

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Lucie Ragin conducted by Peggy Frankston on July 23, 2009 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in New York, NY 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 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.

LUCIE RAGIN

July 23, 2009

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview conducted by **Peggy Frankston**, with Mrs. **Lucie Ragin**, on July 23rd, 2009, in **New York City**, for the **Rivesaltes** Internment Camp Memorial Museum. Good morning Mrs. **Ragin**.

Answer: Yes, ma – good morning. My name is **Lucie Ragin**, I was born **Lucie Laya(ph) Saltz**, and my parents felt that **Zalc, z-a-l-c**, but **Saltz, s-a-l-t-z** is also how it's spelled. And I was born in **Antwerp, Belgium**, February 27, 1935. And my mother and father were very loving parents. My father's name was **David Saltz**, and my mother's name was **Miriam Clara Saltz**. And they already had a son, his name is **Andre Zalc, Abraham Zalc**. And we were a very happy family, and **Antwerp** is a beautiful ci – city by – by the ocean. And my aunt and uncle lived in the same town in a ver – in a Jewish community there, we lived. And my aunt and uncle had a bakery. And that's the only family we really had. Most of my father's family was in **Poland**, and my mother had some family left in **Latvia, Russia**, and – which we never met, but we were very close to my family, my mother's aunt and uncle – ma – my aunt and uncle, and I always would go there as a little girl and on the holidays and we – my mother and – would make wine with her sister, and I – I loved the goodies in the bakery that they owned, so I always liked to go there. And

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

we were very happy family and all of a sudden they said it wouldn't be good for the Jewish people to stay in **Antwerp** because the war was broke – breaking out. So my parents and my aunt and uncle, we decided to leave **Antwerp**, and we packed whatever we could in a – in a rush to leave, and – for **France**. And I was a little girl, I really didn't understand too much. I saw people taping the window, because they were afraid that their houses would be bombed, and they put tape on the window so it wouldn't shatter. And we took a duffle bag, whatever we could, and we left by train to go to **France**. And I remember the Red Cross in the – in **La Gare**, in the station, and they would help all the people and give them hot chocolate and things like that. And when they packed in a rush, one of the scissors that they packed was sticking up, and I sat on that bag, and I had to be treated by the Red Cross, and that's why I remember that incident. And the train went on, and we really didn't know where we were going in **France**, and we went towards this – I guess on the – the southern part of **France**, and my aunt and uncle were with us, we were all i-in a place called **Brens(ph)**, which was a camp. And from there we went to **Recebedou**, or vice-versa. And then we ended up in **Rivesaltes**, which was the worst one, I think, of them all. I remember barbed wire, but I don't remember – I think I was wearing a Jewish star, but I'm not positive. I was a little girl, and my mother was pregnant, and it was very hard for her because we didn't have any food, and we

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

didn't have many things. And whatever she had, she would give to her children. And I rem – and my father in camp, he's – he knew – he was a plumber there, they used him to do plumbing, and he helped people get out of the camp, and they paid him by giving him like an egg, a tomato, a few potatoes and this way he would make his food. But they were aware of what he was doing, so he had to leave the camp and not come back. He had to leave my mother and me there and not come back, because there were – and every day they would come and they would pick up my mother, I don't know if it was the **Vichy**. I remember a German Shepherd also, and they would take my mother for questioning, because they thought she knew where he was, but she didn't. And I – I used to see my cousin in camp, and my aunt. I don't remember about my uncle and my boy cousin. But we were very hungry, very, very hungry. There was hardly any food. I know my mother always said if you got like a hundred grams of bread and a little bit of turnip soup and if they punished you, they would take it away from you. That's what she said. And – and she was always worried about everybody. And I remember in the camp, they put me in the little children's nursery, or whatever, and I would – I was always crying – they called me – I was always crying, I was always sad, I was a very sad little girl because I always wanted to be with my mother. And I even had the German measles there, and they put me in the infirmary. And I had the window by – I slept by the

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

window in the infirmary, and there were other children there, and the mothers would come by the window and they wanted to give things for their children, and I would – I know I wasn't allowed to take it, but they like more or less forced me to do it. And then they took me away from by the window so I couldn't see anybody. And we were there, and also I was in a little nursery where I cried all the time because I wanted to be with my mother. And one day I escaped when the milkman came, and I ho – I heard all the loudspeakers talking, you know, listening to my name, and – and somehow I thought I would find my mother, but all the barracks looked alike, and I couldn't find her. So somebody recognized me and they took me to my mother and somehow she must have convinced them – convinced them to let me stay there. And – but I know everybody was very, very hungry, and there was a lot of suffering all around me. My girl cousin was very close to me and I would see her once in a while, but she was older and you know, they divided you by age. The rabbi in the camp heard that they were going to send everybody to **Auschwitz**, so he told my mother to try to escape. My brother had – and my father were no longer there. We didn't know where they were. You have to remember that in those days there was no radio, no communication from the outside, nothing. So you really didn't know what was going on. After the war we found out that my brother was given away to a French family. But the rabbi gave my mother a few francs and told

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

her to escape. So we had a pass to see my sister, who was born at the maternity [indecipherable]. And instead of going to see her, we escaped. And my mother had spoken to one of the nurses there and she said not to worry, that she's gonna try and get her out of camp. My mother was unbelievable, very strong lady, very strong, that she could survive all of this. And with a few francs we went – we didn't go to see my sister, my mother took me to the **La Gare**, which is the railroad station. And she tried to buy tickets for us, she just had enough money to buy us tickets to go to **Marseilles**. And in **Marseilles**, she knew my father would be there. There was a hotel where all the Jewish people stayed, and she figured somebody there would know where my father was. So – but at the station, I started to cry and she was afraid that the Germans would – because you had to show a pass wherever you went, so she was afraid that the Germans would notice me crying, so she bought me soda. I wanted soda to keep me quiet. So when she went to buy the ticket, the money that she used for the soda, she didn't have enough for the tickets. So she met a woman there that she's a French lady, and she sold her – she had a piece of soap, and she sold her the piece of soap and the lady and my mother bought the tickets and she took us on the train and spoke for my mother, cause my mother only spoke Yiddish and very little French, and they used to come on the train to ask for identity. But my mother made believe like she was sleeping, and I was a little girl, I

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

spoke a little French, so that was all right, and the woman took care of me. But the minute we arrived in **Marseilles**, she – she told my mother, I can no longer stay with – with you, because – she kissed us goodbye and she left us right there. So we didn't know really where to find my father, but we knew there was a place in **Marseilles** called **Hotel Avant**(ph). I don't know exactly how she found that out, but we tried to go there and I was afraid of anybody that wore a uniform, so my mother was going to stop, she saw a mailman, and ask him. And I carried on so that she couldn't even ask him, but somehow she did after a while, and we found a place, **Hotel Avant**(ph) in **Marseilles**, where all the Jewish people were assembled. But it wasn't a very good place to stay, because the Germans would come with big trucks and they would raffle – they would do a raffle at night and take everybody to **Auschwitz**. So we were in that hotel, it's like a miracle. My father's friend was there, and he said he hasn't seen my father for a while. Sometimes he comes in there, but he hasn't seen him for a while. But that night we went to sleep and my father cut his finger while he was – he was a lumberjack during the war, in th – in the forest, that's what he said. And he cut his finger, this finger here, the pointer. I always remember, because he had a big scar. And he had to see a doctor because the bleeding wouldn't stop. So he – he came in to see the doctor and my father's friend said, you know, Mr. **Zalc**, your wife and daughter are here. He said, come on, don't

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

joke around, it's impossible. So it just turned out that that's what happened. So in the morning we saw my father and it was the most exciting time. I'm sorry. And my father went to suture – oh, my father went to the doctor to suture his wound, and my mother like almost collapsed because my brother wasn't with him. My brother and father, in the beginning they were like homeless people. But then my father saw that he couldn't take care of my brother, so he gave him away to a French fa-family. And they took very good care of him. So my mother said she's not leaving unless he gets my brother, so it took a – well, we went to this vil – little village which is called **Aix-en-Provence** and from there we went with my father to **Tres**, which was in the southern part of **France**, where he was living. And the landlady, Madame **Laville**(ph), she was the landlady where my father lived, and she gave us a bigger room, and my broth – my father got my brother back from the French people, and we all lived in that room: my mother, my father, my brother and me. And my sister was still at **Erna**(ph). So the French lady was a wonderful, wonderful lady and she didn't like the Germans because they killed her son during the war, whatever. And she would take me with her all over. She would take me to the cemetery, she would take me to church. So she wanted to really baptize me. And she gave us like food, and she gave us – and she let us live there all through the war without paying rent. We all lived in a big room that looked like a restaurant, all of us. And the Germans,

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

when they came to town, lived upstairs in that hotel. And they didn't know we were Jewish, so that's another miracle. I mean, it's – it's incredible. So we had a little car – and then, the **Ozay**(ph), or the Red Cross, the Swiss Red Cross got my sister out of concentration camp – out of the internment camp and they brought her to us, to my mother. And my mother had to go to meet her in **Marseilles**, and on the way back they didn't like her pass – you know, they came to see, this one, to see if everything was all right, and they – they almost didn't let her get off the bus, because they didn't like the papers. It didn't have some kind of signature, and the bus driver said, come on, let's – let her go, you know, and then he took off, and she came to **Trespeux**(ph) **Giraud**(ph), and we stayed there until liberation, but a lot of things happened in that little village. Sometimes they would come through town, the Germans, and they said ammunition was – a plane came by and dropped ammunition and whoever has it, they took the whole village, put them in the middle of this little park and they said they're gonna shoot the priest if – they're gonna shoot the priest if the ammunition is not found. But finally, after I don't know how many hours, they let us go. But we understood everything they said, because Yiddish and German is very similar. And also, in the hotel where we lived, this German soldier was talking to my mother, I don't know, in German, I guess, and he said, he doesn't know what's going to happen to him, he really doesn't want to be a

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

soldier, he might never see his kids again because you know, it's war. And he always used – and he gave me a few candies. So I didn't know, we didn't let on that we were Jewish or anything like that. And we lived in that little village and we really were hungry too, we didn't have any food. And we had a little carriage for my sister, and inside there was like an opening where she sat. So we would go into the fields and we would steal like potatoes and fruit. And my sister would sit – we would put it in that opening and my sister would sit right on top and that's how we would come back to town. And I would – I went to school there and my brother too, and my little sister stayed with my mother. And we had a very hard time, but all of a sudden they said that the town will be – would be bombed. And so everybody went into the mountains and – everybody went into the mountains – what I forgot to mention, I'll go back to the mountains later, is that my – th-the landlady, Madame **Laville**(ph) wanted to baptize me and my mother said no. Sh – sh – I was bor – my daughter's born Jewish and she will die Jewish; because they were pretty religious before the war. So she didn't do anything. But she was always dressed in black because of the death of her son, and she had two little gi – dogs, one white one and one black one. And she was very good to me, and to my whole family. But when we went up in the mountains, when they said they were gonna bomb the town, that was almost at liberation, but we didn't know it. We saw planes going by, bombs falling,

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

all kinds of things, and we stayed up there. And then all of a sudden they came and they told us that the war is over, we can go back. So everybody was so excited, but they didn't let the children go back because they weren't sure. So they said, let the grown-ups, some grown-ups go back and see if everything's all right. And then I remember liberation, it was great. All the American tanks came through town, and everybody was so happy, everybody was kissing everybody, they were drinking. And one day I was playing at a fountain right there in the middle of town, and an American soldier, who was a Zionist, I guess, he was looking for Jewish people in that town, if there were any Jewish people. So I was playing with my friends and he came over and he said, which one of you little girls speaks Jewish? And I said, I do. And he says, take me to your mother. So my mother lived right across the street in that hotel. So he – he went to my mother, and my mother said she had a s-sister in the **United States**, and he says, on my furlough, I'm gonna try and find out where – if you – if she's still alive, if she's interested and so on. So the next time he came back to town, he brought my – he heard from my aunt, he brought us goodies, and every American Jewish soldier that came through town, came to our house and brought us things. And they – they didn't know whether they were gonna make it because our little village was the beginning of liberation, but they still had to go on to **Paris** and **France** and – and things like that, so they were a little bit – some of

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

them were even crying to my mother. And from there we left nac – we left that little village and we went back to **Marseilles**, because we wanted to get back to **Belgium** to find out what happened to the rest of our family. So we went to **Marseilles**, I went to school there with my brother and my sister, and they still had air raids where you had to go into the shelters in the middle of the day. They still had all these things, and my father worked for the American army, and we saved up enough money and then we went back to **Antwerp, Belgium**. In 19 like '45, at the end of, and my – and we had to find a little apartment, it was very hard, you couldn't – you couldn't find anything. And we found a little apartment and – and we lived there and every time people would come back on buses to the school that I went to, that's wha – they had like a country yard, they would come back there and they would – my mother would go to see if her sister, my uncle, my aunt, my – my cousins were alive, and nobody ever came back. And she would never walk in that street ever again, she would go all around. And we – I forgot to mention that also, when I lived in **France**, I was in children's homes, I was in Villa **Marianne**, which is in south **Raphael**, and I was very hungry there too, I used to eat the peels from the garbage when we went to the beach. I hated it. First of all, I wanted to be with my mother and father, and we would go to the beach, and I-I didn't like it because they made you bathe without a bathing suit. They kept you very badly, and the

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

[**indecipherable**] priest who was the one in charge, he made parties, and we didn't have any food, and some of the boys at night would go to the kitchen, they made believe like they were sl-sleepwalking, and bring food for everybody. And life is strange, I'm – I'm just doing this, I'm gonna f – I'm just doing this – I always talk about the Holocaust because I don't want people to forget. And I'm doing it for my parents – for my parents and my cousins, and that's it.

Q: Let me change the tape. Yeah, we're gonna change tapes.

A: I thought it was –

End of Tape One

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

Beginning Tape Two

A: When I was in **Tres**, I went to school. I played with the children. We st – we made little things, little clothes for the dolls, and I always waited for Christmas because the children always got a lot of toys to play with, and – but I said I was so good, why didn't I get such a big doll, or why didn't I get these things. So – because I didn't understand, so my mother always used to say, oh, don't worry. And one day Madame **Laville**(ph) bought me a lot of toys, so – cause I waited for **Santa Claus** just like anybody else. And also, I loved going to school, and my mother sewed, so she sometimes would make me clothes and she would knit a whole night sometimes to make me a pair of socks. Sh-she – and I didn't have the things, the material things like other kids, but I wasn't really that much aware of it, except when I was cold. And my mother gave my brother and me once money for milk. And we had to stand on line to get extra milk for some reason that store was giving – you could buy more milk and we really needed the milk for my sister **Joujou**(ph), we called her **Joujou**(ph), her name is **Josephine**. And we were playing on line and we lost the money and we came home and we couldn't – we didn't have the milk, and boy did we get it. My mother always screamed, she was very nervous, and my father was very calm. And my sister is just like my mother, and I'm just like my father. I tried to be very calm. And I learned French, and I learned the **Marseillaise**, which I

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

still remember til today, I don't know how, because now I'm living in the **United States** a long time and I – sometimes I don't know all the words to the – the national anthem all the time, I'm embarrassed to say that I forget sometimes. And I also was in **France** in the **Chateau de Marjolet**, which they treated you pretty good. But I was always crying, so I don't know. I made everybody cry by crying. And also I know a lot of kids had lice, and they put powder on their head, or if they had something wrong with their stomach, and I was – I love chocolate, I would give everything for chocolate – so, whatever they gave you, I took it twice, because I got two pieces of chocolate. But they were pretty strict with you, and it wasn't that bad at the **Chateau de Marjolet**, but most kids there were orphans, and they cried a lot too, but I made them cry even more, because – so they told – they told my mother to come and get me because – so we had to leave earlier than anticipated. We were there because after the war you couldn't find an apartment, and my parents had a very small little room. And it was hard to keep us all, we didn't have a stove, we didn't have a refrigerator and they still had air – air raids for – and my s – my mother was holding my sister on the way to the shelter and she was missed by a grenade just by a step or two, so it was very scary. And there was a man in our building who was deaf, and he stayed in his apartment all through the thing and nothing happened to him, so I always used to say, why do I have to go to the

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

shelter? And I used to go to the movies, I loved musicals. And that's really how I learned how to speak English, by going to the movies. My mother used to give me a few francs and I would go to the movies with my brother or by myself. At that time it wasn't like today. And we had – where we went back to **Belgium** we had a lot of friends. Our hearts was open to everybody. When we left to come to the **United States**, the door didn't close all night long. That's how many people came to say good-bye to us, and also, after the war, when we lived in **Marseilles**, we had a young boy who was about 20 years old at the time, he would come and my mother would invite him for Passover and everything and then I heard that he died, my parents were very upset, because he ate too much. You know, aft-after you don't eat and you start eating after the war, you blow up and you – something happens to you, and I know he died and my parents were very upset, because he had no parents, nobody and he would come to us. So that was bad, too. And while you're in camp, you do see a lot, you see people that are laying, you don't know if they're alive or dead. And you see a lot of bad things. And it's always with you, and there's always articles today that will remind you of it. And I'm glad they had the Holocaust Museum, because I go there sometimes. And I try to go to see if I can find pictures that I know. And I find a lot of information and it's really – I once read

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

that the people that died have no cemetery, so when you go there it's the same, you know.

Q: It's [indecipherable]

A: Yes, and I'm very lucky that all my family survived and my father lived til he was 80, and my mother lived with me til she was like 86. And my father was very sick, so – my father had heart problems, **Alzheimer**, everything. And my mother was sick too, but she knew everything til the last minute of her life. And you must always remember and always do things.

Q: Why did you leave **Belgium**?

A: I left **Belgium** in 1950 to come to the **United States**. May 17th, 1950. And we loved it here and we still do, you know.

Q: But why did you leave **Belgium**, why?

A: Why? My mother didn't want to live in that country any more. She didn't – she didn't even want to go back to **France** and I always wanted – I still corresponded with the landlady that saved my li – you know, that saved our lives, and Rabbi **Bloch**(ph) is the first person that I should thank, because he gave my mother money to escape. And then Madame **Laville**(ph) is the other one and lama – I don't know how they did it with the [indecipherable] to bring my sister – it's like a miracle really, that all five of us survived, and – and are here in the **United States**, and my

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

mother and father were very happy here, they loved it. We got reunited with my aunt and uncle and my cousins, and we had a – we have a pretty good life. We're not rich, but we have a good life.

Q: You have children?

A: I have a son and a daughter and I have four grandchildren. And my son – they're all boys. My son has a son, that's **Gregory Ragin**, he's – goes to **Binghamton** now, he wants to be an engineer. And my other – my daughter has three boys and they're still – they're 16 – 16, 12 and seven. And I see them often, and that's about it, you know. And I'm g – and I read things and I read that in **Papiniau**(ph), a stat – a monument has been defaced, the Jewish kids that made and – and I get very upset. And that's why I think we always have to talk about it and there's so many other problems. There's always gonna be war. Look what happened in **Darfur**, looked what happened all over. It's – and look what's happening in **Iraq** and all over. And **Afghanistan**. And it gets me very upset. But I do try to tell people that, you know, you have to be good to one another, that's the most important thing. It doesn't matter what religion you are, but you just have to be a good human being.

Q: Thank you very much for interviewing with us.

A: Okay

End of Tape Two

Interview with Lucie Ragin
July 23, 2009

Conclusion of Interview