

## **RG-50.031.0147**

### **Summary**

Irene Poll (nee Kahn) born in 1922 Germany, father served in WW1-businessman, mother (born in Luxembourg) took care of home, brother 2 yrs. younger, happy memories growing up; early friendly treatment by non-Jews but later endured anti-Semitism in school, brother attacked; near drowning in Rhine because not allowed to swim in public swimming pool; witnessing parents beaten up plus other anti-Semitism endured propelling Irene's desire at 12 yrs. old to flee to Lille, France & stay with aunt/uncle; brother's nervous breakdown, institutionalized; sadness saying good-bye to mother; Irene having to obtain proof that she was Jewish in order to leave Germany; Irene returns to discussing early schooling, enduring Germans' laughter as they brutalized her verbally, physically, feeling anger towards parents for not protecting her; once in France, being shot at during German invasion, pretending to not understand German soldiers' degradations; Germans order French Jews to wear yellow star, Irene removes star, takes nanny work with Catholic family to hide, employer eventually has to ask Irene to leave because Gestapo is inquiring; hearing family had been taken to concentration camps and feeling nothing; receiving assistance, which led to being sheltered by a priest; Irene has nervous breakdown from "things I had pushed away then becoming incapacitated"; learning priest had given up his bedroom for her & had removed his wall crucifix out of respect to her Jewish faith; priest nurtures Irene out of her breakdown by requesting Irene's expertise on text he needed translating, enabling her to feel needed; Irene assists refugees coming & going from house; in fear of being discovered, Irene begs priest to convert her but he denies her out of respect for her Jewish birth; priest Father Raymond Vancourt went on to write 20 books urging "people of all faiths to learn to live together"; liberation, hearing a tank shooting, French civilians grabbing Germans because Americans had not yet arrived; learning priest had been a leader of French underground; Irene joins Red Cross as translator, forced to return to Germany (only woman in 300 men) Spring 1945, celebrating Passover in Germany; learning parents, brother had survived, immigrated to Chicago; getting to know parents as an adult, coming into full understanding of their suffering in letting her go at 12 yrs. old and their pain from extended families' murders – after war, "No one was found."; Irene shares photographs of French citizens who assisted her shelter - at time of interview, Irene wanted them recognized as "Righteous Non-Jews" but they had reluctance to be honored; Irene's volunteer work sharing her story with students, her lingering emotional struggles; marriage, 2 children, husband dies, remarriage; appearances on several tv shows sharing her story; Irene shows & describes her paintings capturing tragedies of the Holocaust; Irene shares photographs of Holocaust memorials and her ID papers from when she left Germany at 12 yrs. old; passport obtained from Committee for Stateless Persons, which enabled immigration to America; obtaining U.S. citizenship 1950.