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Interview with Marcel Bercau
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(Note: The interview was conducted in Perigueux, France, by Polly Haas-Hammel. This is a translation of the French transcript. Both were done by Ms. Haas-Hammel.)

Tape 1 Side 1

Q Mr Bercau, let's start by talking about pre-war life in Paris. First, tell us your name at birth, if it was different, and your place and date of birth.

A I was born on April 18, no, October 17, 1920, in Paris, in the 12th arrondissement in Paris. My name was Bercovici, which then became Bercau afterwards.

Q Where were your parents from originally?

A They came from Romania, from the city of Jassy in Romania.

Q Were they French citizens? When did they come?

A They came in the 30s[1], they weren't French, they were Romanian, but they were naturalized French later.

Q Can you tell me about life in Paris before the Nazi occupation in 1940 – social, religious, family life, etc.?

A My parents were tailors, we lived first on Rue du Pasteur Wagner and then afterwards on Boulevard Jules Ferry in the 11th arrondissement in Paris. My parents weren't fervently religious, they didn't keep shabat like some people, they were used to Parisian life, they had become citizens of Paris and blended into the life there.

Q Was there a community life, did you belong to a synagogue?

[1] His parents left Paris for Romania after Marcel's birth and spent nine years there before moving back to Paris in the 1930s.

A They belonged, you know, people at the time, their main concern was belonging to a mutual aid society, mutual aid helped them in case of sickness or death, there was a common grave at the time and people were concerned about being buried separately from others.

Q Did your mother work?

A With my father. He was a tailor so he worked with the family, I worked with them too afterwards.

Q How many children were there in the family?

A Four, three boys and a girl.

Q You were 20 during the occupation. What were you doing at the time?

A First I tried to escape, when the troops started to advance I tried to cross over into the free zone. I did cross, but since I couldn't get settled in the free zone I came back, I came back to Paris, and the dramatic events happened when the racial laws were dictated by both the German authorities and the Pétain government, I was one of those, along with my brother and my father, who were taken in the first round-up, on August 20, 1941, that opened the camp of Drancy. Almost 5,000 people were taken prisoner in Drancy that day. The camp of Drancy was what? It was originally a low-income housing project that was never finished. It was unfinished buildings that were used as a camp from August 20 1941 until '44 and it was the departure point for the deportation of the Jews of France.

Q To get back to before your arrest, we'll talk about life in Drancy afterwards -- do you remember the beginning, what were your first memories of the Nazi occupation and

the anti-Jewish measures; did you feel threatened? Of course, if you tried to escape – could you talk about that?

A The first memory is that we lived near the Boulevard Bon Marché and I saw German cars and trucks parading down the street from the Place de la République going towards the Bastille – that's my first memory of the occupation which actually didn't make a big impression since they passed by, they settled in and the first measure came only later, that was in May 1940 and the measures came later.

Q Did your father work right up to his arrest?

A Yes, we continued to work up to the time when the anti-Jewish laws were passed and they started the first arrest, actually the first one was, there was one in May 1941 and Polish Jews who were arrested at the Japy gymnasium and deported to Pithiviers and Beaune la Roland, that was in May '41 and then in August 41 was the first big roundup in the 11th arrondissement, at 5 a.m. the 11th arrondissement was surrounded by a cordon of gendarmes and policemen, you couldn't leave or enter the 11th. I'd gone out to get bread, I saw all that, I wanted to cross the Boulevard Bon Marché. "Oh no -- prohibited, go home," and that was so they could then go to people's houses and get them. How they found the homes, is because there had been laws asking all the Jews to take part in a census, we had to be counted in a census in the police stations, people had gone, we went, it didn't bother us that our names were listed at the police station, we went for the census-taking and the lists were then used for arrests.

Q And your mother and the other siblings, were they out?

A They were home, but the first arrest was only for men, between 16 and 60. The women and children were arrested later, since my mother and my brothers and sister were arrested afterwards and also deported.

Q You were arrested by the French. Can you tell about it?

A Well, they knocked at the door, they asked our name, it was police inspectors from the neighborhood police station. The police station was on Rue Charles Descluses in the 11th arrondissement. "Please follow us to the station for verification of identity." It was simple, and it was modest, so alright, we followed, we went to the station, at the station they put us in buses and the buses took us to Drancy.

Q When did you realize what was going on?

A We didn't realize because we thought, maybe at Drancy they want to do a more thorough verification of identity, and they said, "We're going to check your identity." And then the regimen of Drancy started, with, we called it "Drancy-Hunger" – very little to eat, there were wooden bunks but they had taken the mattresses off, the mattresses were downstairs in a room, we could see the mattresses but we slept on wooden planks. We said to ourselves, "This surely can't last long." And sure enough, after a few months the first deportations started, in March '42, my father was deported in March '42, '41, and I was deported in August '41.

Q '42.

A Yes, 42.

Q You stayed almost a year in Drancy. Can you talk about life in Drancy?

A Life in Drancy, at first it was hunger. There was a ration of bread, soup at noon, soup at night, soup that was more like water with a few cabbage leaves floating on

top of it. So constant hunger. Packages were allowed only much later. The first months there were no packages. We had to make do with the food. Many people died during the first few months at Drancy. Life inside the camp was run by French gendarmes, but the outside was guarded by the SS.

Q You had no contact with the outside world, with your family.

A No, we couldn't. There were people who managed to get letters out, through the gendarmes, but often the gendarmes took the letters and the money and threw the letters out.

Q Did a social life develop during that year? How did you spend your time?

A They asked people who wanted to work to pass the time, I went to work in a locksmith's workshop, I figured that the trade of locksmith could maybe help me find a metal saw or a file and try to escape. But all it was in the end, this job, was burning bedbugs, of the people who had rooms with beds. That was the nobility of the camp. Like in every society, there were ordinary people and nobility. The nobility was the people who were in the middle building, they had rooms with beds, we were on wooden beds without mattresses.

Q Were you with your father until he was deported?

A My father and a brother.

Q And others from your neighborhood?

A Of course.

Q When did you realize what the situation was?

A From the very first when we saw how little food they gave us – the main worry was getting food. A human being can't live without food. Soup and a piece of bread isn't enough to live on. So that was the first difficulty.

Q A year in Drancy. What about the transport? Were you warned?

A This is how it was done. They told people to go to the first block, the first staircase near the end, and when you went to this staircase you knew it was for being deported.

Q Did you hear anything about the camps or the other transports?

A We had a vague idea but we were told it was to go and work in Germany. So we didn't worry too much. They told us, "You're going to work in Germany." They put us in the staircase at the far end and… a day or two later a bus arrived in the courtyard, they made us go down and get into the buses, 50 at a time, that was the number a railway car held. A bus stopped in front of a railway car, they emptied the bus into the car, and they closed the car.

Q Did you have your personal affairs with you til then, in Drancy?

Personal things, we had clothes, nothing else, just our clothes, we left with a ration of bread, that's all.

Q You saw your father leave.

A He left in March, I'm getting the dates mixed up, in March '42. Yes, in March '42, and me in September.

QYou were in a train..

A A goods train.

Q Did you know where you were going, when did you realize…

A We didn't know. We were supposedly going to work in Germany. But it was a four-day, four-night trip in terrible conditions, because in these goods cars that are considered to be for 8 horses-40 men, there were 100 of us in each car, so no way to stretch out, no way to sit down, it was a struggle to have a seat, because you can't stand up for four days and fours nights. And the thirst, the thirst. They'd put a bucket of water in each car, at the door of each car they'd put a bucket of water, but we drank the water the first day and afterwards, we used it to urinate in, so there was no water for the whole trip and thirst is worse than hunger.

Q Did people speak to each other in the train?

A People spoke but there started to be frictions, this is my place, this is your place, me here, you there – when people are hungry and thirsty, when they're in pain, they're irritated, they're not in a good mood and it's not friendship that prevails. It's every man for himself then.

Q What is your strongest memory of the trip?

A Thirst. Thirst is something terrible.

Q There were no stops of course.

A Yes there were, the train stopped, the convoys of soldiers had priority on the railway tracks and when a German convoy was announced we were put on a spur for an hour or two, and when the convoy had passed we could continue. There were several stops.

Q There were no more French policemen.

A No, but in the wagon there was no one, just us, the German soldiers were in back, they traveled in a passenger car, when the train stopped, they got off and there was a soldier with a rifle in front of every railway car.

Q When were you transferred from the French police to the Germans?

A As soon as we were put in the railway cars. The French put us in the cars and the Germans took charge of the cars.

Q Can you talk about the arrival [in Auschwitz]?

A The arrival as, the doors opened, but first, we'd seen through the slats, the train hadn't simply pulled in, it stopped, it backed up, it went forward, then backward, and we could see the camp more or less and we saw people in striped clothes, in striped uniforms, and we said to ourselves, what world are we arriving in? Maybe their clothes were worn out and they were given these clothes, we didn't understand, we saw them working with shovels and pickaxes, we didn't understand, and the cars, the doors opened, and shouts – "Raus, Schnell!", blows falling, into line, men on one side, women on the other, women and children on the other side, and we were put into line and of course the women and children were put into trucks for the destination you can imagine, they were exterminated the very day they arrived. We were brought -- because Auschwitz is a complex, there wasn't only Auschwitz itself, there was Auschwitz, there was Birkenau, there was Monowitz-Buna, there was Gleiwitz, there was a whole complex, and each camp was destined to supply slave labor to a certain factory. Our camp was for I.G. Farben Industry, a factory that was to supply synthetic rubber, that was called the Buna, Auschwitz III.

Q Did you go right there?

A Yes, immediately.

Q Can you say when you realized where you were?

A We got out and we were brought to the camp and right away at the camp: "Get undressed, take off all your clothes, don't keep even your underwear, take everything off, they shaved our hair off, shaved us all over, the shower and they threw us these clothes [shows me his striped prisoners' clothes] and right away into line and the discipline started, blows started to rain down, in line, by fives and into a barracks.

Q When did they tatoo you, the first day?

A First or second, I don't remember, at the beginning, they tatooed the numbers.

Q Can you give me your number?

A 169752, in German, *einhundertneunendsechzig tausent siebenhundertzweiundfunfzig*, because we had to announce it -- even those who didn't speak German had to learn their number in German, otherwise they got beaten.

Q Were you still with people you knew from before?

A With some, but we'd been separated, we couldn't do what we wanted, go here, go there, and some disappeared.

Q Did you start working right away?

A Not right away. The first few days were spent bringing us to heel. Getting into line, by fives, learning how to say our number, it lasted… it was called the "quarantine." It lasted a few days and after a few days when we were trained to be disciplined, they called it "going out on commando", we went out on commando.

Q What was the work?

A It was to build the IG Farben factory. At the beginning they asked what my profession was, I said "*schneider*," tailor: "Oh, *sehr gut, schneider*." Earthworks, pickaxe and shovel, that was the hardest work, it was minus 10 [centigrade] weather, digging ditches with a pickaxe and shovel, staying outdoors 16 hours, it's, the maximum survival was two weeks, you couldn't survive longer, with the little food they gave us, the clothes we had, and 16 hours outdoors at minus 10, you can't hold out longer. So I was an earthworks laborer at first and then I fell sick and I went, there was an infirmary there they called the *revir*, and in the revir I came across another Frenchman named Marcel, he told me, "If you stay with your commando, it's all over, you won't hold out, you've got to change commandos." But, I said, you know it's forbidden to change commandos, on pain of death, on pain of hanging. He said, "In any case, if you stay in your commando you're dead, might as well risk it." He said, "Come to the commando, I'm in a commando of *schlosser-electriker*, mechanics, and we have a Kapo who's never there, no one hits us, no one bothers us, and that's what you need if you want to survive, first work as little as possible, and secondly find some extra food." So I said, it's easy to say but how do you do it? He said, "For the work you change commandos and come to mine, I'll introduce you to the Kapo when you get out of the hospital, you'll say you're a good schlosser-electriker, that you studied in Paris, and he'll take you. And it happened like that, I became a schlosser-electriker and he brought me the same day, he'd exaggerated a bit and he'd brought me directly to a German engineer named Riter, he said, "Let me introduce you to a very good mechanic, he graduated from the school of engineering in Paris, and since you're looking for someone I'm bringing him to you," so I had no

more Kapos on my back, I did whatever I wanted, etc. For the work we always got by, and that's how I changed.

Q How long did you stay at the earthworks?

A The first four weeks, as soon as I got sick – no, longer, because when I got out, I was put into a commando of – oh yes, yes, now I remember. Something else happened before that After three weeks, on the square where they did roll call, there were 10,000 of us there one evening and the SS made a speech: "*ir brauchen hundert Maurer*," We need 100 bricklayers. Since there are no bricklayers among you, we're going to create a bricklayers school, a "maurer schule," we're going to choose 100 people – he didn't say "people," – "*hundert schtük*", pieces, to go to this bricklayers school. To be one of a hundred chosen from 10,000, that's pretty good luck. I was chosen, I went to this bricklayers school, where we were inside for three weeks, we were sheltered, we didn't go out, we were warm, so that was already an advantage, but once again I ended up with a pickaxe and shovel outside and that's when I became a schlosser-electriker voluntarily and at my own risk.

Q Were you treated at the revir?

A Non, it wasn't a matter of getting treatment in the revir, it was a a kind of workshop for quick repairs, they left people there a week at the most, and if they got better, right back to work, if they didn't get back up on their feet the SS passed through for the selection and chose them for the gas chamber. I was actually protected by a Greek doctor, the SS passed for the selection and he put me to work cleaning the toilets so I would be busy and not lying on the straw mattress because otherwise I was in danger of getting taken.

Q This is winter '42-'43. Did you continue this job the rest of your…

A All the rest til January 1945 I was schlosser-electriker. I worked with this engineer, I didn't have a Kapo on my back, he gave a job that consisted in, first you had to make, he'd cut round 8 millimeter- metal pieces screws of a certain length, a meter 20, then I had to shape them in a certain way because it was for a set-up for passing electrical wires, then I had to weld little parts -- well, a job I never finished, that never had any use, but it kept me busy doing nothing.

Q And thanks to this job…

A Thanks to this job I was able to survive. Because at the same time, since I had free time, I was able to find a little extra food, and obey the two principles, work as little as possible, that, I'd managed to do, but, now how to get some extra food? I had two solutions, either bring something from the camp for the civilian workers that I could exchange with the civilian workers for bread. Bring something, either a shirt, or shorts, or something useful from the campto the civilian workers who would give us bread in exchange. A shirt was a kilo of bread, but you had to able to find a shirt or shorts for the English prisoners of war, they played soccer, if we gave them a pair of shorts they gave us bread. How I found the shorts, I'd made an acquaintance with the camp's sewing workshop and in secret they made shorts with whatever they had and we exchanged a packet of cigarettes, with the packet of cigarettes I had two, with the Englishmen I got loaf of bread in exchange, well, barter to get some extra food. It was the only way to survive.

Q Your brother wasn't with you anymore.

A No.

Q Did you have ties with anyone?

A Yes, of course, you had to be at least two, I became friends with someone called Anania, with whom I came back, we brought each other back. We came back to Paris together.

Q Could you talk some more about the three years in the camp.

A The strongest memory is the arrival in the camp. The arrival in this camp, it's as if you're getting off in a different panet, it was a world that makes no sense for people on this planet. Those who guarded us weren't SS. Because the SS were only guards on the outside. Inside the camp it was the kapos or the block chiefs, the chiefs of the barracks, who were common criminals that the Germans had taken out of prison to supervise us, they had power of life and death over us and gave free rein to their faults. We were surrounded by these people, honest people ordered around, surrounded by killers and thieves who did whatever they wanted with us. It's something unbelievable, the life in the camp…and then the hours, we were awakened at 5 a.m. and at 5:30 we were lined up to leave for work, and the day was long.

Tape 1, side 2

We were woken up at 5, we had to go to the washroom, come back to take the ration of bread and what they called coffee, which was blackened water, then lining up and off to work, we worked 12-hour days.

Q What about sanitary conditions?

A It was a minimum, we had a sink to wash in but no soap or towel. We did go to the showers once a month or once every two months, but they were strange showers, we were put five or six to a showerhead, first the water came out ice cold, then boiling hot, we went out of there without a towel or anything and we went back outside in minus 10-degree cold.

Q In your barrack was there a mixture of nationalities? Were there difficulties understanding each other?

A Depending on the period. At the beginning there were Germans and Poles and afterwards a big arrival of Hungarians in 1944 – 700,000 Hungarians arrived all at once in Auschwitz. Well, they didn't all get to the camp, unfortunately, many didn't even get in, they were led directly to the gas chambers. It changed according to the periods of arrests. There was a period where it was Greeks who arrived, Greeks from Salonica, there were all nationalities.

Q Do you remember any instances when people helped each other? Can you talk about relations between people?

A Relations – it was everyone for himself because with the minimum of food we had, mutual help wasn't something common, only with your friend, what we called "the second self", but aside from that there was no mutual help, it was everyone for himself.

Q Your close friend?

A His name was Anania, David Anania. With whom I came back all the way to Paris. We were together in all the evacuations, we came back to Paris, helping each other

Q What stays with you most, of this long period?

A It was a period, you know, one day there was like a month here, it lasted an extremely long time, from waking up at 5 in the morning til night, time seemed infinite, endless, so a month there is like a year here, the period I lived there is like I'd lived a hundred years somewhere else.

Q You were relatively well-treated.

A No, not well-treated, you had to want to survive and find the means to survive. The desire, I said [to myself], "You won't get me," and in line, during the roll-call, "I'll survive you, you won't get me, I'll survive you," and the means, I told you, find a commando where you didn't work much and some extra food, and you couldn't get yourself caught by a kapo or a camp chief, and despite everything I got beaten, I was the pet hate of my block chief, for the least little thing after the evening distribution of soup, since he hadn't done anything all day and he needed a little exercise, he'd call a few numbers and it was "*funfen zanzig auf in acsh*," 25 blows on the backside because your bed, your blanket wasn't well-made, because this or because that, "*funfen zwanzig auf in asch*" he gave me, that's when I was a greenhorn, when I'd become an old-timer – because there, the "*alte heltlinger*", the old prisoners, they respected them more, the new ones were always martyrized, if they'd survived it's because they had something already.

Q Do you want to talk about the liberation?

A If you want.

Q Do you have anything else to say about the camp years?

A There were passages in succession. Most of the people who arrived, survived for three weeks, so there was constant renewal in the camp, the old-timers were

recognizable by their numbers, even the SS acted differently towards them, they'd managed to survive even though everything had been done to make them disappear. So afterwards there was this period, on January 17, 1945 the Soviet troops got to Poland and the order was given to evacuate, we had to evacuate. In the Auschwitz area, with all the camps there were, 60,000 prisoners were put on the road, 60,000 – I don't know, when I looked behind me I saw an infinite line of people on foot, walking, 60,000 people they sent out in the snow, in the cold, with no food, with the clothes we had, many died, they called it the march of death, many died, if they fell and they weren't dead the SS gave them a blow in the head with their rifle so they couldn't run away. We marched like that, we got to Gleiwitz. At Gleiwitz we went into a camp that had just been emptied, a concentration camp, we spent the night there, wherever we could, I sat up all night against a wall in a corner because there was no room and the next morning again, "*Alles, raus, schnell*!", the SS screaming and yelling, those who didn't march fast enough were put to the side, I suppose it was for exterminating them, and the others, we were brought on a, in a train station on a train track, and put into cattle cars, open, not closed, it was winter, it was minus 10 or 15 degrees, open cattle cars, and we were loaded 100 to a car. We were standing so we said to ourselves, we won't go far, they'll bring us to another camp two hours from here. The voyage lasted 14 days and 14 nights. When we arrived there were 20 of us in the car. We were in Oranienburg, the headquarters of all the concentration camps in Germany. Oranienburg is near Berlin. We'd been in Czechoslovakia first and gone through Prague, the people in Prague did things for us out of solidarity. They threw us -- the train stopped at the Prague station and there was a footbridge

over the railway tracks and people threw bread to us, bread and water containers, they saw the state we were in. And we went through Prague again and then as far as Oranienburg, near Berlin, and I told you, there were 20 of us in each car. Four-fifths had died along the way. At Oranienburg we were put, not directly into the camp but in a… next to it, in a large tiled hall, there were no straw mats or anything, we were put there without food or blankets or anything. We were put there for two days and afterwards we were brought into the camp of Oranienburg, but the camp was completely crammed, bursting, we slept under the beds, there was no room, no food, nothing, it was horrifying this camp in Oranienburg, there were other evacuations and I ended up next to.. I was in several camps, the name will come back to me in a minute, the last camp where I ended up. This was April 26, 1945. We saw the Germans leave and all at once, it was in the middle of the night, we were in these strange barracks with roofs like this and we went down some steps, it was kind of carved into the inside and there was a hillside and we were on this hillside. And in the middle of the night, we heard some movement, I was with Anania, and he said, "Something's going on, we have to go out, something's happening." And in fact, we went out and the camp was swarming with prisoners going to attack the bakery and the cafeteria because the SS had left and it started, the raid on the cafeteria and the bakery. I saw one poor fellow in a room, there was a bathtub full of jam. Everyone was pushing so much – it was a small room – there was a door like this – there was so much pushing that the fellow fell into the jam and he died like that, drowned in the jam. That was something, terrible things.

Q You were moving around for four months. Did you know what the situation was?

A It's because either there were American or Russians that we were zig-zagging around like that.

Q The day the Germans left…

A It was a big celebration. No more SS in the watchtower. They'd left because the, the Americans were near. We realized that we'd be liberated soon. Then an American major came to stay in the camp and tried to distribute food, and meaning to help – he was a doctor – he said, these people have fragile stomachs, we'll give them rice. But since they're very thin we'll give them lard. He made rice with lard, he killed half of the survivors with his rice and lard.Yes, but they didn't know what the situation was, they didn't know the methods, he wanted to do the right thing.

Q Did they give you medical care?

A There wasn't any care there. The main thing for us was, there were no more SS.

Q Do you remember where this last camp was?

A Now I remember, it was Landsberg, in Bavaria.

Q Did you stay there long?

A No, not a long time. Because, as soon as the SS left, we wanted to get out of the camp. We went out, started to walk a little, some trucks went by with French prisoners of war who were also going home, the POWs requisitioned cars and trucks to get home, so a truck passed us with POWs in it, they saw us, Anania and me, they took us in and gave us a ride to Augsburg. Augsburg was the capital of Bavaria and there was a big so-called repatriation camp there, a repatriation camp.We got to this camp, there was a huge crowd, POWs, civilian workers, survivors, and also for sure people who'd worked with the Germans, but it was all mixed up, you couldn't tell,

mixed, we stayed there a few days and then we got ourselves admitted, since there was a soldier there who we told we were sick, that we couldn't..; lie down… we couldn't---we had to be hospitalized, they had us admitted to a clinic of nuns.

Q What condition were you in?

A Bad. We were very thin, I weighed about 30 kilos, and I'm one meter 75 tall. [66 pounds/5'8"], so you can tell we were in a sad state, but – still on our feet.

Q For repatriation it was every man for himself?

A Every man for himself, any way you could. However you could. So we were put in this nuns' clinic where a soldier came to see us afterwards, we told him we're fine here, but what we want is to get home. You have to find us a way to get back to France. "I'll see what I can do." After a few days he found a military ambulance and we were repatriated in a military ambulance to Strasbourg. In Strasbourg we got to the hospital, we were admitted to the hospital in Strasbourg for a few days and from there back to Paris by train, in our striped prisoners' clothes.

Q Did you organize the trip yourselves, or..

A You had to manage by yourself, you couldn't count on anyone else ---

Q How did you pay for the ticket?

A We didn't pay. We went back wearing the striped pyjama, on the contrary, the train was overcrowded, people made room for us so we could lie down, they closed the railway car, the ticket controller saw us in our striped outfit and there was no question of us paying.

Q How did you feel being back in France?

A The first thing was to see if anyone from the family had survived. First they brought us to the Lutetia Hotel, where we stayed a few days and then I wanted to go and see if there was anyone at my apartment, if --- I got to the building, we lived on the Rue deu Pasteur Wagner in the 11th, I went to see the concierge, I was in the striped outfit, pants and top, the concierge see me coming: "Hello, Monsieur Bercau, here are you keys, your mail," as if I was coming back from a weekend away -- "your keys and your mail." So the apartment was still there, I went up, there was no one there, I knew that… but the apartment was there with all the furniture, in the same state my mother had left it when she was arrested. So I took it back and started living there.

Q How did you tell, did you tell?

A I had a childhood friend, I'd been to school with him, I went to see them, and his mother said,"Look, it couldn't have been as bad as all that – since you're alive." So already the incredulity – it's not possible, things like that aren't possible.

Q And the Jewish community?

A The Jewish community, I didn't have any particular ties with the Jewish community then, people we told about it were incredulous, so we ended up not talking about it.

Q There was no support on the part of other Jews?

A I had no family left, no one. I was all alone. So I found my wife, who I'd known before the deportation, and a few months later we were married, and we had children.

Q You kept your parents' apartment.

A Yes.

Q Did you ever think about leaving France?

A No, no. To go where? To the US? And have to start another life?

Q What helped you go on all those years?

A Human beings are made that way, we're animals that want to live. You have to live and survive and continue life. Life is a wheel and you have to continue it. I had two children, I have a grand-daughter now, so life goes on.

Q What effect did the deportation have on your way of bringing up your children, Jewishly in particular?

A I'm not religious, I'm Jewish by birth, I go to synagogue on Yom Kippur but I'm not religious every day.

Q Was there any change compared to before?

A No, it was the same before. My father went to synagogue on Yom Kippur, he wasn't a fervent believer, not observant, like a lot of others in France.

Q When you came back to Paris, can you tell what happened when you went to have you papers made?

A When….at first we had a repatriated person's card, when we got to the Lutetia Hotel they made us a repatriated persons' card that had your name, date of birth, place of birth. I lived with that card because I didn't care about identity papers. To get my food card – because we had food cards then – I used my repatriated person's card to get the food card and it went on like that until the day we wanted to get married and I needed identity papers and so on, ok, to get my identity card I went to the same police station where I'd been arrested to get it made.

A What happened?

Q I fond the same inspector who was there, and who asked me for my birth certificate, he made out my identity card, he was, like an inspector of that period, not the inspector of the period before.

Q You knew him from before?

A Yes, I did.

Q How?

A He's the one who arrested me. He didn't know me, but I recognized him.

Q You didn't say anything?

A There was nothing to say. People like that, there were thousands of them in France, who had collaborated, who had participated, who had arrested, who had denounced, and who for some people had become great resistors even, so there was nothing to say. Nothing to say.

Q You didn't talk about this much at first, did you?

A First of all because people didn't want to believe it, when I started to tell they'd say, "But you're exaggerating, you're making it into more than it is, it's not possible, things like that, it can't exist, things like that." When I told them the story of when we were in the railway cars, how people died, how they were thrown off the train, they refused to believe it, it's not possible. Not possible, when in a car of 160 people there are only 20 left after a few days, they'd say, "It's not possible, you're telling stories." When we told how we were treated, how they selected people, who were burned in the ovens the same day: "But such things aren't possible." So incredulousness in general. Even today I'm sure there are people who don't believe it. Despite all the proofs, despite all the testimonies that have been made, there are

people who don't believe it. Because it's so immense, so enormous, I even remember a barracks chief saying to us, "Everything you're going through here, if by any chance one of you survives and tells about it afterwards, no one will believe you because it's so enormous people won't believe it." And that's what happened. What happened. Only those who were there can imagine how it was, others can't imagine because you can't tell about it. Just the atmosphere, the smell, the fear… it's unimaginable…."

Q So you went on with your life. Did you stay in Paris a few years?

A Yes, I stayed in Paris, I started working again, a few days after I got back because they'd given us a thousand francs, which was worth ten of our francs – now get by on your own, fellows! So you had to start working. Since I had the workshop and the apartment, I had the equipment, I started to work, because there was a shortage of manpower at the time. There was no shortage of work. So I started to work.

Conclusion of interview