

**BOHNY-REITER, August**  
**RG-50.030\*0031**  
**Two video cassettes**  
**In German**  
**Recorded May 27, 1994**

*Abstract*

August Bohny-Reiter was born in Switzerland, educated to be a primary school teacher, and then served in the Swiss military.

In the summer of 1941, he served as director of the American Quaker-sponsored summer Camp McShannet for 70 French refugee children in the Alsace Lorraine region. In the fall of 1941, he went to Le Chambon in south central France, and spent almost four years establishing homes for refugee children, and hiding refugees. He worked with CIMAD (le Comité Inter-Movements Auprès des Evacuées), Secours Suisse aux Enfants, and the Red Cross. CIMAD liberated 16 young people from Gurs.

In Le Chambon, August arranged for the local College Cevenol to provide educational opportunities for residents of his homes. One home named "L'Abrique" housed French Jewish children, among others. Another named "Faidoli" housed 40 to 50 children. In spring 1943, he opened an agricultural school. He helped protect about 200 children.

Several times, August confronted Vichy administration representatives, but always succeeded in protecting the children. Once, he was threatened with detention unless he turned over 72 children. None was turned over; some were hidden in farm homes; and others were helped to get into Switzerland. He was never detained.

Le Chambon residents were united in the rescue efforts. They were led by Pastor André Trocmé, who encouraged his congregation to maintain their basic values, even against government orders. The pastor occasionally "banged heads" with his church.

The head of the Maquis, the Resistance, wrote to August 40 years later to say that a connection he had made for Virginia Hall (an American working for British intelligence in France) had helped arm 850 Maquis, which had played an important role in the war.

August was honored as a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem in 1990, which also honored Le Chambon and the entire region, Le Plateau.

## Tape 1

**02:00:03** So, you would like to know how I came to do this kind of work. In 1941, I completed my education as a primary school teacher in Switzerland. My education was interrupted by military service which every Swiss citizen must do. When I finished, I learned that a staff member was sought for a children's home in France. I applied, received military leave abroad -- this was not entirely a matter of course -- and arrived in Pregny near Ancien Savoyen on May 7, 1941. I stayed there for two weeks and then I had to go to Lake Dancy in Talloires to take over a camp in which French refugee children were housed during the summer. The camp belonged to an American named McShannet(?), who had made it available to the Quakers for relief action. Earlier, Americans living in Paris sent their children to Camp McShannet during the summer, and now we were able to allow refugee children to spend summers there. It was very well set up. The American Quakers had no personnel of their own in France and had, therefore, asked the Swiss Coalition for Relief to Child War Victims whether they would be able to provide personnel from Switzerland. As a result, we carried out the work there. There was also a nurse with me, and we two worked at the camp during the summer of 1941. There were approximately 70 refugee children from Alsace Lorraine who could be strengthened during the summer in this camp. We had to close this camp at the end of September, and then I came to Le Chambon (Le Chambon-sur-Lignon) in October. I was in Le Chambon from October 1941 until the end of 1944 or the beginning 1945 and initiated my work in Le Chambon. As a teacher, I had always been geared toward peace service. I had definite problems with military duty, and was supposed to have other opportunities to serve my country. I was, therefore, very happy to take on this work and was able to work actively and positively for my country.

**02:03:00** Then the work began in Chambon. Should I simply give you the chronology, how this proceeded? We began to set up the second home in October. One home, "La Guêpe" had already been completed on May 16, 1941. This home was established through the initiative of Pastor Trocmé, the minister from Le Chambon. He wanted to do something for the children who were interned. He had heard that the children and youth had to be in the camps, and he together with CIMAD (le Comité Inter-Movements Au près des Evacuées) tried to build something. The Swiss Coalition for Relief to Child War Victims came to their aid. The first home was opened by CIMAD and the Secours Suisse aux Enfants. CIMAD was able to liberate 16 young people from Gurs and they came to Le Chambon. Le Chambon had a college named Cevenol, and so the young people were able to carry on their studies. That was the reason for building the home. The home was run by a Spanish female refugee, a doctor, who also lived in France as a refugee. There were others who worked as student aids -- an Austrian who had studied law, and other personnel who lived in the village. The home operated from May to October. Then we were able to open the second home -- "L'Abrique." We had taken the name from the "patois" spoken in this region. That is to say, when one is "à l'abri," one is safe, sheltered. This is the name we

wanted to give the home and that is why it was called L'Abrique. And this home was set up largely for French children who were social cases, also for Jewish children from France, and others, and about two-thirds were from the cities. They were supposed to be strengthened and were in the home from three to six months.

**02:06:00**

The first winter was very difficult since we had no reserves. We had no heating materials. We frequently had to try to purchase tree stems, saw them, and before they were dry, put them in the oven. As a result, we often had sooty rooms because there was no alternative. Nevertheless, we were able to withstand the winter quite well. There were times when we were cut off – Le Chambon is about 1000 meters high, on a high plateau, and it is often very cold in winter and has a lot of snow. This was the place, as my wife had already told you, where the girl came to us with typhus, and we had to take care of her for three weeks together with other children and without much room. For that reason, we had written to Rivesaltes, and not very pleasantly.

That was the first contact. Then in April, I had to leave the home for a while. There was also a Swiss nurse who worked there and I left her alone at the home, and went to Moliere(?) near Lyon and prepared an old castle to be used as a children's home for children from the camp at Rivesaltes. And my wife then simply brought these children and that was how we met, if you also want to hear personal things. Afterwards, I returned to Le Chambon. I continued to resist and the total willingness on the part of the population was so great – we always had good relations with Pastor Trocmé. He also continuously sent a representative from the church congregation and from the community to our discussions, and he searched all over for ways for us to get things that we needed. That is how we were supported there, and this situation always encouraged us so that we also wanted to extend our activities. We were able to rent another house, the "Faidoli". Faidoli is the name of a song that our children often sang and so we gave the house this name. This home was set up to handle 45 to 50 children, and was ready for use by some of them in October or November.

The heating system wasn't yet functioning when the third home opened in October-November 1942. At the same time, a carpentry studio was set up together with Pastor Trocmé's College Cevenol. There already was a College Cèvenol and now we had the Studio Cevenol. We could keep the young people occupied there. They were able to make furniture. We had obtained the necessary machines that were set up in an old garage. Even students at the College Cevenol came for handiwork courses and it was thus a highly significant expansion. It also was useful for us because Studio Cevenol made different kinds of furniture for us – buffets, tables – which were especially needed, and so they accomplished two things at the same time. On the one hand, they made furniture for us, and on the other hand, they learned how to do something, and it was this background that led to our later taking young people from the farms so that they could beautify their inner selves and could improve their living conditions. The studio began in the fall of 1941, and then the Faidoli, and then in the

spring of 1943, the Ferme Ecole was opened. The Agricultural school, or Ferme Ecole, had eight cows, chickens, etc., and vegetables. That was an additional way for the children's home to get milk, eggs, and vegetables. That was very important for us since we were offered a second possibility – to take on 15 young people from the cities during the summer who then worked in the fields, became stronger, and as a consequence had strength during the winter when they returned to their cities.

**02:12:00**

During the winter, we took in young people from the local area who had no work, and they learned how to beautify the interior of a farm house. There were also specialized courses, allowing us to fulfill multiple purposes together with the Ferme Ecole. It's actually amazing, when I think back, that an aid organization would have given the guidance and the approval for this work. It showed that we now needed the Swiss organization, that is, the children's aid guidance, and then we had the support of the prefects and the 'Department' and that wasn't that easy, but we had them. That demonstrated how well-anchored we already were in the area and that we had awakened a certain trust with the local citizens. That is why they had given us approval to do these things. The work then...

(Interrupted by a woman's voice: "So that was a completely open, official operation...") (The rest inaudible, but it is clear she wanted to hear about the clandestine attempts to rescue the children.)

Well, the needs of the children, the persecution of the children – that was in 1942. Now for a small addition to the official view -- that we were able to tap a further possibility, namely that we could house children during the summer and even for longer periods with farmers. We had around 20 children living with farmers, and then there was a home that belonged to the Salvation Army. They had run it earlier but were no longer able to do so and they also took on 40 children. That is, the children's aid society provided the financing, had the responsibility, chose the children, and so we had a fairly large center in Le Chambon. At the end we had around 200 children in the village. That was the situation.

**02:15:00**

Now in 1942, the persecutions began, and we experienced them as well. There was a demonstration by the students from the College Cevenol against the French Youth Minister, (Georges) Lamirand, who had come to Le Chambon on August 15. They handed him a protest letter and the church ministers also gave him a letter voicing their concerns that the young people were no longer safe. These were accepted, but nothing changed much. That was on August 15, and a week later the Prefect des Departements, an Alsatian Protestant – perhaps for that reason he had more consideration with Protestant Le Chambon – no one knows for sure. He came and visited our home. We repeated how concerned we were about our children. He reassured us that it was just about paper control – they always said that. That was on August 23. Two days later, we experienced another situation. At 4 a.m., our house, L'Abrique, was surrounded by eight policemen who wanted to control the children's

papers. They had a list of 72 people who were to be taken. There were about 50 policemen in four trucks who had come to the village to take these people, and the first action was at our home. That's where they looked for people; they checked the (house) personnel's papers and the children's papers. Now, we had already feared this situation, and the director of the Gespy home wasn't there at the time so that I was able to take some of the children between ages 12 and 18, who might have been in danger, to L'Abrique House in order to better protect them. They were sleeping in the dining room and were found by the police. The leader of the house search was a French Colonel from Corsica and the Chef de La Sûreté des Departements.

**02:18:00**

So, the two chief officers led the action in Le Chambon and they now ascertained that the children's papers were in order. We always had papers that were accepted by the Mairie, that is, by the mayor's office, even if they may have contained occasional inaccuracies and corrections, periods around birth dates, etc. The papers were in order and yet they weren't certain. Although they weren't on the list, they (the officials) were mistrustful and wanted to take the papers with them. "We can check this further in Quy (?phon) (that is, at department headquarters)."

I resisted and talked with them for half an hour. I also carefully threatened them to some extent since I could say: 'There are 10,000 French children in Switzerland on vacation, and if I were to report to the Swiss Coalition for Relief to Child War Victims that the children entrusted to them were not safe, that could have consequences so that children would not so readily be accepted in the future.' That seemed to work somehow; the talk succeeded for me. That is to say, he left, and said, 'I will get new instructions from Vichy.' That was early in the morning, between 4:00 and 7:00, and the telephone only functioned back then beginning at 8:00. So he had to go back down and wait until he was able to telephone. In the meantime, we prepared breakfast and then the citizenry (the friends from the village) came to our aid. As a guest in a guest country, I had to be careful, and also for the Organization. And that, all the help, so that some of these children could be hidden in the farms and others, in a kind of ladder from one to another, got into Switzerland, that was done largely by the citizenry under the guidance of the wife of André Phillipe, the later d'Ecole Minister of Interior.

**02:21:00**

She was responsible for organizing this in Le Chambon and that was nice. The entire village worked together. We did a little, but the citizenry participated and that pleased us. It was a real experience. The police remained in the village another four weeks. They brought in police dogs to search the forests. They threatened the two pastors, and the three aid organizations received a letter (stating that) if we didn't deliver the 72 refugees within 48 hours, we would be detained as foreigners -- they were able to intern foreigners. We communicated, discussed it and did nothing, packed our suitcases, but nothing happened. It was just a threat.

**02:22:04**

There was a little episode that happened to a Swiss friend, a young student who worked with us in the summer. He was outside with the children playing in the forest and was leaning against a tree while the children were playing ball. A gendarme came along, tapped him on the shoulder, and told him he had to search the area. He apparently thought the student didn't quite look like a native of Chambon and that perhaps he was a Jewish refugee and he wanted to give him the chance to get away. This showed that there were individuals here and there, even with the police. It was the difference between the pure Vichy police and the gendarmerie from the area – they were not the same! So, even that helped. The time passed, and they left after four weeks and not one of the 72 refugees was taken away. On the first day, they had us under surveillance in the Guespy(?) (one of the homes). They had taken Mr. Steckler to LeQuie(?), but on the second day, I was able to free him in LeQuie and take him back to Le Chambon. That was a victory for us, for all who had stood up for the refugees, for the children, but also the adults, and a common victory for the work of those who were there for the children such as the citizenry, the church ministers. So, these were some impressions from 1942.

(A woman's voice asks: There was a kind of tradition in Le Chambon among the Huguenots, and what I didn't understand earlier was that these homes, this aid for the children, was already established. Isn't that true? Before the war?)

Bohny: Yes.

(Woman: ...and so, in this community there were certain roles that one could play...)

**02:25:00**

Bohny: Yes.

(Woman: ...that weren't illegal.)

Bohny: Yes.

(Woman: That helped, right?)

Bohny: Yes.

(Woman: I want to ask a question, but don't know yet what...)

Bohny: You suggest it was there earlier. The Huguenots were a minority. They had to defend themselves, and there is also simply the question of truth. Is the truth only what the government wants to hear, or is truth what concerns life? One had to decide at that time, and if one chose life, one said what satisfied the government, and that might not have always been an objective truth, but in a war situation, one must not quarrel over objective truth. The Huguenots had to defend themselves. In that area, even earlier, they had taken in workers' children during the summer vacations from St. Etienne. Then, during the Spanish Civil War, they took

in Spanish refugees. It had become a tradition in Le Chambon, and for that reason we were able to carry out this mission together. The further expansion, that the Swiss Red Cross, Children's Aid, as it was called in 1942, came to Le Chambon, was thanks to Pastor (André) Trocmé. He looked beyond France's borders, had connections to the American Quakers, to Swedish aid organizations, to the reconciliation alliance. In the KA..., Max, what was that called?

Max: YMCA.

Bohny: to the YMCA. That was also represented in Le Chambon. Pastor Trocmé made connections with the Swiss aid society and extended that. And so, the aid society went beyond the local and national and that provided a kind of energy. The people could see: "We are not alone. The others will also come and help us." And that is the complete background, the total atmosphere in which we were able to operate in Chambon in this manner.

**02:28:00** (Woman: And what was it that Pastor Trocmé founded?)

Bohny: It's always the case with all organizations; they need personalities that form them. The organization is a crude, bad, (*schlachtig*?) affair, supported by certain people, and Pastor Trocmé was a conscientious objector – he listened only to his conscience. He couldn't simply do what his church, whose employee he was, ordered or commanded. He couldn't accept what the government ordered; he simply had to follow his conscience and that told him: 'We are human beings. We must help each other when someone is in need and then we have to be there and do our best to help a human being.' For me personally, there was also the thought that I was connected and committed to the idea of helping as a staff member of the Red Cross. The Red Cross is an organization that has certain directives, but behind the organization you find the tenor, Dunant's (Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross) basic thinking. 'One must, should war break out, whoever might be in need, one must help and do everything so that he can survive. It began with the war prisoners, with the civilian population and with this basic thought: I must do everything to assure that those who have been entrusted to me will live.' I wanted to emulate him and that was also the case with Trocmé. He was committed to these common human ideas and values and that is how he had to live. As a result, he occasionally 'banged heads' with his church just as we also sometimes disagreed with our organization, that is, with the functionaries who had to hold the organization together.

**02:31:00** (Woman: What did Pastor Trocmé say in church, I mean, on Sundays. What did he preach on Sundays?)

Bohny: Well, he encouraged the people to have faith and to maintain the basic values of their religion and Christianity, even against orders. Pastor Theis, the other pastor, always said "The peace that was concluded is no honorable peace; we cannot simply accept it." And so, although he didn't

ask the people to revolt in the church, he did encourage everyone to do his own thing, to have faith and to know that he is not alone. That gave the people strength, as they quietly went out of the church and knew, 'We are together and together we are strong.'

(Woman: Did he ask people to look at their own conscience in making decisions?)

Bohny: I don't think that was necessary. It was simply the case that they saw that he was there. He helped, and his wife – everyone there – and the people from the aid organizations – They all stood together, and there was no discussion. The people believed, 'We must simply do it!' That was the amazing thing. It was a very special atmosphere and it was beautiful, and the entire population was very connected with the refugee children and the organizations.

And a special experience that occurred again and again was the Christmas celebration. Pastor Trocmé had prepared a story that he wanted to tell at Christmastime and he gave everyone a part. There were the boy scouts, and there were those from the Salvation Army – the group; there were the 100 children from the Circle Suisse. There were so many different organizations and also religions that were represented at this religious Christmas celebration. Each group had prepared a special song and a special act or a poem, or something, and it all came together.

**02:34:00**

Christmas was truly celebrated together, and that encouraged the people anew. 'We belong together and we will fight together. We want to help each other and that is what it means to be a human, not like the rest of the world today.' That was the encouragement and that's why no words were necessary. Now emphatically, 'Think about your conscience!' And so on... He didn't need morale; he was just convinced, and he was a strong, powerful preacher so to speak. He could convince the people with their hard, gaunt faces. They accepted it and yet kept it within. I believe that is quite unusual.

(Woman: Why weren't there more people and communities that were able to do that?)

Bohny: Yes, that remains a mystery. But there must have been several different factors: The very region, the raw terrain there, the hardships. This was not a comfortable life for the people up there. The need to fight has been there for centuries. Life was not easy; one had to fight that and then defend one's convictions and stick with them, and that did perhaps shape them to some extent. There are certainly other areas in France, also in the southern part of the Cévennes (near Montpellier, Nîmes), in the vicinity of Guelphie(?), Valance(Valançon?) by the Vercole(?). There were communities there as well, in various areas, perhaps not so spectacular as in Chambon.



**02:37:00**

Something came together there. At the time there were about 28 children's homes up there. There is a special climate there that contributed somehow. But there were other places; they just weren't so well known.

(Woman: That was in the mountains, right?)

Bohny: Yes, this kind of activity could be better accomplished in somewhat isolated areas.

(Woman Interviewer: And the Gestapo wasn't far away, right?)

Bohny: Yes, the Gestapo, they were actually more in the background. They had their underlings who did their work, the French, the Flic (French slang for cop), the Vichy Police. The local gendarmerie were sent. They sometimes had to conduct house searches such as at our House Faidoli and those my wife had spoken of. Sometimes it was the French Police, one time the German Police. The Gestapo itself presumably worked out of the big center. They weren't involved in all the individual areas. But the others were their henchmen.

(Woman (in English): I guess I would like to ask something about betrayal – about denunciation – whether there was a fear of denunciation from others in Le Chambon.)

Bohny: Max, can you help me here?

Max: Yes, were you afraid that someone might denounce you with the police, or accuse you of having Jews and so forth?

Bohny: There was a certain mistrust of small circles where we were uncertain and held back somewhat and didn't want to show it openly, but there were definitely certain circles that we were wary of – a small part of the village.

**02:40:00**

We had another way of staying together – my wife told of the children and their music. We sang a lot in our homes. There was another 15 minutes of singing after each meal. This also gave the children courage and made them happy, just singing together. We also participated in the Christmas celebrations in the village. I myself conducted the village choir to some extent and also played the organ in the church at one time. The chorus members were, for instance, the butcher, the hardware store owner, the coal man, the vegetable seller and the grocery man. There was a natural connection and we all went home together. That's when the grocery man would say perhaps: 'I have a few extra kilos of cheese that I can give you,' or 'I have some coal that I can allocate, I have a small stock.' This is how the relationship first began, and we helped each other as friends and sought ways to solve our problems. This is somehow very special, this kind of atmosphere.

(Woman: Did everyone participate in these Christmas celebrations – Catholics, Protestants?)

Bohny: There were various – there were Jewish children, Catholic children, many different religions – among the youth groups. They were represented as groups and they celebrated Christmas as part of a group in the large church community in the village.

(Woman: How were parents and families who weren't there discussed?)

Bohny: There were further distinctions here. The children who could go home also had many problems, but they always had a contact with their parents. Then there was a group who couldn't write to their parents because they no longer had an address. Those were problems that had to be coped with and we continuously tried to make it so that they sense this. But in addition to the Jewish refugee children, there were also French social cases where, for instance, the father was in jail, or the mother had died. All these difficult situations tied them closer to the children that had no contact with a family.

**02:42:38**

(Woman: So, when you spoke of mistrust, you had a visit from a woman, right?)

Bohny: Yes, that was in May or the beginning of June 1944. The first invasions had already taken place in Normandy and that's when this woman came to us and was interested in our work. She had gotten my address from someone in Switzerland, who suggested she call on me. She said she was a British journalist who was looking into what was being done in all the areas. After a time, I noticed that she had other problems and other wishes, and that's when we began to talk about the Maquis (French Resistance). She was very interested in contacting the Maquis. I was not officially connected with the Maquis. I did have colleagues who were associated with the Maquis, who had connections, and also people in the village, and so I was able to convey this lady's wish, and that is how the connection was made, that she was able to get in touch with the Maquis leadership. And it turned out that she was an American -- Virginia Hall -- who later was honored by Congress for the service she was able to provide in various parts of France and other areas.

**02:46:00**

So she then discussed armaments with the Maquis, and the leader of the resistance movement admitted to me 40 years later – in writing – it was in the early 1980s – that because I had arranged the contact, the 850 Maquis people from the Department could obtain weapons and were therefore able to help free the Department. They played an important role in the war with this liberation. One simply has to provide the proper measures according to one's situation and that's what I was able to do. I myself never had connections with the Maquis, but that was necessary in this situation just as we could not have organized an escape route in Switzerland; that was taken over by the local population. And this is how this acting together, this working together took place and that was very special at this time.

(Woman: There was also a Dr. Forestier, right?)

Bohny: “Yes, Dr. Forestier (Roger Le Forestier) was one of the two village doctors. He had earlier worked with Albert Schweitzer in Africa. He lived near us by the L’Abrique home and we often had contact with him. He was something of an optimist and was perhaps not always careful enough. One time, he drove to Le Puy(?) and had taken two people with him. It later turned out that these people were presumably from the Maquis, and at the entrance to Le Puy, there was a police control. They (the passengers) left the car and let him drive farther alone. But at the control, a revolver was found in the car, and the doctor was arrested. We considered several options to get him free, and finally decided to drive to Le Puy since Trocmé, Dr. Forestier’s wife, and I wanted to achieve something with the German occupation troops.

**02:49:00**

I was taken along as a German speaker and as representative for the Red Cross, and we actually did have a conversation with a major, I think his name was Schmeling, and the discussion was objective and quite humane. We had the impression that the officer saw that we were concerned about our doctor. We wanted to convey that the doctor was no resistance fighter, and that he was only doing his duty as a human, and didn’t go and leave them, and that he simply had bad luck that this revolver was found in his car. The situation looked very difficult for the doctor because this was a court-martial action, and we were trying to somehow soften the case. Finally, he suggested: ‘Well, perhaps, if he is willing, he might work in Germany as a doctor in order to get around the action.’ We were happy about this way out and then left. Before leaving, we asked whether the doctor’s wife might be able to see him. They agreed, and we went out to the corridor and waited for her. They had a room ready for Mrs. Forestier where she could talk with him and they brought him in. I saw him myself with the marks on his face – he had been beaten – he had blue marks, and I saw that. Mrs. Forestier spent about ten or 15 minutes with her husband, and then we all returned to Le Chambon. That was shortly – I know it was a week or ten days – before the liberation.

**02:52:00**

Le Puy was liberated on August 19, 1944, and just before and shortly thereafter, I’m not exactly sure, the prisoners were sent north. We later learned that he never made it beyond Lyon, and that there he was in Barbie’s (Klaus Barbie, the “butcher” of Lyon) regime, and I strongly suspect that he too was this man’s victim. He died there, and that is the story of Dr. Forestier. I happened to be there because I spoke German.

I was also otherwise called upon in the village, later, when the German prisoners were nearby, and I often accompanied Pastor Trocmé in the military hospital, sometimes as interpreter, sometimes as Red Cross representative, and I also assisted during worship services that he held for the prisoners. The local population protested this somewhat, and he told them, ‘Now they are in need and they too have claim to God’s word, and I will provide my worship service.’ That was his position. He had his conscience, and acted according to his conscience. We were there for that,

and on another occasion, during a punitive action by German troops. They had come from Valance and were about 40 kilometers from Chambon with a small tank group, and already they had begun shooting at houses. We worried about the children, and we got together in the village – what should we do? I still remember the date – it was July 9, 1944. We decided to designate Le Chambon as an open city for children.

**02:54:00** That was made evident by the large number of children's homes – so we could declare the city as an open city. Then I also pointed out that legally, the Resistance troops had to leave Le Chambon during this time. It wouldn't do to come up against an armed Maquis fighter in an open city. This was slowly agreed, and then as a representative group including Pastor Trocmé, myself, and I believe, the mayor, we went to the Maquis headquarters. That was situated in a totally isolated area. We drove there and spoke with the Maquis administration commander. They considered this, and we were generally able to convince them. Then we wanted to arrange this, so Pastor Trocmé together with the mayor and I went up against the Germans with the white flag in order to negotiate. Fortunately, it was unnecessary since the entire column (of troops) turned around and went back some 30 kilometers before Chambon. These were some of the common experiences, aid actions and people involving Pastor Trocmé.

(Woman: I would like to ask what the song was that the name of the home comes from. Can you sing a little of it?)

Bohny: Faidoli, yes, oh, that's difficult now. You surprised me. I could have played it for you, but to sing it, after the talk. It is, incidentally, contained in the film by Pierre Sauvage (note: "Weapons of the Spirit"). You can hear it there, the Faidoli song. Like the song that was our community song, for all the homes, 'L'Amité,' that we always sang: (quotes from the French song).

And that was our background, and we tried to pass that on to the children. There were about 800 children who were in Chambon between 1941 and 1944 and who took something with them from their experiences in Chambon. So, that was something about this period. Thank you.

**02:58:01** End of tape 1

## Tape 2

**3:00:00** Bohny: You ask now about other actions, and about the personnel?

(Woman: As you like, and we have enough...)

Bohny: Enough time?

(Woman: Enough time. So, do you have other examples, stories from this time?)

Bohny: I spoke earlier about the 25<sup>th</sup> of August in Le Chambon, “L’Abrique.” That was a spectacular action for us, and we were happy about that, but we were still worried. We were very careful, and organized an alarm system. The distance from one house to another was still about two kilometers. So mornings – we knew that the police began their work around 4 a.m. Someone was always prepared, and we carefully arranged it so that if something was happening, we would turn the light on in a particular room or, if it were daytime, we would hang some bedding out the window, a sheet so that it could be seen from another area and know: ‘Aha, something is going on again.’ After a time, we also had help from the village. As I recall, a control group came one afternoon at 1:30, but the city council’s office had already sent a young man to me at 12:30 with a note saying, ‘The police are coming and want to see the so and so’s papers.’ So I already knew that. We then arranged the papers so that there was nothing wrong with them. We also had to protect our colleagues because we had, for instance, a Viennese doctor, Frau Schwamm, in the Faidoli. She is also mentioned in the book by my wife, and her husband had also been freed there, but could no longer work. He lived on a farm near the house and then, whenever the Control people came, we let Frau Schwamm and her husband disappear.

**03:03:00**

We also had a cook from the north who had come south with a very tall, lean young man. He was a Canadian, had been in Dunkirk with his company, and had missed the ship. She had concealed him, and then taken him through the demarcation line as a deaf-mute nephew. She learned that it might be possible to find work and lodging in Le Chambon, and they eventually came to us through the pastor. We needed a cook, and the young man worked for us as a handyman. He did housework, shopped for food, repaired vehicles, shoes, furniture, etc. Naturally, whenever German or French police came, we had to hide him. There were also some children who had to be hidden. We had a boy, Serge, who came to us from Paris. With us, he found lodging and safety. They came looking for him once, and the cook reacted well. She said, ‘Yes, you have found him,’ and told him to get his things together. Then she offered the policemen coffee and they drank coffee together. After 20 minutes, they said ‘So, now we must get back,’ and went back into the house and called ‘Serge,’ but Serge had already disappeared into the woods, and he remained there.

We usually had some idea where those in hiding were, and we searched for them, or we took a group of children through the forest and sang our songs. Those in hiding would hear them, reconnect with us, and could come back. This problem happened often. We had, of course, colleagues from different lands. I had already mentioned that we had different religions and different homelands, and we always had to be careful. Everyone had official papers, but on various occasions, the papers were somewhat ‘corrected.’ Even though they were accepted by the town council, we knew not everything was in order. These situations continued to occur for quite a while. One time, two young boys were taken out of the Cevenol carpentry studio. One of them now lives in New York; I saw him just a few days ago. We were able to free him. We were very proud

that we were able to rescue so many – that they didn't have to go away, that we could find ways throughout the entire area. But the main thing is that we worked together, and that is how we were able to do the job, just that we were able to achieve this. Although we were there as Swiss Red Cross aids for children, of the 35 workers that we had, there were only four or five Swiss, and all the others were people from many different nations. One could talk at least another hour about their various life stories. But we were happy that we could set the course in the right direction and that we were able to prevent a deportation. This was true both for my wife in Rivesaltes as well as for us later in Le Chambon. The number, how many, is difficult to say, but at the time, there, we could realize that they remained here because of our help. What else?

(Woman: And what did Yad Vashem give you?)

Bohny: Yes, that made us very happy. We were in Le Chambon in 1990, and not just Le Chambon, but the entire region, Le Plateau, was honored by Yad Vashem. The Israeli Ambassador to France himself came to Le Chambon, and I found that very nice, that the entire population was honored, not just the Protestants. There were also many Catholic families who helped. I had said that at the Christmas celebration, it always went further, and the entire action was not just a Protestant action. The OSE (French-Jewish Humanitarian Organization) also worked up there, and many helped, and it was therefore only right that this tribute for the village should take place up there. And then we, as individuals, were also honored, and I found that very special. I was a 'Chambonnais' there. I was a part of Le Chambon, someone who had achieved something special.

Then, just a month ago, we were in Jerusalem, and met with some of these 'comeback kids,' who had been freed as a direct result of my wife's action, and their children and grandchildren. That was a very meaningful encounter. I understand that the people from Yad Vashem who are trying to maintain it, don't just want to show lists of victims of horrible people, but also people who at the time simply did what should have been done.

I had resisted this for a long time, but then I became convinced that this too was right, and the meeting with young Israelis in Jerusalem was for me and for my wife very, very impressive and I am thankful that we were still able to experience that."

(Woman: It's important, as you say, for the young people especially, to see that one can make a difference. One doesn't have to do everything, like---. And it is truly amazing what can be done when all stand together.)

Bohny: That's nice, and it was a wonderful experience for us, and one that we will always remember. It's still intensive. As you can see, we came to Washington 52 years later to talk about it!

(Woman: Thank you very much.)