviet Union. It was a long journey: we left in 1957 from Israel and got to the Soviet Union in 1959, after staying in Bulgaria for six months where we had our papers done to be allowed to cross over to the Soviet Union.

The Bulgarians we worked for during those six months were very pleased with us. I worked as a turner and I made order at the factory where I worked, and my wife [Editor's note: Mr. Burla actually means partner, as they were not married] was working at a shirt company, doing ironing. They didn't want us to leave. But my wife wanted to get back to Russia because she had her mother there and all her siblings and her whole family. I kept telling her that Bulgaria was better as it had a better climate, a better economy etc. If we stayed there we could go visit them and they could come visit us, and we'd be in contact with her family. In the end we left for her mother's place. My second comrade/partner was called Valia.

Yes, of course she was a leftist. When we arrived in the Soviet Union one of her two brothers welcomed us; he was an executive at a manufacturing firm. He found work for me and his sister, but he was against us because he had heard that in Israel the communist party had split into two. The party that I was in was against the one that he was in, and he didn't like that. He always wanted me to follow the Russian line and not the Israeli one. At the beginning I had difficulties to get a position in the factory.

At the beginning we went to Kamensk Uralski, a mountain area. There at the factory 10,000 workers, worked 24 hours, three shifts of eight hours. I got a good position as a turner and I climbed the ladder to the point that a year later my portrait was hanging at the entrance as the best worker of the factory. I could have gone higher, because, for example, I was a blood donor, and the doctor of the factory proposed to me to give me a medal for this. The brother of my wife had told me not to take this medal yet as it was too early, because we didn't know what party he supported. So I didn't. But later on I got some smaller medals that they give to the blood donors: at the beginning a copper one and so on... I still have them.

The fact that I was a Jew in Russia made a bad impression. Every now and again someone would say something about the Jews. Generally they respected the Jews, because many that were working in the factory were people of higher education, who knew the tactics of the Soviet Union, the laws, the language.

One time, and that impressed me, when they were coming down from the party's offices, and I had gone to make an application to become a member, one told me, 'Don't even bother, they don't take Jews now. They know you well in the factory, you are praiseworthy, what else do you need?' And indeed, I didn't develop further because I my brother-in-law was against me, and wherever I went he was tricking me, so I wouldn't climb higher up the ladder.

I took part in many activities such as athletics, the chorus of the factory, and at one time, with the secretary of the party, we were singing in Greek, in Spanish, in Italian. They recognized me there while my brother-in-law was always distant, and with his sister we weren't getting along well either because she adopted a child that wasn't normal, a child from an institution that was mentally retarded.

This situation really affected me, it ruined my mood and in the end she died long before her time. I had to become a member of the party and give the child to an institution to develop, because it was bad for his mother and me at work, it stood in our way.

Valia and I didn't have an official wedding. We just invited a few friends, when we were still in Israel, and we didn't have a formal wedding. We went to her mother's and her younger sister. She loved all of them, except one younger brother, who was a former airman with the air force services in Russia. This is where he got his pension from and with the money he got some land close to some natural springs of Russia. And he wasted his life trying to enlarge this patch of land that he had bought. At the beginning it was small. When I met him, he was living there with his wife.

We stayed in Russia for 22 years. I got my pension, but even after that I continued working, until Greek friends that I had in Sohum, down in Abkhazia, convinced me to live with them. Not only just to live closer to them, but because they could see that for me it would be much easier to leave from there and go to Greece than to leave from Russia. The factory where I worked didn't allow any employees to live outside Russia. I had to finish this career.

One sunny day, I got my things ready, put them on the train, and sent them there. When I went there later my things were already there. When I went to the house, they told me that the mother was working at the train station and she went and declared that these things were hers, and took them without a receipt. This family really stood by my side; there were four siblings, three doctors and an engineer. They kept me going and helped me go on all kinds of excursions.

I started working as a teacher for the Greeks that lived in Abkhazia, not only the children at the school, because they had arranged to go to various schools around the area, in villages where many Greeks lived, so they could start learning the Greek language. Except from the fact that I was working in two villages at the schools, I gave classes to elder students, or parents that were leaving to go to Greece, and I was getting them ready to go. I have many students like that here, who really respect me, and love me, and I have pictures of some women that were among my best students.

I have a picture of a very good friend, from the two groups that I was teaching evening classes; I had a beginners' group and an advanced group. This girl was attending both groups to learn faster and indeed she became one of the best students. Last summer when I went with some friends to Aggelochori, which is where she lived, I told them, 'Guys we should go and visit an acquaintance of mine.' We went and we met her and I said to her, how did you learn Greek so well, and she said that she learned the basics thanks to me.

I came back to Greece on 5th August 1990. My friend, the one that saved my family from the Germans, came to pick me up from the airport with his family. This man helped me, took me to his house.

When I came to Thessaloniki my life was very difficult. I was taken care of by Greeks that had come from there, too, and they had sold their houses and brought their assets with them. I was going to the markets with them, so I'd make a hundred drachma or two to live on. I passed some difficult times. The moment that I started living again as a human being was when the Jewish Community reacted and didn't want to acknowledge that I was Jewish, and told me that I had to fill in an application and would get my reply within in six months. I filled in this application and waited for six very difficult months.

Thankfully a rabbi, who used to work at the synagogue then, took me as the tenth [for a minyan] and he asked me to go and work there and get a fixed wage. This was my salvation and six months later the reply came from the Community that they have accepted me as a member of the Community and a different life began for me.

They gave me a small pension and they also gave me a small room in the attic of a house that we tried very hard to make it humane because it didn't have water, tiles or a bathroom. I had started to live a lonely life. I would sit there with friends and eat bean soup that I used to prepare until the time came when they suggested for me to move to the old people's home.

When I used to hear about old people's homes I used to shake, and run away, but it happened that I went there a couple of times to see a friend of my father's, they had known each other since childhood. I sat next to him, we chatted and he offered me a glass of Ouzo and he says: 'As you can see, we have everything here. Why don't you come and live here too?' I went there for a second time and then a third time and I realized that they really did have everything. So I said to myself, 'Why do I want to stay here where it's hot in the summer and freezing in the winter? They have a nice life, compared to the roof that I have over my head.' And I decided to move to the old people's home.

I had a quarrel with the manager of the Community, because they had given me my old place without me having to pay anything as I didn't have any income. When the time came to give me the twenty drachma that I was getting as an allowance up until then, in order to have some pocket money, the manager resisted, saying: 'Mr. Burla, aren't you asking for a bit too much? At the old men's home, you have a shelter and food for free. To give you an allowance as well, don't you think that's asking a bit too much? Should we send you an accountant too to take care of your financial matters?' I got very angry, and I raised my hand and slapped him. We started fighting and the employees came to stop us, and they got a few too, that were meant to be for him. In the five years that have passed since then I've never ever heard him even say 'good morning' to me.

After this once incident in Italy I had sworn myself that I'd never raise my hand again to hit anyone. What happened was the following: the General Headquarters sent me to take prisoners to the headquarters. This was during the war with Albania. I was then wounded by a shell missile and I was recovering when they came to the infirmary and said to me: 'Since you are a man that we don't have to take out from the army, and you are a man that knows the weapons, as you used submachine guns, you can do this job by yourself. Take these people with our written approval and bring them to the headquarters. They will sign and you will bring back the paper which says that they have surrendered.'

So we got on the way, me with the submachine gun at the back and them walking in front of me. We would say a word or two to each other in Italian, and I understood that all five of them were villagers. Only one seemed nervous. Suddenly I see him running away, so I get the gun to shoot him, and they say to me, 'No, wait. We will call him,' so they called his name and shouted, 'Come back or you are going to get killed.' But he kept running. So I got ready to shoot him.

Thankfully, some of our soldiers were coming that way, grabbed him, and brought him to me. I told him, 'You idiot! Can't you see how easy it would have been for you to go straight to the ground?' And I raised my hand and hit him in the face, and by accident I gauged out his eye and as a result he was blind on one eye. So I got an unarmed guy half blind. That taught me a lesson. After that I swore that I'd never lay hand again on anyone, until this annoying general manager came my way.

I can say that my relationship with the Community is good. The president of the Community really appreciates me; there are people that recognize the sacrifices and the honors that they have given me. But this general manager has stayed the same brainless person. He passes in front of me and doesn't even say hello. Not that it is important to me, I did get my small allowance from the Community that helps me pay my phone bill. I can cover my expenses with the pension I get from OGA, I am doing fine. I don't need anybody.

When I left Israel my son was twelve years old. My wife insisted to give him all the money that he'd need when he reaches the age of sixteen. I got all my money out, plus 2000 that my sisters gave me, in order to get together the amount that my wife had asked me for my son. So when I finally left Israel there wasn't anything that was holding me back. Before they wouldn't let me leave unless I paid the amount that my wife was asking me for. When I left she had put my son in a kibbutz and I was paying for his monthly allowance. When I left and let her pay for him, a Japanese family adopted him, meaning that he was under their protection, and he had a fine time. I had left him my stamp collection, and from this collection he got great prestige, because no one in the area had such a large collection, and he was showing it to people in other kibbutzim

He didn't learn any Greek and until today doesn't speak the language. When I ask him, he replies in Greek, 'I don't understand a word.' That's all the Greek he knows. With my son I speak Spanish, but he knows many languages. He speaks French because his mother was French speaking, he knows Italian and Arabic. That's why he spent a long time as a tourist guide of Arab or Italian tourist groups; he would show them historical and religious places in Israel. I happened to be there with a group of Italians and we went around the monuments and the Italian women asked me, 'Why don't you stay in Israel? Why do you want to leave?' And I replied, 'Israel is not my homeland, it is not my country, it is my second country, my homeland is Greece.'

With my son, I never talked about the war until recently when I went to visit him and my four grandchildren. That's when we first spoke a bit about what had happened. I told him that I had written a book, and he really wanted to read it, but he can't read in any other language than French or English. I would have been interested to get the book published in another language so that my son can read it, but I didn't come to an agreement with the publisher.

In my opinion, many kibbutzim are political: the one is leftist, the other one is half-leftist, the other one is rightist. But, of course, there were also kibbutzim that were religious and all the residents were very religious, they would honor the Jewish religion, and there were kibbutzim that didn't even recognize the religion.

My father is buried here while my mother is buried in Israel. My mother died in Israel; from the time she lived there, she suffered from a disease which the climate of Israel wasn't helpful for. In fact she died at the time when her sister had come from Egypt. Both sisters died within a week. My mother died in 1969 and my father in 1970, and he is buried at the general Jewish cemetery in Stavroupoli. Every now and again I go there with my sister, we clean the grave and put flowers on it.

When my father died I was in Russia. I got a letter when he died, but it came too late, so for me to leave and go home was useless. The second wife of my father wrote this letter. She was a Christian and he had her convert to Judaism. I have a woman here at the old people's home that got married to her husband the same day that my father married his second wife. My father was a witness to their marriage and her husband was the witness to his marriage.

The names of my grandsons are Jewish; they have nothing to do with Greek, or my name. They are names that have to do with the nature of Israel: the sun, the air, etc. For example, my son could named one of his sons after my father or my grandfather, but instead he gave his children Jewish names that have to do with nature. His elder daughter is called Edith, his first son is called Ilor, the third child is called Limor and the last one is called Noam, which means 'spirit.'

My son lives in Jerusalem. He divorced his wife, got married a second time, and now we are expecting the fifth grandchild. My son and his second wife, have big stores with many employees as clients. They give lectures about how they should treat the customers. They go from city to city, from business to business.

With my son and grandchildren I keep contact through my daughter-in-law. Every now and again I send them some pocket money. They respect me and love me a lot. My daughter-in-law and two of my grandchildren came to visit me last year in September. When they came to Greece they wanted to see everything, and I got very tired because they also didn't speak the language, so I had to translate everything for them. One sunny day I got a stroke and they didn't know what to do, they lost it and took me to the hospital and then they left for Israel. I stayed in the hospital for ten days because this incident also trigger other side effects [...] I've been having problems with my ears and with my eyes ever since. I lost my voice for ten days. Everyone in the hospital was calling me 'the stranger.'

We still haven't gotten anything as a compensation for the Holocaust, but we believe that we will get something, because in yesterday's paper it said that they have already discovered the money that the Jewish Community had given to the Germans, and that this money should be returned to

the Jews of Thessaloniki. Now when this money will get to us, that I don't know.

No one asked us about our religion at the last census. On my ID it says 'Jewish.'

The only relatives left are those of the Burla family that was making wine. Coincidentally the father of this family is also called Moshe Burla. One of these days the president of the Community thought that the memorial service for Moshe Burla was for me. But the people from the Community told him that it was for the one that was making wines. We were very good friends with him.

Glossary

1 Forced labor in Greece

In July 1942 all male Jews aged 18 to 45, were registered and dispatched to work sites on the outskirts of Salonica and to the nearby towns of Veria and Katerini where they were used as laborers. The work sites were organized along military lines, each headed by a commander who was a former officer of the Greek army, under the supervision of Greek engineers and German military personnel. Malnutrition, physical abuse and deplorable living condition led to illnesses, epidemics and deaths. After lengthy negotiations, in October 1942, the Nazi authorities and the Jewish Coordinating Committee decided for the buy-out of Jews drafted into Nazi forced labor. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki would have to pay 2 billion drachmas. [Source: Rena Molho, 'Salonica and Istanbul: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Life' (The Isis Press, Istanbul, 2005), p. 63]

2 Colonel Mordechai Frizis (1893-1940)

He graduated in law from the Athens University, his parents believed he would one day be a lawyer. However, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 installed a sense of patriotism in young Mordechai. In 1916, he entered as an officer in training in Euboea. Athens. In the Turkish-Greek war of 1921-1922, Lieutenant Mordechai and his soldiers were captured by the Turks. As a non-Christian officer he was offered his freedom. Mordechai refused, enduring eleven months of captivity with his Greek soldiers. The Greco-Italian War started on 28th October 1940. By now Mordechai was a Major in the Greek army, based out of Ioannina in Epirus, Greece, commanding the Independent Division, his orders to stop Italian attacks from Albania and through the narrow valleys and ravines of Northern Greece. Ioannina. On 4th December 1940 Major Frizis and his men encountered the Italians for the first time. Mordechai never left his men during fighting and always thought of their interests; first earning him the strong loyalty of his soldiers he would call them his "boys," they in turn gave themselves the nickname the "Frizaens" or Frizis's boys. His troops would be the first to be captured by Italian soldiers. During the crossing of the Vistritsa River, mounted as always on his horse, Mordechai, led his troops against the Italians and was fatally wounded but refused to dismount, choosing instead to rally his soldiers with the now famous battle cry 'Ayeras' (Courage in Greek). Not having a rabbi near a priest was brought over. He placed his hand on Mordechai's head and prayed: "Hear, O Israel, the lord our God, the Lord is one." Colonel Mordechai Frizis, was the first officer in the Greek Army to be killed in World War II. A memorial to him has been erected outside the National Military Museum in Athens. In 2002 the remains of Mordechai Frizis were returned to Greece. They are buried in Thessaloniki's Jewish cemetery today.

3 '151'

After the Fire of 1917, the Jewish Community acquired the large No. 151 hospital, which belonged to the Italian army and was located east of the Thessaloniki. 75 wooden structures and many brick and cement structures were subsequently built to house the fire-stricken Jewish population.

4 Ladino

Also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th-century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitreo. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

5 Pangalos, Theodoros (1878 -1952)

Greek general, who briefly ruled the country in 1925 and 1926. On 24th June 1925, officers loyal to Pangalos, overthrew the government in a coup. Pangalos immediately abolished the young republic and began to prosecute anyone who could possibly challenge his authority. Freedom of the press was abolished, and a number of repressive laws were enacted, while Pangalos awarded himself the Grand Cross of the Order of the Redeemer. Pangalos declared himself dictator on 3rd January 1926 and had himself elected president in April 1926. On the economic front Pangalos attempted to devalue the currency by ordering paper notes cut in half. His political and diplomatic inability however became soon apparent. He conceded too many rights to Yugoslav commerce in Thessaloniki, but worst of all, he embroiled Greece in the so-called War of the Stray Dog, harming Greece's already strained international relations. Soon, many of the officers that had helped him come to power decided that he had to be removed. On 24th August 1926, a counter-coup deposed him, and Pavlos Kountouriotis returned as president. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodoros_Pangalos_\(general\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodoros_Pangalos_(general)))

6 ELAS

Ethnikos Laikos Apeleutherotikos Stratos - National Popular Liberation Army, the central organization of the left-wing Resistance, joined also by other pro-democratic individuals. (Source: J. Hondros, Occupation and Resistance: the Greek Agony, New York, 1983.)

7 Thessaloniki International Trade Fair

Taking place every September since its foundation in 1926, it has always been a very important economic as well as cultural city event. For the last few years the Fair has been a pole of attraction and the "place" where the political programme of the government is being presented and assessed.

8 Synagogues in Thessaloniki

Before WWII there were 19 synagogues in Thessaloniki, all of which were blown up by the Germans a short time before the liberation. Already the big fire of 1917 had destroyed most of the synagogues and certainly all the historic synagogues, that is those built before 1680. Historian Rena Molho accounts that before the big fire there were about a hundred synagogues out of which 32 were recognized by the chief rabbi, 65 private small synagogues belonging to well known families and 17 small public synagogues. [Source: 1. R. Molho, 'The Jews of Thessaloniki. 1856-1919 A special community,' Ed. Themelio, Athens 2001, pp.65, 121. and 2. Helias V. Messinas, 'The Synagogues of Salonica and Veroia,' Ed. Gavrielides, Athens 1997]

9 Modiano Market

Built in 1926 by the architect Eli Modiano, son of the biggest banker of Salonica, Saul Modiano.

10 Tsitsanis, Vassilis (1915-1984)

Greek songwriter and bouzouki player. He became one of the leading Greek composers of his time and is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern Rebetika. Tsitsanis wrote more than 500 songs and is still remembered as an extraordinary bouzouki player. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassilis_Tsitsanis)

11 Campbell Fire (Pogrom on 29th June 1931)

Responsible for the arson of the poor neighborhood Campbell was the Ethniki Enosis Ellas - National Union Greece, short: EEE also known as the 3E or the 'Iron Helmets.' This organization was the backbone of fascism in Greece in the period between the two World Wars. It was established in Thessaloniki in 1927. The most important element of the 3E political voice was anti-Semitism, an expression mostly of the Christian traders of the city in order to displace the Jewish competitors. President of the organization was a merchant, Mr. G. Cormides, there was also a secretary, a banker, D. Haritopoulos, and chief spokesman Nikos Fardis, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Makedonia. The occasion for the outbreak of anti-Semitism in Thessaloniki was the inauguration of the new Maccabi Hall in June 1931. In a principal article signed by Nikos Fardis, from Saturday, 20th June 1931, it was said that Maccabi of Thessaloniki had placed itself in favor of an Autonomous

Greek Macedonia. The journalist "revealed" the conspiracy of Jews, Bulgarians, Communists and Catholics against Macedonia. Two days later, the Ministry of the Interior confirmed the newspaper's allegations despite the strict denial of the Maccabi representatives. All the anti-Semitic and fascist organizations were aroused. This marked the beginning of the riots that resulted in the pogrom of Campbell. Elefterios Venizelos was again involved after the 1917 fire, speaking at the parliament as Prime Minister, and talked with emphasis about the law-abiding stance of the Jewish population, but simultaneously permitted the prosecution of Maccabi for treason against the state. Let alone the fact that the newspaper Makedonia with the inflaming anti-Semitic publications was clearly pro-Venizelian. At the trial, held in Veroia ten months later, Fardis and the leaders of EEE were found not guilty while three refugees were found guilty, but with mitigating circumstances and therefore were freed on the spot. It is worth noting that at the 1933 general election, the Jews of Thessaloniki, in one block voted against Venizelos. [Source: Bernard Pierron, 'Juifs et chrétiens de la Grèce moderne,' Harmattan, Paris 1996, pp. 179-198]

12 Makedonia

Daily newspaper in Thessaloniki, written in Greek and published since 1911. It supported the liberal Party and was strongly distinctive for anti-Jewish article writing and journalism.

13 Venizelos, Eleftherios (1864 - 1936)

an eminent Greek revolutionary, a prominent and illustrious statesman as well as a charismatic leader in the early 20th century. Elected several times as Prime Minister of Greece and served from 1910 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1932. Venizelos had such profound influence on the internal and external affairs of Greece that he is credited with being "the maker of modern Greece." His impact on modern Greece has been such that he is still widely known as the "Ethnarch." (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleftherios_Venizelos)

14 Greek-Albanian War/Greek-Italian War (1940-1941)

Greece was drawn into WWII when Italian troops crossed the borders of Albania and violated Greek territory on 28th October 1940. The Italian attack of Greece seemed obvious, despite the stated disagreement of Hitler and the efforts of Ioannis Metaxas, who was trying to keep the country in a neutral stance. Following a series of warning signs, culminating in the sinking of Battleship 'Elli' on 15th August 1940, by Italian torpedoes, and all of these failing to provoke the Greek government to react, the Italian Ultimatum was delivered on 28th October 1940, and it demanded the free passage of the Italian army through Greek soil, as well as sole control of a series of strategic points of the country. The rejection of the ultimatum by Metaxas was in line with the public opinion in Greece and led to the immediate declaration of war by Italy against Greece. This war took place mostly in the mountains of Hepeirous. In the Greek-Albanian War approximately 12.500 Greek Jews took part and 513 Greek Jews died fighting. The Greek counter-offensive pushed the Italians deep into Albania and the Greek army maintained the initiative throughout the winter capturing the southern Albanian towns of Corce, Aghioi Saranda, and Girocaster. [Source: Thanos Veremis, Mark Dragoumis, 'Historical Dictionary of Greece' (London 1995)]

15 Strike of 1936

In May 1936, the northern Greek port of Thessaloniki was paralysed by a widespread strike against wage controls. When workers in the tobacco factories took to the streets, the police were called in and opened fire on the unarmed strikers. Within minutes, 30 people were dead and 300 were wounded. (Source: http://revpatrickcomerford.blogspot.com/2008_04_15_archive.html)

16 Eleutherias Square

On 11th July 1942, following the order of the German Authority published by the local press, 6000-10.000 (depending on different estimations) male Jews aged from 18-45 were gathered in Eleutherias Square, in the commercial center of Thessaloniki. The aim was to enlist/mobilize them to forced labor works. Under the hot sun the armed soldiers forced them to remain standing for hours and imposed on them humiliating gymnastic exercises. The Wehrmacht army staff was taking photographs of the scene, while the Greek citizens were watching from their balconies. [Source: Marc Mazower, 'Inside Hitler's Greece' (Yale 1993)]

17 OKNE (Young Communist League of Greece)

the youth wing of the Communist Party of Greece. OKNE was founded on 28th November 1922 and was a section of the Communist Youth International. Nikolaos Zachariadis became the leader of OKNE in 1924. In 1925 OKNE was, along with the Communist Party, banned. In 1943 OKNE was replaced by another youth organization, EPON. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Communist_League_of_Greece)

18 EAM (National Liberation Front - Ethniko Apeleutherotiko Metwpo)

Founded at the end of 1942. It was the combating section of the left-wing Resistance. (Source: J. Hondros, Occupation and Resistance: the Greek Agony, New York, 1983).

19 ELAS

Ethnikos Laikos Apeleutherotikos Stratos - National Popular Liberation Army, the central organization of the left-wing Resistance, joined also by other pro-democratic individuals. (Source: J. Hondros, Occupation and Resistance: the Greek Agony, New York, 1983.)

20 EPON

The United Panhellenic Organization of Youth, was a Greek resistance organization that was active during the Axis Occupation of Greece in World War II. EPON was the youth wing of the National Liberation Front (EAM) organization, and was established on 23rd February 1943 after the merger of ten earlier political and resistance youth organizations. Along with EAM and its other affiliates, EPON was dissolved judicially at the beginning of the Greek Civil War but continued to operate illegally until 1958. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Panhellenic_Organization_of_Youth)

21 Dekemvriana (lit

"December events"): The term "December events" is used to describe a series of armed clashes that took place in Athens in December 1944 and January 1945, between the forces of the (communist) left and the forces that belonged to the rest of the political currents from socialist democracy (like the Prime Minister George Papandreou, leader of the "Democratic Socialistic Party") to the extreme right. The British were involved in the fight. The clashes ended with the defeat of the leftist forces. The events of December 1944 in Athens are regarded as the first act of the Greek Civil War that ended in 1949 with the defeat of K.K.E., the Communist Party. (Source: Wikipedia).

22 Scobie, Sir Ronald MacKenzie (1893-1969)

British Army officer. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1914 serving in WWI. In 1939 Scobie, a brigadier, was Deputy Director of Mobilisation at the War Office. After this he held staff positions in the Middle East and Sudan before being given command of the 70th Infantry Division, which was sent into to relieve the Australian 9th Division in Tobruk. Scobie was in command of the Tobruk fortress from 22nd October 1941 to 13th December 1941, when, as part of Operation Crusader, the 70th Infantry Division led the successful break-out from Tobruk. In February 1942 he became Deputy Adjutant General for GHQ, Middle East. On 22nd March 1943 Scobie was promoted to lieutenant general and made Chief of the General Staff, GHQ Middle East. From 11th December 1943 he was given command of III Corps which was sent to Greece to expel the Germans but ended up becoming involved in the Greek Civil War. He remained in command of British forces in Greece until after the end of the WWII. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Scobie)

23 Battle of Kilkis (4th November 1944)

a few days before the liberation of Greece, a battle took place between Greece and the Security Police, meaning whoever was supplied by the Germans in Macedonia. There was a great loss for both sides and the battle stopped the same day with the complete prevalence of ELAS.

24 Koufitsa, Dimitrios

Captain of the gendarmerie of the Security Police of Thessaloniki. He was murdered in 1946 by armed leftists, bringing the political aura of the city to the beginnings of the Greek Civil War.

25 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.