

I'm Sidney Elsner. Today, November 14, 1984, we are interviewing Marguerite Morris, a Holocaust survivor from France. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.

Marguerite, at the end of our last segment, you had told us how you had stayed in this small village in what originally was the Free French zone, later also occupied by the Germans. In your own words, tell us what happened after, from the point that you and your mother had settled down until the liberation, and how you got back to Paris.

Well, as I mentioned before, I did try to attend school during those years. We tried as best we could to lead-- well, I don't want to use the term "normal life," but some sort of life.

The next vivid recollection that I have is when we heard when the-- not only Paris was liberated, but when Limoges-- Limoges did have a German occupation, and I remember hearing Limoges being liberated, and seeing people in the streets dancing, and thrilled that Limoges was being-- that the Germans were gone, and that we were going to be free at last. And--

Was this July of '44?

This was August of '44. Limoges and Paris, I believe, were liberated just about simultaneously, within a few days of each other.

At that point, we had no indication yet as to what had happened to the people that had been shipped to Germany, because we really weren't getting news from them, and we really didn't know what was happening. But it seems that within-- I mean, already, we were having-- my first recollection is sitting down and writing a poem, that I'm excited. We've now liberated. And very soon, our fathers will come back, and our families will come back, and we'll be able to resume a normal, happy life.

And as the rest of the country was liberated, I guess some news began to filter down, that-- of the news of the camps. And as time went on, we did not leave, actually. We did move to Limoges for a while. We did not get back to Paris until the war was over. Several reasons. I almost think that maybe the main one was until the war was officially over, maybe my mother was not entirely secure in leaving where we were and getting back to Paris, even though Paris had been liberated.

And I guess I kept having fantasies. I kept hearing stories about things in the camps, but I kept having recurring dreams and fantasies that when we would arrive in Paris, and we would get off that train, my father would be there waiting for us.

And I realized it wasn't a realistic kind of thing to be thinking. But it was, when I was awake, I wasn't consciously thinking. But I kept dreaming that. And obviously, when we arrived in Paris, that did not occur. And we began to hear more and more news of what was happening after the war.

We did have the opportunity to speak to someone who, as I said earlier, who had actually been in Auschwitz after my father was there, and gave us final news. We never did hear officially, as far as my mother's sister, who was taken from France. We never heard officially as far as my mother-- well, my mother's-- my grandfather died of natural causes during the war in Poland. But my mother had two other brothers, and sisters, and children, and aunts and uncles in Poland, and we never had any official word, except that one daughter survived and is now living in Paris. We brought her from Poland to Paris after the war.

And the only thing that I can say is, as these things were going on, we were becoming more and more depressed, and more and more, really, a feeling of despair, realizing how the-- so much of our family had been wiped out. And one of the reasons my coming to the United States was that we had cousins who lived in Akron who came to visit us in 1948 in Paris, and realized the-- really, the emotional trauma.

I had gone back to school, trying to catch up years, and working hard. But we were all really very, very depressed. And

this cousin persuaded my mother that, being a young girl, that I would really be able to build a more positive life if I came to the United States. And they sponsored me here.

My mother was not able to come at first because, as a French citizen, my quota-- the French quota was not oversubscribed. My mother was, by then, a French citizen, but the American rules were that she had to go by the country of origin.

And the Polish quota was a small quota. And many, many people from Poland wanted to come to the United States. So she was not able to join me for several years afterwards. And being a mother myself, I realize again what courage it took, as far as my mother was concerned, to let me come.

As far as the conditions, we were able to get our apartment back, but the Germans had shipped all of our furniture, and everything was gone from that apartment. But very honestly, at that point, my mother was able to start to work again. The French government, because my father had been in the French army, did award my mother a pension, and me a pension, and considered-- gave us the same consideration as if my father had been killed in action, as far as any privileges for free schooling, or pension, or anything else.

And this was a situation where many of-- those of us who did survive, my dad's sister who survived, and my dad's brother-- everyone had members of the family that were gone. And it was really a very sad time.

Going back to the Allied invasion of Normandy in June of 1944, you were a few hundred miles away. Do you recall any-- the emotional state of the population in your area at that time? How were they affected? Did you have any contact with the Resistance? Do you know of any actions that were taken against the Germans in your area?

I know that there was resistance, because I'm mentioning that particular instance. But we never had, really, direct contact with them personally. And I don't recall at what point we started to hear what was happening. Don't forget, it was very censored. And if the news would filter, they wouldn't filter very--

Once Limoges was liberated, then we were able to follow the rest of the combat, because obviously--

From the Normandy beachheads.

Well, we weren't really that close. I mean, we-- I don't know that we heard about it right away, because I think it was probably still-- the news didn't filter immediately.

Yeah, I realize. But tell us what life was like at the same time, June, July of 1944, when you knew the Allied armies were coming a little closer.

Well, there was--

[CROSS TALK]

There was obviously a great deal of joy. But it was also a matter of apprehension, because somehow, as we were saying earlier, the Germans, in spite of the fact that they had to fight a war, did not let up on their activities in trying to pick up more and more Jews, and ship more and more Jews. So on the one hand, we knew that it was getting-- it's, like, closer, and hopefully we would survive. But on the other hand, there was still that same apprehension. And we probably spent more time with that friend of ours near the little village in hiding towards the end than we did at the beginning, because we-- there seemed to be almost a madness, that that persecution and that pickup of Jews had to go on, regardless of whatever else had to be done.

We were also very concerned. We were convinced that the Germans were not going to leave Paris without blowing it up, because one of the very proud moments of Hitler was when he was allowed to occupy Paris. Paris was a beautiful city, and this was a tremendous source of pride. And we were absolutely convinced that he was not going, that the Germans were not going to leave Paris without blowing it up. It turned out that it went so quickly, and they weren't able

to.

And we had family in Paris. We weren't able to keep in touch with them, but we knew that we had-- we thought, we hoped that they were still living in Paris in hiding.

Marguerite on the farm where you would go to hide, your second home, tell us, please, exactly what the circumstances there. Where did you hide? How did you hide? What kind of cover story did you have?

Well, if I recall, they had sort of a, well, almost like a cellar. And there was some place that if-- that they said when we came, they would be able to cover up, so that even if the Germans came there, that they would not find us.

I don't-- maybe it's under the emotion. I don't remember the exact details. But I do remember that there was a special-- like, we would have to walk downstairs. And they had carts there and things so that they would be able to close it up, and it would not be apparent that there are people down there. And it had all been prepared.

One of the reasons, I guess, we didn't stay there all the time is, as I said earlier, we still wanted to get some rations. And it was just-- we also were reluctant for a very lengthy period of time to impose on these people. We would only take advantage of it when we felt there was danger.

OK. The liberation of Limoges and Paris has occurred. When did you go back to Paris, and how? And you found your apartment. Had people been living in it?

When we came, no, there were no people living in there. We were able to get back into it. We didn't have to ask anyone to leave.

I remember my cousin mentioning in Poland, when she got back to her parents' home, she tried to evict people, and they threatened. Here was someone who had survived from a concentration camp, and was coming back in horrible circumstances. And when she tried to get into her parents' home, they threatened her life. They said, if you try to evict us, we will finish what Hitler did not finish. This was in Poland.

But in France, I didn't hear of such circumstances. If people left, they were usually able to get their apartment back.

Back in Paris, how did you get along until you came to the United States?

Well, my mother actually, even before we moved back to Paris, my mother had enrolled me in a secondary school to try to catch up with my studies. And then, when I came back, I continued my studies in an accelerated fashion because I had really lost several years because the small village where we were was very backward educationally compared to what I had had. They put me in the highest class, and that was that.

My mother tried to reopen part of what my dad's business had been. And at that point, the Jewish agencies were very helpful, because we went, and they assist-- gave her financial assistance to buy whatever was needed to get things going. We also, as I mentioned earlier, had the French government helping. So between all of these-- my mother was not a very strong person, but I guess, under those circumstances, she was very courageous and was able to rebuild something for us.

You came right to Akron from France?

The family that sponsored me all lived in Akron, yes.

What was their name?

The Sachs family, who was a prominent family in Akron. And when I came, I enrolled. I had the equivalent of a high school education. I had the [FRENCH], which is about the same as-- and then I enrolled in a business college and completed a two-year degree as a junior accountant.

And they offered me a job in the firm that they had, but I wanted to have the opportunity of getting my own job. So I worked for Firestone for a while. And then I went to work. Once I proved that I could get my own job, I went to work for them.

And about a year after I was in Akron, I met Allan, my husband. And we were married about a year later-- about two years after I came, I was married to him.

Is he also from Akron?

Yeah. He didn't spend-- he was born and raised in Akron. Then he was in the army. As a matter of fact, he liberated a very small camp when he was in Germany. I don't remember the name of it. And he was also in France. He stationed-- was stationed in Normandy. We went back a couple of years ago to France, and we went to Normandy, to the small village where he was stationed during the war.

I had another interesting experience on that trip. When we found out, when we were in Paris, that there was a monument that had been built in memory of the Jews from Biala Podlaska, which was the town where my father was born, and I knew that my father's name was on that monument, and I tried to find out what cemetery. It was within a cemetery. And--

In Paris?

Well, it's in [FRENCH], which is a suburb of Paris. It's one of the two main Jewish cemeteries from the greater Paris area. So we had gotten instructions to get to the cemetery. And we walked over to the administration office. And I was convinced that if I explained to them, because it was a fairly sizable monument, that they would be able to direct me to it.

But it turned out that they didn't know where it was. And I said, but I can't leave Paris without seeing it. I know it's in the cemetery. So then they said to me, well, there's a Jewish undertaker down the street, and maybe they will be able to give you the information.

So we walked over to the Jewish-- to the undertaker. It turned out we were there late afternoon, and the cemetery was closing within the next half hour, and we had very little time, and we were due to leave Paris the next day. But fortunately, they knew when we came back. And basically what this monument says is, this is a monument to our families and friends who were cowardly destroyed during World War II. It lists all the people that were taken from France, and it also lists people who were from Biala Podlaska who were killed in the ghetto in Poland.

So my dad's name is on the monument. So is my mother's sister, and so are my mother's grandparent-- I'm sorry, my mother's parents and other members of the family.

How do your Holocaust experiences affect you now, Marguerite?

Well, they've affected me in the sense that I have been very determined that one of the ways to-- how should I say? To ensure that the people who died did not die-- that I survived, there was a purpose. And one of the purposes I feel is I have been very active in the Jewish community. I have felt that if my life has some meaning, either Jewishly or as a human being, then my survival will have had some sort of meaning.

My father was a very-- I didn't see my father after I was eight years old. But from everything I've heard, he was a really very warm, wonderful person. In fact, one of the recollections that-- the person who spoke about him from Auschwitz said that when he arrived at Auschwitz, people were saying how my father had tried to help other people as long as he was alive, by lifting their spirits. And if I can, in some way, in my life, through my life, do some of the things that he would have liked to have done, then my survival will have meaning.

I don't feel that bitterness can ensure that this will not happen again. I think it's a matter of Jewish people being proud,

and Jewish people working to keep Judaism strong.

I think in our relationships with non-Jews, I think that we can also strengthen, not happening by having non-Jews have the ability to know other Jews, to know Jews, and to realize that they're human beings, that it's not a class. I think sometimes what happened is that many Jews lived some isolated lives, that stereotypes could develop more readily. And I think in our context, I think we can help to educate us. On a one-to-one basis, we can help to educate others.

What made you decide to share your experiences with us?

Well, it's my impression that there are not many people here in Cleveland that have had the experience with the French-- that lived in-- not too many people that lived in France and went through this experience. I think it's an educational kind of situation. And I hope that maybe by people understanding what happened, we can leave some sort of a remembrance so that the next generation cannot say that this was a fiction.

You were 12 when the war ended. Do you think that survivors have a message that others need to understand?

I think they need-- the only thing that can help is not so much telling for the sake of telling, but more for the sake of if there's something that we can do to prevent it from ever happening again. That's how our message will be the most effective.

Marguerite, I do want to thank you very, very much. This is Sydney Elsner. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Marguerite Morris. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Thank you, again.