United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Paulette Fink
March 7, 1992
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PREFACE

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PAULETTE FINK
March 7, 1992

Beep.

Okay, Paulette, tell me about the resistance. Give me an overview of what it was like working ----------.

You know, the very strange is that in America, I don't think that we had any conception of what ---------- was. There was no such a thing. I mean, the ---------- escaped from France, and he made a first appeal from London on June 17, 1940, and he told the French people, we've lost the battle, but we haven't lost the war. You have to get together, and you have to resist, and you have to resist the occupier. At that time the Germans were not through France yet. They had made a demarcation line between the, the two sides of France. They were in the North, the South was supposedly free. And the people really didn't know what to do. There were nobody to organize anything, there was nobody who could be a leader, there was nobody who knew what, what does he mean by resist? Well, how do resist with nothing. We have a absolutely nothing. Well, a few men came through. First of all, a few went to London. They were able to escape uh in a clandestine way, of course, to London, got some orders from deGaulle, and came back with some orders, and little by little, organizations started to take place. One became the FFI, which was French, the Free French Forces of the Interior. One was the FTP, which was the, the Franc uh Shooter of uh Patriot, the Frank Patriot Shooter were really the communist party, and to who it turn out to be very, very much better than we were because they are, they were trained for guerilla, they were trained for sabotage, they were trained much more than we ever had been trained. And so by little, by little, we found people who had a little bit more guts, and people who had a bit more, more courage to start something again then, but you have to realize, what it means to be absolutely weak and, and, and, and, and powerless in front of the might of the German, which we never expected. We didn't expect the Germans to have any might. Our entire uh spying service had been so unbelievably bad, that we were, we didn't even know that during the Spanish war, we had a minister of aviation in 1936 who had sent absolutely our entire aviation to Spain. And, we had nothing. And when the Phony War took place, there was 8 months of no war and no peace, but when there was no shooting. When there were, there was anything happening, the French civilians were coping with it saying they are, they are protecting the army. And when the army never show a plane, and when the army never show anyone to protect them, they were told they are, are protecting the civilians. And we had nothing. We had absolutely nothing, and the Germans were armed to the teeth. So, all we could do was actually sabotage their work, and this is really the way we started. We started by sabotaging as much as we could. Later on in Lo--in, in, in, up to 4 yrs of resistance we knew how to dynamite a bridge, long before the Americans would come and bomb from 24,000 feet, and always missed it. But, as far as the resistance is concerned, there was really no such a thing. There was no such a thing. We, each one of us had this, and my husband, my husband at the time of the Gold Appeal was prisoner. He was prisoner of war, he had been taken as being the only official left of his entire battalion because everybody run. Everybody was running away. When the Germans came through Belgium, I mean and they started to rush through France. I mean, in no time we were finished. And my husband was picked on, on, on at a port, at this port where he decide not to run away. And, he, he was picked up, taken prisoner, he was an, an officer

uh of ----------, I mean, the prisoner of war camp. And, he tried 3 times to escape, and 3 times he was picked up again. And they, they gave him more time every time, and the 4th time he succeeded. And so he finally got back, and I was in the Red Cross, I mean, I was, I was, I was able to get as much information as I could possibly get and I never heard about what happened to him. I just didn't know. When he came back in August, 1940, 40 I think, I think so. I think he was prisoner for 3 months. And the minute he got back, he was going to go in the resistance. Now the first thing he did was to go in the South of France, and first of all, the first thing he did was to get into the business that he had before the war. He was in the 5 and 10 cent business. He was supervisor of 200 stores, and he he decided to take over one store in the free zone, and to see what he can do to help the people. Well, a lot could be done, because we had, for instance, in the, in the, in the attic of the store we had tons of dry beans and tons of lentil, and ton, ton tons of everything dry, and the people were absolutely starving the first year of the occupation, we had nothing to eat, but nothing. And he made them put a plaque in the paper saying, 'As of Monday morning, 7 o clock in the morning, you will be given ration.' That's all he said. Thousands of people turned up, and he gave out thousands of tons of, of, of anything he had in the attic, emptied the attic. Half an hour later, of course, he was picked up and taken, put in jail. And this is the way we started. I mean by doing things against them, by trying to interfere with their actions as much as we possibly could. But, he was taken 3 times, he was in the, in the, in the, the lowest end of a prison, you know when you, they put them in fortress, and he was tried in the lowest, lowest cell, completely, completely in secret, I mean, no connection with nobody. And, he said, "I can tell you so many stories, I..."

Why didn't you leave? Could he have left?

We, we, we could have left.

Why didn't you?

My parents, my parents finally had managed to escape, uh, in June, they escaped with my sister. They drove through the Spanish border. They were able to go at the time where nobody could pass the Spanish border. There were thousands and thousands of people trying to escape France, but my father had been a very prominent person in the OSS during the 1st World War, and uh his World War name was in the files, and when he got to the, the immigration border, there between France and Spain, he immediately found his name in the books, they gave him a, a, a policeman on the left side of the car, and one on the right, you might remember cars at that time, what they had a kind of a, uh, they had a step that you could step on, on each side of a car, so you had one on each side, and they passed 4,000 cars that went into Spain. And so they escaped enough to be able to go to Casablanca, stayed there for a while, and uh, and asked if that, at that time we had no contact, there was no way to know where they were, there was no way for them to know where we were. They had, there was no communication whatsoever with nothing. Uh, the time came when the FBI here asked for my father to come. And he was actually here, this is transgression, but he was actually for 4 years here, the head of the Alsatian Department of the Or--Office of War Information, and broadcast in Alsatian to France, to the ones who understood that that, that patois. And uh, so that thi, thi, thi, this was, this was the, the reason why we could have come, because when my father received the papers to come to America, he u-he he wanted to do anything possible to make us come with him, and to uh to make us join him, and my husband would absolutely not leave. He

said, first of all he was a very deep French patriot, and as a, as a Jew, he would absolutely not leave. He said, "If we, if we leave the boat when it's sinking, then who is going to be, to, to, to keep it afloat." And this is why we never moved. We never, we could have done, we could have gone. (Cough). As far as building the underground movement, the resistance movement, there, there was, there were those different groups, as I say, and those groups worked really in their own direction, very often interfering with each other, getting missions, they were getting BBC mission, mission uh, uh order, and sometimes two, two groups were given the same mission, I mean it was very, very messy, until deGaulle in 1942 decided to get rid of all those different factions and build the Secret Army. So, it became the AS, Armee Secret. And, at that point, they, only one headquarter could get mission order. There was no more any, one who could say, "I go the mission before you did, and I'm going to get that paratrooper uh, uh standing, and you're not going. I mean, it, we, at, at least working uh in connection. It became more and more organized, we had more and more people in, we had camps up in the mountains, we were, we were supplying those camps with everything we could, blankets and everything, we were stealing everywhere and we were supplying them with, uh, they, the, the things were really clandestine. It really was, it really was done very much undercover, I mean, under really big cover, that the Germans most of the time, could not find it. I mean, the, my husband was told when he came down from the mountain once on a bicycle that they were below waiting for him. And, he, he made up his face, and he passed in front of this whole gang on his bicycle, that's nothing, I mean he just went through and they never, they never realized it was him. And this kind of, of, but unfortunately, as we went, you want me to proceed really to go very far? Toward the end, then, it became very confusing because when Eisenhower started to give order, and deGaulle did too. And on June 6, 1944, when the, the invasion came in Normandy, at that time, the first thing deGaulle said, "Get out! Get out of wherever you are, hidden, get out in fight. Now you have the right to fight in the open." Ten minutes later, Eisenhower takes the, takes the microphone and says, "French Resistance, stay where you are, stay put, don't move, wait until our orders." And so some listened to deGaulle, and some listened to Eisenhower, I mean they, they, they most of the, of the kids were so fed up with being hidden, and being doing things undercover, that they went. And this is the way my husband was caught. Because they were doing things much more risqué, and, and, and much more dangerous, and uh, he would never have been caught if he hadn't, if he hadn't done that at the time. And it was just a few weeks before liberation. A few weeks before, after he had fought the entire occupation.

We're just running out.

Beep.

Tell me a little more about the organization. You used a phrase, "Chain with many links," one time when you talked about it. Chain with many links. You said it was a chain with many links, talking about the different sectarian groups like was there a Jewish resistance, was there a Catholic resistance?

Oh yeah, yeah. ----------There was a very definite Jewish resistance. I mean the Jewish Scout?, we have a Jewish Scout movement in France, which doesn't exist anywhere else, but in France, the, the Scouts are divided by religion, and so the, the Jewish Scout Movement were absolutely unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable. They did their work, they organized some camps for the children to be hidden in, they, they were fantastic. The, the others were not really

with any given religion. I mean, they, they were, they were Christian groups. But they, those Christian groups were full of Jews, I mean, I, I belonged to a, a Scout troop when I was 13, and, and there, I think there were 2 Christians in that group, and it was a Protestant group, so that everybody was Jewish, so, we never had this kind of life in France, we never, we never were divided by religion. Uh, the, the groups, each one, each one worked their own, their, their, really their own doing. Wherever they were, and wherever the Germans were acting, then they were doing the, what they could do to sabotage what they were doing, and they tried to do it without being caught, and tried to do it with, with, with uh, all kinds of uh of, of, of manners of acting that without being able to confront them because we had no arms. We had absolutely no arms. Later on, during, during the occupation, we were getting parachutes uh, uh bundles, so that this was another, another one of those big tragedies. We were told by the BBC when, when the parachute would take place, at the beginning we were getting them very well, but the Germans had found out the code, and of course, they were getting sometimes there before we did. And so we were getting uh for instance machine guns, and we were getting them in parts, so in one parachute, probably we had ten parts and we were missing four, and the four would be in the next, in the next parachute, and then we wouldn't get it. The German would get hold of that one with the four parts, so we could never use that machine gun, and that, everything was like this, I mean it was, it was really, it was pathetic, you know, when you, when you realize what, what really happened and how badly organized we were, but we did a tremendous amount of work. We, we sabotaged uh plans where they were working, I mean they taken, the, they had supposedly when they were , when they were picking up people, they were sending them to Germany to, to work in the factories, and in the plants that the Germans had to had to leave in order to go to war, so our people who were deported were supposed to be deported to factories and to slave labor, not to be killed, it was absolutely no knowledge that there was such a thing as being killed. I mean, we ne-you will never believe that, but we never heard of Auschwitz, we never heard of any, any, any, any camp or gas chamber or cremator--we never heard of that. Our people were living to be slave labors, and we never knew anything else. I mean, the whole, the whole truth came after the war, after liberation. I mean, until liberation, we didn't know anything. And so people were disappearing by the hundreds and by the thousands, and they, they were, they, they were, there, there, there is a German word, which is not translatable, and it Schadenfreud. Well, Shadenfreud is the pleasure, the joy of doing harm, and this is what the German built their entire philosophy on. They were picking up parents for instance, at five in the morning, leaving the children behind. Because they knew, what will those children do, without parents, I mean, they were lost. On top of that, of course, needless to say, that they were not ----------people had already escaped from another country. So France was loaded with people from Germany, from Poland, from Rumania, from Hungary, from all over, and those people could or could not speak some French. They were easily...depictable, I mean, it was really easy to, to find them. And, uh, they couldn't hide themselves so easily because the peasants would be suspicious if they would go into countryside, so they were really caught, I mean they were caught like rats, and we were the web. And there was an entire Jewish section in Paris where the people had a little suitcase at the bottom of their bed and they were waiting. They were actually waiting to be picked up. And they didn't dare to, to sleep, and they didn't to go, they didn't, they didn't know where to go. Where could they go? Take a train to go where, and then what would happen to them after at the end of that train stop. I mean, they stayed there and waited. And waited, and they were caught like rabbits, I mean caught by the thousands. And uh, this is the way we started to find children. We started to find kids sleeping the subway station. S-sleeping on a bench in the park, and not knowing who they were and of course it it's very hard to be able to get

from them who they were, and finally, little by little, we understood that the Germans were, that was one of their greatest pleasures was to leave the children alone. Those children were bound to disappear. I mean, who would take care of them. They couldn't express themselves, they couldn't talk, and uh this is the way we started to have, we had a, we had a chain, we had a chain of people, who were expressing them from, from hand to hand. And so we had absolutely everything possible. We had monks, and we had these nuns, and we had priests, and we had farmers, and we had, and we have one fabulous example in the, in the entire French resistance that was the ----------. I don't know if you heard about it. My children were hidden there for a while. And the Chambon happened to have as their priest, and every village had to have the priest because he was the one who was all protecting you or giving you up. And if the priest was protecting, you were protected. I mean that's, that Chambon, it was a unique situation. They were Huguenots. They were they people who had remembered from 1400 that they had been persecuted, and they were always the most willing and the most accessible. And this pastor told me, who was the head of this little town of the Chambon with his wife and his children. Was originally from Germany, apparently he had come long, long time ago to Ger--from Germany, and in Germany, they heard his name, and the very first one to arrive in the Chambon were German Jews. And uh little by little they were followed and followed and followed by more and more and more, and it was a very strange situation. First of all, there were five thousand farmers in that place, and they hid 5,000 Jews. This had become, you know, a real heroic page of history in, in French, history. But, on top of that, it was, it was strange happenings there because there were Germans in there. There were a, a garrison of German soldiers. Why didn't they move? Why didn't they do something. Some, some apparently were willing not to denounce. They didn't care. And others denounced without having been asked to do it. So that you could never be sure of anything, you could never be sure if you could, if you could talk out loud, you couldn't write, you couldn't telephone. I can tell you one very interesting incident. My husband, in 1942, was a, on the telephone with a friend of his, who was in the Southwest, and he at that time was in the east, and they were passing on codes a mission to accomplish, and at the end of the, the conversation, my husband said to him, Happy New Year, and it wasn't 2 minutes after he left that telephone booth that there were 2 people from the Gestapo there, follow us. They did. What is that conversation that you had? Why did you say happy new year in September? What does that mean? ---------- they all had a way to get out of the situation like this. But the fact is that you see what could have happened. I mean, that's the only word he said that was really happy new year. The rest was all code, and was terribly opp--against the Germans, but that they couldn't get. A second thing, where we, we needed card, we needed ID card, I mean this was the most important thing because we needed ration cards, without ration cards, you couldn't have anything to eat at all. We couldn't have ration cards under our name, and so we had friends who were in charge of doing nothing but ID cards, and I remember when I went with my American husband in 194--in 1954-55, to France. He wanted to see the men I had talked about, who had made the, the most of the ID cards, and uh, we go to that town, and he expect, he's expecting somebody, you know, real, big 6'2" very strong, and he sees a little, like he calls them a milquetoast, and he said, "You're the one who was doing that?" He said, "I sure did." "Well, uh, give me some proof." So he went into the attic and he took a big enormous trunk where he had all these uh, all the cards that were all prepared to be given and to be, to be distributed, and my husband had to see that with his own eyes, and then, as an American, he was absolutely unable to, and unwilling to to believe it. Just didn't want to believe it.

How did the ID cards get made. Tell me more about the ID cards, about making them.

Well, well, yeah, this is a very good question because it was a very hard question. You could not have, I could not say to you, "From tomorrow on, your name is Margaret Smith." There was no Margaret Smith, who was she? You couldn't do that. You had to constantly prospect the City Hall and Church of France, and see who died, and you had to try to get a way to, to take away the files from that person who had died, and get hold of that file, and give that identification to somebody who had to learn by heart everything about that person. So you had to learn about Margaret Smith, you had to know exactly where she was born, where she was baptized, what priest baptized her, where she lived after that, I mean, it was an unbelievable business. And, I'm telling you, when you were taken in the middle of the street, and you were asked for your identification, you better knew, knew your facts. Otherwise you were, you were cooked. This was one of the, one of the ways to get, to get false identity. I'm sure there were many others that I didn't know, but this is where I was involved.

We have to reload.

Beep.

So tell me more about rescuing the children, and what your role was, and also, something about the fact that you had 2 children at that time too.

Yeah, that was always the worst, the worst was to have your own, your own family, and try to hide it. I mean, we, we actually went from hiding place to hiding place. But, when, when my husband came back from escaping from prisoner of war camp, we stayed in this town called St. Etienne, and uh he, he took over this uh, this uh store because he wanted to try to, to equip the underground that was in the mountain not far from there, and gave them every possible item that was in that store, socks and blankets and everything that was needed up in the mountains. And uh, we stayed there, we, we stayed there for about, about two years, and when the things were getting strange and difficult, I mean, I had this place called Le Chambon, which was actually the resort above St. Etienne, and no more than about 50 kilometers up, maybe not even so much, and uh, this became really the, the, the, the, the save, the saving uh during the war because I mean, you could always go there and, and put the children there, they had two little children's homes, and uh, you could, you could hide them there. But, where I had been later on in 43-44, we were in another place again where 16 of us were hidden, my in-laws lived in the South of France at the time, and everything that was the Riviera, which is such a glamour place in the for, for anybody in the world, was the place where the starvation was worse than anywhere else because all they had was citrus fruit, and they were getting all their grain and everything from the North, and they were completely cut off from the world. So, uh, he decided that to, to put us in charge of finding a place where we could all be together, and at one time, we were 16, which would have been a fantastic catch for the Germans if they had got us, but we had a wonderful, wonderful priest, a wonderful person, my father in law was a very prominent doctor, and of course, only the priest knew it, and uh, during the night he was going to have women having babies in a mountain, I mean, it, did everything possible, and so, we became very much loved by the people there, and nobody would really denounce us. But, my kids were going to school, and uh when they, when somebody came from the mayor telling me to go and get them, quick, go and get them. So, I didn't know why, but I took my bicycle, and I went, and I told the teacher, "I need my children. I'll bring them right back." And, uh, took the kids on

my bicycle and I left. And this was the time when they were coming to a classroom, and they were the most nicest person, if you asked the children, they would say, "Oh, those Germans, they were so nice, they were so cordial, they were, they gave us candy, they were wonderful. And so they were asking questions. "All you children, you, you like the priest here?" "Oh, yes." "You go to catechism?" "Oh, yes." "And what do you do? I mean, your some of you had your first communion?" "Oh, yes." " Oh, but those 2 didn't. Those two don't come to catechism." Well, this was enough. And I reach a point where you were sending your children to catechism, and you telling, telling your children that we were, and I remember my oldest one who was there at the time uh 6, 7, 7 years old, who came home on a Sunday noon, and she said, "Mother, look, I'm willing to do anything. I don't care, I'll do anything. But today the Archbishop came in, and he came from Grenoble, and he we, we he could talk to us, he was very nice and then he said, "Now children, come and, and, and, and greet me properly," and so by being greet properly, he handed his hand to the children, and they had to kiss his ring. So, my daughter come home and she said, "Mother look, I'll do anything, but don't ask me to go and kiss his ring!" I mean, you know, this was life. I mean it was a, it was a, an, an absolute combination of jokes and tragedies and comedy and, and melodrama, you know, the whole life was like this for, for almost 5 years, but when, talking about the Chambon, I, I wondered if anyone of you has seen a wonderful film called, "The Weapon of the Spirit," that was written by a young man by the name of Pierre Sauvage, who lives on, in California, and who went to the Chambon when he heard about what had been happening there. And, uh, he was tremendously surprised to know that he was actually born there, that his parents had...

Tell me about what you did, taking care of children during the war. Tell me more about that.

Yeah, so we did this, you see, we were taking children to the Chambon, we were taking children there to hide them from (sic?) the parents, who, if the parents had been deported, that was one of the place we took them, but this was not actually the, the, the normal routine when we were finding children who were left behind, was to give them to the very first place we had near Paris, that first place --------- was taken place a little further. And we actually had no contact that we're too far away because the less you knew, the less you could talk, so we knew as little as possible. My district knew very well where to put the children first step. We knew the first step, I never knew the second step. First time we had another thing happening in that same vein. The parachutes, the para, how do you call that, the paratroopers, the paratroopers who were coming down. They were coming at certain spot on the Normandy or the Brittany coast. They immediately, as soon as they get word, they got there, they were there to, to take one in their house. Immediate they gave them another shirt, because they had shirts made of parachute silk. So they could immediately be found. So they were given a shirt, and they were given a key, and they would stay the night there, and you usually didn't have the right to see who was there. You were, you didn't see them, and they didn't see you. They were given a key to go to the next one. The next one, the same story happened again, they were given a key for the third?? The way, this way they went all the way from Normandy, all the way down to the, the area near Bourdeaux, and in Bourdeaux they were picked up and sent back to England. I mean, this was the almost the same thing that we were doing with children. They were going from A to B to C to D until they were staying in a farm, or staying with a, a, a monastery with some nuns. And, most of them finally end up being with farmers. Finally they did. And this was the, the big tragedy for us after liberation. Because when we wanted to retrieve these children, they didn't want to. They didn't want to be Jewish, they didn't want to come

back with us, and they hated the Jews because they had been fed for 4 years with the hate of the Jews, and what was coming through the propaganda on, on radio was nothing else. Twice a day at least there was somebody who was saying that everything we had to endure came from the Jews. It's because the Jews were there that we, we were starving, it's because the Jews existed that we had the occupation. I mean, everything was put on the, on the, on the back of the Jews, and those kids were brought up hating the Jews, and they, they certainly didn't want to be Jewish, they spat in the face of the social worker that we were sending to the different places where we knew they were, because we kept track of where they were. And we finally end up after liberation, my organization had 11 children home and we took care of 1500 orphans. We had actually 1500 orphans. But we had to, re-retrain them and reeducate them completely, they just, they just, just uh, I mean, this was the worst thing in the world, was to talk about Jews.

During the war, talk about how you kept records, you tried to keep records for their parents. Tell me how that is.

Well, we knew, a child's name was Goldstein. I mean, and we put that child in in a certain farm. Some social worker kept track of where they were put, and we also knew what name they would have then. They would pick the name of the farmer, or they would be given a false name. And when we went back there to tell them that your name is really Goldstein, the child would look at us they'd say, "Oh, no, no. My name is Gepeaux, I know very well I'm not Goldstein. What are you telling me?" And this, this we had kept track. I mean nobody hoped that they, they all believed that the parents could not come back. We, we, we just could not believe it. But when we first got the children in the first children's home in Paris, we had a ----------in Paris, where everyone who was coming back had to register, and the children knew that when the parents would come back, they would register there, so that they had to know in what children's home they were so that they could find them. And it passed, and month had passed, and to almost years, and, and nobody registered. Nobody registered for them, were looking for them. And finally the children had to come to the, the understanding that that if the 6 million Jews had been killed, their parents were among them. And, so, we, we were loaded with orphans, not knowing what to do with them, we had a tremendous idea, we sent them, sent tremendous amount to Israel, and so many stories that I could tell you that I would almost not believable because things happened in such a way, but they became grown up them.

Tell me about the code names in the resistance?

Code names in the resistance.

My code name?

Yeah.

Oudard. O-u-d-a-r-d, because my name Opere, and we always had to kept, keep the same initial. It was terribly, terribly important to keep your initial because if you had a handkerchief, or you had anything on you with an initial O on it, and your name was starting with a P! If you were picked up immediately and said, "What is this? What is the real name?" So that you had to be terribly, terribly careful of what name you were taking, and how you were using it, and, and also sometimes

changing, I mean not always keeping the same one. But uh, the, the, the biggest problem was to get the ration cards with that name because without ration cards you were absolutely starving to death. We already got very little, but what we were getting, we needed ration cards to get it. Now, I, I would love to tell you some of the stories, I came with my oldest daughter here, in America, in 194...generally in 1945, 46, 46. And, we came on the troop ship, and she had never seen any of the things that were, we were eating in, the officer's table, and there were cold cuts there and they had white bread, and there were fruits and bananas. She had never seen white bread, she had never seen a banana. She had never seen any of that. And when she saw that table and we were about to sit, she started to cry, they bitter tears were coming down, "Mother, see I told you, I told you, you should never have given up our ration cards. Now we're never going to be able to get anything here." And she started to eat banana with the peel and everything else, and she'd never seen one.

We have to reload.

Beep.

I want you to talk to me about what the risks were for the work you were doing. What were the risks that you faced?

There was nothing that was done during those 4-1/2 years of occupation that wasn't risky. Nothing. They would, you could not move. You actually couldn't move. You couldn't travel. You had no way of travelling because you had no car, you had, there was no gas allowance, even for those who had a mission, and could use a car, there was no gas allowance. So that you always had to stop a truck on the road. That was, that was the bringing food to Germany or vegetable or --------or whatever it was. Everything we had was going to Germany. Everything was, was on the way to Germany. If you could find a nice driver who was willing to take you to the next port where you wanted to go, you went. If you couldn't, you could wait sometimes for hours on the road, and find nowhere, no one to pick you up. We, we travelled hundreds of miles on bicycle. I don't think anyone ever used bicycles the way we did, because it was not just to go from like they do in China, from the, from the home to their boat, to their work, and back home. We were travelling. We were travelling a hundred, a hundred fifty miles with a bicycle if there was something to be done. And so that you were risking a stop from the Germans, you were risking your check, you were risking, every time, you were risking something. Some area more, some less. I mean, we ---------- until 1942, we were in a so-called free zone, so we were a little bit more, more, less exposed, let's say, less exposed. For instance, I never wore ----------David. I never wore a yellow star, never. And, uh, there, there was, there was a way to pass through it. I mean and not to be detected. I mean, this was the whole thing. And we, my husband was not caught as a Jew, I mean, he was caught as the leader of the French, French resistance. I mean they, they not, not as a Jewish person. And uh, they were, they were a lot of people among us who were, were Jews, but also an awful lot who were not Jews, and so we were passing the work from one to the other. One was always trying not to go too far, and not have too much to do so that they there was less risk. So, if I was ta--taking your child 25 miles from where I was, then the next one would take the next one would take the next 25 miles. Then, the risk was divided. But, there was nothing, nothing that was sure. There was nothing you could do that that, that, that wasn't risky because they were all over. If, if they weren't in uniform, they were in civilian clothes. I mean, the Gestapo in the free zone was in, in civilian clothes, they weren't in uniform, so that you had to be terribly careful. They had

detection cars going through the streets at night. They were detecting the radios that were picking up the message, and two of my Christian friends were picked up like this, I mean, and we never heard of them again. I mean, just be picking up message to trans-to transmit to us. I mean, that, every, everything you did was risky. It was nothing that was sure and was and, and was and was, I mean the whole country was like that, the whole country was under, under police, I, I don't know what how you can, I can't even, how can I describe it? I can't describe the police being at every corner where, where you live, I mean, and where you, through the streets all the time, detecting with, with very diffe--dif-different machines, of who was having a radio, and what was taking what. They were able to know what you were taking, what you were listening to . And we did a lot of that. We did a tremendous amount of trying to get the message at night. But my sister in law and I were really in charge for a long time to, to bring to the, the good number of uh, uh Waterloo, we knew who Waterloo was, to get to him, and bring him the message that the BBC just, just sent out, and if the detection car was down below in the streets, he got it before you did.

Were you afraid all the time?

Yeah.

Talk to me.

There was no such a thing as not being...there was no such a thing as not having fear. There was no such a thing. A fear that, go to bed at 5 o clock in the morning, and more we lived outside, more lived in, in the countryside, the less afraid of these kind of things we became because we knew that uh if the Germans would enter a village, somebody would come and tell us. There would be someone. The priest would manage to send us someone. So that we, we got much less afraid when we were living in the countryside, but in the big city, was terrible. Terrible. I met my husband for the last time the day of his 35th birthday in Lion, on the 6th floor in a maid's room in France, the apartments all go up the, the 5th floor, and the 6th floor is reserved for maid's room. And, a very nice person had rent to his room, that maid's room, so I spent that day with him, the day of his 35th birthday. I left that night, went back home, he left to go back to where he belonged. The next day, the Gestapo picked up. The next day the Gestapo came to pick up whoever had followed us in that room. So, that, everything was like this, you never, absolutely never could tell. They, two friends of mine were picked up in a cafe in Lion because they were, there, of course, you know, every time you met, you met always for business, you were never meeting socially. So, those two boys were talking about, I expect the next endeavor that they were going to accomplish, and they were smoking, and in the parachute bottle that we were getting whether it was food or toilet paper, or machine gun, there were cigarettes, and they were American or British cigarette. And they found the two butts in the, in, in the ashtray. They were picked up. I mean, these, these are things that you will never be able to make anyone understand. It's, it's not possible to, to actually visualize this kind of life. That everything you do you have to be so, so careful, even smoking a cigarette.

Why did you do it. Why did your friends do it?

Oh, there is no why and there is no because. There isn't. You get involved. Somebody come and, and talk to you and said, "Could you help in that direction," something there to do, you go. And then I'd helped my husband a lot, I mean, my husband was passing the message to me, and ----------

--- was going and bring, and bring the message to who it, it concerns. You, you don't know why, my husband was a, a violent patriot. I mean we're French for 14 generations, you see, I mean, my, my, my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents, my great-great grandparents, are all buried in Paris, I mean, we are deeply French, and our, our roots are so deep, that that you cannot take the Germans in your hometown, I mean, my grandmother could not take the Germans in Paris, she'd commit suicide. When my grandmother saw the Germans on the streets in Paris, she committed suicide. I mean, this, this, this is the kind of thing that made you do what you did. I mean, we would never leave. We just wouldn't leave. And, and I was convinced until the end that we go, we would go through. He was picked up so, so close to the end that I I really thought we would go through it. They wouldn't get us.

We've got to wait for this plane. ----------.

Is there somebody there? My gardener? Is it my gardener?

Beep.

Okay, go ahead.

Uh, when I was telling you, uh, the children in this little village, I mean were, were protected. I mean we were definitely protected by the priest, and we thought that nobody knew who we were. And, it was always suspicious because we were big city people. You know, we came from Paris, and we start to live in a little tiny town in France, and we were not like them, I mean, we didn't have nothing in common. But, we still believed that it was okay. And my daughter, my oldest daughter became very good friend with the daughter of the mayor, they were the same age, they were in school together, and everything was good, and they were very good friends. And one day coming back from school, they start ---------- the males' house, and they were having, they were having what, what the older kids in France have, a piece of chocolate in a roll at 4 o clock. And, being the mayor, I expect he had ways of getting things that we could never get. And they're reading quietly on the floor, and the little girl says to my daughter, "You know, it's really interesting. You have to realize that we are sitting on the ground, on the grass where the ---------- used to go. I mean they stepped here. They stepped on these, on these grass when they, when France was founded." So, my daughter was very tense here, and she said, "Yes, it's really interesting." And suddenly the girl looked at her, and said, "Oh, but not you. You belong to the wandering Jew." And, absolutely never before did we think that anybody knew, but absolutely not. So this is what you were up against all the time. Then I was also telling you that they were the very uh very strong uh well-well-organized chain of (clears throat) people that were passing the children, if we could get them to the border, they were passing them into Switzerland or into Spain. This was not without risk because in Spain, we very often were denounced. By even the pa--the people who passed them. The people who were paid by us to pass them, denounced them when they were getting in Spain. In Switzerland was also another story. We could pass them, they would get into Switzerland, and they would put in camp. Everybody who passed through Switzerland was put in camp. There was not a concentration camp, but it was a camp. You could not go, you could not walk out, you could not have any activity. You were in camp. And even the people who had bank account in Switzerland were not allowed to touch them.

Beep.

Uh, who, what happened when you got very little children. Like, babies, and up to maybe 2-1/2, who took care of them?

We had, we had, in France we had a, a what do you call that a ----------, where you put the very little babies when the mother works...uh, there is such a thing in America that you can put it, day care, day care, yeah, there was one day care place that was handled by 2 Christian women who were wonderful, and uh we, we, we put an awful lot of young babies there, but we, try not to keep them there. I mean, we always tried to, if possible, give them to a family or keep them somewhere, because it was too easy to ----------. We got into so much trouble that we we had, we had to go home of, of a wonderful g-girls who were going for graduate school, and uh, the parents little by little had disappeared. There was, they didn't know where to stay, and they could not stay where they lived because Germans always came back if they missed 2 or 3 and the family that they came to arrest 5, and they only got 2, they were coming back to get the other 3 . So, they were in one home, and that home was in the St. Mary, and was it was directed by a Christian woman, and everything was done there that nobody could really find them, and one night there were, they came and they picked up a whole, there were 27. They took the whole 27 away. I mean, so you did, did what your were trying not to, not to, uh, what shall I say, make a cluster of them, you know, try, try to get people to be hidden individually, but not too much in groups, and uh, we didn't have too much trouble with the babies because, very interesting, because, they, they little by little were, were scattered in people's homes, and so that this wasn't one of the trouble. The trouble was more with the, the, the more grown up, who, who when they finally wanted to join the resistance, wanted to fight with them, and uh, ----------...I uh, I can't I can't give you too many, too many precise details of that because I was not involved in that end of it, and as I said before, you know, each one of us had a, our area of work, and we tried very, very much not to know, didn't want to know what you were doing, what he was doing, because if I was, if I was questioned by, by the Gestapo, I, I couldn't answer. I mean, we tried as much as possible. Now, what you have to understand also is that our telephone was completely taped, that we could never talk freely on the telephone. And, I can give you another instance of my, my in-laws who lived in Nice at the time, and were, called me to tell me that we did, we could no more stay, but they couldn't say that like this. So they say that um, as you very well know, the climate is not same for your daughter where you are, and I think that uh you should move, you should move somewhere in the mountain. So, I couldn't understand it, you know, you always had to figure out what in the world did you want to say, and uh, I didn't have time to think, but they were knocking at my door. So, I said, "What is it? That the climate isn't same for you here, what is that?" So very quickly I remembered that my daughter had been operated of tonsillitis about a year before , and Dr., Dr. said, "You know, in this place," where we were then was something like Pittsburgh here, so it was, the weather was the, the air wasn't good, and I remember him saying vaguely, "Maybe one day you'll leave this, this town, and will be just as good." And I took a chance. I just took a chance. I told they, they, they call me, they call me in there, and question me, and I gave the name of that doctor, and then they send people there to question him, of course, and I was kept under question as long as they didn't come back. And uh, we, what I had said that the doctor had said that it would be better for my daughter to live up in the mountain, and he vouch for it. I'm sure he never, absolutely never remembered, but, when he vouched for it, and he said, "Yes, I remember very well, this little girl would be better

off in a different climate." And that's what you depend upon. I mean you could never be sure that you were not listened to, that you were not heard doing saying something, and you wouldn't get questioned, and you know, a lot of people just uh, uh weaken, weaken up on questioning too, I mean, it was not very easy. Sometimes they were decent when they questioned, sometimes they weren't. But it was, there, there is no way to go to, to, to think that we were not scared all the time, that we were always, always scared. It was not, it was, it was nothing was firm, nothing, you never knew what tomorrow would bring . It would, it was, there was an and, I knew my husband was terribly involved, and after this didn't make it easier either.

Can you sum up your marriage. Your ten years of marriage. What it was like.

With my husband? I mean when I first got married?

Yes.

Oh my God. I mean, I got married at the end of January, 1934, and that year was a good year, I mean we were one month up in a mountain in Winter sport, we came back to Paris, and at that time my husband was in charge of those, those 5 and 10 cent stores, and, actually starting, he was a young man, he was 24. Was starting to get in, in into the thing. In 1935, we started to have terrible, terrible strike in Paris. They, they had what they called the strike on the spot. They were, they were locking the boss of a manufacturer, manufacturing plant, locking him into his office, and prevent, preventing him not only to get out, but also to receive any food to eat or anything until their demands were accepted. This was one of the worst periods of social upheaval. 1936, Leon Blume was prime minister and had became murdered because he was the first Jew who was a prime minister, and he was very social, very, a big socialist, and uh, he was even, there was even a joke running in France at that time with the, with the a Jewish Prime Minister, you have Saturday out, with the Catholic one you have Sunday out, with the Monday one you have Moslem out, and in the mean, uh, all you need is have 3 or 4 different religion, and have a 4 day, 4 day week. I mean, the, the was a very, very bad year. 38 it was Munich. All the officers of the army were mobilized, the, the soldiers too, but the officers more so, and my husband had to be mobilized for about 5 months during Munich when Chamberlain came back and said there would be no war, and then the war is avoid for the rest of the century, there would, you can, you can be sure now that everything has been settled, we are in agreement with ---------, and nothing is going to happen. That was Munich, and in August 39, the war was declared, so we had been married exactly 5 years then. And a very, very uneven and, and hectic 5 years. And then he was in the army, he was on the marginal??? line until it collapsed. He was picked up in 40 as soon as the Germans started to run through France, he was picked up, as I said before, and sent to Prisoner of War camp, he was a prisoner of war for till the end of 1940, and started to be in the French Resistance immediately and was killed in, in 44. This was my ten years of married life. The children saw their father very little, but he was, when he was killed, I mean I had to take them where they had buried him, and he was buried unknown and with French flag on his stone on a piece of wood that the families had made during the night to bury him, and they took, this is, ----------, you know, I can't start telling you how it happened, but uh, my oldest daughter a few months later when we buried him in Paris, and I carried his casket with me to the cemetery in Paris, and he had the honor of his guard and, and with the with the sword cross you know and the French flag, I mean they, he was a hero. And, uh, my oldest daughter said to me, "Do you really think mother that it was more important for

Daddy to die for France than to live for the children?" So, this was the period that is, nobody who hasn't lived it through can really understand it. No matter how much things change later, and how much, how much you still, you live, you live in a world where nothing is safe, where nothing is sure, where they have more, there is there is more crime and more tragedy and more upheaval all the time, and you sometimes, you wonder what did you accomplish? Sometimes I say to myself, "My husband died for an ideal, he died, with a, but I mean, the freedom was there, I mean, it was free again, and everything would be nice from now on." What...I, I am not very pessi, very I'm not very optimistic, that's for sure. Very pessimistic in many ways I am. But I am afraid. I am afraid because the mentality of the people is bad. When I see somebody like Duke who can get 48% of the vote in Louisiana, it's the most horrifying thing because for me, for me this is the way Hitler started. I mean he started by being voted for because they thought he would save them. People are not sufficiently conscious of what can happen with somebody like Duke or, what you call him, Buchanan. Uh, it's terribly scary, terribly scary, because I lived through that. I know what it means. And I'm afraid when I see people saying, taking things so leisurely and so, and so easily, but no, don't worry, it's always the same answer, don't worry. There's a lot to worry about. A lot. Antisemitism is violent again, violent in Russia, all over. The German, the German antisemitic movement is getting tremendously strong. I've had all kinds of pamphlets on that. And uh, and they, they tell me that France is also with ----------where you had to tell about France, because when you're not, when , when you go home, I mean, ---------- I'm not a tourist in France, so I, I can't really tell, I can't see what was on there, but I can tell you that that there isn't a country today in this world where the Jews are not again the scapegoats. They are again the scapegoat everywhere.

We have to reload again.

Beep.

That question that your daughter asked when, when your husband was buried. How important was his heroism? How would you answer that question?

I wish I could tell you. I don't think, I don't think there is any answer. It was almost, it was not possible to make a, a ten years old, she wasn't ten years old, yeah, she was ten years old, to make a ten years old reason what she knew about the Germans, she was scared about them, and uh, she understood very well that this are to happen, but she wouldn't have wanted her father to be among them, and, I just must have said, "Look, we're going to have to, to live without Daddy, that's all, and remember him and remember his courage." And, uh, I mean, there was nothing much more to say.

What about your courage? What about your work as a rescuer?

Oh, it was very hard. It was very hard, I was married to my first love, I mean I never had anybody else in my life, and uh, we were very young kids, and uh, I don't know, I, I, I just didn't believe it could happen. I, we had gone through 4, 4 and a half years of Nazi occupation already, and I just couldn't believe that it could happen now. It was just that, half of France was liberated already, and this was the, the next half that they were that that, that, that the resistance really uh, uh went out to get. I mean, you know, they were really to make they were going to, to give it to the Germans, and

they were they were so happy to have, to have a real say-so, and to really have encountered directly with the, which they did. Uh, it worked or it didn't work. It didn't always work. And we were too much alone. We were not sufficiently surrounded by the French army or the British army or the American army, we were too much in our own, in our own sphere because they were going much faster further.

But, you were heroes who saved a great number of lives.

Oh we weren't. We weren't, things came out, we, we weren't. I mean, you, you know, just like you get involved with I don't know, I, I, I can't sa, I can't put it on any, I can't compare it to anything, but this was, thi-this was not being heroes. I mean, the man, the man who really fought against them, and, and ,and who really, who really made their war machine weaker, I mean, they were heroes, but we, we, we were trying to, to scatter human beings you know around just to, to try to protect them. We never knew what the result would be, but that was not, not heroism. It wasn't. It wasn't. I still had a life with my children, I still had, I mean I wasn't away like my, my husband was away completely. I mean, he was, he was staying in the in the resistance camps, the camps were changing location all the time, sometimes I was taking my car during the night and bringing a boy up the mountain. With, with, with a jeep or with a any kind of thing that we, we had got that we had, that we had stolen, of course, that's the only way we could move, so as long as we could use that stolen car before it was discovered, we were bringing kids up in the mountains to have their own resistance camps there and be trained, and things like this we did as a I don't know, as a normal way to live, you know, it was, they were, you couldn't, you couldn't stay put. You couldn't just wait. You, what wait, and then what? I mean, you, you had to be, you had to be active, you had to do something, you had to feel that you are doing something against them, you couldn't just stay there and wait. Just like all those poor Jewish people that were in Paris, who had their suitcase in front of their bed, and didn't know what to do. Who had absolutely no, no initiative of trying to leave or trying to get in with, and didn't know where to go, and what to do. I mean, the peasants, if they had got into a village with them denounced them immediately, they were foreigners. So you, you, you had to do something. You had to be active in some way, you know to, in order to, to live that kind of life, otherwise you were dying a slow death. You couldn't be shaking like this all the time, waiting for them to come for you...It's nothing, it, I don't think that it's a life that anyone, anyone who has lived in a country that has never been occupied, and has never been under the boots of a, of an enemy army can understand. If you would talk today of people from Czechoslovakia, or Rumania, or Hungary who have been in a resistance, who have resist the communist party, and who have, and who have finally got to where they were hoping to get, they would understand us, and we can understand them, but not if you have never lived through that. It's not possible. It just isn't. One has to hope that it's, that it, that what is taking place today is really for good, that sort of, that a regime that can pressure you and can, and can put you under uh under police guard all the time and, and that there is such a thing as a Gestapo or a KGB or a any anything like this can possibly exist again. You just have to hope it never can because this is this is the, nothing is worse, nothing in the world is worse than to lose your freedom. And if you haven't lost it, you don't know what it is. There is nothing worse. You can be without food, you can be without, so, so what, but not to be free, that's awful. You're not free when the telephone is taped, you're not free when you get ration cards and then we, you go in line for hours, and when you get finally in front of the store, there is nothing left, so there is so many people in that kind of a condition today. So many. When you see what happens in Russian where they have no food, and

they stay in line for hours, and get no food. I mean, so that nothing has really changed, and you hope that things can change and stay changed, but I, I, I believe it less and less because when I, when I see somebody who can be a, who could have been a head of a Ku Klux Klan, and being able to say "I changed a lot, I'm no longer that now, I'm a cha--, I cha--," it's like if Hitler comes back and he's alive again today. He has changed. I don't know if you heard this because this is something that is I think California. There was a speech contest here, did you read about that? A little 11-years old boy who, who won the speech contest dressed like Hitler? Having made a mustache on his face, and carrying *Mein Kampf*. And he won, not only did, only did he win the speech contest but he got second prize. The teacher of that school gave him 2nd prize. So needless to tell you that in the last 2 days there isn't a center in Los Angeles, and, and the survivors have gone to these places in ----------, and talked to the children, talked to the professor, talked to the parents, talked to the, to every official in town, I mean, they have taken the town in their hands, and have relived Auschwitz for them, to show them what happened. So this is yesterday, the day before.

Beep.

What is, what is really important maybe to end with is uh what the creation of Israel has done. The underground of every country was followed by the Israel underground. Uh, Hagana, who was the army of Israel, when Israel was not a state yet, was active in, in Europe under the name of Brehot. And a lot of us who had been involved before became involved with Brehot. And we saw a little bit the, the result of our work when we were able to take some of the displaced persons out of a camp, those who had been rescued from Buchenwald, from Auschwitz, from anywhere, and we were able to transport them illegally through all the borders of Germany at that time that existed at that time. And, finally, load them in the ship in Israel somewhere, but I was part of that at one time, and load them, not knowing whether the ship would end up in Chartreuse???, or would finally end up in Palestine. We did, this was before the state was created, but this gave us the feel of what would have happened if Israel had existed. At least those we saved, we saved them, we saved them to the point that the first year that Israel was in existence, we sent 1000 people a day in Israel for a whole year. All these people had been rescued, they all had come out from somewhere. And so that they, there is a definite feel among us that if they had been a haven, if there had been a place, if there had been a place without ---------- like in America, with, without absolute impossible way to, to weaken the people who were at the head of the immigration, where the, where, wherever it was in the, in the world. A place where you just could go freely. And so at least one thing that we feel, the ones who have gone through that, is that we have accomplished a lot by seeing Israel built, Israel uh exists, Israel become a state, and Israel having people in their mitts, who are not turning the other cheek. I mean, we were told when you hit on the right, turn the cheek the other way. In Israel maybe they are too much like that sometimes, but we have people who defend our rights, which has never happened before. It's never been true before. So, I hope that all our work led to the creation of a state, and, and, and a haven for at least all today almost 3 million people, and this is, this is really, the rewarding part of my life, because I have dedicated my life, my own life to Israel, I mean, ever since all this stopped, and I have at least one thing that I really feel very deeply about is that I, I did everything in my power to, to raise the money and to, to educate the people and to and to be part of those who made it exist.

Thank you.

Paulette, we have to record the sound of the room so just sit very quietly. We have to just record the sound of the room, so just be very quiet.

30 seconds of room tone for interview with Paulette Fink.