

-TITLE- SIMONE MONNIER
-I_DATE- APRIL 26, 1990
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR
-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Simone Monnier is a French woman who taught at a school for maladjusted children in central France. After France fell to the Germans in 1940, she and others at the school took in Jewish children and disguised them as Gentile students. She also performed many other acts to save Jewish lives. She was honored at Yad Vashem years later by these students. To this day she still claims that she is not a courageous person, and did only what she had to do.

:80 Her mother was Swiss. She herself is Protestant. She was born in Switzerland while her family was on vacation. Her father was a French Pastor. She has two sisters, both younger. She was born in 1913.

1:10 She studied education at the Institute Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva.

1:40 She wanted to do special education. It was too difficult, and she was just interested in children so Madame Suberant (ph), who was at the same school in Geneva, hired her as a teacher.

1:70 She knew that there were Jews when she was growing up, but she didn't think they were any different. Her school had both Jews and Protestants.

1:90 Dreyfus (ph) of the "Dreyfus Affair" in France was a member of the family of a classmate of hers. She had some Jewish professors. She was very close to some of them. They had a great influence on her.

2:20 She was also influenced by her parents, and by her experience teaching at the institute for difficult (maladjusted) children She worked there for 35 years starting in 1936

2:90 She was satisfied by all of the artistic training given to the children. The work changed her completely -- gave her humility, and broadened her.

3:20 It was incredible how much the liberty and opportunity to

express themselves changed the children

3:40 Her mother was very passionate, but it was her father that they loved the most because he was very tolerant. Her mother had grown up rich, but her family had no money. All of her friends had bicycles and she did not. They never really needed something. It was harder during the war, but it was hard for everyone then.

4:05 She was able to do everything she wanted at the school she taught at. She had extraordinary liberty. Madame Suberant (ph) was open to everything. That's why they helped people during the war. "It was impossible to do otherwise "

4:40 She visited other schools in Europe for work while they were in England before 1939 she read in a newspaper that the Germans were putting Jews in concentration camps. She was surprised when she returned to France and no one believed her. She remembers round-ups of Jews. They heard about torture, and the regular soldiers were beating them. "It was so horrible. We tried telling people when we got back to France, but they didn't believe."

4:70 They had to do something but they didn't know what. As soon as France fell they started looking for contacts so they could help.

5:10 The question of the Jews presented itself right away. She went to go see the foreign Jewish children in Marseille. They were housed in a big house in Marseille, each small room full of children. They offered to take the youngest children back with them so they could get some fresh air. They took six 4-5 year old. They were starving. When they left her school they were restored, but they had to send them back so they could take others.

5:55 The children fit in very well with the kids in her school. It was sad because they had to keep getting separated from them.

6:00 The Baron de Rothschild had a house where he sheltered a lot of refugee children. They were asked by him to take some of these children into their school.

6:40 Once they had to evacuate very quickly because the Germans were approaching, The school was in central France and would soon be occupied. They dispersed the children everywhere--some in schools, some in families, some by boat to the U.S. Her school took 15 to 20 of these children. She's still in contact with three of them whom she knows very well. They are like her children. One lives in Paris, one in Israel, and one in the U.S.

6:85 Everyone in the school knew what was going on, even those whose parents were with Petain. A father of one of the students who was for Petain wrote her a letter saying "Are you crazy? Be careful of what you write."

7:20 It is not possible that any teachers in her school were against what they were doing. Three of the teachers had been chased

out of the high schools where they previously taught because they were Jewish. They were good teachers. The state had run them out, and they came to her school.

7:50 It was frightening every day. She remembers saying to herself one day on the way to school in 1944, "This is never going to end, it's a tunnel. We're never going to get out of it." It wasn't always like that. There were times when they felt more optimistic. There were difficult times though. There was a school near them - the Germans found out there were Jews and rounded up the whole school. Every night at her school they took all of the circumcised children, Jewish and Catholic because they did not want them mistaken for Jews, up to the mountains where the kids had made a cave to play in. They slept there every night. If there was a red flag the next morning on the school, they couldn't come back

8:00 There was once a roundup of all foreign Jews. There had been a warning on the radio to be careful of such roundups that night in the Lyon area. They thought they were in the Marseille area because they were halfway between the two cities, so they were not worried. They woke up at 5 am with the whole school surrounded by the police. There was not a single child in the school because they had placed them in the country for a change. The police asked where the 3 Jewish children were. They had a list and knew that there were three Jews at the school. She didn't know they had such a list. She wouldn't tell them where the children were.

8:50 They called the village where one of the Jewish children was and tried to rescue the child, but were too late. The police got there first. The three Jewish children were taken away with another Jewish girl whom they didn't know. They had been brought to Creche (ph), about 30km from where they were. They followed them here, but the police would not let the children go because they needed to fill a Gestapo quota or risk the roundup of French people. They were advised to go to Lyon and see if anything could be done there. In Lyon they went to the Christian associations, but they couldn't help because they had a lot of cases like this. They then went to see Lausee (ph). A little blond boy worked all night. He told them not to say that the children were sixteen because this was too old. They then went to the gate where the children were being held. They got the same quota story from the police, but they agreed to let all the children under 15 go. She still regrets that they didn't have the name of the other girl that was taken with them because they could have given her name as well.

9:60 They brought back all of the buses of children they were able to. They put them in an apartment and began to make fake identification cards for them right away. A boy of sixteen took care of the babies. It lasted hours. That evening French farmers and families came to get the children and take them home with them.

10:00 They quickly left there, taking their boys with them. They heard later that the militia had been there after they had left. They had saved children, but not a lot.

10:20 One of the Jewish boys went to take an exam and the woman correcting the papers said to Madame Suchard (ph), "Isn't he a little young?" His card said he was only three--they had made the cards too quickly. At least there were funny things from time to time. No one ever denounced them, they were helped everywhere.

10:40 They also hid adults at their school.

10:80 A young Jewish boy whose family was across the demarcation line came to see them.

11:00 She and Madame Suberant (ph) collaborated equally on all things. Mme. Suberant was mostly in charge of external relations with the authorities, and she was more in charge of taking care of the children. Another, Mme. Clef (ph), was in charge of feeding the children -- 100 kids twice a day. They didn't have things like butter. She herself became very good at doing the identification cards.

11:35 "We were not especially courageous. We weren't very conscious of doing this. We were so positive there wasn't another way to do it. There was no hesitation " Before the war she lived a very calm life. It was Mme. Suberant who taught her how to be enterprising and courageous.

11:60 She was very tired after the war. The school was in bad shape. They had nothing. It was only really essential things that mattered. She doesn't think she changed that much. She continued to work with Mme. Suberant after the war. She started to take more of a part in the directing of the school, but she didn't like directing that much.

11:90 She left the school in 1971. The school continues with her daughter, son-in-law, and two other educators. She never married, but adopted.

12:10 The best days of her life are now. She does more of what she wants to now. She really liked teaching. Her school was always full of kids who studied music and art. It was an extraordinary transformation of kids who learned to express themselves. Those were good years. Life is too short because there are so many things that she likes.

12:50 Children have to know about this. They have to fight for what they love. The children that they saved fought in the resistance in 1944. They have to be good with themselves first in order to fight to save others. She tried to teach them self knowledge, to learn how to live with themselves, and with others.

12:85 Both of her children are married

13:10 She adopted children because she wanted to have them and it wasn't possible. She got them when they were infants. They grew up at the school. They're 44, and 35 years old.

13:35 Every year they told the children about the school. Part of this was the history during the war so they told them what had happened there. They also have a lot of visits from former students.

13:45 It wasn't courage that allowed her to do what she did, but conviction. She doesn't consider herself courageous. She's thought of whether or not she would talk if she were tortured. She always thought she would, but she doesn't know.

13:60 Her parents did serve as altruistic examples. Her father was a pastor. Both showed a lot of courage during the occupation of World War I.

13:90 She was honored at Yad Vashem about 15 years ago by her students. A tree was planted for her.

14:10 She learned a lot but continuously. She's sure she's not the same as she was before.

14:25 She hopes the world learned something from the Holocaust. She didn't realize that they were sometimes put into camps first and not killed. In Shoah there's a part where they talk about a Polish village where Jews are all living in nice homes, and then are brought directly to death. "It's terrible. It's difficult not to have hatred."

14:50 She does not have the avocation to run after risk. She takes care of people individually, internally, so they can be strong themselves. She hopes this way, spiritually and emotionally, to make changes with each individual---adults as well. "One person who's at peace with himself does more than one who's agitated with himself."

14:90 "There are others like me, more than you think. The ones who acted were strong. When people want so much to do something a different force comes which isn't the same as usual."
.END.