NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier:	F60-00050
Interviewee:	Rosa Miller (RM)
Interviewer:	Carolyn Ellis (CE)
Interview date:	February 22, 2011
Interview location:	Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by:	Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Transcript date:	March 28, 2011 to March 29, 2011
Audit Edit by:	Kimberly Nordon
Audit Edit date:	March 29, 2011
Final Edit by:	Dorian L. Thomas
Final Edit date:	March 31, 2011 to April 11, 2011

Carolyn Ellis: The date is February 22, 2011. I am interviewing Rosa Miller. My name is Carolyn Ellis. We're in Tampa, Florida, and the videographers are Nafa Fa'alogo and Richard Schmidt.

Today is February 22, and I'm here with Rosa Miller. And Rosa, I was wondering, could you tell us your full name and then spell it for us?

Rosa Miller: My name today is Rosa, R-o-s-a, Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r. I was born Rosa Modiano, M-o-d-i-a-n-o.

CE: Okay. And the date of your birth?

RM: I was born on the fourth of December, 1929.

CE: Okay. And where were you born?

RM: Salonika, Greece; nowadays the city is better known as Thessalonikē.

CE: Okay. And your age at the moment?

RM: I am eighty-one.

CE: Eighty-one. Okay. I would like to start back during your childhood, and have you just tell us what your childhood was like.

RM: Well, we belonged to the Jewish community of Salonika, which was an essentially Jewish city even though it was in Greece. The Jews in Salonika had come to the Ottoman Empire, actually, because Salonika belonged to the Ottoman Empire until 1912, and they forged a large community. There were about 68,000 to 70,000 Jews in Salonika, out of a population of 250,000, so it was a significant number. And it was a Jewish city, because the port used to close on Saturday because of the Sabbath, and the longshoremen, who were mostly Jewish, did not work on that day. So I was born—it was a very tightly knit community, but it was large, so you had a big choice of friends, if you wanted them. You had a large family, usually, so people remained within their families, but the families were all interrelated anyway, because so many weddings had taken place within the community.

CE: Were your friends Jewish?

RM: Yes. Actually, I also had some Italian friends, because, strange to say, I always lived in Greece—Salonika being in Greece since 1912, and I was born in twenty-nine [1929]. My family had an Italian citizenship, which had been—which had come down through the ages. They originally left Spain or Portugal, I believe, around 1492 when they were expelled by Ferdinand and Isabella, and they went all over the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire being one of the main destinations. The apocryphal story is that the sultan said at that time, in welcoming the Jews who were fleeing Spain, that “The King of Spain must be very dumb, because he’s denuding his kingdom to enrich mine.” Because he knew, with the arrival of the Jews, he would get more commerce, more arts and crafts and more business and travelers and all kinds of people, so he was happy to attract that group that fled Spain.

CE: Okay. So, tell me about your parents.

RM: My father was an Italian citizen, because the citizenship was going from father to son, father to son, all the way down; and even though they never lived in Italy, when there was a birth in the family, the baby was registered both in the Salonika civil—what do you call it? In Salonika mayor’s office, and in Italy in Livorno, in nowadays—in English it’s Leghorn.

CE: Can you spell that?

RM: Livorno, L-i-v-o-r-n-o, which is a coastal city in Tuscany, in Italy, and supposedly that's where the family started. But there is also a village in Tuscany called Modigliana, and a friend who has done a lot of research on the Modiano family maintains that the *g-l* was dropped, like the painter Modigliani; it was dropped when the people went out of Italy, because it was very difficult for others, foreigners, to pronounce it. So from Modigliana, it became Modiano. And I visited that little town. We were welcomed by the mayor during a family reunion.

CE: Wonderful. And what was your father's name?

RM: My father's name was Dario. Actually, his name was David, David, but he was called Dario commonly. Dario Modiano.

CE: And that's spelled?

RM: D-a-r-i-o.

CE: Okay. And your mother?

RM: My mother, she was a Spanish citizen. Now, that's another little story, apocryphal perhaps. A Spanish diplomat visited Greece at the beginning of the twentieth century, very beginning, and he found a whole community there—65,000 people—still speaking Spanish after an exile of 400-some years. So he was so impressed that they had kept the language—even though the language had become a dialect by then, because it had accretions from other languages—so he offered Spanish citizenship to whomever would take it. So my grandfather did, and therefore, my mother when she was born was a Spanish citizen. Oddities, both times, with Italian and Spanish citizenships because I never lived in those other countries.

CE: It is interesting, yes. And you had a brother?

RM: I had a brother, who was a very adventurous fellow. Unfortunately, he died when he was thirty-seven, of cancer. So I was mostly an only child.

CE: So who else lived in the house with you, just the four of you?

RM: Just my father, my mother, and my brother and I. We had two Greek maids. And that's why, when I was born, I started my language learning in Greek because one of the maids had kind of adopted me; I was hers and nobody else's. So I spoke Greek for the first language, and then I went to an Italian school: it was a government school, an excellent one incidentally. And eventually I went to a Greek school, but at the same time I had a French education because the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris had founded schools to teach French culture and French literature throughout the Near and Middle East. They were very good schools, and many of my relatives went to those schools: my mother did, and so did her two sisters. Some people went to the German school and spoke excellent German, alongside with Ladino, which is the dialect that occurred after the Jews had been out of Spain for a long time. So French was the language of literature, of polite people—of wealthy people, actually, because not everybody could afford to send their kids to French school.

CE: What language did you typically speak at home?

RM: French. My parents didn't speak good Greek, because they had never been in—they had never lived in Greece. They were adults when Greece became Greek—when Salonika, I'm sorry, became Greek. So they spoke it with an accent. Not my case, because I was like a native, obviously.

CE: What kind of work did your father do?

RM: My father worked for a German company. It was a company that received the German ships that came to the Port of Salonika, which was a very large port anyway. And the name of his employer I still remember, as I used to speak of Mr. Heitman. And Mr. Heitman was a very nice fellow—a gentleman, really—and he trusted my father completely and he left the whole business, the whole office, into his hands. But this came to an end when Hitler came. He wouldn't allow German citizens, God forbid, to have Jewish employees, so my father was let go regretfully by Mr. Heitman, who gave him a very good severance pay. And then after that, he associated himself with his two brothers, and they sold very fine suiting material, English material, for men.

CE: How do you spell Heitman?

RM: H-e-i-t-m-a-n.

CE: Okay. And did your mother work outside the home?

RM: No.

CE: Okay.

RM: Women did not work outside the home at that time. It was a dishonor—

CE: Ah, yes.

RM: —if this happened. Women were ladies of leisure at that time.

CE: Yes. Sounds wonderful.

RM: Yeah.

CE: So, would you describe your family as being upper class at the time?

RM: I wouldn't say upper, but upper middle class, yes.

CE: Upper middle class, okay.

RM: Yeah.

CE: And talk a little bit about school.

RM: Well, I went to an Italian school at first, which had a very different feature. Of course, the teachers came from Italy, and they were very good teachers usually. And then once a week a Catholic priest came to minister to the kids who were Catholic, and at the same time they brought a Jewish woman who taught us our first prayer in Hebrew. I have never heard this in any other school that they would bring somebody of a different religion, but the Italians did. And it was a school where if you were Italian—I have said

that before—you became a little fascist, you know. You belonged to the children's organization, you saluted the *Duce* [Benito Mussolini], and you wished him all the best. You believed in all the songs about Ethiopia because that was the time where Italy wanted to create an empire and attacked Ethiopia, and they used a little ditty that said where the Negus, who was Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia, the Lion of Judah, "With his beard, we're going to make brushes to shine the shoes of Mussolini." So, I still remember it.

CE: Oh, wow. And were you good in school?

RM: I was the first in everything I attempted. I was first, and I was dumb enough to believe that the letter we wrote to Mussolini every year—they always told me that mine was chosen to be read by Mussolini, and I was dumb enough to believe it. But mine was the best one, and maybe that's where I started writing well.

CE: Maybe. Yes, yes. So, you enjoyed school?

RM: Yes. And we had the *adunata*, which was the meeting of the little boys and girls in the fascist organization, on Saturday afternoon. We were very happy to go; but our cousins, who were Greek citizens, used to go to the movies on that day, so there was a little bit of ambivalence in attending the organization. But then, of course, we were expelled. When the racial laws started in Italy, we were expelled from the fascist organization as well as from the school, and that's when I went to a Greek school.

CE: Okay. What year was that?

RM: What year? I think it was 1939 or forty [1940], around that time.

CE: Now, up to that point, did you feel any prejudice because you were Jewish?

RM: No! Not in the Italian school. All those teachers were very nice to us, and we used to invite them to our home and my mother became very friendly with them. No, there was absolutely no inkling of prejudice, and it was only because of Italy's alliance with Mussolini—I mean, with Hitler. That's when it happened, when the racial laws started being applied in Italy.

CE: And what about your religious life at home?

RM: Well, my brother had a bar mitzvah. I received absolutely nothing as religious instruction. My parents went to services at the synagogue across the street from our home maybe twice a year, for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and that was the extent of our religious life. We did celebrate Passover with a big Seder. First evening we went to my paternal grandfather and grandmother, and the second evening we went to my maternal grandparents.

CE: Did you have a strong Jewish identity at the time?

RM: Well, it was a very strong Jewish identity, but it was nationalistic. It had nothing to do with religion. We felt very Jewish, and intermarriage was frowned upon a lot, you know. You were not supposed to marry outside your religion. My mother's—not sister, cousin, but she considered herself her sister, eloped with a Greek Orthodox guy and they got married, and my grandfather decreed that nobody should talk to her anymore. And my mother, who was a very courageous woman, said, "Who says that? She's my sister and I'll do as I please," and she kept up the relationship. Eventually he was accepted in the family as well, but then they were divorced and she married a Jewish fellow; but that's another story, nothing to do with me.

CE: Okay. And so, at what point did things change? With the racial laws?

RM: Yes. You see, we were expelled from the fascist organization. My father used to like to go to the consulate in Salonika, where things took place. I neglected to mention there were about 500 to 700 Italian Jews in Salonika. That was it. And they formed a tightly-knit community, and one of the most aristocratic families in Salonika would belong to that group, the Fernandez family. It's a very Spanish name, so it shows that they came out of Spain originally. And then there was the Morpurgo family. These were the cream of Salonika society, and they lived a wonderful lifestyle. I used to go to the places for birthday parties, because I was classmates with some of the Fernandez kids. The maids there served tea to youngsters like us: we sat at the big table, and the maid had lace and everything, very, very aristocratic. They had a bad fate. Well, eventually I will talk about them later; it's not the place for it now.

So it was a tightly-knit community, and there was an interchange between the younger generation and the older one. It was a very different thing. The older generation only spoke Ladino. My grandparents used to read a newspaper that was written—I mean, spelled—in Hebrew characters, but when you read it, it was Ladino. So that's the only thing they could read, actually.

CE: Wow.

RM: But when my parents' generation came, by that time we had the French education, we went to the *lycée*, the *français* and so on. Actually, I didn't go to a French school, but I had a teacher who came—both my brother and I had a teacher who came twice a week and taught us French spelling and French grammar and vocabulary. That's how we managed to learn three languages at one time.

CE: Wow. So, do you remember the first time you felt any kind of prejudice or that you were being treated different?

RM: Well, you know, it's interesting. There was always some prejudice in the Greek community. For example, I had—when I went to a Greek school, I had a very good friend, and one time she said, "Oh, this is just as noisy as the *chabra*," which is the synagogue in not polite Greek. In polite Greek it's *synagogē*, but in not polite Greek it's *chabra*. And she used the term, and she immediately caught herself and said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." But it shows you that there was ingrained some kind of feeling against Jews.

CE: So, can you tell me any details about when these laws were passed and how it felt?

RM: The laws were in Italy. We only felt the remote effects of it. My father could not go to the consulate anymore wearing his black shirt, because that's the amount—his activities were limited to attending meetings at the consulate, and it was more a thing to do rather than an obligation, you see, and he couldn't do that anymore. And he had been in the Italian army: he had fought in the First World War. He had been a pilot, of all things, those rickety little planes.

There is a picture somewhere; my father standing against one of those cardboard things, and the story went that he crashed against a storefront in one of those. I don't know if it's true or not, but that was his reputation. So he was very upset, of course, because he was a fervent Italian, you know, having fought for the country. More than we ever did, my brother and I, because we were subject to a lot of other influences; in my parents' generation, it was a limited thing, you see. You didn't have too many opportunities to travel or to do something, and you were very little schooled in politics. They didn't think about politics the way we think now. It was a very clear-cut thing: my politics are I'm a Fascist; I go to the consulate in a black shirt, period. Didn't do anything else, you know. They only spoke.

CE: And then, so, talk about how things started to change for you.

RM: Well, they started to change when I couldn't go to the Italian school. I went to a Greek school instead, and I wasn't familiar with the system of education in Greek. There was another little girl who was the best one in the class, Lilette Reva. She was a good friend of mine. She was very good, and I decided that I would be just as good because I couldn't stand the fact that I wasn't going to be the first one, (CE laughs) the best one in the class. So I doubled my studying and managed to equal her.

CE: Oh, wow.

RM: She eventually went to Mexico with her family, and she recently died.

CE: Did you keep in touch with her?

RM: Well, we weren't in touch for sixty years, and then through some kind of quirk, we got in touch again, and I saw her when we took a trip to Mexico.

CE: Oh, wonderful. So, what happened next?

RM: What happened next is that Italy attacked Greece. You know, Italy wanted—well, Italy wanted an empire; that's why it had gone into Libya, into Ethiopia and North Africa. But they didn't quite succeed. The Italians were not good soldiers—I think they were only good for playing music and singing. And Mussolini, he maintained that he had I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of people under arms.

And Greece was a small country, so Mussolini decided that he wanted Greece and he told —he gave an ultimatum to the Prime Minister of Greece—the King, actually; it was a kingdom at that time—and said, "Open your doors. We're going to march into Greece." And the answer was a resounding "No!" which is *ochi* in Greek, so that day among Americans is known as *Ochi* Day, which was the twenty-eighth of October [1940].

So Mussolini, having refused—I'm sorry. The Greek Prime Minister having refused, Mussolini sent his armies against Greece, and he was stationed in Albania already, which he had occupied years before. So the war started in Albania, not in Italy proper or Greece, because the Greeks advanced into Albania, and strange to say, their forces were much

smaller and poorly equipped than the Italians, but they repulsed the Italians for quite a while back into Albania. And that lasted for about a—less than a year, if I remember, and then Mussolini, losing the war, asked for Germany to reinforce his army and the Germans started the campaign against Greece. And their tanks, of course, overcame the Greeks very easily: the war lasted maybe a few days, and that was it. The Germans came.

CE: Prior to the Germans coming in, was your life different other than going to the Greek school?

RM: No, not in any way. We were more anxious, I guess. News from Europe used to come and be read with a lot of interest because we thought—we did not think that it would touch us, actually, in the beginning. But by the time things had taken place, we kind of knew that Greece would be involved, and it was occupied by the Germans, who at first didn't do very much against the Jews. It was strange. I still remember the day they entered Salonika. We were behind the shutters—nobody was out in the streets—and then we saw the first motorcycle drive up; you know, the Germans would. And it was such a feeling, you know. It was a bad feeling, because we knew that nothing good would come out of it.

CE: So were you and your family together watching from the window?

RM: Yes. Yes.

CE: And you could—you saw?

RM: Nobody was out. Nobody was walking.

CE: You felt very anxious? Do you remember?

RM: Very much so, yes.

CE: And I guess your parents did as well.

RM: And then what happened is that the Germans didn't have enough space to house their officers. They had barracks for the soldiers, but not for the officers. So they went from house to house, chose the best room in the house, and told the people that they

would house a German officer and that they should give him the liberty of the house. So they did for us, too. They came, and we had a succession of sergeants who stayed in our house. Actually, my mother always told them from the very beginning that we were Jewish, in case they didn't want to associate with us or they wanted to leave, maybe. Nobody, no German, ever reacted to it. That was very strange. And then, we had a Viennese air force officer, a captain, and he was a real gentleman. More about him later, you see, because he is involved in the Holocaust story. But he was a very nice human being, and had nothing against Jews.

CE: Did you have to feed these people?

RM: No. We just had to have bathroom facilities.

CE: Okay, so they went somewhere else to eat.

RM: They went to their mess or whatever, yes.

CE: Okay. Was your day-to-day living, then, interrupted very much?

RM: Not very much, because they were away during the day. They were very polite, you know: it was a presence that you saw in the house, but you didn't feel it was bad. They didn't make it known that they were anti-Semitic, even if they were. So, we did all right.

CE: So you were okay with it, as a child?

RM: Yes, that was fine. And eventually they told those officers they couldn't stay in Jewish residences, so he left; this particular gentleman left. But he had done something unbelievable before he left. We'll talk about that with the Holocaust.

CE: Okay. So you have these soldiers staying in your house, and then what happens?

RM: Well, in the beginning the Germans didn't do very much. I guess maybe they didn't want to raise doubts about the fate of the people, or maybe rebellion. Who knows? They decreed, for example, that people should give up their radios. Everybody had to do it, Italian Jews or Greek Jews. They had to give up their bicycles.

CE: Just the Jews?

RM: Yes. No, the radio was a common thing for the whole population. Bicycles they took from the Jews, you see; then they took over their business. They couldn't go to work in the morning, they had to stay home. That's when they had moved the Jews into a ghetto.

CE: All right. So, let's talk about the ghetto.

RM: Yeah. The ghetto was—they delineated a part of the city where everybody had to move into. Now, it just so happened that the house where we lived was within the ghetto. But we, as Italians, did not have to move; even if we had lived outside the ghetto, we would have stayed. But my mother's relatives—two sisters, their families—they all moved in.

CE: Because they were married to Greek men right?

RM: Yeah. They had been Spanish before because of my grandfather. When they married Greek citizens, they became Greek.

CE: Now, if they had been Spanish still, would they have been exempt?

RM: Yeah. It's a whole other story, you know, about the Holocaust that's not well known. Anyway, so everybody moved into the ghetto and it was very crowded, you see, because you were moving at least half of the Jewish population in a tiny enclave. So life became very difficult in the ghetto. I could go back and forth out and in without any problem. I had an Italian ID card. And you know, as a child, I guess I was ambivalent. I was so happy that I could do that. Somehow, I was allowed to do that when my cousins could not do it. At the same time, I was very upset about it, because why did they make an exception for us? I couldn't understand, you see, and I wanted to be like my cousins. I didn't wear a yellow star, never did. The consulate said the Germans could not impose anything on us, even though they were allies, you see. But it's very interesting, the way it happened.

CE: It is yeah. Did people move into your house, other people?

RM: No, no. My mother's sister moved into my grandparents' house; there was space. No, nobody moved with us.

CE: Do you remember how you felt at that point about what was going on?

RM: Yeah, as I told you, I was ambivalent. On the one hand, I thought I was very important because I didn't have to abide by those measures; on the other hand, I was questioning why they and not me.

CE: Okay. So now you're in the ghetto, and you're able to go in and out but other people are not.

RM: Yes, that's right. They're not allowed.

CE: And talk a little bit more about the conditions.

RM: Conditions in the ghetto were pretty bad, you know, because people were living five to a room or something, more than that. The medical facilities were not that good, although there was a very large hospital—well, not very large by today's standards; a large hospital that had been founded by the Baron [Maurice de] Hirsch, and he was a very fabled Jewish man who contributed a lot to communities, to Jewish communities. So the hospital, he had financed it, and it bore his name. That was the only place they could go for medical treatment, and it's not easy to serve a large population from a rather small hospital, so health conditions were pretty bad. And starving occurred, because you couldn't go out and buy anything. You had to live on the resources, and of course the black market took off like anything. My parents used to pay the price, because we ourselves were suffering, even the Italians, because conditions were the same for everybody. So we tried to help them as much as we could by buying things outside. And, I must say, the German officer who stayed with us used to go hunting and bring us back what he killed, and we would have a festive meal after that.

CE: Which officer was this?

RM: The Austrian.

CE: The Austrian.

RM: I might as well tell you about him.

CE: Okay, go ahead.

RM: You see, his name was Otto Wengersky. I remember very clearly.

CE: Can you spell his last name?

RM: Yeah. W-e-n-g-e-r-s-k-y. Otto, O-t-t-o. He had become accustomed to our family, and he loved to stay with us in the evening and talk. My father spoke excellent German, because he was employed by a German company. My mother had a few words of German, but she managed to learn quickly. And he befriended us. He would bring us food: bread from his mess; sugar, which was—you couldn't find it for love or money. He was very helpful. But then he had to move, because no German should stay in Jewish residences.

So he came back at night sometimes to find out how we were, what we were doing, and then he came one night particularly. The Jews were already in the ghetto; there had been measures against them and so on. And he said, "Tell your family to leave, to leave Salonika." Well, why should they leave Salonika? Because Athens, which was in the southern part of Greece, was occupied by the Italians, so you could cross the line of demarcation and be in Italian territory—not that it was easy, and it was fraught with danger. You could get—you could be seen as a Jew, recognized as a Jews. So he told us, "Tell your family to go to Athens. They will be safe there. I just overheard today some SS officers who came to Salonika, and they were discussing the deportation of all of the Jews, and one even asked how many horses can you put in a"—what do you call it? A rail car.

CE: Yeah.

RM: And they said, "Forty, so we'll put fifty—we'll put eighty," he said. So he reported all of this to my parents. He said, "You won't have to worry, because you'll be protected by the Italians. But tell your family to leave." They did not. Only two cousins did, and they survived and everybody else died.

CE: And what reasons did they give for not leaving?

RM: You know, I didn't take part in discussions—I was too young. But it seems to me that one reason would be, suppose somebody comes in here and says, "Tomorrow morning you're leaving with just one bag in your hand." It's not easy to do that.

CE: No, it isn't.

RM: And also, it was dangerous to cross the lines. Older people could not do it anyway, you see, and there were a lot of older people in the family. Disbelief, like an uncle, a very nice older man, said to my mother, "What are they going to do to us? They will deport us, they will put us in a camp and we'll sweep the streets, and we'll survive and come back after the war." That was a very common belief. They never could have believed that they would meet death just as they arrived.

CE: Now, is your father still working at this point?

RM: No.

CE: No, okay.

RM: By that time, nothing worked right anymore, you see. They could, if they wanted to, but nobody was buying anything. I maintain that I have bad toes because I couldn't buy new shoes and my feet were growing.

CE: Yeah. So, a little bit more about the conditions in the ghetto at this point?

RM: It was crowded, that's the main thing.

CE: And people were starving.

RM: But you know, at least they were all Jews. It's a funny feeling. You didn't have to worry anymore about somebody rejecting you. All your neighbors, all your friends were right there. But it was a small area, and it created a lot of difficulties. Of course, when they moved they couldn't bring all their furniture; it was abandoned in the homes, like many other things.

CE: Were there people dying on the street?

RM: I saw some in Athens later on. I didn't see anybody in Salonika, probably because I was more sheltered in Salonika. When we got to Athens I was taking care of family affairs and I was out.

CE: So in Salonika in the ghetto, people weren't going in and out unless they were Italian?

RM: Yes. If you wore a yellow star, you couldn't go in and out. And remember, there were also Greek police and Jewish policemen as well—traitors, you know, who collaborated with the Germans.

CE: So they had to depend on somebody like you bringing food in?

RM: In Athens, yes.

CE: I'm thinking still in Salonika.

RM: No, no, no. My parents were at perfect liberty to do anything they wanted.

CE: Yes, but I mean other people in the ghetto.

RM: Oh. Yes, they couldn't. They lacked everything.

CE: That's really hard.

RM: You could only live on the resources that you had within the ghetto. Black market, of course, took care of some of it, but sums were enormous for flour, and there were no ovens in the homes; you had to send it to a communal oven. That had been the case before the war during the occupation, and even after the war it continued in Greece.

CE: There were no ovens.

RM: No ovens, so you prepared the plate uncooked and you go to the local bakery and you entrust it to the baker, who would bake it or roast it or whatever for you. You saw the maids coming back home with their big burden, covered with paper. Usually it was a lamb roast and potatoes.

CE: Oh, so for each meal you had to go to the oven.

RM: Yeah. Well, not everything was baked.

CE: Yes, okay.

RM: They had developed a lot of recipes that just needed boiling or whatever.

CE: That's interesting.

RM: And remember that we cooked with charcoal when I was a child, I remember, until I was twelve or—until we were in Salonika, before moving to Athens, we used charcoal for fuel. There was a delivery of charcoal every month or so: it was put in a closet under the counter and the whole kitchen was full of charcoal dust, but it was a ritual that everybody did without protesting.

CE: That's interesting. I don't remember seeing anything about this in your other writing.

RM: No, no, no. And then in Athens, we still used charcoal in a small—like a little contraption here, which we called *foufou*, because you had to blow on it. (demonstrates) You know, for the charcoal to light up. So it was called the *foufou*, and that was the only way we could cook.

CE: Do you remember any specific details about your family helping other people during that time?

RM: There might have been. The main thing was what my mother did, that's what I remember very well. You see, the Germans had decreed that if you were caught crossing the lines of demarcation between German occupation territory and the Italians in the

south, you were executed immediately. Of course, you had to pay a Greek guy, Greek Orthodox guy, to take you through the lines, because it was very mountainous terrain and people didn't know the way, obviously. So you had to pay—I don't remember how much. But the Italian consulate had told Italian citizens not to take any money or jewelry from other Jews for safekeeping, because it was punishable by imprisonment or death or whatever.

So my father wouldn't take anything from anybody, but my mother, who was more tenderhearted, had the visit of a friend who said, "I have twenty English gold pounds, and I have to give them to the man who will take me through the lines. But I can't take the money with me because I don't know that I will get to Athens. When I call you from Athens, you can give the money to him." And my mother agreed, against reason and against better judgment. She felt that she had to help a friend who wanted to escape. Well, the guy was caught when he was crossing the line, and the Germans beat—I mean, not the Germans; it was the Greek collaborators beat him to a pulp. And he said that he had given twenty gold pounds to Dario Modiano. He didn't say Lily, my mother's name. So my father eventually was arrested and so on. But that was something my mother did, which didn't turn out good for us. But people tried to help each other.

CE: Okay. So, what happens then? You're living in the ghetto area.

RM: We're living in the ghetto. Neighborhood by neighborhood, people are being deported. And that was when I saw the French movie I told you about recently, *La Rafle*, because it was exactly the same. I left the movie crying. I went through it. I saw it happen. It was harrowing. They would start coming on motorcycles, the Germans, and trucks, and they would empty out in each street and they would go throughout the houses and [say] "*Raus! Raus!*" meaning "Out, out!" And they had dogs barking, and lights to light, because it was dark; it was like two o'clock in the morning. And they rounded up the people. They didn't put them in trucks; they had them walk to the train station from where they would be deported to Auschwitz, and other places, too. And neighborhood by neighborhood, Salonika's ghetto was being emptied, because they would block one part of it and get everybody out and put them in the trains to send them away, and the next day, after two or three days, it would be another neighborhood. And that was harrowing, because you saw the thing happening right in front of you.

And then the turn of our neighborhood came. That was terrible. We couldn't be open and watching, you know, because we had to be protected from the Germans coming in. We had a little piece of paper on the door from the Italian consulate, which said that we were Italian citizens and not to touch us. But you know, any German could have taken it out and walked in. They didn't. They respected it. They didn't come into our apartment. We had three floors, three different families. They took the ones from above and below us and left us alone.

CE: Wow.

RM: And then you had to contend with a neighborhood where there was no life. You walked out in the streets: empty. Houses: empty. Everything, it didn't exist anymore. It had just, like, disappeared in an instant after the people left, because after they left the Germans came and then the Greeks came and took everything that could be used from those houses, which you had left open, like walking out this door, you know, and leaving everything behind.

CE: Were there other families left at that point, besides your family?

RM: Yes, the Italians, the families that were Italians. And the other ones, some had escaped into Athens and most of them had stayed. They were taken away. I remember in our yard, there was a little old house that was built there for the owner's nursemaid. Two old people, an old couple, and they couldn't walk, they couldn't do anything. He was bent over. And they were walking; they were leaving at the same time as the others, and they couldn't walk. I bet they died soon thereafter.

CE: That just sounds so horrible.

RM: Yeah. You know, it's one thing to talk about it; it's another thing to experience it in the flesh. I mean, how could this thing happen? It's like if this whole Harbour Island is blocked by policemen and they order you to leave.

CE: Do you know what they were telling the people about where they were going?

RM: Well, Poland. You see, people thought they were going to Poland, which of course was right: Auschwitz was in Poland. They didn't know Auschwitz then; nobody knew the word. But they knew they were going to Poland, and they wanted—actually, they had taken a lot of heavy clothes with them, because they knew that it's going to be cold where they're going. They didn't know that they wouldn't experience cold or hot, nothing.

CE: Did they take a lot of things with them? Were they able to?

RM: Yes, a bag, and they put [on] three sweaters, you know, so to carry more. Of course, it didn't help them at all, because those belongings were abandoned upon arrival.

CE: Yeah.

RM: You know, I'll tell you something: My mother was helping her sisters, who were subject to deportation, you see. She helped them put—in the buttons, put diamonds inside the button. People used to go to the dentist, who would put gold under their teeth, you see, because they thought that that way they'll sell the jewels, they will sell the gold, and survive. They went to the heap upon arrival, and they had a special commando that searched the clothes for such items.

CE: And they pulled their teeth, too, right?

RM: Yeah. Right.

CE: So you're left in Salonika?

RM: Yeah. Well, we're alone, nobody from our family except my maternal grandparents. Now, let me tell you the story of the Spanish Jews, some who had taken on the citizenship. They stayed in Salonika even after we left as Italians. We had been given the choice, go to Italy or go to Athens, so we chose Athens. So the Spanish Jews remained in Salonika. It was my grandparents and my uncle, his wife, and two girls—and others in the community, about 400 people. One day they received the order to gather in the synagogue, which they did, and from there they were taken—oh, I'm sorry, I have to mention that there was a Spanish consul in Salonika who tried to protect the Spanish Jews. He wasn't very successful, because they deported those Jews to Bergen-Belsen. Now, Bergen-Belsen was not a death camp like Auschwitz; it was terrible, but they didn't kill people there, they didn't gas them.

So they took the Spanish Jews to Bergen-Belsen, where they were imprisoned for six months or a year, I don't remember. And then the American Joint Distribution Committee intervened, and they tried to persuade the Spanish government to ask that those Jews be freed and bring them to Spain. Well, Franco did, at that time. He didn't like the Jews himself very much, you know—he was a rightist, as you remember—but he allowed those Jews to come to Spain, to be taken by train through France and into Spain. But he didn't want them to stay there.

So the odyssey of these Jews was that they went from Salonika to Bergen-Belsen. After a while they were taken out of Bergen-Belsen, traveled through France, which was occupied, into Spain, where they stayed for a few weeks until they could recover, because they had suffered a lot in the camps. And they took them to Casablanca; the British took over the protection, so they put them in the displaced people's camp in Casablanca, and eventually they took them to Palestine. Not Israel; there was no Israel at that time. They arrived in Palestine, so they had done a whole round trip, and after the war finished they came back to Greece.

CE: They did?

RM: Yeah.

CE: Okay. So, now what happens to your family?

RM: Well, we went to Athens, because we had a choice. That Fernandez family came to my parents and said, "Let's all go to Italy. We will be safe there." My parents decided no, they wanted to be in Athens. So he and his family left, wife and three children, and they went to a small resort area in the northern part of Italy near Lake Maggiore and they thought they would be safe. But they were betrayed, and the Gestapo found them and arrested them, shot them on the spot, and threw their bodies in the lake.

CE: Who betrayed them? Do you know? You don't know?

RM: I don't know.

CE: Okay. And your family went to Athens.

RM: We went to Athens, where—my father's two brothers were already in Athens. So we joined them there. But we had a whole odyssey for that, as well. You remember that my mother had gotten the twenty pounds from the friend.

CE: Right, right.

RM: What happened is that the friend gave my father's name. So the day that we were leaving on an Italian military train for Athens from Salonika, the train would not leave.

We waited and waited. It was my grandfather—my grandmother was already in Athens—my father, my mother, and the two children. And the train wasn't leaving. Then they decreed that all the men should get out from the train and line up on the quay.

CE: So you didn't know what was going on?

RM: No. And then we saw Dr. [Max] Merten—he was the Nazi in charge of the slaughter of the Jews in Salonika—accompanied by the very infamous Jewish traitor. So he started going over, looking at every man in the line, and he got to my father and he said, "You. Out."

CE: He was the first one he had pulled out?

RM: Yeah. He didn't pull out anybody else. He said, "Now the train can leave." (CE gasps) Well, my mother wanted to stay because she wanted to be with my father. So the Germans said, "You're doing it at your own risk and peril, if you want to stay. You're free to go, but if you want to stay, you have to know that it's not"—it's fraught with danger, in other words. But she decided to stay anyway.

So my father was put in a Gestapo jail. He was not tortured, he was not beaten, but he was really terrorized. My mother used to take food to him every day, and it was a prison that was high up in the city. She had to walk a lot; there were no taxis, no transportation. But the Germans were very respectful of my mother. She was really surprised. They would call her *Abgeordnete Frau*, meaning "honorable lady." Anyway, it took a while, but through the Italian consul, who was an excellent man—Pietro Zamboni was his name—the Germans finally allowed my father to leave, because the Italians had argued there is an Italian court in Athens. This is an Italian citizen. We should try him in an Italian court, not a German court. So they put him on a train with my mother, with two *carabinieri* with the big hats, and his hands in chains, and he was put in an Italian military prison in Athens, from which he was released a couple of weeks later because an Italian judge decreed it's not a crime in Italy to keep money for friends.

CE: Oh, okay. Good, good.

RM: So they joined us in Athens, and that's another kind of story.

CE: One more question, and then we'll stop for now. I'm just amazed that your mother stayed there.

RM: She was a very courageous woman.

CE: And how she was able to get food for him every day and get it to him.

RM: I know. She was always like this. My father was not a very strong guy, but my mother had a very strong will.

CE: Okay. Well, I think we'll stop, and then when we start next time—

RM: It's in Athens.

CE: We'll start in Athens.

RM: Salonika now is in the background.

CE: Okay, good.

RM: We left Salonika, and there were no Jews practically. Some Jews did hide in Salonika, but it was very difficult because they could be recognized very easily. They really would have been totally isolated if they had stayed, but some did, and succeeded in hiding.

CE: Were the local people helpful?

RM: No. No, no. As a matter of fact, after the whole thing finished, my mother went back to Salonika to sell the few things that she had left behind, and a Greek guy came and he wanted to buy something. She said no, the price was too low, and he said, "Ah, they should have made soap out of you like they did with your others."

CE: Oh!

RM: Yeah. There was anti-Semitism in Salonika because there had been so many Jews, you see. If there are some Jews, say a hundred, there's no anti-Semitism; but when there are thousands and thousands—

CE: Okay. Thank you.

RM: You're welcome.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CE: We're with Rosa Miller, and this is tape two. When we ended the last tape, you had just arrived in Athens. So, let's start with your arrival in Athens. Your father and mother are still back in Salonika. Tell me your experience.

RM: Well, we were traveling with my grandfather. He only spoke Ladino, but he was an Italian citizen. But my brother and I had fun. Obviously, we were worried about my father having stayed, but this was such a new experience for us: to be on a train, to be on an Italian military train with a nice Italian soldier singing love songs, you know—*Firenze stanotte, sei bella in un manto di stelle*.[1] So it did something to us. We had been oppressed, you know, for so long in Salonika. That was kind of a relief for us.

So we traveled day and night, and it was dangerous in those years because the partisans—mostly communist partisans—had gone up to the very high mountains of Greece and were fighting against the Germans—not real fight, it wasn't a battle that they gave, but they would launch something against them. I'm looking for the word. And they would—well, anyway, they would try to prevent the movement of the German armies. So I was looking at those mountains as we were traveling, and I had heard of the partisans there, so I was worried that we might have a bomb on the train or whatever.

Anyway, we arrived, and we had our two uncles and my grandmother already in Athens living in an apartment. We necessarily joined them in that apartment, so it was kind of crowded for a while. But my uncle had a very nice Greek Orthodox girlfriend who came from an excellent family, and she helped us a lot, you know, because my parents—my mother wasn't there, so she tried to substitute for her. We even found that the Greek they spoke in Athens was a little bit different than the Greek we had spoken in Salonika. The pronunciation was a little bit different. For example, instead of *zesti*, we said *zesta*, you know, and so on. So we were new to Athens, but we loved it right away because it was so different from Salonika. The city was wider, and with Italian administration you didn't

---

1 Rosa is singing the song *Firenze Sogna*.

suffer like you did in Salonika. So we liked it right away, and we were well taken care of, and then eventually my parents arrived and my father was freed from the Italian military jail.

We rented an apartment, a furnished apartment, from another Jewish guy. And we stayed there three months, during which it was like old times—except that we didn't have the family, of course, but otherwise we went, we did, we went to the movies. You couldn't eat out—there were no restaurants—but at least you had some entertainment. You were free. You didn't have to give any account to anybody, and especially we, as Italians, were privileged, you see. Anyway, we—

CE: Was this true for all the Jews there?

RM: Yes. Yes, pretty much so. The Italians never did anything against the Jews. They didn't adopt any racial laws, absolutely nothing. It was like you were in Greece, except that it was an army of occupation, you see, the Italians. But compared to the Germans, they were easy, really easy. So three months of that, and we enjoyed it fully, and then Italy made a separate peace with the Allies. And that was determining for us, because there was no more Italian consulate or Italian administrator who would do something for us, who could help us, nothing. We had to count on ourselves. Thank goodness we had an excellent Greek Orthodox friend. He had worked in Salonika; he was from the part of Greece that reverted to Bulgaria for a while, and the name was Didymoteicho; it's very difficult name.

CE: Can you spell it for us?

RM: Yeah.

CE: Okay.

RM: Yeah. D-i-d-y-m-o-t-e-i-k-h-o.

CE: Okay. That's a very difficult one.

RM: Didymote—no, t-e-i-c-h-o. Yeah.

CE: Okay.

RM: Yeah. That's it. So anyway, they made fun of him because he came from kind of a village in that, but he was a very sophisticated guy. And from him I learned two principles of good dressing. He said that linen is never so elegant as when it's creased, and that Burberry is never so elegant as when it's dirty. (both laugh) So he was that kind of a guy, you know, and he was an excellent friend to us. So when the time came, we had to find a hiding place. He was at first—I'll tell you, at first we went—we had a Greek maid, and she said, "Why don't you come to my house? I'm there with my husband, and it's a very lonely location and nobody will see that you are there, so why don't you come?" We did, my mother and I, because in the meantime the partisans had taken the men in the family and led them to a village very high in the mountains. Germans didn't hazard to go there because they were afraid to be ambushed. So they went on that.

You see, there was a good reason why we should separate. We couldn't remain as a family all together, and women staying at home, even if they are seen staying at home—well, that was the fate of the women anyway, to cook and to clean and so on. But if somebody happened to see grown men staying at home and not going anywhere and never going out, you become suspicious. So, we separated, and he found—well, we went into this maid's home. Our only entertainment in a one-room house was to go to bed at night and start discussing the bedbugs crawling down. (laughs)

CE: Oh, my!

RM: Yeah. That was—and there was no bathroom, you know. We used to use a chamber pot, and the maid would go and throw it in the fields.

CE: Oh, my. You had separate bedrooms?

RM: It was a one-room house.

CE: Just one room total?

RM: The maid and her husband slept in the kitchen, and my mother and I occupied the room with a double bed, and that's where we lived. We didn't go out. It was quite far from the city, you see, from any inkling of civilization. And we had mice at night, of course, besides the bedbugs. So we didn't last more than two weeks, and we begged our friend to find us another place, which he did. A very nice family: they were Greeks from

Istanbul. And the husband worked; the wife was some kind of a seamstress; and their mother, Marika, lived with them. We found a very congenial place, because they were very nice people.

It's interesting. One of the children to whom I was speaking at the Holocaust Museum said one day, "What did you do for entertainment?" (both laugh) Well, we weren't really entertained, but I could go out, you see, freely, because nobody would recognize me. I spoke excellent Greek, you know. I was just like anybody else, and nobody could look at me and say, "Oh, this is Rosa Modiano"; you see, I was too young.

So we gave Yorvus—that was the name of our savior—any money that we had. You see, banks did not do very good business in Greece, because the moment people acquired money they changed it into gold and put it away. So we could rely on some resources that my parents had, gold that they had sold and gotten the money for it, and we entrusted it to this friend. Every week I would go by his office, and he would take a piece of gold, send one of his employees to the Wall Street of Athens, and cash the money and give it to us to live for another week: to pay the rent and to live for another week. That's how we spent about one year, with these people.

CE: For a year.

RM: They were wonderful people. And he—the husband had been able to take the radio, which had been branched only on Athens—it had been sealed at the police station by the order of the Germans, so you couldn't listen to any other broadcast from anyplace else. It was just Radio Athens, which of course was controlled by the Germans. So I would go and he would give me some of the drachmas that he got from the gold and we'd live for another week and we'd live for another week, until we were liberated. But we had to leave there.

They were very nice people. He had been able to fix the radio, so at night we closed all the curtains very tightly, and all the windows, and we listened to the BBC, the news of the war on the BBC. That was fantastic. But they used codes, and it was so mysterious. "The moon jumps over; the weather is very good this week," and we knew it was code for something important, you see. It was just wonderful, just to hear this without knowing what was going on. Another entertainment that we had was hearing the Flying Fortresses —that was the plane in World War II—fly over Greece on a mission elsewhere, because they didn't bomb Greece. We knew they were going to be our liberators, you see, eventually.

So we left there because one day, two young men, Greeks, came into the house. They pushed past my mother, who had opened the door, and went into the room that we were occupying. One took a gun and put it on the table. And for one hour, for the better part of an hour, they were grilling us. My mother from the beginning, when they said, "You're Jewish?" She said, "Yes, we're Jewish." "You want to go to the Germans?" [RM's mother said] "No. Okay, I have a little bit of money; would you like this money not to give us away?" No. "I have a watch that's worth something; do you want?" No. "What do you need, what do you want?" They never really said anything. And they left after an hour, leaving us there, obviously, in bad shape. The women in the family had not heard anything that was happening. They were in the kitchen in the back and we were in the front of the house. They left by saying, "Don't leave here, because we'll come back for you tomorrow," which is a strange thing to do, you know.

To this day, we have no idea what happened and how we were let go by these two young men. The only thing that we could surmise is that another couple used to come to play cards with them, and they saw that they were affording a little bit more food because we were paying them rent, and they became jealous and they tried to frighten us so that we could leave."

CE: Oh, maybe.

RM: Maybe. I have no idea; it was not something that was ever explainable to me. Whatever. But of course, we had to leave.

CE: Before you leave, tell me what was a day like?

RM: A day? I would go out in the morning, for example, and come back. There wasn't very much that I could buy. We used beet tops for spinach; beets were abundant. You know, they're so expensive in this country; they're the cheapest vegetable in Greece, practically. And we would cook, and it wasn't easy to cook, you see, because it was only that little contraption with charcoal, and we had to cook our food and they had to cook their food. Sometimes we used to eat the same thing, but normally my mother would cook for her and me what I would manage to buy when I went out.

Now, my mother went to a movie a couple of times—with trepidation, I should say, because she was so afraid of being recognized. And we usually saw German movies, obviously; that's the only thing they brought to Greece. I had liked one song so much that I learned how to pronounce it and sing it without knowing what it meant. "*Ich brauche keine Millionen*, I don't need any millions," and so on and so forth. My grandparents

were also in Athens, hiding in a section of the city that was kind of far from where we were.

Now, there's something very funny that I'm going to tell you, not to take away any of the gravity of the situation, but it was funny when it happened. They were hiding on the first floor of a house with two floors. A Russian—a White Russian woman lived on the second floor. It was in a suburb kind of far away from Athens, from main Athens, and we had to take buses to get there to them. We did it once in a while, and my mother affected what some of the Greek women did at the time: in order not to get the sun on their face, they would take a gauze scarf and put it on their face like this. Nobody could see who it was behind that, so my mother used the stratagem. We visited our grandparents—her in-laws—that way.

There was an older lady who was sister to my grandfather—a very stolid lady, I remember—and her name was Tia, which is aunt, Gracia, G-r-a-c-i-a. And Tia Gracia was very deaf. So when she said something, it was heard, really, and the place was right on the street, so anybody who would go by, if they heard that kind of an accent, that kind of word, they knew it was Jewish and they could very well go and betray them. So every time she would say something, my grandparents would jump on her. "Shh! Shh! Don't talk, don't talk! They will be hearing us." Okay, so she sighed, (sighs) and there's "Shh! Don't talk, don't talk!" So one day, finally she said to them, "Do you mean to say the Germans will find out we're Jews on farts and sighs?" (CE laughs) Because that's what she used to do, you know, pass gas.

CE: Yes, yes.

RM: "Is it any different for Jews than it is for Greeks?"

Anyway, so when we had to leave, that was the only refuge we could find, because you couldn't go to a hotel, obviously; you were in hiding. You couldn't go anywhere, because there was a curfew, so it was very dangerous. So we decided to go to them, even though it was far away. We traversed Athens—thank goodness nothing happened—and we got to the house. The Russian woman from upstairs was very kind. She gave us a mattress to put down on the floor to sleep at night. We stayed two or three days. There was a German barracks on the other side of the street, and you know how we were afraid of being found out. But nothing happened, and our friend found us another place, a young woman who needed the money, and she had a much better house than my grandparents were staying in. She was very nice, educated young lady. So we stayed there for a few months, and then finally the Brits came, finally.

CE: Now, did you continue your education?

RM: Well, it was interrupted, obviously. So when I went back to Greek school, I was two years older than my classmates. That was not good, because again I was the best one in the class, you know, and the other ones would contend I was because I was older by two years.

CE: Right, right, right. Did you read books while you were in hiding?

RM: Yes. As a matter of fact, that was a main feature. There was a lending library in downtown Athens, and the guy who owned it was an intellectual with a beard and long hair, which was not common in Greece at the time. Soukalas was the name, and he had the lending library. I would go by there and borrow books and take them back and take the other ones. He never said anything to me. I mean, we talked; he recognized me, we talked. Only after the war, he said, "You know, we knew you were Jewish, but we didn't say anything."

CE: Did he know your name at that point—or you used another name then.

RM: Of course. Yeah. The name I used—we had false ID papers, you know, that you had paid a police administrator to get. My name was Marianthi Ni Kolaidhou, which sounds very Greek, of course, and I had to get accustomed to the fact that if they said Marianthi, I should answer, you know. But thank goodness, we didn't have too many people with whom to do it, so it didn't make any difference.

CE: How did you and your mother do, being together all this time?

RM: We became very close.

CE: You did?

RM: Very, very close. And later on, when I fell in love with a Greek Orthodox guy, she didn't understand the idea of my marrying him, not in the least. I'm just as happy that she did, because that way I met my husband. Going back to a normal existence was kind of difficult, you see. We had lived in that threatened state for so long that—well, first of all, it was like a new world, that you could go out and not worry about being recognized, that you could go out and go to a restaurant if you liked. We had not become accustomed to

those things; actually, we had lost the habit by being in a place, hiding in a place, although the hiding was not like Anne Frank's, for example, where they never went out, they were in a secret part. We were like guests in a house where we paid rent.

CE: But your mother never went, or rarely went out.

RM: Rarely, rarely. I did at will, you know, because I was okay. The two young men never came back. I don't know why. It's very difficult to explain why.

CE: So any other close calls?

RM: No, that was the only one. Of course, they had a difficult time up in the village, the men in the family. There was no food—it was a very poor village—and people used to farm. What did my parents know about farming or anything? They just lived there. There was no newspaper, no books, no nothing. Eventually my uncle's girlfriend went to take care of them; that was heroic on her part, because here you had four men to take care of and wash and cook and do things for them. But she was very nice.

CE: Do you remember the day of liberation?

RM: The date I don't remember, but I remember the—

CE: Would you remember that day?

RM: Yes. We all went downtown; we went out, you see, to see the Brits come in. And it was like "Is this finished? Is this nightmare gone by now?" And of course, pretty soon after that, we had the communist revolution in Greece. They became—they were communists, and they took over, and of course they had all those partisans with weapons that had been provided to them by the Brits and the Americans; they were very well armed. So Athens was—well, part of Athens was in the hands of the partisans, and part of Athens under the Brits.

CE: And what impact did that have on you?

RM: Well, you know, it was a civil war that was happening, and it was happening right in Athens. There was no food, nothing. You couldn't buy anything. Everything was closed.

It’s like it’s happening today, I guess, in Libya or whatever, only people were not protesting at that time.

Then there was the news one day that the synagogue was distributing some food, some flour. So we decided to go: my mother stayed home, my brother, myself, and my father went. And you know, we had to cross streets where they were shooting from both sides, so we had to take protection behind the wall and wait until the shooting was over and continue. It was a long way to the synagogue; it wasn’t next door. So we managed to get something, because they would distribute some flour and some sugar, so we managed to bring it back home. And when you baked bread, you didn’t bake it, you prepared it and it went to the bakery, if you remember. There was a partisan, a communist guy, right there at the counter, so when you would pay for the baking of the bread he would cut a big piece of your bread and say, “That’s for the heroic ELAS.” ELAS [Greek People’s Liberation Army] was the organization, the communist organization.

CE: Wow.

RM: So you had to say yes, because they were in power.

CE: So liberation, then your father and brother came back?

RM: They returned. They returned.

CE: And you hadn’t seen them for quite a while.

RM: A year and a half.

CE: A year and a half, okay.

RM: They were returning back to nothing. We had no possessions anymore.

CE: Did you still have some money?

RM: A little bit.

CE: A little bit.

RM: A little bit to start, but it wasn't much, you see. And we remained at that young lady's house quite a while, where we had just one room because we couldn't afford anything else. Eventually we got—I don't know where they got the money. I really didn't care much at that point. I don't know, maybe they had some reserves that they had given to a friend, I'm not quite sure. But it was a while before my father started working again. And interestingly enough, they received letters from the German company who would like for them to resume their post.

CE: Wow.

RM: Yeah. They wanted to show that they were not the bad Germans.

CE: Uh-huh. And so you continued living in Athens.

RM: Yes, we never went back. There was no reason for us to go back. Other people had a lot of real estate property; we never did.

CE: You didn't own your house?

RM: No.

CE: You didn't.

RM: No, we rented. My parents always rented. Many people did that, you know; it was the thing to do, rather than live in your own place. You rented the property and you paid for your own rent.

CE: But you lost all your possessions.

RM: Absolutely. My mother went back and gathered whatever she could. A maid that had worked for us in Salonika had kept some things together, but that was it. It was a new beginning in a new city in a new school.

CE: Yes. But not long after liberation, you had the problems with the civil war.

RM: Oh, just six to seven weeks.

CE: Wow!

RM: A couple of months we had the problems of the uprising, and it was fighting, real fighting, you know. We used to hear about it. And they damaged the Acropolis.

CE: Did you fear at that point that this is going to be just as bad?

RM: Yes, yes, that the communists would prevail. Sure. And it was only through the massive aid that the U.S. started pouring into Greece that we could be saved. It was through a program called Point Four, because it was the fourth point in a speech by President Truman, to help Greece and Turkey to recover their previous status.

CE: So you started going back to school in Greece?

RM: I went back to school, where, as I said, I made the best grades. I was the one who wrote the best things. And I'll tell you, the funny thing was the school was owned by an old maid, a very typically aristocratic Greek lady who was swathed in black all the time, you see. They never called you in school by your first name; it was always Modiano. So I became the best writer in my class and in the school, and the Minister of Education decreed a competition one time, "Greece enlightens the rest of the world." I wrote the paper, and I was the one who won the competition in all of Athens. That Greek old maid, the director of the school, was so upset that her good Greek Orthodox girls couldn't write something, the Jewish girl did! (both laugh)

CE: Good, good. So did you—I'm wondering about, like, having boyfriends and not having boyfriends.

RM: Oh, that was totally out.

CE: And how old were you at this point?

RM: Well, about fifteen or sixteen.

CE: Fifteen, so ordinarily—

RM: Dates? My goodness. You got punished if you did. And if you did, you had to do it secretly. So it was not something that was done. Girls did not date.

CE: So it wasn't like the Holocaust got in the way, it just wasn't done.

RM: No, not at all. It was, as the Germans say, *verboten*. That was it. You couldn't have a boyfriend and talk to him, talk to your parents about him. You could have one in secret and meet him in the afternoon somewhere, but that was it.

CE: (laughs) Did you have one?

RM: In a garden. Yeah, I did have one, and my parents were very much against it.

CE: Is he the Greek Orthodox person?

RM: Yeah. Thank goodness I met my husband after that.

CE: So you graduated high school then?

RM: Yes. I was taking at the same time private French lessons to get my what they call the *baccalauréat* in French. It's a diploma that is equal to a two-year college education in this country. So after we traveled, my husband and I after I had my children, I decided when I was forty years old to go back to school, and I finished the two years that were left in three years and I graduated magna cum laude from Trinity College in Washington.

CE: Okay. Great.

RM: And that allowed me to get a job later on—not that I needed the diploma, because it was a language job, and my degree was in history. But I loved taking the courses, and I did very well.

CE: So, go back to Athens. You finish, you go to school. What happens in your life next?

RM: Well, I was one of the first young ladies in the nice society where we moved to get a job. Actually, it was because the company, the owner of the company that imported textiles, was a friend of my father's. I knew some English at that time; I was taking private lessons in English with an American. Incidentally, I thought he was the mafia and he had left the U.S. because he was in danger of being arrested. He went to Greece and just stayed in Greece and survived by giving English lessons. So I learned English from him, and he was a very good teacher. So I got this job, and I was making some money—my goodness, it's amazing!—which I used for clothes, for this and that, never contributed to the family budget; it was just for me. And then when I met my husband, obviously I stopped working because I knew him for about six months, and he said, "When are we going to announce our engagement?"

CE: (laughs) That's how he proposed?

RM: That's how he proposed.

CE: How did you meet him?

RM: He was a friend of my brother's, and my brother had gone with him on a trip around the Peloponnese, where he had had projects built—hospitals, health centers—and he wanted to survey the progress. He hated to drive, so my brother was on vacation in Greece that summer and he drove for him. And then he came home one day and said, "My American friend has jaundice and he's very bad in the hospital; you want to visit him?" I was looking to improve my English anyway, and I thought I'll practice, so I went with him. And that was it. I went back and back and back, and then we were married. We were married in Germany. And somehow I think I resented—I resented my husband today—I didn't at the time—for taking me to Germany to get married: the place where we had lost so many people. When I finally thought seriously about it, I didn't like the idea, but it was done. We were in Heidelberg.

CE: Why did he take you to Germany?

RM: Well, he had a very good reason. The jaundice had left him in bad shape, and Frankfurt in Germany had a very good hospital. So his superiors wanted him to go to Frankfurt to get evaluated. So he decided this would be a good opportunity to get married as well, and he had a friend in Heidelberg who was a chaplain in the army. A Greek rabbi would not do for him; he had to have his American rabbi. So that's why we went to Heidelberg. My father came with me; my mother did not. It was very expensive in those years to travel by plane, and that was my first plane ride ever.

CE: Wow. So where did you settle after you were married?

RM: Well, we came back to Athens, because he was settled in Athens, and three months later we had to leave. I was already expecting my first child. We came to the U.S., where I was naturalized in five days because there's a government regulation that says that if the government sends you on missions abroad, I have to follow as his wife, obviously. So it may be ten years if they keep sending him abroad before I can become a citizen. So the law said that they allowed the people who were sent on government business to become naturalized much faster.

CE: And tell me again what your husband did?

RM: He was in the Public Health Service. He wore a uniform. I guess that's what impressed me at the time, the whites. The navies are okay, but the whites with the high collar, you know—very elegant. So he contended that—no, I contended that I married him because of his uniform. (CE laughs) That lasted until I had to starch it and iron it.

CE: That was enough.

RM: It had to stand up like this with the starch. You see, the Public Health Service is one of the uniformed services of the U.S. There are five: the Army, Navy, Marines, Public Health. They have Navy ranks and Navy pay, but they belong to a very special group that deals with health matters: hospitals, medicine, clinics, whatever, and engineers, sanitary engineers, water supplies, and so on. So he was a member of the PHS, and—well, he was an administrator, and then a consultant as well. He retired after thirty years of service as a full captain, which is the equivalent of a full colonel in the Army. That's how we traveled, because he was lent from the Point Four programs to the embassy, and he went to countries and he dealt with the health situation in that country.

CE: So tell me the different places you've lived.

RM: Well, right after we were married, we were in the States for three months, and then we went to Brazil. We were sent to Rio de Janeiro. To me, you know, for a little girl who had only known hardship until then, with the Holocaust and surviving, it was like something out of a miracle to go to Rio de Janeiro, that exotic place. We liked it very much, and we had our first child there. We were thinking of going for a second term, and then he was offered a position in Iran. All we could think of is we could stop in Athens on the way and see the family, so we accepted to go to Iran, where we lived for four years. On the way back we exchanged a first class ticket, which the government was generous enough to let us have at that time—that's changed now, of course—for tourist class. We exchanged it for a tourist class ticket and took the longer way home, so we visited Pakistan and India and Vietnam and Cambodia and so on and so forth. So that was a very interesting trip.

And then when we left Iran after four years, we were sent to Ecuador. My husband got very sick in Ecuador, again, and the altitude affected his chest and his lungs. So after a while we had to go back to the United States—we didn't stay a full stay there. And we lived in Fort Worth, and I learned how to say Mrs. Baird's Breads in Texan. (CE laughs) After eight months—we had acquired a Great Dane, incidentally, and we were sent back to Iran for two more years. The girls said that they wouldn't leave without the dog. But we had to find a way to transport him to Iran, so we found a ship that went around through the Suez Canal and got to the Persian Gulf.

We were in Shīrāz already. So we flew down to Ābādān, where the ship was in port, and the Italian—the American consul had kept the dog for a couple of days until we came. Of course, the dog was as big as that, like a little horse. So we got the dog. The Persian driver who came with me talked Iran Air to take the dog in one of the planes.

CE: Wow.

RM: And something unbelievable happened. The dog was poisoned after a year, but that's beside the point. Fast forward thirty-some years later: we're in Baltimore attending a wedding, and we sat next to a gentleman very nicely dressed. And at a certain point I said something in Persian to my husband so that people would not understand. He looked at us and said, "Oh, you speak Persian!" Yes, we speak Persian. Why? Well, we were in Iran for six years. "Oh, I was in Iran, too." I forgot to tell you that the dog's name was Puppy. Nobody had bothered to give him another name. So he said, "I was the consul in Abadan." "Well," I said, "isn't that a coincidence? We sent the dog to a consul in Abadan, and we picked him up." "Are you Puppy's owners?" he said.

CE: Oh!

RM: That was thirty-five years afterwards.

CE: Wow!

RM: It was really something. Yeah. What a coincidence. We couldn't believe our ears.

CE: That's great. (laughs) That's wonderful. So then after Iran the second time?

RM: We went to Ecuador. No, no, after Iran we went back to Washington.

CE: To Washington.

RM: No, actually no. Sheldon retired from the Public Health Service after thirty years of duty, and he accepted a contract with Tulane University to go to Brazil, where Tulane had a joint program with the Brazilian government and the USAID organization. It didn't succeed, so we came back to the States after living in Brazil for ten months. Came back, and Sheldon started applying for positions. He did not actually make that, but he got a lot of consultant jobs. And I decided to go back to school, get my degree, and get a job. I finished three years in two years that I had left, and I applied to the CIA. It was a whole year before my clearance came through, because we had lived in so many countries, but it finally did. I started as a [GS] 7, the grade of a secretary, even though I was a linguist, and I think I doubled that in no time at all. I retired as a 14, which is pretty high in government. I worked seventeen years for the CIA.

CE: Seventeen years.

RM: Eighteen, actually, and five years for the NSA.

CE: Wow. And what was your husband doing all that time?

RM: Consulting.

CE: He was doing consulting.

RM: Yeah.

CE: And then when did you come to Tampa?

RM: Well, I had finished the twenty-three years; he had retired long before I did, because he was eleven years older than I was. So we decided to come. I wanted to continue working—I could have worked until I was eighty-five or whatever—but he needed me at home. His vision was very poor by then; he was legally blind. So I decided I have to retire, unfortunately, because I loved the job and they loved me. And we came to Tampa because we have the two girls in Orlando and Lakeland.

CE: So it's kind of in between—well, not in between, but close by to both places.

RM: Yes.

CE: What year was that?

RM: I always forget. Two thousand? It's eleven years. Two thousand one, I guess.

CE: Eleven years, so 2000.

RM: Yeah, 2001 we came. Dates I don't remember too well.

CE: Yeah, I don't either anymore.

RM: I don't pay much attention. I know in general.

CE: But the older dates you seem to know.

RM: Oh, yes. Well, they were the most important ones.

CE: Yeah.

RM: That was like the date we were leaving Salonika: it was June, a very hot day, and I remember the lineup of the men and how amazed and terrorized we were when the German motioned to my father to step out.

CE: So you have two daughters?

RM: Two daughters, yes.

CE: And what are their names?

RM: Ann and Joan. I would have liked more fancy names, but my husband had had parents who liked fancy names. His name was Sheldon. His older brother was Chester. His younger brother was Carson. So when the time came, he says, "I want plain names." I would have liked something better than Ann and Joan, because in every other language they sound the same: in Greek it's Anna, Yoanna; in French it's Anne, Jeanne. It's only in English that you say Ann and Joan. And my mother never learned how to say Joan. She married John, so it was "Jon" for both of them.

CE: Oh, okay.

RM: You know, she never could say "paper" and "pepper." It's very difficult to distinguish between the two sounds for a foreigner.

CE: Yeah. Let's talk about your parents. What happened to them?

RM: Well, they stayed in Athens, obviously. They were really—they were longing for me, because my brother had gone to the Congo, the Belgian Congo, to work, where he got—well, I don't know that he got it there, but the sun was very bad for him. He had melanoma, and he died at thirty-seven. He had married before that and they had a little girl, named Lily after my mother's name. And they had moved to Belgium, because he had a lot of people whom he knew in Belgium from the Belgian Congo, and he was the representative of the big machines, the coffee—the espresso machines, you know, the big ones that they had. But he died very early. His widow and the little girl lived in Milan, and she married a cousin so she didn't even change her name. She was a Modiano; she remained a Modiano. My parents—my mother looked after my father for twelve years.

He had a stroke and he walked with her arm, and my husband decided—that was really generous of him—that they would do better in this country, where we could take care of them, and if they became his dependents they could get medical care free. So we brought them to the States, and they lived with us. My father lived only three years; my mother lived with us for thirty years.

CE: Wow! So you really did have a close relationship with her.

RM: Yes. But it was kind of difficult at times. You know, I was in between my husband and my mother, and it's not a good position in which to be.

CE: No. No, it's not.

RM: But we managed, and my mother died just a year before we decided to move. She would never have been able to move to Florida. But he was a very generous guy, Sheldon.

CE: Very, very. And when did he die?

RM: He took care of them. Four years ago, in May.

CE: Four years ago, uh-huh.

RM: But I stayed here because I'm comfortable here. I have friends in the building. I have friends from the synagogue. And I continue—I have a pretty active life. I volunteer at the Tampa General Hospital, and I try to stay—what should I say?—informed of what's going on. I like it in Tampa. Tampa is a lovely city.

CE: Good, good. I do, too. And you volunteer at the Holocaust Museum, too.

RM: Well, it's not on a regular basis. They have asked me to stay to, actually, give speeches to the people—the students from schools. I want to show you the invitation that the Holocaust sent out—the Museum—because it's very interesting.

CE: Don't get up with this [the microphone] on.

RM: Oh, that's right. Yes, I forgot. I'll show you afterwards.

CE: But what we'll do, we will take a photo of it at the end of the—

RM: Oh, you can actually—if anybody wants to walk to the office, I have some yellow envelopes on the side, if you can bring one of those. I have the pictures in there.

CE: We can—when we're done here, we'll turn the tape off and then we'll get it.

RM: Oh, I see.

CE: And take a photo of it.

RM: Yeah.

CE: And let you talk about it.

RM: It's a very interesting photo of my grandfather with all his grandchildren.

CE: Okay, good. Good. That will be wonderful.

RM: And I'll also show you—talking about Sephardis, you know, there are many things that are different in cooking between the Sephardis and the Ashkenazis. I mean, some things are totally different and some are cooked a different way. I don't think Greeks—Greek Jews—ever cooked brisket the way you do here. As a matter of fact, are you familiar with the Brisket Brigade?

CE: No. No.

RM: Well, when a wife dies, the other widows ply the widower with brisket.

CE: Oh, okay.

RM: They call it a Brisket Brigade. (laughs)

CE: Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah. So, talk a little bit—'cause you mentioned it when we were having lunch—about the way the different Jews feel about each other, the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi.

RM: Yeah. You see, as I said, Sephardis thought of themselves as the aristocrats. They were, once upon a time, during the golden age, like Maimonides and Rashīd [al-Dīn Tabīb] and so on. But they claimed that they were the only ones who maintained the culture and civilization, which is wrong, because the Ashkenazis did just as much for culture. But Sephardis eventually turned into just merchants, you know. There was no more of that air of aristocracy about the Sephardi. Actually, it passed into the hands of the Ashkenazi, because they produced people like Einstein, you know, and all the scientists. But nevertheless, it did not prevent the Sephardi Jews to despise—to this day despise—the Ashkenazi Jews. We were better than they were.

CE: Okay. And then I wanted to ask you about telling your story and what impact that has on you.

RM: Well, you know, I was nearly in tears when I spoke about when they were rounding them up, because this was the worst thing I could have seen. The way they came, like a horde of savages calling for the people to get out, putting the dogs on them, you know. And these were old people; they could hardly walk, you know, and they were burdened by the stuff that they thought they could use. It was heart-rending. And our relatives were among them. And then there was—well, I better not talk about it, I shouldn't—about an incident with one of my cousins. But it's too bad; I don't want to talk about it. So every time I think of that, and especially when I went to the movie and it was depicted in vivid color in front of me—how could it be possible? I don't understand. What did these people do that they had to go, to leave everything they had for a lifetime? That's very bad for me. But on the other hand, I want the story to be known, to be told, because there are so many doubts already. Eh, it didn't happen.

CE: Yeah. Yeah. When you tell your story or when you give a talk at the Holocaust Museum or whatever, does it then make you think more about it?

RM: Of course. This has been constant with me. I've written so much, I've given so many—and as you saw in the papers, I try to vary it a little bit, not to give the same old

trite report. And one of the rules I learned, and probably you agree—definitely—is that you start with a bang.

CE: Yes. You always do that in what you wrote. I love that.

RM: This I learned at the NSA. You start with a big bang, you know, and you keep the interest of the people alive. If you start in—what should I say? The customary way.

CE: Like, "I was born in—" you know.

RM: Yes. It doesn't excite anybody. Yeah.

CE: Yeah. That's good. Is there anything you would like to leave the people with who will be watching this video?

RM: I don't understand.

CE: Is there any message that you would like to send.

RM: Oh. The message is, we survived. The ones who tell the story somehow survived, with the help of God, of society, of human kindness, whatever it is, and we found quite a bit of it—and we found some bad stuff, too.

CE: And I have at least one more question.

RM: Yes?

CE: In all the interviews that I've done, people have talked about having children and their children having children, and that being kind of a way that, you know, we survived and so forth. I think your girls are the only ones who have not had children—

RM: I guess so.

CE: —and I just wondered if you would talk about that.

RM: They're not particularly interested, either. I don't know why, because I've tried to write down what—they're not very interested. And they're the only ones, I guess, because I see others express their closeness. I'm close to them, but that doesn't mean that they're interested in my past. I'm going to show you also a pan that we used, the Sephardis used; the better one is at the Museum, the Holocaust Museum in St. Pete. But this is a concoction with matzo.

CE: Okay.

RM: And it's very interesting. I have the not so good one here—the better one I gave to the Museum—but I said I need it back this Passover to make the dessert.

CE: Oh, okay. All right.

RM: I usually invite people over to taste this Sephardi dessert.

CE: Oh, wonderful. Is there anything else you want to say?

RM: I don't know. What could I say? Sometimes I feel really very lucky that I had this kind of life. And even the experiences through the Holocaust were helpful, because they kind of shape you in a different way. I don't think I'm very much like everybody else. I'm not special, but I'm different, you see, because I have gone through all of that. You develop a certain personality. I have recurring nightmares, though.

CE: Do you?

RM: Yes. Well, Parkinson's makes you have nightmares and hallucinations, but mine is always on the same theme. I'm afraid of something. I am afraid to go out; if I go out, I take byways. I found myself fighting with somebody one night. I have scratched my husband's back one time because I was fighting against him. So I suppose it's not all free, it doesn't come free. It's a good story. It's nice to talk about it so that it will become known, but you pay a certain price for it.

CE: Thank you so much.

RM: You're very welcome.

CE: I've thoroughly enjoyed getting to know you a little bit.

RM: Thank you.

CE: And hearing your story was very special.

RM: Thank you very much. Yeah, I don't think I'm special, but this thing has made me feel special.

CE: Oh, you are special, very special.

RM: And I'll show you what I meant—what did I mean?

CE: Okay.

RM: The pot, and something else. I forget.

CE: We'll think about it. Thank you very much.

RM: You're very welcome.

End of interview