

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Simone Weil Lipman

July 3, 1990

RG-50.030*0136

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Simone Weil Lipman, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 3, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

SIMONE WEIL LIPMAN

July 3, 1990

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

01:15:03

Q: All right. Would you -- sorry about that. Would you tell me your name, full name, again, please?

A: My full name is Simone Marguerite Lipman. My maiden name was Weil -- W-E-I-L. Simone Weil.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was actually born in a very little village in Alsace, near Strasbourg. I was born on April 22nd, 1920.

Q: And what was the name of the village?

A: The name of the village was Ringendorf. In spite of the fact that it was so small that it didn't even fit on the -- doesn't appear on most maps, it had a Jewish community. It had a synagogue which, of course, was destroyed during the war. And I -- the house in which I was born is in shambles, but it's still there. My family moved to Strasbourg in -- when I was three years old. My father was a sheep raiser, a very unusual kind of a profession for -- occupation for a Jew. His father, whom I never knew, was a butcher. They're all family of Jewish butchers, but he broke out of there, 'though he had barely, probably, a sixth grade education, and he became one of the most prominent sheep-breeders in the east. So I grew up in Strasbourg, which was a vibrant, vibrant and dynamic, Jewish community. I have a brother -- I should say, I had a brother, because he died some 14 years ago after losing his son in the Yom Kippur War in Israel. My brother was just a year younger than myself, and both of us were very active in, in the Jewish youth movement, which were the Jewish scouting movement, Les Éclaireurs Israélites de France.¹ Les "ÉIF," as we called them.

01:02:20

And I'm going to refer to them many times in this hour to come. I also got a very solid Jewish education there -- very unusual for girls my age. I went to Talmud Torah all through my high school, and was very active in things Jewish. And particularly, as I said, in the Jewish youth movement, the scouts, where I was a leader and had leadership training. I went into the lycée,² like all kids my age. I got a good classical education, I suppose. In those days, it was the typical classical education: studying Latin and Greek and philosophy, whatever. But when I finished high school and got my baccalaureate in 1938, I wanted to become a physicist. But somehow I was talked out of it, because the writing was on the wall, and somehow was told that was not a thing to do for a Jewish girl, and that it would be better in -- to go into something more practical. And so I went into early childhood education, and I'm stuck. I mean, I never moved away from that. So I got one year of training, and that's all.

¹ The Israeli Scouts of France (French).

² French grammar or high school, funded by the State (French).

But already in 1938, while the Munich Agreements and the debates were going on, my parents sent me to safety with my grandmother -- then very close to 80. And I went somewhere in the south of France with her for just a short period. Then things calmed down again and I went back to Strasbourg. And we stayed in Strasbourg. By 19 -- by the end of the summer 1939, of course, we knew war was coming. And again, I was shipped to the center of France with my grandmother. I was eighteen years old. But the safety of my grandmother was utmost. That was my ma -- paternal grandmother, lived with us. And I was sent down south to take care of her.

01:06:04

In the meanwhile, Strasbourg, which was the most -- considered the most exposed city of France in spite of the Maginot Line -- was completely evacuated. All the population of Strasbourg was evacuated and sent down to the to the Périgeaux, to the Department of the Dordogne. But somehow, because my parents had their own private means, they did not join the flow of refugees going down south and they went near Nancy, where they rented a house. Now, here I am south with my grandmother and -- when things settled down. But because you had relatives, somehow it was they were able to get in touch with me. And so I returned to Blâmont, where my parents were living, with my grandmother. And there we were waiting for the war to finish. We had just with us whatever we needed. And when the winter came, we needed some more clothes. And I remember to this day, going with a "safe-conduct" -- that what you call it? A "sauf-conduit."³ And we went into Strasbourg, my brother and I. It was a ghost town with just cats and dogs in there, and we got some winter clothes and went back to Blâmont. In the meanwhile, I took a job in Paris, in, in a private school, to -- because I had had some training in early childhood education. And I worked there, while the bombs, the bombings were starting, and taught in the shelters, and so forth and so on. But that lasted a very short period, because my mother took sick, and I returned to Blâmont in the spring of 1940, just in time for the invasion. And so we were in -- I think the invasion is four -- the fifth or sixth of May 1940. My very religious family had prepared everything for Shabbat, and the first time in their life, they had to take to the road on the Shabbat. And here we were, loading as much as we could in a car and taking off direction unknown, because the Germans were -- had crossed over. Coming through Belgium, Holland, and crossing over. And we were very close to the border, so we left. As a matter of fact, a neighbor of ours had a car. Was a crippled lady and her daughter. And nobody to drive the car. And I had had two lessons in driving, so I took the wheel, and followed my brother with... And we drove for five days and five nights. We drove with the bombings going on. These were convoys of people just carrying with them whatever they could. We were fortunate we always find a room for my grandmother. But anyway, we ended up in the somewhere near Vichy, of all places, and we heard that France had surrendered. This was June 6th, 1940. And here we were. Couldn't go any back. Couldn't go any forward. So we stopped. And we waited to see what would happen. What would happen was that all the Jews from Alsace were expelled because France was divided into two zones: the northern

³ Safe-conduct (French).

part and the southern part, with a demarcation line in between. But Alsace and Lorraine were annexed, and became Germany -- became German right away.

01:08:38

Like they had done so many times before -- before the World War II, before World War I, and...and so on. And so all the Jews from Alsace were expelled. And relatives were -- were coming down over the demarcation line. And my father and my brother managed to find a farm, that is where -- the house of a guard, in a big chateau in the southwest of France in Périgeaux, in the free zone. And that's where my family settled for the rest of the war. there were, there was -- there were my parents, my grandmother, my brother, myself; and then two uncles, two aunts, two cousins and two German men who had come -- had escaped from the -- from Germany. And we took them on...on the farm. One of my great guilts about that period is that I wasn't -- I didn't know what was going on. We were -- we felt safe in this farm, where we were going to wait. We were going to have food. And I really didn't know what was going on. And my family was not very new, were not -- wasn't oriented to this kind of thing. And I was -- we were surviving there. I was milking the cows, literally. One morning the gendarme⁴ came -- the French police, the French gendarme -- and asked for our two German men. They were rounding them up. And I was so unaware of what was going on that I went to call them. But one was smart enough, aware enough, to jump out of the back in the woods and disappear. And the other one, of course, they took along. To this day I don't know what happened to him. The Jews had to register in the south of -- we never had to wear the, the star in the south of France, but as Jews we all had to register with the Commisariat aux Affaires Juives⁵ -- the, the special office for Jews. And my parents registered. I suppose I did, too, although I don't remember that particularly. But somehow during this first year there, I got a call -- I got a, I got a letter. I think it was a letter. I don't think we had a phone. Certainly we had no transportation. We had no phone. And I got a call from one of my former leaders in the Jewish scouting movement. And I'm going to mention her name, because she's so well known: Andrée Salomon is known by everybody for her incredible work that she has done in rescuing Jewish children during the war. And had already started doing so in Strasbourg, when all -- when German Jewish parents started to send children across the border for us to... And they were placed in families throughout Alsace. And Andrée was already the person to take care of them, and to, to see to their safety. How she got in touch with me, I will never know because unfortunately she died a few years ago, before I ever really cleared this up. But she said they -- I was needed in one of the camps, and explained the situation. And this is the first time I knew about camps. And to this day, it's a great guilt that I carry, that I didn't know about these camps. But I packed and I left. Not very much support from my family. I was very distressed because my mother was not terribly well, had taken very hard all these changes in leaving Strasbourg. But I left. Of

⁴ Soldiers of the Police Militia (French).

⁵ The correct name of this bureau is: Commisariat Général aux Questions Juives [Commission for Jewish Affairs] (French).

course, there were plenty of people on the farm. And I, and I just packed my things, and I went to Rivesaltes. Now, I don't know if you want me to go into any explanation as to what Rivesaltes was. I'm sure you know about Rivesaltes, but I didn't know. And I went there, and became a resident -- a worker for OSE.⁶ At that time, OSE had -- of course, Madame Salomon sent them over to there -- another worker, Vivette, and a doctor, Doctor Malkin. And then there were other organizations that, like the OSE, had resident workers there. There was the Unitarians, the Quakers, the CIMADE,⁷ and a number of other rescue agencies -- Secours Suisse,⁸ particularly. The Swiss Relief Agen...

01:13:48

I'm not sure exactly what it was called. And the primary job of these agencies was to help improve the conditions of the people there, because the camps hygienic and physical conditions were beyond descriptions. The camp was situated in an area where what I remember mostly is the wind blowing -- this hot wind called "La Tramontane,"⁹ which, the people being so weak from malnutrition, they just rolled along with the wind. They couldn't, they couldn't walk in the wind. Now, in the camp there was still some Spanish refugees from the Franco wars, and in the camps were all the Jews that had been deported from Rhineland, from areas along the Rhine, on the -- in Germany. Some of them had already been in Gurs, another very infamous camp in the southwest of France, and transferred to Rivesaltes. After a year of internment, they were in very weakened condition already. Because, although as I understand it the food that was provided was according to the Geneva Convention, but much of it disappeared on the black market. In addition to which, there wasn't much food, period, in France. And one of the jobs of OSE, which was originally actually a medical social agency, was to provide extra rations for the people. So that became one of the important tasks of OSE, to distribute whatever it could. Some day it was milk from the Secours Suisse. Sometimes it was dates. Sometimes it was a handful of olives. And always a little bread that we had to divide. I shall never forget entering into the barracks and dividing the breads in eight pieces. And how can you make them exactly equal? So we put numbers of them, so that it was like a, a lottery for people to get the piece of bread. So that no one would be slighted, because fights would erupt around the size of a piece of bread. I remember handing a man in the barrack a piece of bread and his just falling back. And he was dead. That was the condition of the adults. And, of course, the men lived in their own barracks, and the women in their own.

01:16:06

⁶ Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants [Organization for Children's Rescue] (French).

⁷ Comité d'Inter-Mouvement auprès des Evacués [Committee of Inside-Movement related to Evacuants] (French).

⁸ Swiss Rescue (French).

⁹ North wind; Tramontana (French).

And the children, we tried to keep them in special ilôt¹⁰ where we kept the children, and tried to provide as much as we could for them in terms of extras. A lot of little activities, and so on. My -- but the particular purpose for my going to Rivesaltes was to take care of the children. Not so much the administrative work to which I'm going to come a little bit later. Oh, I did food rationing, this food ration distribution; but I took care of the children. I remember the first Saturday afternoon, Shabbat afternoon, we gathered. I had two hundred and eighty kids for one Oneg Shabbat.¹¹ And I've been trying to do something in one, one big barrack. But there were wonderful people among the internees. There were some people who -- whose moral fiber was just such that they wanted to do something for the others. So there were teachers, there were rabbis, there were people who, who lent a hand. And we tried to provide whatever we could and -- with nothing. Singing, dancing --whatever we could. I also created some groups of girl scouts. I mean, girl scouts in a camp! It sounds ridiculous when I think of it today, but that's all I knew in, in, in activities. So I created girl scouts. But when I have the pictures to show you later, I had -- we organized activities. In the meanwhile, OSE proceeded to get the liberation from the camp of the children under 16. And some over 16 as well, because you could just work around that a little bit. The procedure is well-known today. I think that the way it was done it was that you could get the permissions through some very cooperating officials in the Department de Hérault, where Perpignan was -- no -- in Hérault. Not in Perpignan, in a neighboring Department. To get the children into residence there. And once they were there we could of course disperse them into the very number of children's home that existed, that OSE had set up in the south of France after having transferred the children from the children's homes around Paris. Because -- all right, I have to back-track a little bit there. OSE had already set children's home up around Paris in the late '30s for children who had come from Germany. In fact, I had been offered a job in one of these homes and instead went to work in Paris. So we had all these children's home existing there, and it was a an administrative procedure in trying to get these children out. But it was not only that.

01:19:10

It was it was persuading the parents to let the children go. Mind you, at that time we had not -- deportations had not started yet there. They were still -- we are still in the early part of 1942 now. Yeah, we're still in the early part of 1942, and the deportations haven't started. But there were rumors of shipping the people off to labor camps or resettlement camps. Far from us was any kind of idea of what -- where they were really sent. But OSE had had the foresight, through some people like Andrée Salomon and a doctor, Joseph Weill, to think of saving the children and getting them out. And at numerous occasion, I had opportunity to convoy children out or to take children out. I remember one particular group that sticks in my mind of all of it. We had a small group -- but sizeable enough -- of Down's Syndrome children in the camp. Very young, small Down's Sy -- and there was a place for them in Bergerac, in the Dordogne, and here we are on the Rivesaltes. I mean, had to cross all the

¹⁰ Small islands, figuratively (French).

¹¹ Sabbath entertainment, rejoicing, and reception (Hebrew).

south of France. And I took these children by train to Bergerac. There must have been five, six of them. These children had actually learned to walk in the camp, had never known how to take steps. And we get to the station, and they didn't know how to go down or up stairs because they had just never experienced this. In addition to which, they were -- had Down's Syndrome. But that's the one convoy I remember, of all of them. I'm not sure exactly why, but I remember this one more than anything else.

Q: What was that trip like?

01:21:10

A: I only remember that, that -- the steps. What it was on the train, I really don't remember. I know I got them to safety in Bergerac. What happened to them afterwards, I don't know, but we got them out. What I do remember very vividly is the deportations starting. And that was in August, I think, of August of '42. It was again a matter of sending people in work camps -- to work camps, or to resettlement camps. I think we should have known that that wasn't quite it, because they were rounding up. I can see this elderly woman on crutches, and I can see the young people and I can see the sick -- all being called out on this enormous empty space in the camp of Rivesaltes and crossing the line over as their name was called. I also remember this very dignified young Rabbi, who would not hurry this woman on crutches, and walking over that empty space. Now, I was very young. And I had learned a lot about humanity while I was in this camp. I learned a lot. I remember one woman, and to this day I remember her name. Do you want her name? She was Madame Grynszpan. In fact, she was an aunt of the young Grynszpan who, who started things in Kristallnacht because he killed the attaché in Paris. And she was always -- in spite of the horrible conditions there, she managed to have a neat scarf on her head and lipstick on. And she says, "The day you are going to see me without my makeup, you know, that's the end for me." I know she escaped, because I -- one day I saw her on the train station in Rivesaltes. And, of course, I made no effort to acknowledge that I recognized her, because she had escaped, and so I know she escaped. So I -- one thing is that I had -- I learned so much from the, the, the dignity and some of the attitude of the people who were living under these horrible conditions. I was, I was very young, and, and it made a tremendous impression on me. I remember these first convoys. The train came to Rivesaltes, to the tracks there, and people were boarded. Now, I do not remember cattle trains. These were regular trains. But what I remember mostly, too, was during that period there were categories of people that could be deported and some who couldn't. There were still categories, because -- gosh, how naïve we were -- and thought that it was going to continue. If you had been fighting in World War II on the Allied or some -- or in World War I, I should say that. If you had been born one, one parent, there were categories who were non-Jewish. Or if you had resided for that long in Paris. So we scrambled for certificate from concierge to demonstrate that he had -- so and so had lived in Paris for that period of time. We scrambled for all kinds of documents, sometimes falsifying them somewhat. And I remember, three of us -- I don't remember who the third one was. But I know was Jacqueline Levy, with whom I've discussed this very recently. We had all of a sudden, people were all in the trains. And we hadn't -- we had these papers to get twenty people out of, of the train. And we went through the train and got these 20 or 21 or 22 people

out of the camp, because we had these wonderful papers. What we didn't know is that there was a quota for that train. And while we scrambled to get twenty people out, twenty other people were rounded up without -- regardless of their status, and were just added to the train. When I discuss -- I remember discussing this in Paris a few years back with Jacqueline, and she said she shared exactly what I felt. She said when she found that out it was a nightmare to realize that the defensive people actually were replacing these people in, you know, in, in the train that we so miraculously saved. Nobody was saved, finally.

01:26:10

Q: How did you choose the people to save?

A: Be--because we had the papers. We, we didn't choose anybody. We managed to, to put together a, a record for these people, enough papers to fit the categories. We didn't choose anybody. I mean, the papers came through. This certificate and that certificate, and this document. And we had sufficient documents for these select twenty people. So we didn't choose them. We -- oh, gosh, no. Nobody played God. But that's what -- that's how we got them out of the train, only we were not realizing that actually twenty-odd people would be added to the quota. Can I stop?

Q: Of course.

A: I need to take something for my headache. It's just getting so bad. I have to take another pill.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: That's the point I want, I would like you to make then -- that you were doing all of this under your own name. Ok, we're back again.

A: Well, during this -- starting in -- as I said, starting in, I think, in August, through September and through the end of the year, deportations continued because round-ups of Jews. First it was the foreign-born Jews. Then it was different -- other categories of Jews. And then it was Jews, period, that were rounded-up. And Rivesaltes became the center from which they were sent off to destination unknown. But in the meanwhile, we continued to try to get out as many children as possible through the legal means. And when the legal means didn't work. Because we felt a sense of urgency, sometimes we stood watch at the gates when the trucks came loaded with Jews into the camp, to try to separate the children from the families right then and there so that we could get them in the special barracks for the children and work on their liberation right away. I mean, in retrospect, to ask the parents who were so bewildered coming into the camp and to separate from their children. And we had them in, in, in the special barracks, where the children worried about their parents, where they saved food for their parents, where they matured so quickly. They, they -- sort of there was a, a reversal, as they worrying about their parents just like a parent would worry about a child. And we became also very aware that in the meanwhile -- for a very hypocritical reason of family

reunion -- the French police were -- was going back to the to the homes, the children's homes, to get the children back into the camps for family reunion purposes. So we had to try to avoid that as well. Both in the homes, which was impossible when they rounded up the kids, but when they came back into the camps. And some, of course, were deported with their parents. Some under 16, and definitely the over 16 as well. By the end -- I forget exactly the date -- when the invasion of North Africa came about by the Allies -- all of France was occupied. And I remember the Germans coming down south. In fact, coming there had been no Germans in Rivesaltes. This was strictly Vichy government. But when the south of France was occupied, the Germans came in as well, and then the round-ups started harder and harder.

01:30:00

And I remember one particular one on Simchat Torah.¹² And on Simchat Torah, the very religious Jews, about to be put into the trucks and from the trucks into the into the trains, were dancing to rejoice with the Torah -- which they didn't have. But this was still a holiday that we're celebrating. And truckloads of Jews were coming in from Belgium and from Holland, and from all over. And rounded up all over. And among them, some French-born Jews. It was just absolutely, at this point, a very -- I imagine they were French Jews; I'm not quite sure. But anyway, they were rounded-up, coming into the camp. In the meanwhile, we continued to get the children out. And one of the one of the girls from my group of teenagers, who was liberated from the camp and then placed very briefly with the scouts, was eventually placed into my family to help my parents at the farm. She is still living today in Israel, and is my sister-in-law. She married my brother. This is a girl who was born in France of Polish parents, and the parents never bothered to acquire the French nationality. So when the war came, they were all put into Rivesaltes: her two parents, her two brothers. The father was deported right away into forced labor, which means he was sent to his death. The older brother joined the Maquis¹³ -- the French underground -- and was killed under such horrible condition that I have never found out the details. The younger brother was placed by OSE, by one of our network workers; and is living still in Israel. And Rachel living with my family. And her mother survived -- also helped by OSE. She just died a year ago in Israel. So by the end of 1942, there remained but about five hundred people in Rivesaltes. And all the kids had been -- whatever kids we could liberate, we had sent into various camps to the various children's homes, I'm sorry. And, of course, also into the youth facilities of the Jewish scouts, because they had facilities for over-16s. And, of course, we had to lie about the ages; and, of course, we had to get them out. See, by then we still had not directly worked in an underground or in illegal kind of way; except that when the pressure came, we tried to help kids escape as much as quickly as we can. I remember always wearing a cape. Girl scouts had capes in those days, khaki capes. And you could get a baby under your arms, you know. And you could walk out of the camp with children. The Secours Suisse smuggled

¹² Rejoicing of the Torah (Hebrew).

¹³ Anti-Nazi military partisans, associated with other groups in the French Resistance.

a truck into the camp, and we smuggled children out of the camp under milk cans. And we there are many different stories to tell as how kids came out, and the one I remember mostly is the one having children on the -- actually, literally, in my arms under my cape. But I don't remember what happened afterwards. We handed them over to another network. Each one of us did only one piece of the work. The camp was closed in November or December 1942, and whoever was left was sent to Gurs. By that time, I had contracted a horrible jaundice because of the living conditions there at the camp because we social workers didn't have any more better hygienic conditions than the internees, 'though I had an individual room. We had one barrack where all the workers had an individual room. But we had no toilet facilities. And we had one bucket that each one of us took turns having in our own room. We also had bed bugs infesting everything. And though my parents occasionally sent me some food, it was run over with worms by the time I got it. But we scraped it off and we ate it anyway, because it was food. And if I ever want to look again in a, in a -- what are they called? Rutabagas, Rutabagas. Never in my life again ever, anyway.

01:34:48

Q: What -- before, before you go on from here, what was it like for Simone Weil? In this camp, you're a young woman. What did it feel like to you? Did you miss your parents? Were you feeling that you took any risk in doing this, even though it was legal? What was it like for you doing all these things?

A: At this time it was not illegal yet.

Q: Right.

A: Because I was an accepted French citizen, although Jewish, in the camp. You know, people have asked me, "Did it?" The same kind of question. First of all, you're young. And when you're young, you feel sort of invulnerable and you really don't think beyond what you have to do. And I think my the other workers were my age. It was it was sort of a natural thing to do. There was a job to be done. It was a natural thing. I don't know. It just I don't think I really thought much of the risk. It was very interesting; you ask me about risk. The camp command the commandant of the camp was a police commissar of the neighborhood in which I had lived in Strasbourg. And he knew my father. I'll talk about him again later. There is a connection there. These people took on jobs which, if, if they had refused to take on these jobs, if more people had refused to do these kinds of things, maybe, maybe just maybe, things would not have worked out the way they did. For us, I don't know. I guess for me the risk I took -- occasional trips to the farm, occasionally. Taking a train to go back to the farm was no excursion. On the trains There were so few trains. I usually traveled with a knapsack. And you tried to get your knapsack through a window; and you climbed through a window, and you stood up all night in the hall. Or I remember standing up all night in the toilets. You know, we were -- there were so few trains, and so little means of transportation. So I did occasionally go back and see my family. I don't not often, but I, I did. What I did, actually, when the camp was closed, I had to go back to my family because I was sick. I was

-- and actually, I went to Gurs. And but I -- by Gurs, by that time, they would not let any new workers come into Gurs. And I remember meeting Dr. Joseph Weill in a train, and he says, "You better take care of your -- " I was yellow from here, from the top of my head to the bottom. And I really had to take a rest. So I did go back to the farm just to recover from that. From that jaundice or hepatitis, or whatever you'd call it. And when, when I was healthy enough again, then I went to work in one of the children's homes. Because I couldn't get into Gurs, and here were all these children's homes. And I had the background in education early childhood education. So I took a job as the chief educator, for OSE again, near Limoges. And my family wasn't far.

01:38:22

The farm wasn't far from Limoges, in Poulouzat. The Director was Monsieur Job, who later became one of the administrator of OSE, who's still alive in Paris, whom I still correspond with, whom I still see when I'm in Paris. And here we were, taking care of the children whom we had gotten out of the camp. This was a home that catered to maybe 50 children of all ages. And we tried to make the children as live as normal a life as possible -- "normal" in quotation marks. Again, the food situation was terrible. I remember sorting out rice in which mice had gotten. And taking out the, the rice doo. Is that what you call it? If it's dog doo, it's rice mice doo. We ate it, because that's all we had. And making do. And, and yet, and, and cutting out things of the papers to decorate the rooms. And, and I worked at creating as Jewish an atmosphere as we possibly could, leading Shabbat services. Because of my background, this was no problem. I could do these things very easily. And I tutored some of the kids who had missed schoolings, some who were prepare preparing their baccalaureate.¹⁴ They went to school. They went to public school, but still under their real names. And this is 1943. I also remember that the drama coach who came on weekends or whatever to teach to, to take care of the kids, was Marcel Marceau, of all people. Whose real name is not Marcel Marceau, but whose real name is Marcel Mangel (ph), and who was a kid from my neighborhood in Strasbourg. And so we had the best. He was a student at that time, doing artwork in Limoges.

01:40:30

But these were these were my peers. You know, he's a little bit younger than I am. But by that time the OSE Direction had seen the writing on the wall. Some children's homes had been rounded up. The police was coming to pick up the over-16. The police -- the French police I'm talking about -- was finding these very easy targets, because here was a group of Jewish children. So at that time, the OSE Direction had decided that the children had to get out of the homes in two steps. There was one step: they was under their real names, into non-Jewish kind of settings, but mostly, to form a clandestine network and place the children under assumed names. And workers were recruited for that, and I was one of them. what

¹⁴ In France, this is the equivalent of a high school diploma.

were the qualifications? None, really. Wanting to do it, but also not being not looking "Jewish." Quote, unquote. I mean, there are some people who just simply couldn't do it because they were "typés,"¹⁵ as we called it. And so I qualified. And Georges Garel, who is organized this clandestine network for OSE, recruited me in Poulouzat in children's home where I worked because all the children's homes were going to be closed. In the meanwhile, there had been arrêtes -- arrests -- in the Direction of OSE and the various offices. There had been really -- it was danger with knowing where the children were, and so on. So I got recruited for this. And this was towards the end of '43. I therefore left the children's home, and took up residence in Châteauroux. Châteauroux is about what -- 60, 75 miles north of Limoges. Well, I had to change identity. And my name was Simone Weil, and I decided on "Werlin (ph)," because it was sort of easy to change the "I" to an "R" and to add something at the end of it. And I had to work on getting, number one, a nationality -- a Fiche de Nationalité.¹⁶ I'm not quite sure how I got it, but I have it. And from that on -- oh, and I made myself being born in Toul, because we -- I knew that in Toul, the, the city hall had been bombed and all the documents had disappeared. And by then, there was really a whole network of people working in forging false papers. So we had access to identification cards, blank ones and so forth. But I did it, really, the legal way. After I had a Fiche de Nationalité by which I think I got by just making a statement -- then I had that, claiming that papers had disappeared. I couldn't produce a birth certificate. I got an identification card and gave a Limoges address, and immediately then moved to Châteauroux. And had myself registered in Châteauroux. So it was perfectly legal. I mean, it was perfectly ok. The most wonderful thing -- my nose. The most wonderful thing that helped me in the forging my identity was the help I got from the Director of the school of social work and the director of the school of early childhood education. One lived in Clermont-Ferrand. One lived in Paris. I took the trip, and I just simply told them that I needed their help.

01:44:56

And I have in my documents still a certificate stating that I that Simone Werlin was their student in 1938. I got a certifi-- I got a diploma established in on that name, under my false name. And I got some others you know, other statements to that effect. And to this day, I am convinced that at the time I was arrested, to which I'm going to come later, that these papers helped me. And these people, without, without any question, just established these papers for me. In fact, I went to Paris. I remember very well, because this is the first time I saw people wearing the yellow star because we did not wear it in the south of France. I also needed a cover. And the Department of Public Health put me on their fictitious payroll, I suppose. But I had a statement saying that Simone Werlin is employed by the Department of Public Health. And just to make sure that I knew what I was, what the Department of Public Health was, I went at least there once. And now comes a funny story. You know what department was assigned to? The department that checked the health of the prostitutes of the city of Châteauroux. And they were coming regularly to that clinic to be examined, and that was my

¹⁵ Typed or stereotyped (French).

¹⁶ Nationality card (French).

assignment. But at least I knew what my assignment was so that later on I had to describe it, I could describe it. But it has a little funny aspect to it. I got a room, stayed with two elderly ladies. And we had a team working together in Châteauroux. I remember at least two of them. One was a cousin of mine. And we all had assumed names. And children would come to us, brought from various children's home by a worker. Brought to us, for us to change the identity of the kids, and then place them in various foster homes, institutions, families, convents, what have you.

01:47:25

This was our job. And transportation was mostly bicycles, train, horse and buggy, whatever. Or walking. Whatever we could round up. And it ended up by, by having around Châteauroux, in that whole area, we had some three hundred and fifty kids placed. The Direction of the region was in Limoges, but Châteauroux, in that region, we had between three and 350 kids. It was a matter of finding the places and trying to finding following up with the kids. What I remember most dramatically -- and, and also sometimes through Châteauroux came groups of children that had to be escorted towards other workers, who would help them get into Switzerland. And I remember one group of children that came one night, and we had to find a place for them overnight. And I in some school or some institution. And we worked feverishly all night to get them false papers. For the kids. And take out the labels out of their clothes that the mothers had lovingly sewed into their clothes and take those labels out. And look through their luggage. Take away whatever they had because they had to have be safe. And just coach them in what their new identity was. I have often said that if I had known then what I have since learned, being a clinical social worker, I think I would have been completely immobilized by the, the traumatization that these children went through. I could have just not functioned. And it was just a matter of saving lives, and that was it. And I remember taking these -- I don't know how many children -- and spreading them through a train, and coaching them. Some who spoke French was all right. Some who spoke with an accent, they were supposed to be from Alsace. And telling them what their name was, and knowing how to answer. And getting spreading them through the train, and getting them across France into Lyons. And there, getting them to another team of workers. That was the end of my mission. And they would then be handed over to somebody else, and gotten into Switzerland. And kids came day and night, and we changed their identity. I remember most I remember two incidents that I want to relate. One of the source of help was the Catholic Church. And the area the area close to the Château was Bourges, which has an archbishop-- archbishopric. Is that the word? And I went to see the Archbishop of Bourges, to ask him for making -- it easy mak-- making the entry into convents and to all Catholic orphanages easy for us. But he knew what was the object of my mission, but it was never discussed. I had never encountered an archbishop in my life. And I went to the Archbishop in Bourges, and he gave me a letter of introduction to the various Catholic institutions.

01:50:56

He also handed my hand with his ring, and I hadn't the slightest idea what I was supposed to do with it. But that was a minor detail. I also worked with Protestant agency that ran summer camps for kids who had to flee Paris. And she also -- this was a partisan social worker in Bourges, who was very unhappy being in this very Catholic kind of area. And she had no idea what the real object of my work was. All I wanted is place children in her summer camps. And I hit it off with her. And because she was so unhappy as a Protestant in this Catholic environment, taking me for a Catholic we had some discussion which made her say that she had never met such a liberal Catholic as I. I haven't the slightest idea what I said. But when the dis-- when the questions became too difficult, I managed to escape by pretending that I wasn't feeling well and going to the bath. But anyway, we had the openings to these camps, summer camps, for our children, and that's where we placed them. I worked at that time with another worker, who was actually not Jewish, Ann-Marie, and with two other workers who were not Jewish, among in our team, as well. At one time and at one time and, of course, the as the war was drawing closer and closer to an end, the round-ups just continued. Both my parents were arrested at the farm. And 'though I had -- by that time, the uncles and aunts had left; and there was just my both my parents, my grandmother, my brother and, and the girl we had placed, you know, who placed from, from Rivesaltes. The uncles and aunts had gone elsewhere, found their own place. And I had provided my parents with false papers. But, when in the spring of 1944, the gendarmes came up and said to my father, "Êtes-vous Juif, Monsieur?"¹⁷ He said, "Oui, Monsieur."¹⁸ And they took both my mother and my father, leaving -- and my brother pretended that he was the farm hand, and my sist-- my future sister-in-law, too. She was the maid, she pretended. And both my parents were interned in a camp near the farm.

01:53:26

But the French police actually went over and beyond the expectations of the German authority, and had taken my mother to a camp that was only for men. So after 24 hours, they sent her back to the farm. And she survived. And I had heard had word of my father being in that camp. So I -- oh, I always traveled in something that looked like a Red Cross uniform. Something navy-bluish, and some Red Cross sign. I mean, it was really nothing real, but it looked like a uniform, so I had access to the camp there. And through some cigarettes or tobacco or something, I got a message to my father. Who, by the way, survived. Because on D-Day 1944, the camp was attacked by the Maquis and the internees were able to escape -- among which my father who returned to the farm. But in the meanwhile, there was great concern for my grandmother. And I managed to come back, round-up a truck from the Maquis -- from the underground -- and load my grandmother into the truck and get her to Périgueux, the city near the, the city prefecture where we lived, and get her into an old age home. And a very nice gentle woman would visit her regularly there. But aside from the other work that I did, it was one of the most dramatic things that I did because she was nearly blind. And she said, "Don't leave me here!" And the bed was on the wrong side and she

¹⁷ "Are you French, Sir?" (French).

¹⁸ "Yes, Sir." (French).

couldn't find her things, but I had no choice. I left her, but she survived. Not very long. She never came back to Alsace, but she did survive the, the this period of the old age home. Also when I was in Châteauroux, you know, Georges Garel, the head of our network, would appear from time to time. And he appeared one morning, having come from God knows where. And coming to that room which I rented and say, "You know, we have to move very fast. The members of the Jewish Committee in Périgueux have all been shot as in reprisal for God knows what had happened to some German. The Director one of the Directors, Monsieur Lederman, has been shot. He has -- his wife has had died the year before of cancer. And he has two daughters in a private boarding school, and we have to get them out of there." What he didn't know...that Monsieur Lederman was my uncle. And these were my cousins. And they were two young teenagers, and I called them. I had the number. How we got calls through is a puzzle to me today; but the phone must have functioned. And I called them in the school in which they were. And I told them, "You pack up, and you go. And you come to Châteauroux, and I'll be at the station." And I was there. And they came. And there was a curfew. I don't know how I made it through the curfew. And we got them into a safe home we had at Châteauroux.; there was gentle lady who loaned us the apartment where we could do our papers. So I remember changing their name to Ledormier. And while we were there, I do remember the Milice¹⁹ coming. But the Milice didn't come to -- they didn't know. They were just looking at apartments. But they came, and I jumped out the back window with my two cousins. And also Ann-Marie tells me it was the paper of her husband who had been deported to Auschwitz and who -- whose papers she had. And I don't remember that, but as we put our selected memories together, we reconstructed. And I reconstructed the events. As a matter of fact, while I was in France I found that hou-- that house again. And I knew it was it because I saw the windows from which we jumped. But anyway, the girls were placed into a Catholic convent, and they survived. Last year --

Q: Ok, excuse me. At this point, we have to stop and change tapes.

A: Ok.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #1

¹⁹ Militia (French)

Tape #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

02:00:15

Q: We're on. Ok, take us back. Let us continue.

A: So we continue with the story of my cousins, where I left it off. Just a year ago, one of my cousins came to see me in Chapel Hill. And she got off the plane. And I waited for her. She says, "This is the second time that you're waiting for me someplace." And she remembered the time I was waiting for her at the station. But then she said, "When you called us in the school where we were to tell us to pack and come, we didn't know whether it was really you." Distortion of the telephone. "And we had really didn't know whether it was a trap for us. And whether it was a safe thing to do, to come to Châteauroux, until we saw you at the station." And that devastated me. And actually, they did not know their father had been shot. And they're telling me that I had to tell them that their father had been killed. They thought he had been deported. I do not remember this, nor do I remember so many of the details. I have recently encountered a woman who lives in Richmond, who was a child in Rivesaltes who I got out of Rivesaltes and who I placed in a convent later on and went back to work with me in a children's home that I had later. She survived this way. Her family was deported. And she went to the United States soon after that. And she gives me all these details. And I believe her because it fits into what I remember, but I don't remember her, and I don't remember the details of it. I do not remember individuals as such. I remember my cousins. That's somewhat in some way different -- it's very close to me. I see myself going into farms. I see myself talking to children, talking to families. I remember the incident of the, the Archbishop in Bourges. I remember being arrested -- and I'm going to come into that in a minute. But the individual kids, I do not remember. Exc-- I remember the groups, and not one in particular. I do remember the one day that I went to Limoges on my bicycle. 75 miles. In my memory, it was a straight route to Limoges. Six or seven years ago, we went back there. I told my husband, "Don't worry, it's..."

02:03:22

Q: Excuse me. We're going to have to stop the tape.

[TECHNICAL CONVERSATION]

You started to tell me about the trip.

A: On regular intervals, I guess, I had to go to Limoges, which was really the headquarters of this area. And I remember some of the workers there having to do with papers, or having to do with whatever instructions we had about our network, our children. And I remember walking with this other worker in Limoges, in the city. And treating ourselves to some of

these coupon-free pastries. We had to -- we could go into a pastry shop, and they had made some pastry out of some God knows what ersatz stuff. And coming out of it, and a young man coming to us, and saying, "Follow me." And opening the big book he had under his arm, which was not a book but something that hid a box with a revolver in it. The -- it was clear that they were not after me as well as after Charlotte. Charlotte was living in -- she looked very Jewish, by the way. She was very "typée." And they suspected her to be part of the Resistance. And he marched us with this gun under his arm to her apartment. And there, ransacked her apartment, looking for I'm not sure what. But I had sewn in the lining of my pocket some seals, to make false papers. You know, of city halls and town halls, and dates and stuff. I also had, on cigarette paper, the coded list of my children, because -- I didn't mention this earlier. OSE had a list of the children with their real names and their false names, with copies in Geneva. Not one identity was ever lost. Some children were lost, unfortunately. But no identity ever got lost. And we had codes in which way we were keeping lists. I mean, these identities available. And I had that with me. And here I was, watching calmly as they were ransacking Charlotte's apartment, and trying finding a way of getting at least rid of this incrim-- incriminating documents I had on me. So I asked to go to the bathroom. And what I know how to do was to act as a very innocent little girl. I think I can still do it. And they let me go. And that simple little slip, on their part, saved me. I went to the bathroom, got everything out of the lining of my pocket, got the papers out, flushed whatever I could down the toilets, threw everything that I could out of the windows, and came back into the room clear of all this incriminating stuff. I knew that, you know, we'd get some other seals and we'd get the lists. They were saved somewhere else. Legend has it already that I swallowed the cigarette papers. But I'm sure I didn't. I'm sure I threw them out. I get back and they went through my papers. And this is where I want to come back to the wonderful paper I had. I always carried with me all these document that these very helpful people had made out for me -- my diplomas, my cert-- I had everything with me. Library cards which had false from pre-war library cards, under my false name. I had university student cards, and etc. I had all this with me. They slipped on one thing, which have which would have been my undoing. I had given an address in Limoges as my original. I had my identification card. I didn't even know where the street was. I didn't even know whether it existed. If they had asked me to take them there, I couldn't have done it. But they didn't. So I left this place. they imprisoned Charlotte, but we managed to liberate her to help her escape. And she's still living.

02:08:00

Q: How did you help her?

A: I don't -- we didn't. I wasn't part of that. The resident workers in Limoges managed. I don't know how they did it. I haven't the slightest idea. I was very anxious to retrieve my knapsack, which had a lot of incriminating papers in it. And so I got in touch with another worker, who first went to where my knapsack was parked -- I don't remember where -- and got out all the stuff that was in there that would have been incriminating. And then I got my knapsack back, and then I went back on bicycle 75 miles to Châteauroux. Now, just a few

years ago in Paris, I met a woman who, when we're introduced to each other, says, "Oh, I know who you are. You spent the night. You were arrested in my room." I don't remember. I have absolutely no memory of it. She remembered the incident. She remembers Charlotte, and how she and Paulette and another young woman rescued Charlotte. I don't know how. I don't know how. But for me, I was anxious to get out of Limoges with my cleansed knapsack. I remember this as a straight route to Limoges. And I took it a few years back, and it was the rollercoast-- the worst rollercoaster road. And my husband said to me, "This is a straight road?" In my memory, this was a straight road. So I came back to Châteauroux. And no sooner did I get to my room that my landlady says, "Your friends from Limoges came to see you, and you were not home." Needless to say that I spent no time in Châteauroux, and took my bicycle and went on to Bourges, where I had somebody else. But you see, it wasn't always bicycle. Whenever we could, we took a train and put the bicycle in the luggage compartment. And we went as far as we could on the train, on where the Maquis had blown up the tracks, we had to get out. We were always rejoicing when the tracks were blown up. So we took the bike, and we went a little bit further. So that way, we, we traveled. So I went to Bourges. And I even remember getting a horse and buggy part of the way, putting the bicycle in the back, and getting there until things calmed down until my friends from Limoges were, were sure that I was somewhat safe. There's another crazy incident that I do remember, is that I had mentioned earlier that the head of the camp of Rivesaltes was the Commissar de Police from Strasbourg. He ended up being the Commissar de Police of Châteauroux, where I was doing underground work. And I did something which today seems absolutely crazy to me. I went to him. And I told him, "I know you know who I am." But I told him that I was working under a false name, and what I was doing. And I was expecting him to leave me alone. In retrospect, it sounds absolutely totally crazy. But he never bothered me. It so happened that after the war as soon as the war was over, and when you know, when they sought out the collaborators, he came to me begging for some kind of, you know, "See what I did for you?!" But at that time I went to my superiors at OSE, who says, "He doesn't deserve any, any kind of consideration because if he hadn't been the, the commandant of the camp of Rivesaltes and he hadn't accepted that job, it would have been, you know, more to his credit."

01:12:00

So, but this is the -- so but this is the -- so you asked me earlier, "How did it feel?" I got a sense of invulnerability. Of -- I had to do a job; and you do it with some kind of daring. And you, you feel I could wear these uniforms of Red Cross, or doing and, and just pretend and do anything. And I didn't feel it was anything terribly unusual, because I saw all my peers doing it. All my peers from the youth movement did the same kind of work, whether it was in the in the escape, the routes to Spain or to, to Switzerland -- or whether it was in the in the Maquis. Whatever. We did it because that was the thing to do. That brings us pretty much to almost the end of the war -- no. I remember D-Day -- June 6th, 1944. I thought it was all over. It wasn't over by far. And I put my the gold little flag on my bicycle, but very quickly put it back in. You see, I had lived as really with these two ladies, who took me for a very good Catholic girl. In fact, I had a rosary, and I had went to church every Sunday morning in

the back of the church. But anyway, it was too early to really tell them. I was I was just exploding with telling the truth, but we couldn't because as the in, you know, as the Allies had landed, that didn't mean at all that France was liberated. And then the fierce battling went on -- the bombings. I was part of the Red Cross emergency teams, where we went when there were bombings, picking people out from under the rubble.

02:14:05

This was just a civil service of a some job that I didn't do as part of my underground work or anything. It was just a community work. And that went on. And as reprisals, very nearby was this horrible incident of Oradour-sur-Glane, where the Germans locked up the whole population in a church and put fire to the church. This was non-Jews as well as Jews. I mean, it had nothing to do -- they had just to do with the psychology of an army that was losing the war and went and arresting more Jews and more kids that came our way. But don't ask me the details of how it happened. I know it happened. I know we did it. I know I did it, but I don't remember the details. I don't remember. More kids coming, and I know we placed more kids. It was just a frenzy of, of, of needs at that time, until finally the war was over. I, I know this was a, a very hectic period. I remember -- one more thing is this team of, of Jewish girls celebrating Passover that spring, in the basement. And one of us watching, standing guard at the door, just like Marrano-type kind of celebration. These, some of these little details come up once in a while. But I have mulled over and over and with great guilt, really, as to why I don't remember individual children and individual stories. With very few exceptions, I don't. My sister-in-law, those of my cousins. And the only explanation I can come up with is that the fear of getting attached or the inability to get attached to individuals, for fear of loss, for fear of getting too close. And so that I do not remember individual stories, with the few exceptions that I gave you. Also is I left the United -- I left France in 1946, after filling a couple of years very briefly. And I had one urge and that is to put everything I cut even loose from the people I worked with during the war. I never spoke French to my children, never talked about any of that story. It was all something to put behind me. And it's not until about 10, 12 years ago or so that I became part of, of those of us who feel a responsibility of, of telling our individual stories.

02:16:56

When the war was over in our in my area, Limoges and Châteauroux, in the fall of 19-- oh, just before the High Holy Days in 1944, when I remember getting my cousins out of that convent, and I remember getting anyway, I just went there and got them and put them on God knows what trucks. And from one stage to the other, and got them back to the farm. Because that my, my parents and uncles and aunts were the only living relatives they had, having lost both parents, and leaving them with my family but with very little time to, to spend there. Because OSE immediately asked me to reopen one of their homes, and I reopened the first home in Montintin, in the center of France. It was a big old chateau which had been a children's home before, but it was closed during all this clandestine period. And it was populated by rats and by filth. And we cleaned the rats. To today, I stand on a chair if I

see a mouse. In those days, we put traps in, and we caught one rat after another, and we cleansed it. And it was the most exhilarating kind of experience. And we got as quickly as we could the children out of the religious institutions, of the Catholic institutions. And we had no idea yet as to what had happened to their parents, of course, because it wouldn't be until the spring of the following year when the Allies would reach the death camps that we really had the reality of what had happened. So we did the best we could to create as quickly as we could a real happy Jewish atmosphere for those children. With nothing. With whatever we could. We had staff survive -- survivors. I remember particularly one couple from Holland who had survived. And I had really a desire to do something in my field, and that is, create a home for pre-school children. Because pre-school is, was and has always been -- and continues to be -- my area of interest. And OSE then replaced, replaced me at Montintin. And I went to Paris; and with another girl, actually, who had worked in Rivesaltes -- but not for OSE, but for the Unitarians. Jacqueline and I -- who had the same training under the auspices of OSE -- we set up a wonderful model home for pre-school age children. Later on, when I read Anna Freud on war and children and infants without family, I realized we really copied -- we copied...no, we didn't copy it.

02:20:00

We initiated the same model. And these children had survived in hiding -- but not only children who had survived in hiding. Children who were entrusted to us by parents who couldn't handle them. They had survived themselves, but they were alone. And for a period of time, we had these children. But it was also a training school for early childhood educators. Actually, my diploma was in Montessori education. So we set up a Montessori program in, in the -- in a chateau near Paris, which, by coincidence, happens to be the one where I had taught in a private school before the war. It was a beautiful place, surrounded by ground. And there I stayed until -- this was '45 -- and all the do-gooders from the United States came over. Oh, the most wonderful thing I got is a pair of army shoes. A WAAC²⁰ gave me some shoes. That was wonderful! And they brought us candy, and they brought us all kinds of stuff. But the important thing is that I was asked whether I would want to come to the States to continue my training, to go back to France and continue on with my work. To tell you the truth, I would have gone blind-folded to the moon. I would have gone anywhere. This was it. Was I was ready for a change. And why me? Why not Jacqueline? Jacqueline didn't know English. She was just as qualified, but I knew English. This was a scholarship offered by the National Council of Jewish Women, who had set up a program of scholarships to give additional training for people who had worked under these circumstances; in, in Europe, not just in France. And would return to their countries to continue to improve the situation. So I had a very hard time. It's Georges Garel, who actually wrote paper upon letters upon letters to get me a place on a boat, and I came on a warship in 1946. And the Council of Jewish Women sent me to Tulane University. And for one year, but extended my scholarship for a second year, which I completed in Cleveland, and got my Master's Degree in social work. But in the meanwhile, I had met my future husband. But I did return to

²⁰ Women's Army Corps (WAC after 1978).

France before we got married, and worked for the Joint Distribution Committee. And there I am worked in -- really, at that time, the local agencies who had all these children's homes and all these children had to reassess the needs of these children. And I did survey upon survey of facilities -- not just OSE of various children's homes -- to assess their need and to see what else could be done with the children. And I also set up L'Association des Travailleurs Juives²¹. I started with training workers in the various homes, with my newly acquired wisdom in social work. And I started this program going, going through the JDC. And my commitment was for at least two years, but I was itching to get back and to the States. And after a year, I came back to the States. And that's the end of the story, I guess. I continued in social work for the rest of my life.

Q: What -- tell us a little bit, if you would, about your adjustment to the United States. What had that year been like when you were here, and what was it like when you returned?

02:23:57

A: Well, when I originally came -- there's two stages there. It's interesting. When I went to Tulane University I found this to be a dilemma, which was far below what I was used to in my own work and in my own experience. And I didn't feel -- besides, I really had no intention of getting a degree. It was just a year to be exposed to things here. So I didn't work very hard. I was asked to talk about my war experience, and I found it very strange. Why talk about my war experience? Everybody else had done it. And why did I have to talk about it? And yet I did because I was their first student. And I went to their triennial conventions, and I talked about it. I don't know what I said and how I told the story then. There was a lot of publicity. And it bothered me for two reasons. One, because as I said, it seemed so natural to have done that. I didn't see what was the big fuss, the heroism about it. Everybody did it, in my mind. And the other thing is, is the thought of all the children we didn't save. And how can you sort of make it this beautiful story? There was just one other thing is that there were there was a program of Ship-a-Box the Council of Jewish Women had. And I accepted to talk, provided they sent packages overseas. And that was one of the, you know, redeeming features of my talking. When I transferred to Case Western -- no. It wasn't Case Western, it was Western Reserve University. I got a somewhat different experience. And yet, I remember my supervisor, or my faculty advisor, never asking me what my experience had been or what, what my expertise. I mean, after all, I had left I was By then, I was 26 years old. I was not a kid fresh out of high school. I mean, this was graduate school because I got credit for all my work I had done. And I didn't find the academic work any difficult at all. I didn't find -- what surprised me very much is the true and false kind of multiple choice kinds of things, because I'm not used -- I wasn't used to that kind of thing. And there was a naïveté about people. I had a sense that they didn't know what life was what real life was about. It was all textbook kind of stuff. Until I finally got one supervisor who asked me about -- not about my work during the war, but about my concepts about working with people and children. And I said, "Finally, somebody feels that we know something there, too." You

²¹ The Association of Jewish Workers (French).

know, it's not just in the United States that they have invented social work, or that we -- to me, it was much too theoretical and so unhum-- it was right and wrong, and there was no nuances. There were I fought tremendously with my faculty advisor about one particular area. Social workers were being trained to work in children's homes in the United States, and I did my field work at Bellfaire in Cleveland, which was one of the top-notch child-care agencies. They were training the social workers who saw the child one hour a week. To me, it made much more sense to do it the way we did it in France, and that is, train the house parents who worked with the children on 24 hours a day basis. And I couldn't understand. We would train people in France who lived with the children, who were with them all the time. But we're training a therpa-- a social worker therapist, who saw the child one hour a week. And that didn't make sense to me. Does that answer your question? And but more, I think one of the reasons I was just thinking of something. One of the reasons I clamed up, too, is that there was such a lack of comprehension as to what really happened. The questions sometimes were so -- excuse me, but -- stupid. And it's hard to talk about it. It still happens today. I'll give you an example. Very recently, in Chapel Hill, I was asked to talk to a junior high school. A very sweet young teacher had her class read The Diary of Anne Frank. And could I -- she got my names through the Jewish Federation, because I'm very active in the community there. And could I come and talk about my own experience? And I did, at what I hoped it would be junior high school level -- which is not particularly my fort , but I tried to tailor it to, to them. And especially ask questions. And the kids were wonderful. They really had some very pertinent questions. The teacher, when I recalled the incident of being arrested and, and Charlotte being put into prison, said, "But on what basis did they arrest her?" And you know I mean, there's this you feel like screaming! And, and in front of the kids, I didn't want to tell the teacher what kind of question is that. I said, "This is war. This is you know, you don't have to have any reason." And so on. So in retrospect, I think, also this was one of the reasons maybe I didn't talk about it. The other thing is, in Cleveland we really had -- there were some people there was a whole a group of German Jews who had left Germany. That's how I met my husband. He's, he's from Germany. He has a whole other saga to tell, but which he wouldn't tell, because he cannot talk about it. But there was a group of what I called people with European background, and as one didn't need to talk about this. This was really my circle. One of my very close friends was from Italy. My husband's friends were from Germany. And you didn't have to dwell on these things.

02:31:03

It was part of what you brought with you to your daily living. And, and I realized, when I started talking about it in Syracuse -- it all started when the Council of Jewish Women in Syracuse had a workshop for teachers in the public school to teach the Holocaust, to introduce the teaching, whatever that means, teaching the Holocaust. And I participated in this workshop. And I became aware, and I began to accept, to recount some of that. Again there was, you know, when I say "Rivesaltes" to most my, my close friends or the people who come from Europe or come from France, it immediately evokes something. But then I have to go into the detail as to what Rivesaltes, why Rivesaltes, where Rivesaltes, how Rivesaltes. And it's difficult, and there is this lack of background to do it. It's interesting.

When I went to France, well, it just so happened that my husband was transferred to France from '83 to '86. So I retired from my -- I was teaching at Upstate Medical Center by then, in the pediatric residency program. And I left. I retired. And my clinical practice as well. So here I was having all this time, and I reconnected with people that I hadn't seen, with people I had worked with in the camps, and so forth and so on. And we put together our selected memories. And it was wonderful. And I was asked by a group I became active in WIZO²² -- which is the equivalent of Hadassah -- which I had never done, because I had never had time for this kind of thing. But I was very happy to create an educational program for them, and a program of activities; and I was asked to talk about my war experience. It surprised me. But then I realized there's a new generation. And they were mostly Jews from North Africa, because the Sephardic community is so much bigger in France today than it's ever been. And these Jews had all been coming in the '50s -- after the war -- and they didn't know. Yet, at the same time, there was a physical closeness being there in Europe. And when I said "Rivesaltes," or when I say and name any place, there is some response, which made it easier for me to talk there. And even to talk here. And that, that's a reality.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?

A: Yes. I'll probably think about it tonight. I, I want to add that I always find it very difficult to do this, to give these talks in the first person. And yet I know I've got to do it, because that's the only way people will I've had more people who have heard me talk in Chapel Hill recently relate to exp-- pieces of experience. Each one comes away with another little piece, not the whole. And I think it's important, because I can -- personally, I cannot relate to anything that's fictionalized about the sho'ah,²³ the television series on the sho'ah, or anything that's fictionalized in books or in the media, I just can't even watch. To me, it's not the real stuff. And so, I suppose that by my talking and sharing it with others, it's the real stuff. And maybe something remains for them. I feel that responsibility. I really do.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview

²² Women's International Zionist Organization

²³ Holocaust (Hebrew).

Note: This section, the section on photographs and documents, has not been checked for accuracy, spelling, or authenticity.

DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

- (1) This is the diploma of early childhood educator, which I received under my real name in 1940, I believe.
- (2) This certificate was given to me by the same director of the school of, of early childhood education in 1943; giving it to me under my then assumed name and pre-dating it to 1938, '39 and '40. Thus, ensuring more solidity to my false identity.
- (3) That's a real Carte d'Identité card established by the city hall in Limoges, under a name which I took; pretending to be born in Toul, where I knew that all the birth records had been destroyed and there was no way of verification.
- (4) This is a general view of the camp in Rivesaltes showing the desolation, the, the dust, the mud. these were old army barracks--not even deemed good enough for the army anymore and infested with vermin.
- (5) OSE took care of the children in special barracks. And this is a group of the very young ones, walking from one activity to the other. And you can see the wind blowing over the blankets that wrapped some of the children.
- (6) Another activity of OSE was to provide some group activities for the teenagers. And here I am with forming a girl scout group with some of the teenagers. [TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - PAUSE] one of the activities was to provide some group activities for the teenagers; and here I am, at the right, forming a group of girl scouts within the camp of Rivesaltes.
- (7) OSE also participated with the other agencies, such as the Swiss Red Cross, in providing additional rations to the internees. Here I am participating in a distribution of milk and of bread, helped by the man on the left, and bringing it to the barracks of the under-nourished, which had been set apart.
- (8) In Rivesaltes, there was a number of internees who felt a need to help their fellow internees in some way. And we called them the Committee--made up of doctors, rabbis, housewives who helped us, the resident social workers, in all our activities. And here they are.