

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Henry Levis
October 28, 1993
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Henry Levis, conducted on October 28, 1993 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

HENRY LEVIS

October 28, 1993

Question: Could you be so kind to tell us your name?

Answer: My name is Henry Levis.

Q: Where and when you have been born?

A: I was born in Ioannina, northwest Greece, June 20th, 1913. I'm 80 years old.

Q: Tell us please a few words about the background of your family.

A: My family has a history of 21 centuries in Ioannina, northwest Greece. My father was a representative of the _____ big factories in Ioannina. My mother had a good education that time. She spoke French and Greek. Was something because young ladies didn't go to school, they stayed home that time, and my mother finished school and she did some trips to Europe. If you want I can tell you the history of the 21 centuries.

Q: Yeah, please _____ please.

A: You know that two kinds of Jews exist, the Ashkenazim, speaking the Yiddish and Sephardim, speaking Ladino. We had belonged to the _____, the third kind, which now, are mostly mixed with the Sephardim of Greece, but if you ask _____ in Greece. When Titus destroyed Jerusalem and wanted to make his triumph on Rome, brought a lot of prisoner Jews, with his fleets, from Israel to Judea, to Italy. On the straight between Greece and the island of Kofu(ph), the sea was rough and _____ indenture, all the Crete was indenture, so one admiral suggested to Titus to drown all the prisoners. Another admiral said we have to stop to take water, so let them stay here. The biggest number of prisoners stayed in Epirus, which is in northwest Greece and later made to free big communities, the community of Ioannina, or Arta and Preveza, which community were in good condition until March 1944.

Q: Would you be so kind to tell us few words about the life of your family and your life during your school years?

A: Yes. After I was born, my father came to Athens to work there, despite that my grandfather was a banker, he had the bank of Ioannina, which merged later on with the commercial bank of Greece, came to Athens, and in 1918, _____ five years old, all the family moved to Athens, so I went to school there and I finished the school there, the French school, where I learned French and English. I _____ German teacher, Stenholm(ph) and my brother, my sister and me, we learned German. I finished the high school, by 1929, in age of 16 and I passed exams to the University of _____ Medical School, and _____ military Medical School, too and in 1935 I was a doctor, and second lieutenant of the Greek army. I served in Ioannina, my hometown and in Athens. _____ war with Italy, where I was the doctor with six other reserve doctors, of a regiment of artillery in the _____ of Albania. After the occupation by the Germans and Italians in April in 1941, I came to Athens. When the Nazi did the pogrom in Celonica(ph), I said to my wife and my son, to move back to Ioannina, where it was Italian occupation and the Italian occupation was very smooth. We went to Ioannina and I was serving of the police, _____ as a doctor there and at the same time, I was a member of the resistance, and all day long I was trying to gauge different views from the Germans, to send them to the resistance, to do different sabotages. When the Italians did the armistice, they gave my file to the Germans and in end of January, 1944, the Germans, at four o'clock in the morning came and arrested me, with two other Jews of Ioannina, the president of the community, Doctor Moses Kofinas(ph) and a relative of my, _____. They took us to the area of execution. In the truck were the soldiers for the execution and they started laughing, saying

what will be the face of these three during the execution. I understood German because I spoke German, I'm still speaking, and I was ready to react. And I reacted, I said to them, shame to you, if you execute three people without passing a trial. When the officer, captain, probably this captain was from Austria, because he had the edelweiss on his heart, says to me, we'll see what we'll do with you, with the others too. They took us to the Gestapo and the Gestapo did, we talked together, he asked me about different things. They suggested to me to cooperate with them, of course. My answer was negative, and they put us in the jail in Ioannina. We were in the jail about one month, more than one month, until the 25th of March, '44, when all the community of Epirus, Arta, Preveza and Ioannina community were arrested and started the deportation to Germany, to Auschwitz. We left Ioannina the same day, on the 25th of March, is the fourth of July of Greece. They said everybody stays home early. They took us to near the lake of Ioannina, where they had a lot of trucks and they took us to _____, we're there nine days, the Red Cross of _____ gave to us food to eat and on the ninth day went to the trains. You know, the classical wagons, like the one which is here, with wires in the small windows. The Red Cross gave to us something to have to eat and this train, _____ train, which took nine days up to Auschwitz, we passed from Belgrade, Budapest and Vienna and in Auschwitz, when we arrived, there were German officers there and they did _____ recall selection. All the people who went to the trucks was killed at the gas chambers and later on was cremated. Many of my relatives went there. One cousin of my and me, we had the chance to go to the survivors. All of us, the survivors, who went to a gas chamber, but just for a shower and before the shower they shaved us in all the body up to the toenails and they took everything we had in gold except the teeth. Golden teeth, you know? And after having a shower, they gave to us a uniform with the lines and so we went to a building to sleep. Next morning I met some _____ from Celonica(ph), which were there about one year before us and they explained to us about our relatives who were cremated. We're in, we found there the prisoners, the hostages of Gastogia(ph) and nine days later we left by train and we went to Schtensilberg(ph), is a _____, a village named _____. There were tents of wood, not _____, they call it _____ and we were obliged to build a new, big camp in Goldsberg(ph), about two miles from there, because they were planning to arrest the Jews of Hungaria and Transylvania, which that time was under Hungarian occupation. Klausenburg(ph), Kloosh(ph), Baracksas(ph) and other towns. When the, at that time I was the _____, that meant chief of the camp and a doctor at the same time of the camp. We went to, when the new camp in _____ was ready, we moved there, but I _____ the Germans, I was not bad and I didn't kill any hostage. So the Nazi's, the SS, the commander was a sergeant. Commander of the camp, _____ a request to, he asked to bring some Polish Jews to lead the camp. So they came, about 15, me I was not any more the _____. They were good, strong and sometimes they had to beat some Jews. Anyway, me I was just a doctor, because we build a small hospital, and lots of _____. We had to treat sick people, injured people, etcetera.

Conclusion of tape.