

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: THE STORY OF RENÉE MOLHO



I am Renée and this is
the story of my life.

I was born in 1918 in
Thessaloniki into a
Sephardic Jewish family

My parents, Stella
and Joseph Saltiel,
were Spanish citizens.



For the Jewish
holidays, my father
went to the synagogue.





Back then, girls didn't go
to the synagogue. We
stayed at home
with Mother.



My mother was
a happy person
and sang a lot.

I was calm, but
my sisters Matilde
and Eda used to
fight a lot.



Many Jews lived in our
neighborhood: there were kosher
butchers and bookshops.



In my school there were students from different backgrounds and religions but we stuck to the people we knew.

When I finished school I had taken typing and stenography lessons. I applied for work at an oil company, and I would have gotten the job had it not been for the war.



In October 1940,
Italy declared war
against Greece. To
help our freezing
soldiers, we knitted
socks and gloves.

Stupid Mussolini,
nobody will stay, you and
your ridiculous country,
you are all afraid of
our khaki colors

At first, our
troops defeated the
Italian army.

But in April 1941 the
Germans, who were
allied with Italy,
helped Italy to beat
the Greek army.

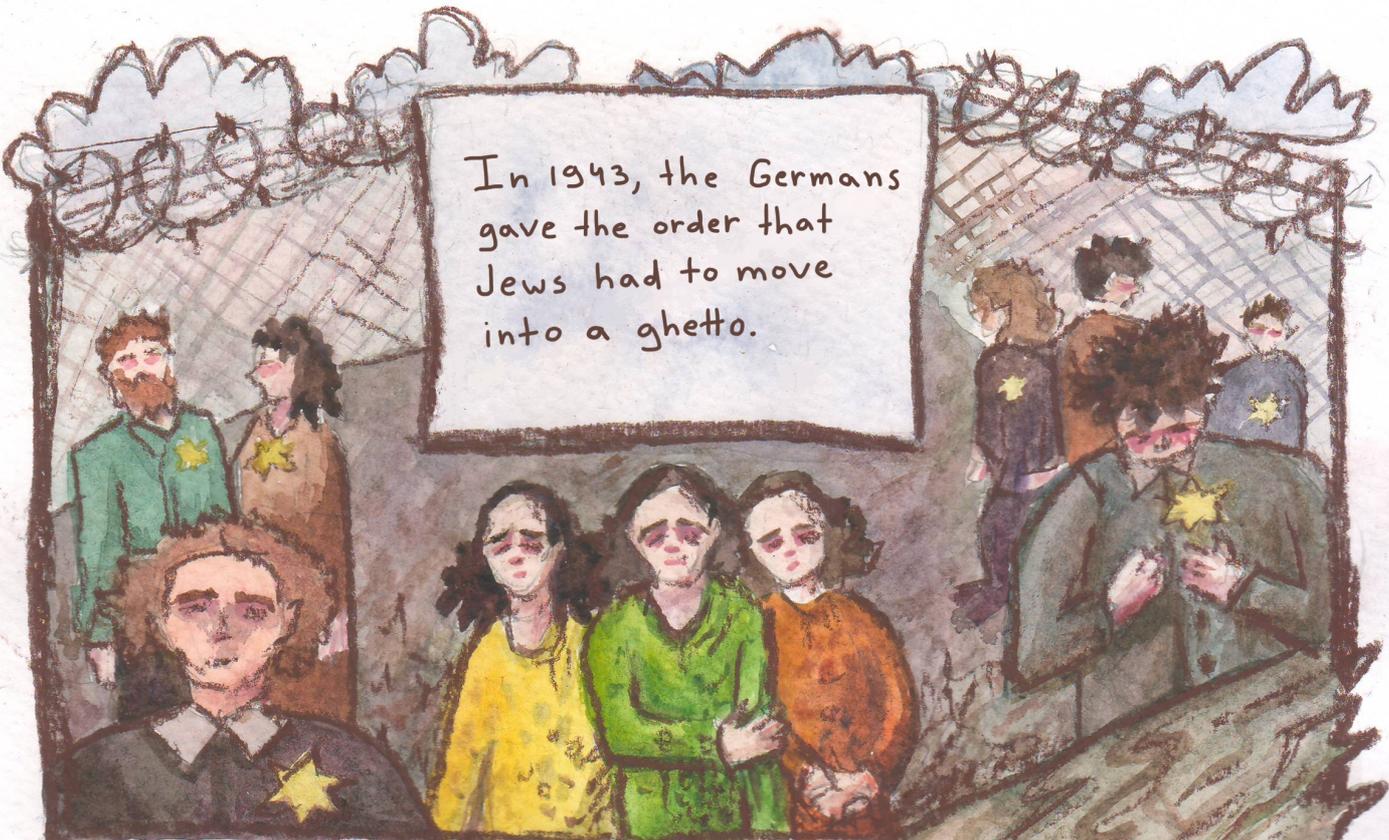
The German army
entered Salonika.





The Germans
confiscated our house,
and we had to leave.

At the baker we
were given moist
'bobota'; one piece,
not one loaf of
bread each.



In 1943, the Germans gave the order that Jews had to move into a ghetto.



Most Jews had to wear a star but my family did not wear them. At first we felt protected by our Spanish citizenship.

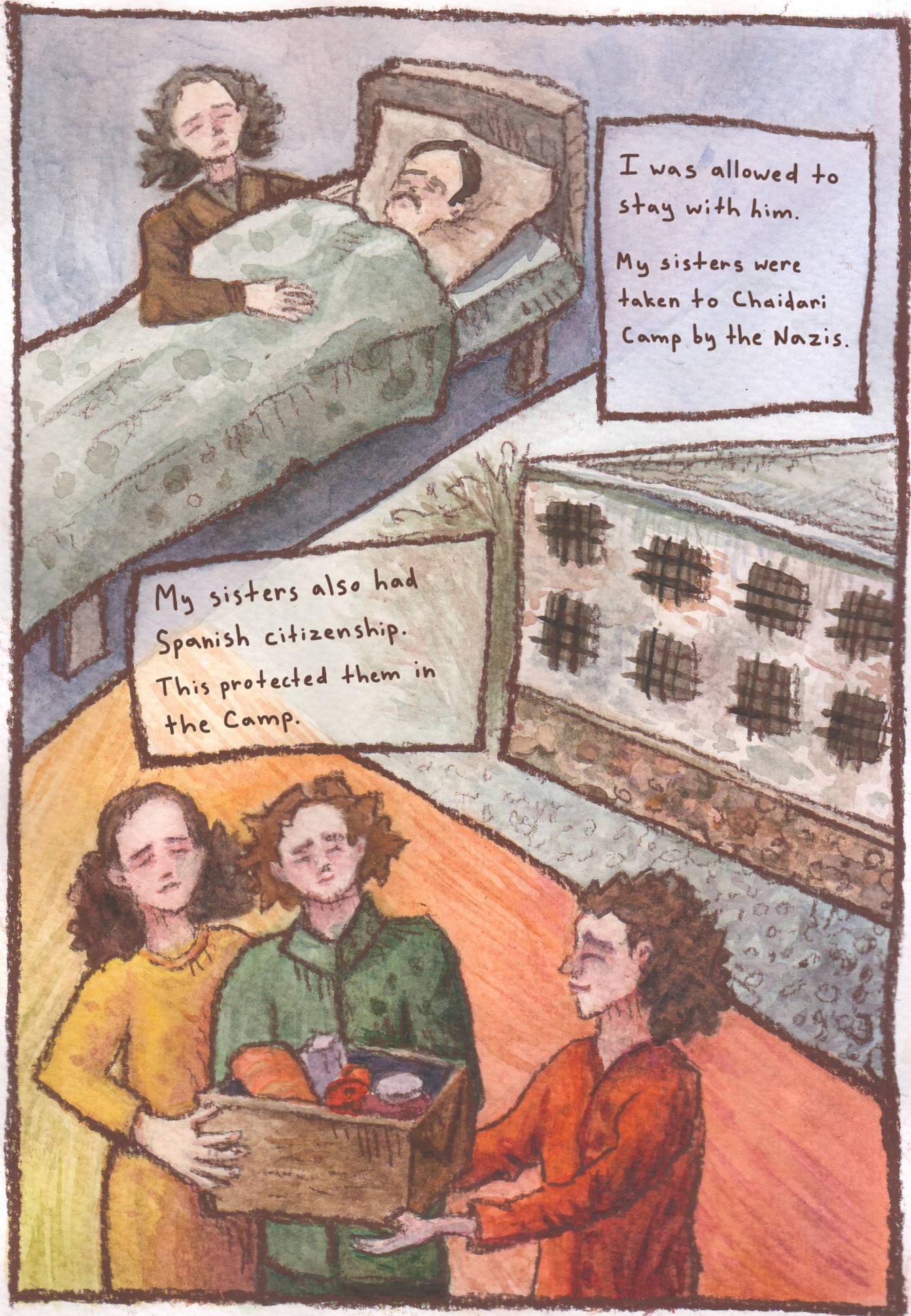
But as time passed by we became more afraid. We knew that the Germans could come anytime, knock at your door, grab you and take you away.

Most Jews from
Thessaloniki got
deported to Auschwitz
and never came back.

My sisters, my father
and I, however,
escaped to Athens.

We had to hide
and people snuck
food to us and
our sick father
but the Germans
found us.





I was allowed to stay with him.

My sisters were taken to Chaidari Camp by the Nazis.

My sisters also had Spanish citizenship. This protected them in the Camp.





After my father died, I escaped from Greece.

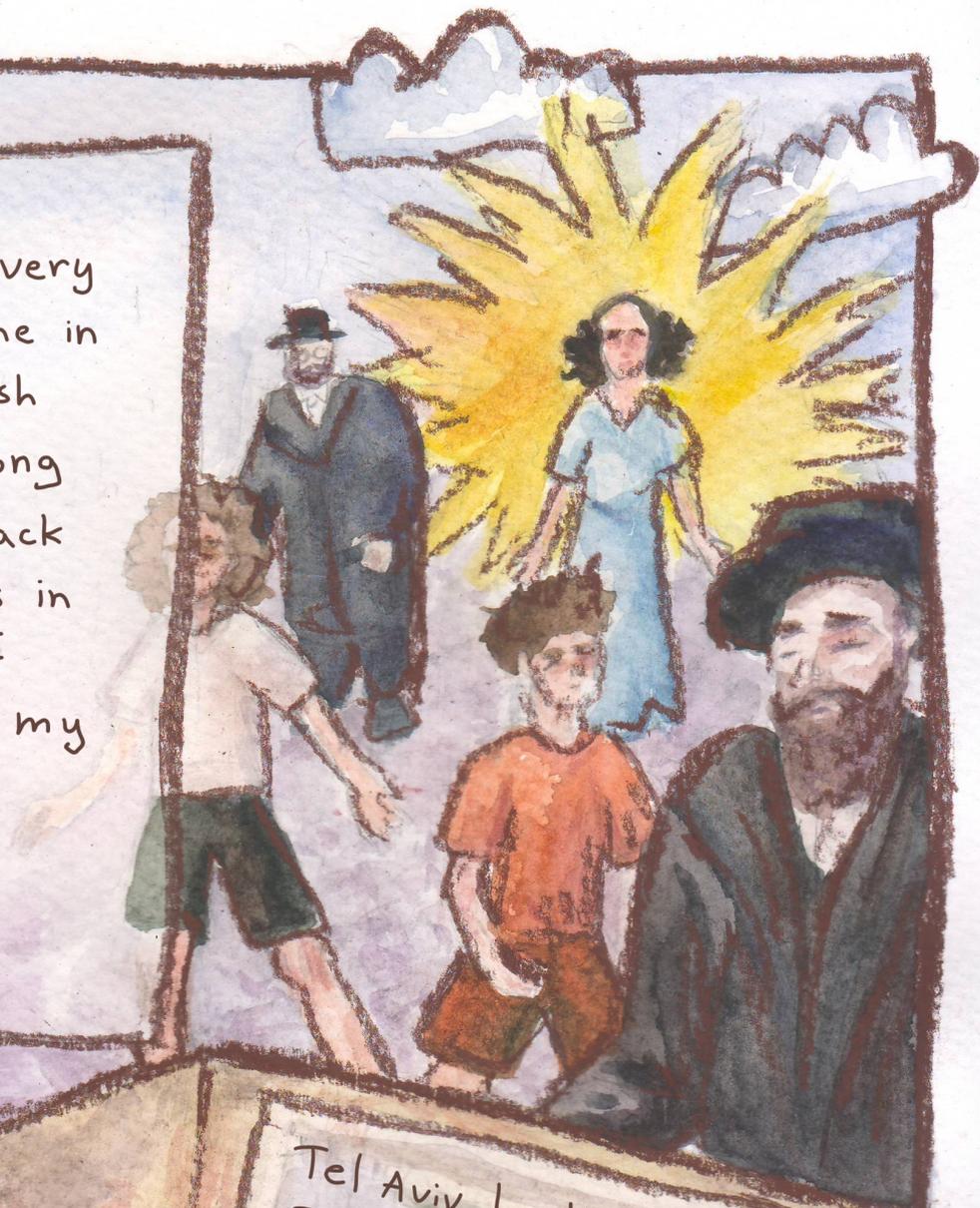


With the help of Greek partisans, we escaped through Evia and Turkey to Palestine, which was under British Mandate back then.



TEL AVIV

In Tel Aviv,
people dressed very
differently: some in
traditional Jewish
clothing with long
beards and black
robes — others in
shorts. But I
kept wearing my
clean and
ironed dress.



Tel Aviv had a
Thessaloniki Club,
Le Club des Saloniciens.
They were trying to
accommodate whomever
they could.



I worked as a secretary for the army office, and later at the bank in Tel Aviv, while I had a second job at an import-export agency.



NEWS WAR IS OVER!

Finally, the war was over. I remember a big cry of joy.





I learned that my sisters were still alive. Finally we were able to write to each other again.

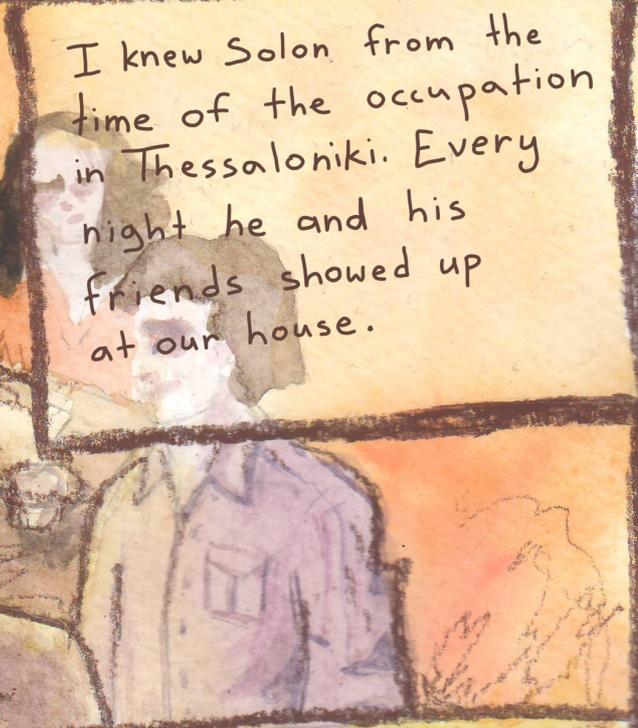
Thessaloniki

All I had in my mind was returning to my people. I was starving for the warmth of my family.

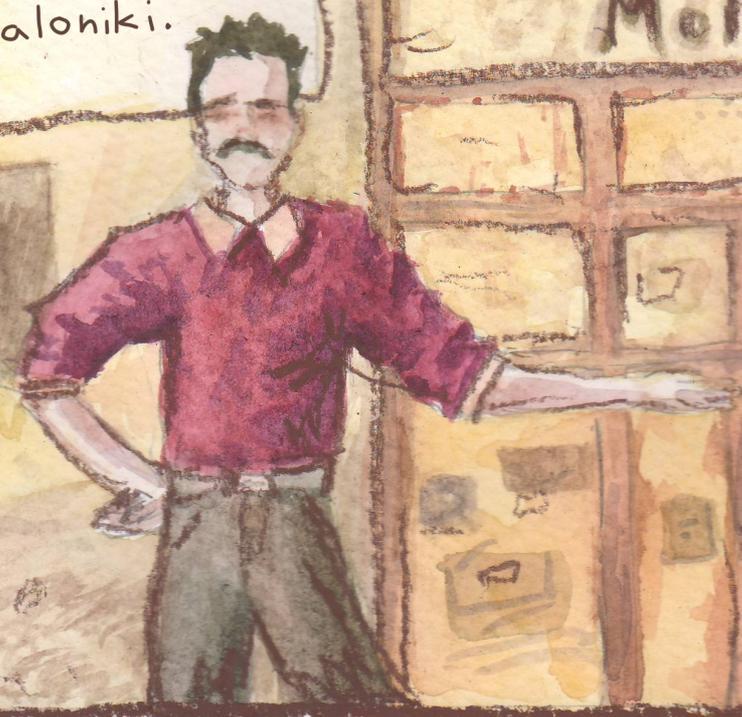


Haifa

I knew Solon from the time of the occupation in Thessaloniki. Every night he and his friends showed up at our house.



Solon was the son of the owner of a well-known bookshop in Thessaloniki.



Solon and his sister hid
with the Leon family on
the island of Skopelos
during the war.

Skopelos

Solon proposed
to me through a
letter from
Thessaloniki.

Renée Saltiel
29 Rue Maze
Zel. Avir

tesse nouvelle consentamment
pour une bonheur Espere
reconstituons ensemble
merveilleux avenir attend
impatiemment retour

avec tout mon amour
Salomon
Mollier

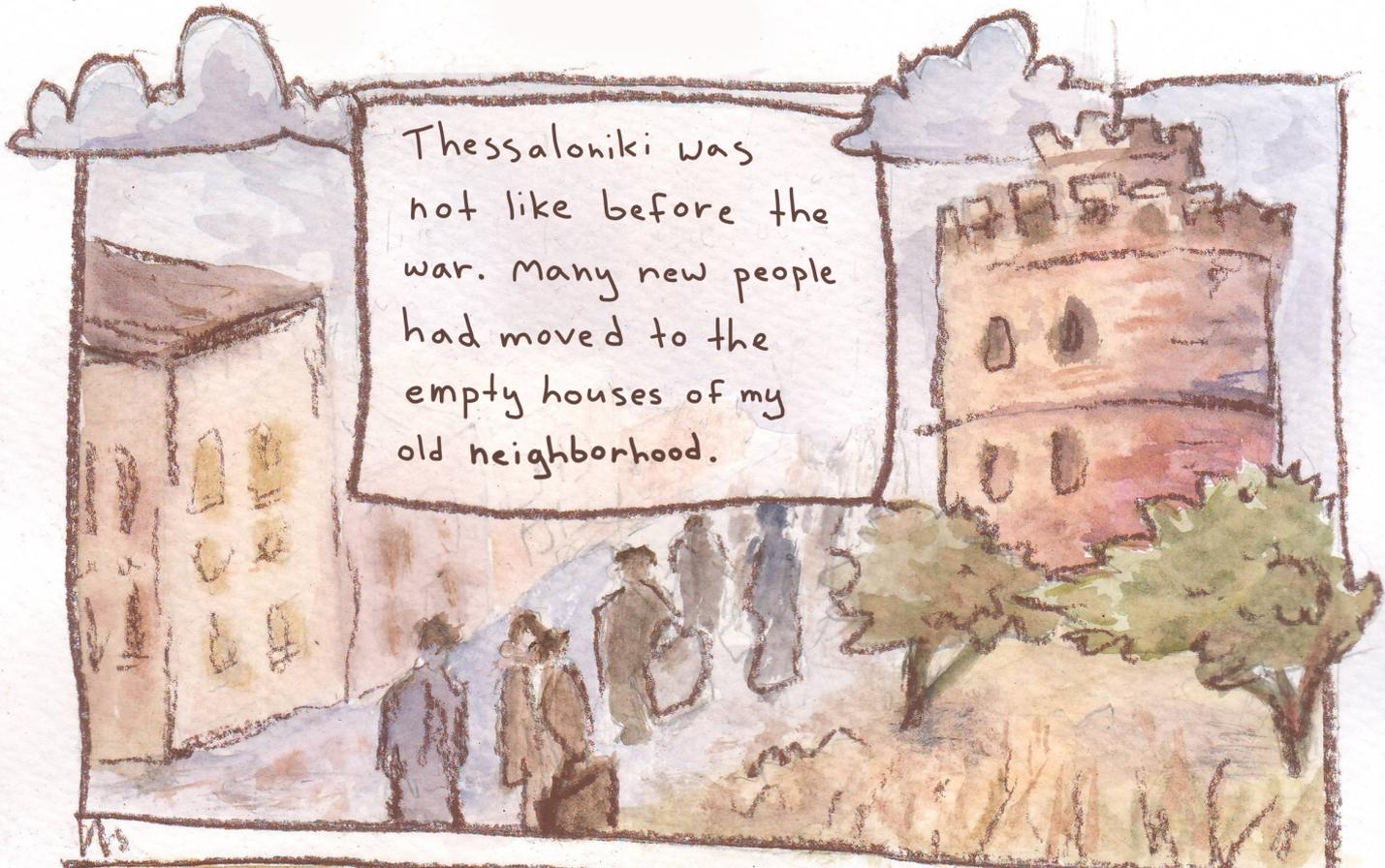


I travelled back to Thessaloniki to meet my fiancé, Solon.

Thessaloniki

Turkey

Tel Aviv



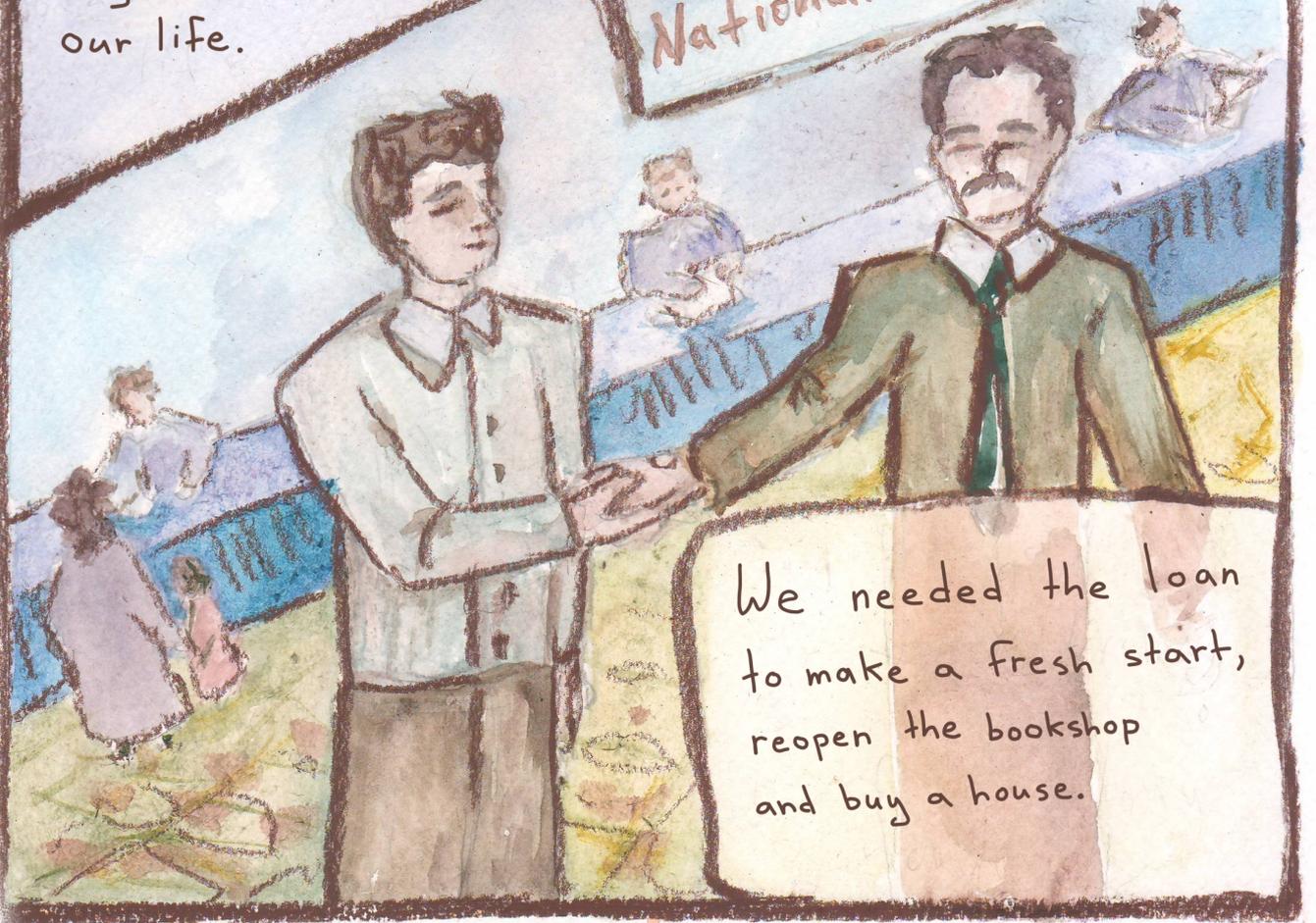
Thessaloniki was
not like before the
war. Many new people
had moved to the
empty houses of my
old neighborhood.



Solon and I
married in 1946 at the
Monastirioton Synagogue.



We went to Athens for a short honeymoon right before we began rebuilding our life.



We needed the loan to make a fresh start, reopen the bookshop and buy a house.

Our family was growing and we celebrated every new life.

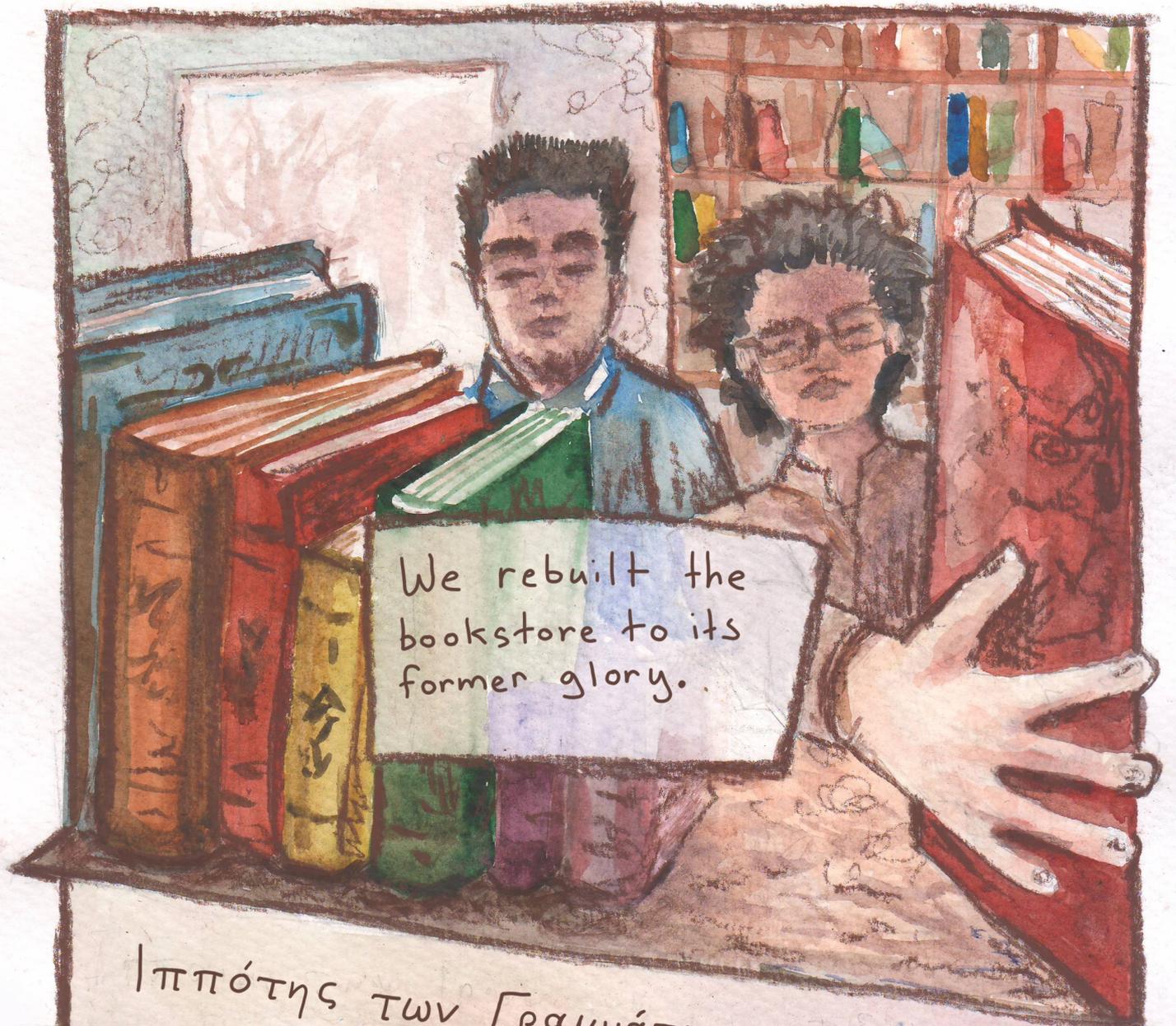


MAIR

Yofi
I have two sons and one daughter; they each have children of their own now.



NINA

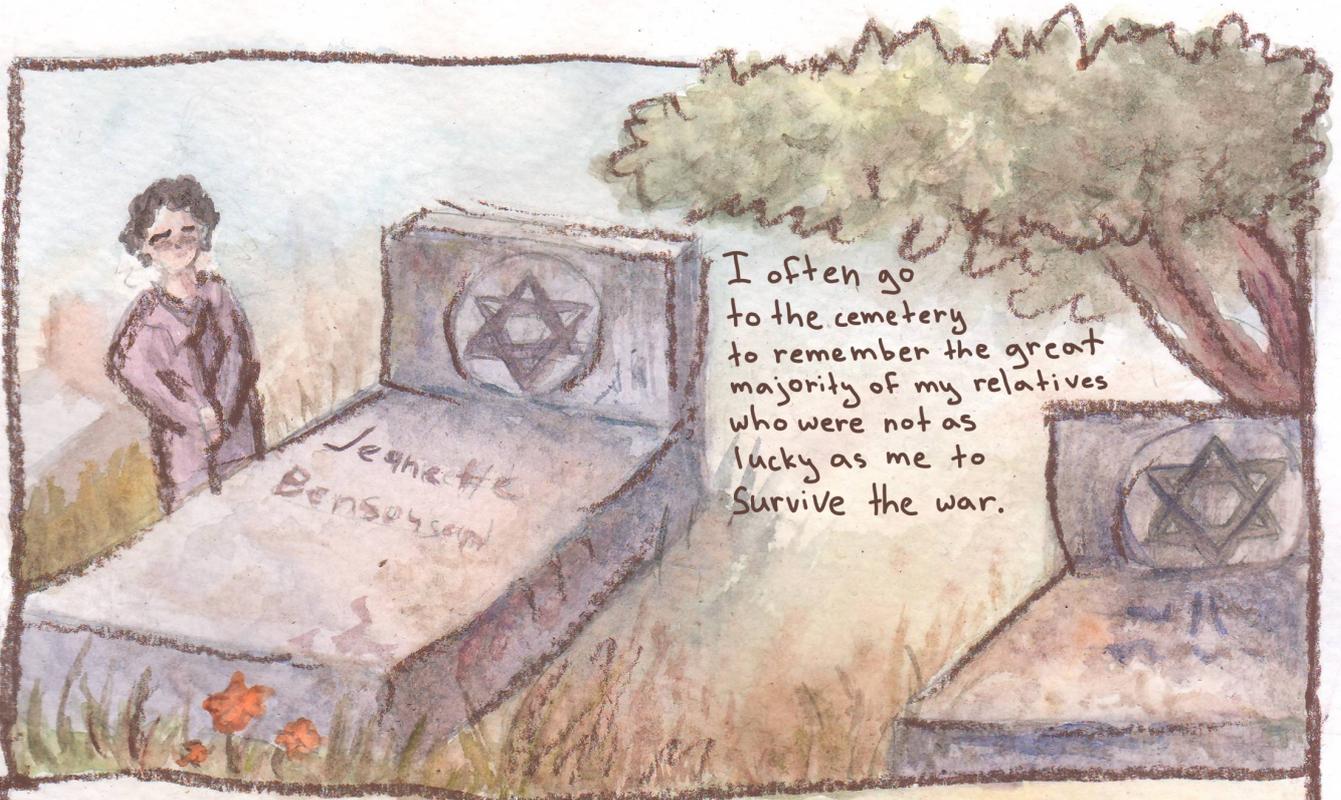


We rebuilt the
bookstore to its
former glory.

Ιππότης των Γραμμάτων και Τεχνών

We worked
all day at
the bookstore
and celebrated
the 100th
anniversary of
its opening
in 1988.





I often go to the cemetery to remember the great majority of my relatives who were not as lucky as me to survive the war.

I thank God that he gave me a good husband who loved me and three children whose health and well-being I wish for with all my heart, and I pray to God to take me sweetly.





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This graphic novel was funded
by the German Greek Future Fund
of the German Federal Foreign Office

