

Interview with Dr. Marcel Francis KAHN on October 1, 2012 in Paris, France

Sound file M 4197003 = 37 minutes 09 seconds
Sound file M 4197004 = 1 hour 16 minutes 10 seconds
Sound file M 4197005 = 43 minutes 32 seconds

(There was a sudden, violent noise during the recording of the first track. Construction work was going in the apartment just above. I preferred to stop the interview and relocate to another room. I feared I might lose what I had by simply putting the recorder on “pause”.)

Dr. Marcel Francis Kahn, born in Paris on November 1st, 1929, discusses his family background. His parents were both Alsatian Jews. His mother, Jeanne Meyer, came from a family which made its fortune in a silver mine in Mexico. His father, Gaston Kahn, received a scholarship for rabbinical studies in Paris, but ended up studying literature at the Sorbonne. He was unsuccessful at business. However, he was made director of the CAR (Committee for Assistance to Refugees), a charity created in 1934 to help poor immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe and German Jews forced to flee Hitler’s regime. Dr. Kahn emphasizes that his father was reluctant to become director of UGIF, but finally accepted.

He talks about his secular and religious education. The man later to become the *Grand Rabbin* of France, Jacob Kaplan, gave him and his sister Dany Claude (born in 1925) private religious instruction. At an early age, Marcel told his father he did not believe in all this and did not want to continue. Later, during the war, he celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in Limoges, where the family fled in May, 1940. Dr. Kahn did this to please his father and also, as an act of defiance.

The family later left Limoges, in the unoccupied zone, to the southeast occupied by the Italians, the town of Gap (the *chef-lieu* of the *département* of the Hautes-Alpes). After that, the family went to the nearby village of Chauffayer-en-Champsaur, where two groups of resistance fighters were in competition, the Communists and the Gaullists. He was given look-out missions and was considered a “neutral” element by both groups. He describes this briefly in the second track. The family was housed by Jean Jourdan, a member of the F.F. He maintains that Grenoble and the surrounding countryside were liberated before Paris, around the 22nd of August, 1944.

Marcel Francis Kahn said that he was a mediocre student during this period, having to change schools several times and take classes by correspondence. He mentions that in May, 1944, he simply threw away the homework sent from the *Cours Richlieu* in Paris.

Most of track M 4197004 is devoted to Dr. Kahn’s post-war experiences and eminent medical career. In track M 4197005, the interview backtracks to the wartime period to better understand how the family survived in Vichy France, even with “JUIF” stamped on their identity papers and when bank accounts and assets belonging to Jews were appropriated by the Vichy regime or inaccessible. He states that his mother had, “brought enough to live on” and his father received a salary. He maintains that in the post-war trial of members of UGIF, his father was freed of any charges. In school, the students were divided into pro-Pétainists and pro-Gaullists. He did not experience anti-Semitism.

Dr. Kahn mentions many names of people and places. (I shall list many of them since he refers to many of the famous figures of the Left, both in France and abroad, many of them still active in contemporary France.)

Hotel Regina in Limoges: Dr. Kahn's maternal, Léo Meyer, was director. He organized the family's exodus from Paris in May, 1940, just before France capitulated and German troops arrived.

The *Lycée Carnot*: where Marcel Francis began school at the age of 6. He returned after the war, where he was friends with the intellectuals Jacques Braunschweig and Pierre Vidal-Naquet.

Limoges, Gap, Grenoble, Chauffayer-en-Champsaur, Marseille.

Albert Lévy, Raymond-Raoul Lambert: both involved in Jewish rescue activities during the war. Lévy escaped to Geneva with his wife and son and may be the person who obtained a Salvadorian passport and visa for the Kahn family. Lambert and his wife and children were arrested by the Gestapo and deported from Drancy. In Lambert's diary (published in English with the support of the USHMM), written partially in Drancy, he disguises Gaston Kahn's name by using Marcel's sister's name, calling him "Papa Dany".

Colonel Payol: chief of French counter-espionage

Daniel Mayer: illustrious figure of the French Socialist Party and the French resistance, worked with Gaston Kahn in Marseille. He created the *Comité d'action Socialiste* there in 1941.

Marc de Bonneau (de Bonnot?): in the French resistance, gave lodgings to Jeanne Kahn and her two children. The Zisman family were also hiding there. Limoges?

Gap: the "5ème direction de l'UGIF" set-up operations in the Italian-occupied zone in March, 1943.

Valence: town in south east France on the demarcation line between Italian-occupied territory and Vichy and German-occupied territory.

Hôtel des Colonies in Gap.

Bellegrain: one of Marcel's classmates who fell in the fighting.

René Renoux: former minister from the Radical Socialist Party

Hôtel Charbre in Chauffayer.

Serge Barret: Prefect of Gap, gave Marcel fake identity papers, using authentic administrative forms.

Karol Pilat (spelling?): survivor of a ghetto in occupied Poland. Gaston Kahn asked Marcel to take spend time with him and keep him company. He spoke only Yiddish, German, and Polish. He was interviewed by the Spielberg Visual History Foundation.

David Rousset: resistance fighter, tortured *rue de Saussaye* and deported to Buchenwald. He was one of the first to write about his experiences in *Les jours de notre mort*. Later formed a political party with Sartre called the *Rassemblement Démocratique*, with Trotskyite leanings.

Réseau Brutus

Moscow trials : of Jewish doctors

PSU: *Parti Socialist Unifié* (party of Pierre Mendès-France)

Hôpital Percy in Clamart, outside of Paris

Dr. Morris Ziff, head of research lab in Dallas

The John Birch Society

Jack Ruby

Hospital of the *Lariboisière*

Dr. Stanislas de Sèze: head of the immunology department of the Lariboisière

Cuban vacation organized by Dr. Bernard Kouchner, who later created “Doctors without Borders” and then became Minister of Foreign Affairs in President Sarkozy’s government.

Fidel Castro

Che Guevara

Viet Cong

Hôpital Bichat

Dr. René Frydman: « Père de la ‘fivette’ » FIV = fertilization *in vitro* or medically assisted fertilization. He was the doctor who was the first to successfully create an embryo outside the womb and then transplant it to the future mother. Apparently, he and Dr. Kahn were adolescents together during the war and plastered pro-Gaullist posters in the streets of Gap.

Lidice

Oradour-sur-Glane

José Bové: militant ecologist, known for tearing down MacDonald’s restaurants or ripping out transgenetic crops.

Jean-Yves Nau: journalist with *Le Monde*

UbuRoi : play by Alfred Jarry where the absurd characters are called « pataphycians ». Dr. Kahn makes a play on words, calling alternative medical practices “pata-medecine”, implying that they are absurd.

Yves TERNON: contemporary historian, specialist of genocide

De Courioux: pro-Pétain student, who later became a doctor

Michel Dreyfus-Schmidt: highly-revered Socialist political figure from Belfort

Tristan Mendès-France

Members of the resistance Dr. Kahn knew: Bourdet, Ravenel, Aubrac, Kriegel-Valrimont (deceased) and

Stéphane Hessel and Crémieux-Brilhac