

[BEEP] So now you were hiding--

--from--

--from your own family.

Yeah.

So before you were hiding that you were Jewish.

And now I'm hiding from them.

And now you're hiding--yeah.

So my father made several attempts to, but David was the one who persisted most. And he wanted us back. Of course, no one had planned on our father coming back and wanting us back. That's not something we even thought about during the war.

So I didn't want to go. I had had my experience, and I wasn't going to repeat any of the type. And even if they made me-- it even if they promised God knows what, I wasn't going to go through this anymore. And Henri didn't want to go. He didn't want to go to live with him. His father was a stranger. He was not wanting to leave his family. He had no intention of going with them to Israel. So he didn't want to go either. And I suppose he expressed that in the Alardo family.

So for my own sake then, Marie rented a little cottage-- not in Grez-Doiceau because they knew the address and they would come and they would come back. And so we decided we'll go away for a few months, see how this develops. So we rented the little cottage near that monastery where we used to go during the war. And Henri decided he'd come and hide there with me. Because he didn't want anything to do with that.

So we did. And at least for three months, things were OK. But then they decided to send the police after us.

After both of you?

Mm-hm. And I know that the Alardo family had more than one word against that, you know? I think they first sent the police to them to question them on Henri and where he was and his whereabouts. And from what I gather when I talked after the war, years later, to one of the daughters who Henri considered like a sister, she told me that her father was really furious and, in other words, said, well, when we needed you, where were you? You weren't there for Henri.

The police? Or the--

No, the father said that to David.

Ah, uh-huh, where were you?

When we needed you, where were you? You weren't there for your brother.

Right.

And now you're sending us the police, we who took care of him and saved his life? And that's not the way to go anyway. Maybe if you gave him a chance to adjust, to get to know his father again, maybe, or at least to do it gradually, invite him for a week, bring him back. He won't feel so threatened. Maybe you can try, but not the way you are going about it, to send immediately the police after us when we did everything to save your brother and you weren't around to do anything for him.

But I don't know how, I don't know what happened, but they found us. And I was questioned by the police. And I maintained I would not reveal where Henri was.

So they didn't find you in that little cottage?

No, not yet. But then I went back, and they came back again. And I kind of went very open [INAUDIBLE], and I thought, well, I have nothing to lose now anymore. This isn't German time. This isn't Gestapo time.

Why would I be afraid and say the things the way they are? So I explained the situation. And I explained what had happened and why my father was after me. And I have no intention to change. And I had no intention of going to Israel.

So they were very understanding. They were very willing to listen and follow everything on the story. And he said, now let's explain something, that you hide for another 12 to 18 months, maybe. You know it's against the law.

Your father has the right to have his children back. He's alive. He has the right to take them back. He is the legal father.

But to hide your brother another 10 years, there's no way. There's no way you can go against the Belgian law like that. So you're just going to have to let him go. And I understood that.

So I explained all that to Henri and explained all that to the Alardos. And they said they would try, see how they could help him to adjust and maybe get, you know, explain to my father, take him for five, six days then let him come back. He won't feel so threatened. He won't feel that every door is closed for him.

He promised all of that. But he didn't do it. So it was a very awkward situation. I didn't see him anymore.

And because of that, I couldn't see Henri anymore either. So it was a very, very difficult situation. And Henri is the one who suffered a lot. So they took him back almost like by force, promised they would bring him back to the Alardos, didn't bring him back the way they promised, and guarded him day and night.

And they had to put even Simon in the picture, the cousin, never to leave him a minute alone. So if one wasn't free, the other one had to keep a 24-hour watch on Henri because they knew he was able to escape and he had a place to go-- which he did on several occasions, regardless of being guarded as he was.

And not that long ago, he told me on one of the days, he fell asleep, Simon, and I just left and I went to mass. And next day, found him in the church. They had searched everywhere, couldn't find him. And there he was.

Then I got a letter, an alarming letter. And I was telling that Helen yesterday, I said, one thing which is sad in all this what I have gone through, I have reconciled with most of the things. But one thing I'm very sad is that Henri felt like that towards me.

I got this terrible letter that he had seen on the desk of David that they were arranging for him to be taken to Israel without papers. They wanted to rush it because they were afraid of my influence and they didn't want to waste any time. They weren't going to wait for any legal documents.

They were just going to ship him off with father to make sure he's away from me. And he wrote me this terrible letter. But that was to beg me to interfere and not to let him go. And you're the only one who can save me.

And, Joan, I couldn't do anything. So that is still something which is almost like impossible to heal, that he felt like that, that I abandoned him. I couldn't do anything. And they left.

Now, they left for Palestine, actually, Israel wasn't a state yet, right? This is before.

That's right.

Mm. And--

They left with illegal documents.

Right.

And they ended up nine months in Cyprus in that concentration camp. And Henri was extremely bitter. He didn't want to go. He didn't want anything to do with David. He was mad at him because he's the one who organized this whole going over to Palestine.

He was mad at his father. He took it out almost on the whole world. And then he was-- you know, me, I thought I had dropped him, abandoned him. And that's the only person he counted on. So it was very, very hard on Henri.

Now did Izzy also go with him?

No, Izzy, I think, went later, I think. I think for those nine months, it was just Henri and my father.

Your father.

Then Izzy came along later and so did David. And in the beginning, Henri refused to go and live in the kibbutz with David. So Izzy rented the little apartment. And he, father, and the two of them lived together for a while until all these feelings.

So you got this letter from Henri--

--from--

--before he left, to say, come and do something already.

Yeah.

And did you then not hear from anybody? Did you-- did Henri write to you when he was in Palestine?

I don't think so. I think there's been a long gap where we didn't correspond, well, maybe just because he was imprisoned--

--in Cyprus.

--in Cyprus himself that he couldn't write. And then I don't know when he got out of there whether he must have spent a little bit of time with David. They had to be somewhere. So maybe the kibbutz was the only answer until Izzy came along and took a job and took an apartment. And did they check what he wrote or to whom he wrote? And did they not-- they could have prevented any communication--

--correspondence, right.

--between us.

Yes, yeah.

So, I mean, quite some years before I heard from him.

So now you are split again from the family after a short--

And with worse feelings, really.

Yes, because now you're split emotionally. There, it was-- it was because of the Germans.

Yeah, and they had nothing to do with really, you know?

Right, right, right. So this was not an easy time for you at all?

Not at all. Not at all. And I stayed with the Hanquet family, which was my strength, shall I say, and my safeguard. And it took quite some years then before I heard from them. Then they started agitating again when I entered the convent. They were still trying to get me.

So let me ask you, during this period, did you go to school?

No, too late.

Too late.

Too many years in between, the gap is so bad, so, no, I don't go to school. I just--

So '53, you go into the convent. So tell me how-- '53, is that right?

'55.

'55, OK. So tell me what happens in this period.

Oh, I think--

Because it's one thing to become a Catholic. It's another to decide to go into a convent.

I know.

It's a very big decision.

Well, I suppose I wanted the whole thing.

--thing. You weren't going to do it halfway.

And everyone tells me that, that the day I declared I was becoming Catholic, even David admitted that, I knew knowing you, there was no turning back. I mean, you do what you do the whole-- which was true.

Now Marie didn't go into the convent.

No.

Did they-- Marie at least say--

She didn't particularly-- no.

--what are you doing? Why are you doing--

Yeah, they did.

They weren't so happy about this part of it?

No, no, but I insisted I'd go. Now, what really happened-- and this is kind of a total nothing to do directly with the family I come from. But I took care of the girls. There were four of them. The mother was a very sick mother, mentally sick.

So in order to help the situation, Paul had them all in a boarding school. And I went along with them so I could keep an eye on them, particularly the youngest one. She was like five years old. She needed a lot of care and attention. So I went along, offered some services to the sisters, but just to be around them while they were boarding and going to school.

Yeah.

And that's how I got to know these sisters.

And this is the same--

--the same order I entered.

Same order.

Yeah.

So it became something very attractive?

Mm-hm.

So in a way, it was like what happened to you with Marie and Elise, that it was a circumstance that-- in which you felt very uncomfortable.

Yeah, yeah. I had thought about religious life not before. Because we went to many retreats and conferences and visited, and she was more on the contemplative side. And when I talked about it, she thought maybe I was considering entering the Benedictines order, but I was too much of active. I needed action and people around me. So, no, I wasn't attracted to that. So I searched, I looked. And once I met those sisters who were in schools, that appealed to me really.

So let me ask you a couple of questions. What is-- what are Marie and Elise saying to you? They don't like this. What are they saying to you that--

Well, they were kind of OK if I wanted to dedicate my whole life to God.

Yeah.

Because that was like, I give it all, not just converted, but I give it all. But maybe I should consider a different order. And I said no. So we kind of--

And what order did they think?

They thought more of contemplative. And I said no--

Because Marie and Elise were both more like that.

Yeah, I said, no, that doesn't-- that's not what appeals to me. So--

So they didn't-- they weren't against your becoming a nun.

They weren't against me becoming a nun. They weren't particularly maybe enchanted that that's the type of order I chose. But they went along with it.

That's interesting, uh-huh.

Yeah.

But explain the difference to me. You enter a convent in '55--

Yeah.

--and then join this order.

Mm-hm.

So as a person who doesn't know about this, what kind of a convent do you go into in order to that-- isn't it the convent associated with the order? The Daughters of Mary and--

Hold on a minute now. You're not clear on that. Convent or orders--

Well, because--

--are the same.

So the--

OK, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph--

--have a convent.

--run schools.

Right.

And they have this big convent in Brussels.

Oh, OK.

And they have a boarding school.

Right.

And that's where Paul places his four girls, right?

Uh-huh, OK. Right.

Now I, in order to be able to stay and help them, particularly the youngest one, Cecile, I offered to do some secretarial work and to do whatever they asked me to do. And so we go back on the weekends, we go back home. And on Monday or Sunday night, we come back to the school. And little by little, I get to know the sisters.

I see, OK.

And I get interested. And I decide to join them.

And what is that process? You declare yourself and then you--

Then they, they start talking with you. They explain a little bit what the order is all about. And I didn't take too long. I mean, you know, I entered in July '55. Then you go to formation, postulant, novitiate. And then after my novitiate, I indicated that I wanted to go to Africa. So I left in '58.

--and stayed for 20 years?

--and stayed for 20 years.

Now, did-- when you declared that you wanted to enter, did you also say something about your history, that you were a converted person--

Yeah.

--and that you were Jewish? And did you--

That wasn't an obstacle. But I will say, in all honesty, I have had some hard times with it in the convent too. Do you notice what I told you earlier on that table? If you are Jew, no matter which way you go, there is something that is troubling, something that is a problem.

Right, but what's happened to you is that each place that you've been in, you have somehow been partially a foreigner or completely a foreigner, that you're always sort of, um--

--neither here nor there. Because that is true. How many Jewish girls entered the Daughters of Mary and Joseph?

You're the first one that I've met.

And the first one they've ever had--

Yes.

--right?

Yes.

There's no other.

Right.

So it's true that for them too, it's kind of--

--strange.

--strange, a person, and they don't know too much about it.

Right.

And, of course, there are no parents or family attached we think. So that's straightforward. They know that this is the family that I consider my family who has been hiding me. They know they're not 100% delighted that it is not a contemplative order because we are pretty open about that.

Right.

But they go along with it. And what they really liked about it is the missionary idea. So things smoothed themselves out. And everyone is happy. And I get ready. And I go to the missions.

But in the meantime, in those three years, I cannot tell you the number of attempts I've had from Izzy--

--to get you out?

--to get me out. And once or twice, he even came with Simon. Now Henri is not in the picture anymore. And I'm sure those are the years when Henri is already over there.

Right.

So Izzy either did you come back from Israel or did you come for business? He must have come for various things because, remember, they were trying to get compensation from the Germans, saying whatever, you know, and--

So he may have been coming--

He might have had to come back for Germany, for the tribunal to, different things, he and Simon. And they made several visits to the convent in Brussels. And I had been so terrified and so traumatized, I never wanted to go to see them alone. So if it was announced, you have a visit.

Now, who would come to visit? If it was Marie or her mother or the-- that was fine, no problem, or Paul. But when they told me that it was my brother, then I would make sure that I had the bodyguard with me. Because I was-- I sincerely thought they would be able to abduct me if that was the only way they were going to get me.

Now literally a bodyguard?

Yeah.

A male bodyguard or female bodyguard.

No, a female bodyguard.

[LAUGHTER]

Now was Izzy calmer these days?

Yeah, a little, but he had Simon with him who was able to kind of--

--calm him.

--calm him down and kind of say, that's not the way we're going to get anywhere, so let's just try again. And what did you do that for? And why do you have to stay here? And-- I said, I'm free to go if I want to.

Right.

No one is keeping me prisoner here. But that is my choice. And they promised this and I'll say no and I'm happy and that was my choice and I'm staying. So they made several attempts. And I was never comfortable ever since.

--with him?

--with him.

Yes.

And I really wanted someone next door. You know, these are parlors where in those days, I mean, this has all changed,



you would go for your visits or there would be someone in case the slightest thing, they would be there to protect me.

Right.

And David tried once or twice too. Because he was quite a few times sent on a mission for the movement for the Zionism to recruit. And he was in this country and in that country. Now with David, I was a bit more relaxed. I knew there wouldn't be any violent moves of any type.

So I would accept like if I meet him in Brussels, if he was in Paris and he said he'd be passing in Brussels, I happened to be there, OK, I'll go and see him. And he was usually with his wife and one of the daughters. So that wasn't too bad. But it's never been easy.

So it's always an issue?

It's always an issue. And with my father, I have no correspondence at all. And this-- and they did invite me a few times later in the years to come. And so many other sisters visit Israel and we give them the best welcome and we gave them to the royal tour of all the Holy places.

And I can explain everything to you. And why don't you come? And why don't you come?

And I always refused. I didn't want, you know, it's marked me more than anything during the war, this encounter with the family. This went on close to 35 years with not seeing any of the family, none of them.

Including Henri?

Mm-hm. No, I must have met Henri once in England, yeah, I think so, with his wife. He was visiting and I was with the sisters. And I was studying in Cardiff. Because I did--

--eventually.

--pick up studies eventually later on. So he came to visit me in the convent. Now with Henri, I had no fear. He could have come anywhere. I knew he wasn't going to do anything against me. If anyone understood my situation--

--it was him.

--he was the best one to understand. So I did meet him in London with his wife when he visited. And we had a good conversation. And again he said, you know, nothing would happen and I shouldn't be afraid and I should come and it would mean so much to our father if I came and visit. He really wanted to see me. So I finally decided in-- let me think-- in '60-- in '70, 1970 that I would do the trip. But there were still conditions.

One of our sisters was on a course which included a visit to the Holy Land. So I arranged my personal trip to coincide with the group who were studying who would be in the Holy Land when I was there. And so I would separate the day of arrival. But she would know that of the 18th of February, if I wasn't at the airport, to alert whoever was to be alerted, that means there is trouble. So that's the only way I accepted to go for the very first time.

And they all knew it was going to be hard on everyone. I hadn't seen anyone since. But they particularly feared for my father, the emotional shock.

Yeah.

So they had a doctor stand by at the airport. And they had warned him about that. And I will say, it was such an emotional upheaval for me that it's a very difficult experience to even explain or share. It was like you live something outside your body. I don't know whether that makes sense.

There I am, but I'm living a total different experience with the family here. It's like me looking into me from the outside. And it did shake me up physically a lot. And I spent the 18 days with them. And so this is when, finally, I had a chance to talk with my father about all these events and where he expressed regrets of having left me alone, that he shouldn't have done that.

When Izzy was threatening you?

Yeah.

Yes.

And he consulted with David who didn't find it too, too difficult. Henri was there, married already and children. So I stayed part of it with Henri, part of it with David.

And my father was in David's kibbutz. So he was there like almost on a daily basis. We had a very good visit. I was there for the seder. That was the first seder after the war that we had together in one of the kibbutzim.

And we invited cousins and whichever distant relations we could find. So we had a whole table. It was very, very emotional. And that's the last time I saw my father. Because he died in '78 and I was in Nigeria. So I couldn't go.

Right. So you saw him once?

Yeah. But then I've seen the others quite a bit. So '70 was my very first visit, just 18 days. And then I went back, I believe, for the year I told you, in 1980-- no, '81, end of '81.

Did you tell your father about your mother then?

No.

So when did you tell him? Or didn't you tell him?

I never told him.

You never told him. You just told the brothers?

I told the brothers. And as everyone denied it and everyone said that I had just arranged that and it was my making that it all was like that, I decided there's no point bringing this up again and I'll just leave it for what it is. They don't have to believe it. But we were still fighting backwards and forwards, me being Jewish or not Jewish until one of those visits.

And that's in the '80s when I was there for a year that we had the long hours of talks and questioning. Oh, were they good at questioning. You have no idea that I finally convinced them by my attitude and by all that, can't deny it, you're really Jewish.

I said, did you ever doubt it? What has that got to do-- and that's when I said, we have the same father, the same mother. We are not from different blood. He said, no, but I really didn't think you had anything Jewish anymore. I said, look, Catholic religion has nothing-- then, of course, I've had some very difficult times.

Because Catholics haven't been in the best books of anyone. And they've still done tricky things. And we found out Pope so-and-so didn't do that and the other one-- and I can't deny that. And I understand and I agree, but that isn't that will always be. And I have been pretty open with Davids and Henri of my experiences, even, of anti-Semitism in the Catholic church as a Catholic nun.

And I haven't hidden that. I can share that. Because as I said, you know, it's very difficult to be Jewish in whichever category I put myself.

--put yourself in.

It is a problem because I have experienced anti-Semitism from sisters, from religious, from priests. But I suppose that's the way it is.

OK.