

Ninetta MatzaFeldman

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Summary

Ninetta Matza Feldman was born in Arta, Greece on March 21, 1938 and moved to Agrinio when she was two. Her parents were Esther and Noam Matsas and she had a brother, Mykos (Michael), about eight years older. In 1941 her father was drafted into the Army (at 35, 1st time at 21) and the family moved to Ionnina where he was stationed. They rushed to a nearby shelter when the Italians bombed them. Her father returned in April and the family returned to Agrinio. Italy, Bulgaria and Germany occupied Greece. Her brother's high school closed as it was used as a hospital and tobacco warehouse. Her father worked for the National Bank of Greece until the family left in October 1943. At that time Germany occupied their town and the Jews were leaving whereas the Jews in Athens were in hiding. The family stored their food in the bank, gave their clothes to neighbors and placed all the furniture in one room. They took a taxi to Kremasta, a nearby spa, along with some belongings. The paved road ended so then they took a mule and a donkey to get to Psilovrahos, a remote village in the mountains. They moved into one room with little furniture so had to make their own beds and oven. They bought some food from the wealthier residents and sent for some of their food from the bank. Also, they bartered their sugar and soap for supplies. They had no running water, indoor plumbing or electricity. Ninetta enrolled in a one-room schoolhouse that only went up to the 4th grade as it was a poor village and the children had to work. Ninetta liked the animal sounds in the village of the goats, sheep and roosters. She tried to dress like the others but she refused to make the sign of the cross. When they were notified that the Germans were advancing, her family quickly packed and went up higher in the mountain to Chiandafelas where they slept in the house at night and in a cave or secluded woods during the day. They bartered sugar for food. After eight days, they learned the Germans had left so they returned back to Psilovrahos and found their room was looted. The owner of the house had done the looting and returned some of their belongings. They moved to another house with a similar room. They were left with no food so obtained food by bartered sugar and by her mother's teaching girls how to sew, embroider or knit. In the summer they could pick mulberries and figs. For a few weeks, they were able to obtain some food from the Partisans stationed nearby. Her mother dyed mattress covers and made them into boys' pants, and used sheets to make shirts for men and exchanged them for bread and cheese. In the spring they harvested food from their small plot. Her mother felt desperate in March so walked to Agrinio where she learned that her relatives were deported which made her feel greater despair. She returned with only a bottle of quinine and matches. Ninetta's mother hoped her relatives had been deported to Krakow. She decided to write to the Greek government in exile in Egypt, to the British government in Priantza and to an aunt and uncle in Alexandria, Egypt, requesting help. She took her letters to Priantza but did not know if they were delivered. There she found parachutes which she made into dresses and blouses and bartered them by walking from village to village with her son. Ninetta's mother was exhausted and was told to take the waters at

Kremasta spa to get cured. They were there a short time when they learned the Germans were advancing and they must return home. They returned home and obtained some belongings and went up to the plateau at Kamaria to camp. There it was very hot during the day so they suffered from thirst and cold at night as they only brought one blanket. They borrowed a blanket and suffered from lice so boiled their clothing and cut off Ninetta's curls. They were liberated in September 1944 and returned to Agrinio the next month to find their house occupied by the owner. An agency found them housing. They obtained their food from the bank and resistance gave them some food. The Civil War began immediately and ended in 1949. Ninetta attended school and felt her life was enriched by neighbors who had a record player with classical music, produced plays with her and the father was an oil painter. Her mother was upset at the loss of her relatives so went into the fabric business to keep busy with other thoughts. She became a successful business woman. When the survivors of concentration camps arrived, the family learned the truth about them for the first time. Ninetta urged her parents write their adventures and they did so and she translated them. When she visited Agrinio in 2005 she saw one of the two synagogues that remained and had anti-Semitic graffiti. Ninetta believes her family survived as they spoke Greek and lived in a village where they could blend in. She did not feel like a survivor in Greece where only those who returned from the concentration camps were considered survivors. When she came to the US, others considered her a survivor. Ninetta talks about her relatives lost in the Holocaust so they will be remembered. Following the interview, Ninetta shows about 20 photos of her relatives, places where she lived and her father's ID.