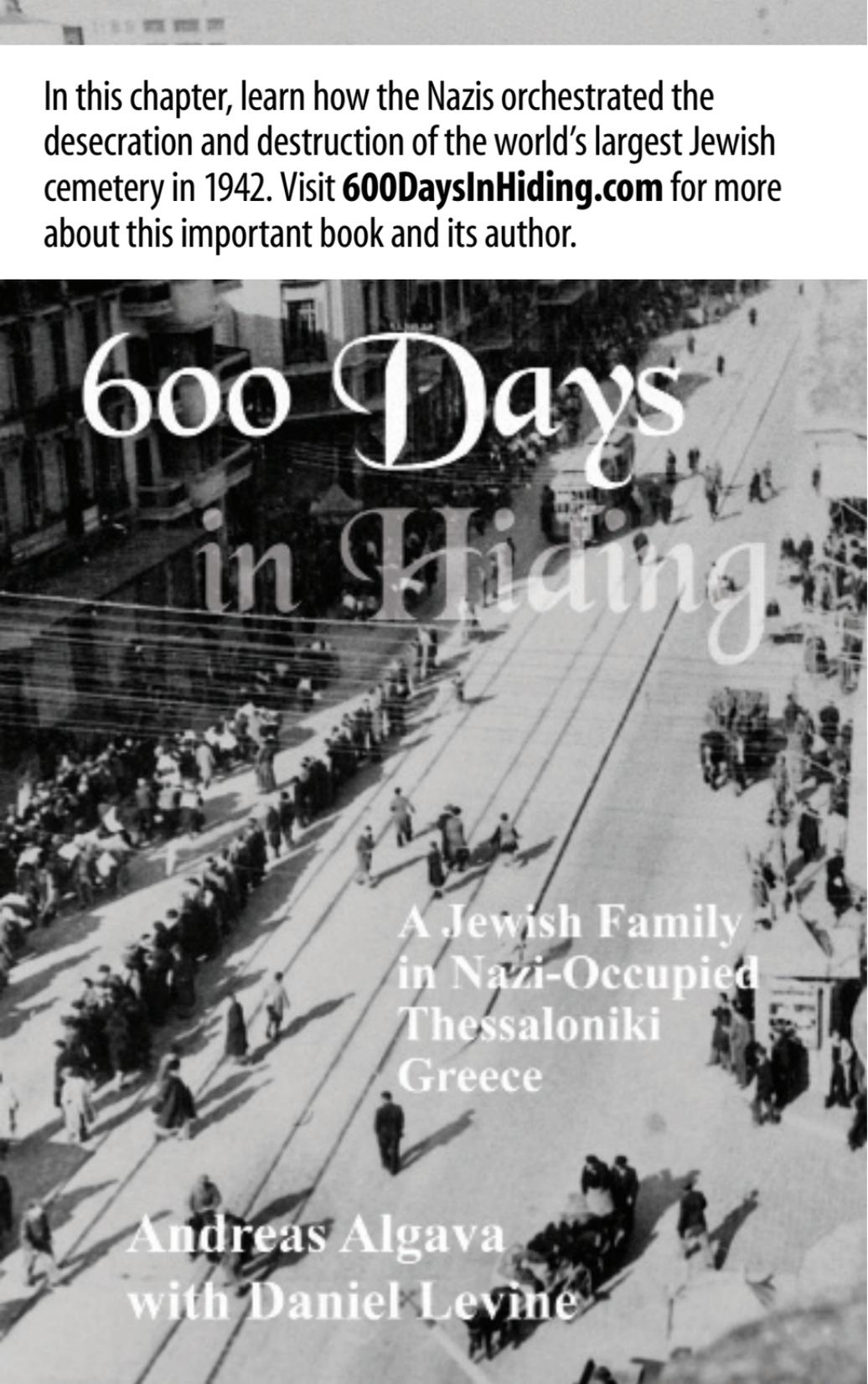


In this chapter, learn how the Nazis orchestrated the desecration and destruction of the world's largest Jewish cemetery in 1942. Visit 600DaysInHiding.com for more about this important book and its author.

An aerial, black and white photograph of a wide, busy street in Thessaloniki, Greece, during the Nazi occupation. The street is filled with people, many of whom are walking in lines or small groups. There are tram tracks running down the center of the street. Buildings line the sides of the street, and the overall atmosphere is one of a densely populated urban environment under duress.

600 Days in Hiding

A Jewish Family
in Nazi-Occupied
Thessaloniki
Greece

Andreas Algava
with Daniel Levine

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**Based on the True Story
of a Jewish Family
in Nazi-Occupied
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**A Survivor
of the Greek Holocaust**

**For Passion Publishing Company, LLC
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Chapter 22

A Half Million Graves

December 7, 1942

Thessaloniki's Jewish cemetery was the largest Jewish cemetery in the world and had grown to over 85 acres with more than half a million tombs. At one time the cemetery had been well outside the city walls, but as Thessaloniki grew, the cemetery became encompassed until it was practically in the middle of the city. Because Jewish law does not allow the movement of graves, the cemetery's location created a difficult problem for the Jewish and Christian communities. One contentious issue was that the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki bordered one side of the cemetery and was unable to expand its facilities.

The Nazis knew the cemetery was a major concern and they used this to their advantage by offering the Jewish community a chance to free the Jewish slave laborers...in return for a large sum of money and the surrender of the cemetery. The Germans slyly arranged the pressure to come from the Christian community, not the German command. The Jewish community had no choice but to accept the offer, and bought the release of 4,000 forced laborers.

The Christian city government quickly took advantage of this opportunity and the next day sent 500 workers to begin the destruction of all the tombs. Within a few weeks the entire cemetery had been demolished; grave robbers stole artifacts

and gold teeth from among the bones and skulls. Centuries-old Jewish gravestones were used to pave streets and for the construction of homes, churches, urinals, and a swimming pool for German soldiers.

“Please do this for me, Henri,” said Avram, with tears in his eyes.

Henri looked at his father and could not deny him. Henri was in near tears himself, upset with the magnitude of what his father asked. “How was it possible?” Henri thought.

“Of course, Babà,” Henri replied calmly. “I will do what you ask.”

“Thank you,” the old man said. “I just cannot do it myself.”

“The sooner I go, the better. They are opening the graves now, and I’m not sure what section they’re working on.”

“Henri, be careful. There will probably be looters and I don’t want you getting hurt. If you can’t do this safely, I don’t want you to do it at all.”

“I’ll be all right, Babà. Don’t worry. I’ll take care of myself,” said Henri as he stood up to go.

“God bless you, son.”

Henri leaned over his father, and gently kissed him on both cheeks. Henri was surprised to taste the old man's tears.

"God bless us both."

Henri walked out of the dining room and down the hall toward the nursery. When he got there, Andreas was turning pages of a book with Daisyka. Andreas heard his footsteps, and the young boy looked up and saw his father. A big smile blossomed on the boy's face.

"Babà!" Andreas called, happy to see his father.

"Andriko mou!"* Henri replied, equally delighted. "How is my Andriko today? Are you having fun with Daisyka?" Henri asked as he bent over and scooped his son into his arms.

Andreas laughed as he flew through the air.

Henri held Andreas against his chest and kissed his son on the forehead.

"I love you very much, Andriko. Always remember that. I have to go out for a little while," he said to Andreas, "but when I come back I will have a little treat for you."

Mou: My, as in "My Andriko!"

Andreas smiled and burst into a laugh. Henri smiled with joy. He set Andreas down on the floor next to Daisyka. "It's almost time for your nap," he said. "I'll be back before dinner."

"Babà!" called Andreas.

"Goodbye, Andriko. I love you."

Henri walked down the hall to the front door, putting on his hat, coat and gloves as he prepared for the cool wet December weather waiting outside.



Henri stood at the edge of the massive Jewish cemetery sprawling before him. The crypts and headstones extended for thousands of meters in all directions, a vast city of gravestones marking the remains of Jewish men, women, and children buried here during the past 450 years.

At one end of the enormous cemetery a small army of several hundred Greek workers were busy with shovels and pickaxes, tearing up the gravesites, pillaging for treasure. Henri watched with a mix of astonishment and horror as Thessaloniki's Jewish history was being destroyed before his eyes, forever.

"Dear Lord, please protect me," Henri whispered, realizing the ravenous workers would demolish the

cemetery quickly, feeling nausea at its imminent death.

Forcing aside his feelings and thoughts, Henri induced a state of numbness. He knew where Uncle Abraham's grave was, and he walked through the rows of memorial stones and marble crypts. The fragrance of moist soil and the decay of autumn's vegetation were strong in his nostrils, his shoes wet from the raindrops caught by the grass and weeds that poked between the graves.

Other Jews were carrying shovels, too, moving among the hundreds of thousands of memorial stones. In several places small groups were gathered to exhume an ancestor's remains. As Henri walked between the stones, his eyes caught the names of the graves' inhabitants in Hebrew, Ladino, and French. He twisted and turned through the centuries, through the labyrinth of marble and stone. Henri briefly remembered Allegra's dream, the long line of people exiting the factory carrying shrouded corpses.

He arrived at his father's brother's gravesite. "Abraham Algava" the stone letters read, "1873 - 1917". As he began pushing aside the giant stone sitting on top of the grave, Henri remembered a distant summer chasing chickens and ducks in the yard behind his uncle's house. The ground beneath the raised stone revealed a large curling earthworm, surprised at being discovered. Henri scooped up the earthworm with the shovel and gently placed it to the side. He then began to sink the shovel into the soft flesh of the earth. A light drizzle began to fall.

What are a man's thoughts as he digs in the grave of another? Time was suspended as the shovel excavated the years. Henri thought of his son and how someday Andriko would see his remains settled into the earth...as Henri would someday see Avram's.

Henri moved the earth more gently, and within the hour the remains of Uncle Abraham were reverently gathered into a jute sack. There, upon a gaping grave in the midst of a half-million other graves, Henri finally let his feelings overwhelm him, and he cried and cried, his hot salty tears flowing endlessly, streaming down his cheeks into the open earth.