

Perla NUNEZ née Hauszwalb

Perla Hauszwalb was born in Pulavi, Poland a few miles from Kazimierz Dolny, on January 6, 1928. Her mother, Mala Rywka Akselrad, was the daughter of well-to-do businessman from Warsaw who sold supplies to hatmakers and ran a notions shop. Perla remembers living with them in their nice apartment. They were Orthodox Jews, but Perla emphasizes several times, not "Hassidic". Mrs. Nunez says that she herself believed fervently in God, but after the Shoah, she lost her faith.

The Hauszwalb family had been hatmakers in Kazimierz Dolny for several generations. Her father, Moszek Chil Hauszwalb and his brothers Henri and Maurice went to Paris to start a hat business after the Great Depression.

Perla was the youngest child. A sister, Bella, was born in 1926, and her brother Rachmil or "Raymond" was born in 1922 and her sister Chaja or "Helene" was born in 1921. A brother Shlome was older. Their mother tongue was Yiddish.

Perla's mother ran a small hat shop in Pulavi while her father tried to set-up business in Paris with his brothers, during the Depression. He came home to die of a respiratory infection in 1932. Perla has memories of this time.

After her father died, Mala Rywka decided to move the entire family to Paris where her husband's two brothers lived, in 1933. They first lived in Montmartre, in the 18th arrondissement and the girls attended the local public school (During the interview, Perla searched for the expression in French "école communale") for girls situated on the rue Marcadet. Perla learned quickly and her teacher commended her for doing so well. Later, her uncles gave the family an unused store for lodging.

Perla remembers that her brother Raymond or "Rachmil" (later deported), the "nice one", went to work right away, picking up supplies at the train stations on his bicycle and delivering hats to shops. The family made felt, straw, and cloth hats. Mala Rywka was put to work doing piece work and received her lodging and a small stipend for food as her only payment. Perla's older sister Chaja or Hélène was tall and quite attractive and she tried to get work as a model. She studied French at home.

When Jews were required to register at the local mayor's office, Perla's mother did so. Perla does not remember the first time she was made to wear the yellow star. Actually, she does not remember wearing it at all.

The day of the "Rafle", Perla remembers sensing the danger, wanting to flee and pressing her mother to leave, but her mother kept packing things. She distinctly remembers looking out the window and seeing a man and his little girl walk down the street, his daughter hiding her face in her father's coat, and how upset this made her. Mala Rywka gave her daughter a loaf of bread with money in it and told her to wait for her at the metro station near-by, the Hôtel de Ville. Perla remembers waiting in the street for hours, but her mother did not come. She remembers noting that everything was running "normally", buses and cars in the streets, people going to work, as if nothing was happening. Finally, she went to the rue Ferdinand Duval in the near-by Marais, a Jewish section, where her Aunt Fanny lived with her son Billy and her aunt took her in.

Several days later, she returned to her own apartment (it is not clear if this is in the 18th arrondissement or elsewhere) to try to get some clothing and the concierge told her that she could not open the door, which had been sealed by the police, and that she would have to go to the local police station to get access. Apparently, the concierge was the wife of a policeman, which was common at the time. She may have denounced the Jewish families who lived in her building.

Perla gave her aunt all the money her mother had left her and they met with relatives on Aunt Fanny's side who were in touch with a network to get Jews to the free zone, crossing the demarcation line. Everything was well-organized. The "passeur", his sister, and mother took Perla with them on a bus to Dijon, where they were taken to a farmer's house in the country. They then took a bus to Macon and were greeted by people in a restaurant. Perla then took a train from Macon to Carcassonne alone and though a policeman was checking papers, he apparently thought she was with the couple in the same compartment. From Carcassonne, she took a bus to Esperaza, where her two uncles, cousins, and her brother had taken refuge.

The family had chosen this town because one of the major providers of felt for hats lived there and allowed everyone in the Hauszwalb family to make a good living. However, the woman who lodged the family got tired of one of her uncle's incessant disputes with his wife and later denounced the uncle to the Milice. He was deported, never to return.

Perla was taken to a boarding school in Limoux, where the other students were not too friendly. The only other girl who was nice to her was Protestant. She shared her food packages with Perla. The mother of another student did bring a blanket for her. Perla was the only Jewish girl at the school, but a family named "Picard" (Perla searched for the French word describing the father's profession, which was probably "brocanteur", someone who buys and sells antique or second-hand furniture). The family had four children and even wanted to adopt Perla when it seemed clear that she had no parents. She had very little of anything. From time to time, her uncle and family visited and took her to the grocery store. Perla remembers going to Grenoble for summer vacation, but that her uncle and older brother (the one who always "ends up on his feet") escaped into Switzerland, but it was considered too dangerous for her to try.

At one point, the family no longer had money to keep her at the school, but the headmistress and teachers arranged for her to stay, supervising the studies of the younger students.

Mrs. Nunez says that the people of Limoux were very kind to her.¹ She said that it was at this time that she really felt "French" and no difference between her and the others. She passed the first part of her baccalaureate exam in Montpellier. Perla returned to Paris in 1947 and finished her studies in a girls' school in Versailles, where she passed the second part of her baccalaureate exam. She registered at the Sorbonne, but did not have enough money to continue her studies. Her older brother and his wife were very unwelcoming to Perla.

The Jewish aid organizations she contacted would not help her because she had some living relatives. One uncle found her a small maid's room on the rue Ferdinand Duval. Perla met Gicacomo Nunez at a place where young Jews met to go on hikes or organize other activities – it may have been the Jewish scouts or another Jewish youth group. Her husband, Giacomo Nunez, describes how they went to Tunisia to meet his mother and how they were married there several months later. They have four children and five grandchildren and currently live in Chevy Chase, Maryland, where they moved in 1996.

Nota bene: for other information on Mrs. Nunez's time in Limoux, please consult her written testimony in French or English, included in her file.

¹ Mrs. Nunez describes in a written testimony, translated into English, which accompanies her file, that the headmistress at the school, Madame Rousset, took her to the police station when she turned 18 and was required to have identity papers. The local official, Monsieur Persillon, and Madame Queffelec, forged papers to make her family name "Osvald" and her parents first names typically French.