

Lily Lustig Redner from Norristown, Pennsylvania. This is the American Gathering of Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Washington, DC, April 12, 1983.

Well, I must say first that I have today a feeling of emptiness because I hear people that look for other people. And I have nobody to look for. I know that-- I know that I would not be able to do it. Stop it.

Because those people of Poland or Germany or all these Eastern countries have no preference list. These people have their relatives that died in Auschwitz and concentration camps. They don't know when, they don't know how. While the French Jews have been recorded. There are lists, precise lists that have been found by Serge Klarsfeld. And he made a book with the names of the-- the deportation dates, the location, and where they died, and when and what.

So I have a precise date of when my parents left Paris to the trains of Auschwitz. And I know that they died there. So I cannot be announcing, tell me, where are you? Are you there? Where are you somewhere in the world? I know they are dead. So I have that terrible feeling that there is no hope.

And what is stupid is that, from 1942, the date of their deportation, till maybe 1960-- I was 30 years old-- I was still hoping that they were with amnesia in Russia. They were somewhere, that I would turn around and see them somewhere. They had forgotten to come back home, where their four daughters were waiting.

Then other days, I would say, no. I know my mother was very sentimental. She died on the train to Auschwitz knowing that she was leaving four children alone from the age of 16 to two years old. She didn't survive that.

So my imagination has been inventing all kinds of things for years and years. And there was never a grave. There was never a Kaddish said. There was always hope, hope, hope for years and years, until I saw the French-- famous French book, the famous records, where I saw, black on white, my parents name, both of them.

Say their names.

And there their name was Benjamin Lustig. He was born in Limanowa, in Poland, had left Poland as a young boy, met my mother, Lea Klinger, in Germany. She was the daughter of the boss, and he married her. They emigrated to France in 1924. And considered themselves, by 1942, they thought that they were French. They felt French.

They had four French children. They were completely assimilated, with stateless passports. And they were proud of these stateless passports. They thought they had immunity. Nothing could happen to them because they had stateless passports. And the children were French.

Came the exodus in 1940. We left our house with all its content and went south to escape from the Germans that were invading France. Two months later, we came back home, thinking, well, the French government is going to protect everybody from the Germans. So we will be protected too. So we went back home.

From 1940 to '42, the Jews were not allowed to work. You had to live on whatever you had. We were not allowed to get out of the city. I had no contact, couldn't write abroad, no contact with their families abroad. And that is the way that 1942 arrived, when the Germans decided to deport. The deportation of the foreign Jews started in July 1942.

Being a stateless, suddenly he was considered as a foreigner too. The French government didn't protect the stateless people. And although we, the children, were French, they came anyway.

It was on a Sunday morning, 19th of July 1942, at 8:00 in the morning. I still smell the omelet with onions my father was cooking for the breakfast of everybody. Every Sunday morning, it was a tradition. Daddy was cooking breakfast. And I still smell-- each time we have an onion omelet somewhere, I remember that smell.

The police came at the door. It was at the door-- the French police, not the German, the French police. Of all things, a friend of my father had a list of the French Jews that he was supposed to take to the police station that morning.

His name?

My older sister knows his name. And I think he has been apprehended. So my father said, but what are you doing here? And he said, I can't help it. I have-- the orders are the orders. And they answered just like the Germans did. The orders are the orders.

And my father was not there. My father had received a phone call from a friend at 6:00 in the morning. This was at 8:00, what I'm telling you. At 6:00 in the morning, my father had received a phone call from a friend announcing that a few blocks from our house they were starting to gather foreign Jews. So my father was hiding in our basement when they arrived at 8 o'clock.

But the pipe of the kitchen was going to the basement. And he could hear everything that was said to my mother. And that French policeman arrived with a friend, with a colleague of his. And he said to my mother, I have a list. Monsieur Lustig is supposed to show up at the police right now. And if he's not right now there, we take you instead of him.

My father, very naive about the subject because it was true that in France when the resistance people, for example, were arrested, they would arrest the men of the family, and they would just leave the family alone. It was like a tradition till now in France. So my father, very naive, when he heard they were going to take the mother instead of him, he came upstairs.

And then suddenly the truth came that both names were on the list. They were supposed to take and my mother and my father. So they said, prepare a blanket and a change of underwear, and we'll go.

And my father's-- we had a maid who is living. My father said, I remember very clearly although I was only 11 and 1/2-- I remember clearly my father saying to the maid, you are going to wait here with the children until we come back. It can be today, it can be tomorrow. But you'll stay here with the children until we come back. And the maid said, yes, in front of the French police.

According to Serge Klarsfeld, it is a miracle that the police didn't take the children also. They can't-- he cannot understand what happened because my younger sister was three, the next one was 10, then me, 11 and 1/2, then 16. Being all minors, supposedly the German always took the children with the parents.

Klarsfeld-- Serge Klarsfeld feels that either my parents paid the French police so that they would leave us, or it was in the name of that friendship that he left the children. We cannot understand what happened. Nevertheless, they were gathered.

All the Jews of that day were gathered at the police station, Then to the next city in Nancy for a few days. My sister went to visit in that-- those quarters, military quarters where they had gathered the Jews. My sister went, took a train, went to see if she could see my parents. And my mother was at a window and saw her 16-years-old daughter down at the gate.

And she threatened to throw herself by the window. And some women kept her back from throwing herself by the window. My sister still tells the story. She saw it also with our own eyes.

Two days later, they left, like all Jews in France. They were gathered in the camp of Drancy-- Drancy, D-R-A-N-C-Y. It's a famous gathering place near Paris, where they gathered all the Jews, put them on the trains to Auschwitz. And now I know that two weeks after our separation, they went to Auschwitz with the convoy 11.

And this is my memorial, my grave, that famous book of Klarsfeld, with the two names that say, yes, they went to Auschwitz. They died. They didn't survive, because we never heard from them anymore. That was-- we did receive a card, postcard from Drancy, from my mother, saying tomorrow we leave for an unknown destination. This was the last sign of life we had from mother and never from my father.

Of course, my imagination has been running in all directions. My father was a very bright, extremely bright man, with a lot of initiative and courage, even guts, what you call chutzpah. And nobody that knew him can believe that he didn't make it, that he didn't survive, that he didn't find a way to escape. He was that kind of adventurer guy. And he was, unfortunately, I must say, they were very young.

I don't feel sorry one minute for myself in that story, but for them. My mother was 37, was [CRIES]. My father was 42.

Did you ever try to contact anyone who was-- do you know, did anyone survive of that time?

Well, yes. This has been my obsession because I have been wanting to know what were the circumstances from the first minute, from Drancy. And I have been trying so many ways. And I just asked again yesterday to Serge Klarsfeld, is there a way? Why do we know only the name of the survivors? Why don't we know the names of the ones that died at a certain period and their family or whatever, more contact with the people that left with the same convoys, the survivors of those convoys, the family of those convoys. There is not enough contact and flexibility to know information that way.

You know, I never met one person that left Drancy in that period that arrived in Auschwitz in that period. So that it's a complete, complete blank. It's awful, just awful.

One of the things this gathering does is put this data into a computer so that the computer can find.

That's good. It could help. Right.

We want to know someone who was on that convoy.

For example, on that convoy 11. I'm desperate to talk to somebody. It's late. People are old. They can't remember anymore. It's not because you talk one time to a person on a train that you know that person or remember that person. It has somebody that has been either in the same barrack or at least one week in the same room in Drancy, because I'm sure that my mother talked about her children, talked about what was going on, from which city she was.

And to know, just to know how they were behaving, how they were taking it. The fact that they left four children is torture for a mother. I think she cannot have survived. I know it. She cannot have survived.

But I want to know. Not to know is even worse than the doubt. I think the doubt is worse than to know. I would have liked to know all those years. But I know it's too late. If you start calculating, 1942 till now, these people are dead, the ones that were around them. It's too late. That gathering was too late, too late. For most of the people, it's too late.

Anyway, how did we survive? Now we were-- my parents had left, and we were left in an enormous house.

[SIDE CONVERSATIONS]

No. We need privacy. But did you register up at the desk here? That's where you have to go. You have to fill out a form. I'm sorry.

We were left in an enormous house with money to live still some 18 months, with four children and the maid. No heat because it was winter in France, no heat. Everybody was deprived of food and coal and wood and so on.

Was the maid Jewish?

No. It was a Gentile maid that-- Gaby died now. But Gaby had been my parent's name. I have one photo that was sent to America to an uncle, where I'm two years old, and she pushes already my carriage. So that I was-- when my parents were deported, I was 11 and 1/2. So that maid had been around me for all my life. And she was very close to my parents.

And what we don't know, when she promised to take care of us till the end of the war, she did it, I'm sure, for many

reasons. It was loyalty, maybe, but also the fact that I think the French police would have taken us also, deported us also, if she wouldn't have said, I will take care of them as an adult.

And the fact that she volunteered to take care of us I think saved our life. But to tell you the truth, as soon as my parents left and she knew that she would never be paid for her services, she became very tough. She was very cruel with us. If, for example, we didn't like the food because it was terrible food during the war or we were upset because mother was not there or we didn't want to wash our underwear, she would be so nervous with us that she threatened us almost once a month to deliver us to the Germans.

So we lived that way from 1942 to March '44, under the threat of being denounced by her, being delivered to the authority any time, or--

She must have been terrified though.

I still see her with the broom. I still see her. And also, the fact that-- I think that she was afraid to herself be starving. The fact that she was taking care of us was keeping her from looking for another job. So she couldn't work either.

So we were living on the last reserve of my parents, which had been lasting since 1940 already. So imagine in 1944 how much money is left after living five people on that money. She started to sell stuff from our house, which I don't blame her. I don't blame her.

We had two cars in the garage. She started to sell the tires. She started to sell jewelry and things like that. I know it. If she put the money in her pocket or if it was to feed us, it doesn't matter. The fact is that her cruelty, this I don't forget.

She, for example, would give us a description of the gas chambers in-- before 1944, telling us your parents are already dead in there in those gas chambers. Why don't you go join them? And things like that-- and this was cruel. Nevertheless, we lived. This is one thing, right? And we lived in our own house. So I don't-- I'm not too mad at her, let's say.

In 1944, the Germans decided to deport the French Jews. Everybody knows it started in March 1944. The night before, the French police, the same guy, came to warn us that the Germans would pick us up the next day. Why did he do it at that time? Everybody knows it was the end of the war. The Germans were losing the war. And they were turning their vests, their coats, as we say in French, and preparing the ground in case, in case. And it didn't save his skin anyway. He was apprehended after the war.

Nevertheless, because we had been warned the night before, the French resistor came to pick us up in a car during that night. We were--

Who contacted the resistance?

My older sister went to a fellow that we knew was in the resistance. He took me and my two years younger children in one farm, took my older sister in another farm. But the young ones that was three years old couldn't be taken by anybody because she was dangerously young, could have cried, could have been difficult. And the maid had to keep her.

The maid kept her for a few months more in a dark room, hidden from all neighbors, going to work, leaving her, three years old, all day long alone. My sister, my younger sister is now married in California. She doesn't remember anything. There is a blank. Doesn't remember her parents, of course, because she was only not even three. But she doesn't even remember that period, a blank, completely blank.

A few months later, my older sister that was on the farm had a priest stopping at the Gentile maids house picking up my younger sister and took her and hid her in another place. So at the end of March--

Do you remember the priest's name?

No. My older sister knows also. I never met him. We were, from that time, separated and never lived again under the same roof. The older daughter, my older sister, was 18. I was, at the end of 1944, I was 14. The next one was 12. And the little one was three, four years old.

From that age, we never lived together again, never. Nobody could take care of four children. Nobody wanted to adopt four children. And my older sister was stubborn. She had one thing in her head. We must stay in our hometown. We cannot go to Israel or to a children's home or to America to the relatives. We must stay in our hometown in case Mommy and Daddy come back. They must find us together.

So what we did, she got married after the war in 1945. She got married very young because she thought that marrying also a child of deportees, of deported parents, they had a lot in common. In fact, they had nothing in common. They had only in common that they had lost their parents. But she thought by doing that she was also preparing a roof for us. It didn't work.

I was-- my story was, from March '42 to April '42-- '44, sorry-- from March '44 to-- from March '44 to April '44, or even May, I changed every week or two weeks, I changed address. Nobody wanted to keep me more than one week. They were so afraid of denunciations. They were so afraid that anybody would recognize that little Jewish child suddenly appearing in the village.

This is after the war.

No. That's still before the end of the war.

Oh, it's in March.

In March '44 until May '44.

And your sister is already married.

She got married right after the liberation.

This is before the liberation.

Right. But in my-- I tell my story how I survived, that from March to May I changed seven times families, not knowing if the next one would take me for one day or for one week or if I would meet somebody that would recognize me and be on the truck to the Germans. And each time I would be some miles more away from my hometown, further away, further away, until I arrived in another state.

In May a miracle happened that I was in a farm, on a farm, and they had friends, Gentile friends, that had lost their son, hit by a truck two months before I arrived on that farm. They were still full of sorrow to have lost a child, their only child. And being very religious Gentiles, they thought I was sent to them to replace their son because we were the same age.

And although they were antisemites, and although they were very Christian antisemites and very conservative, their religion took over. Their faith took over, and they took me anyway. This was a big cornerstone of my life.

He was the principal of a school, and she was a very educated person. And their intelligence took over their feelings of antisemitism. They took care of me until the end of the war, saying that I was a cousin coming from another state to help them to take the sorrow of the loss of their child and so on and so on, stories of that kind. And I didn't look Jewish, so it was fine.

If you were looking Jewish, by the nose or by anything else, you couldn't be hiding, even in France. Denunciation-- for money, people would denunciate you right away. But I didn't know Jewish, so they could tell stories about me.

I went to church with them every Sunday. And I passed as an Aryan girl with a false identity paper, with false ration tickets for food and so on, all this by the resistance.

Yeah. Would you say the resistance--

The resistance provided all those documents and followed me all the time. So I arrived then, after seven families, I arrived at the Vachet house.

What were their names?

Vachet-- V-A-C-H-E-T. I gave their name in Israel. They are recorded as benefactors, benefactors. And they even, for example, did black market for me. They bought-- they gave their wine so that I could have a bike. They showed a lot of affection in their own way. But I would see all the time their antisemitism by the things they would say about other Jews, not about me but about other Jews. And you would feel it all the time.

Nevertheless, the end of the war came. I saw the American tanks arriving in the village. And I felt a joy in my heart for my life, maybe. But I knew that for my parents it was a big question mark because of what our maid had told us, that they had died in the gas chambers. She had told us that without knowing really. But I had that mixed feelings, not knowing what was going to be next.

What happened is that the family Vachet, those people where I was, right away applied for a scholarship in a boarding school in a little town near where we were. And I started to study my second year of high school. I took right away-- I started my studies again. And all through high school and the university, I kept a full scholarship. That was thanks to these people, that managed, that because of my grades remaining always high, I should always be with a full scholarship. And it did happen that way.

I can't say that I owe my education to these people. I am a teacher now. I teach French. I teach French in a high school in Philadelphia. And I married my husband, who is an engineer and was studying in Nancy, coming from Poland and spent the war in Poland, also with a whole story that will be recorded separately. His name is Salomon Redner-- R-E-D-N-E-R. And he will tell his story separately.

But I can say that it's because of that background, that education that was given to me, that I survived stronger than before with a husband that I met because of my exposure at the university and a very happy life. He has been my father, my brother, my friend. He has been all in one. And we have beautiful four children, four daughters.

We multiplied, and this is my pride from being dead, almost dead by Hitler. Here we have four daughters. Isabelle is in Pittsburgh and married a excellent doctor and is now 29. Silvia is a physical therapist, married another Jewish doctor, and is married with a baby. These two daughters gave us already three grandchildren.

And the two young ones are still in college. Barbara is 21, and Francine is in engineering and is 20. And we are extraordinarily-- very bright children. And we are very proud of that. I'm going to stop here for the moment. And I will--

Say the names of your sisters.

Yes. If it is interesting to know what all this did to young children, I think I should tell the names of my sisters and how they behaved after the war, what happened to their lives. Renee was, at the time of the deportation of my parents, was 16, was a spoiled, bright, extremely bright child, but very spoiled. We had been very protected financially and by very loving philanthropic parents, very loved in their town.

And when the war finished, she thought that by marrying her husband, which is Irving Goldman-- G-O-L-D-M-A-N. He was of Hungarian origin and had lost his parents in France also. By marrying him, who was also an orphan, she thought that having that in common would make them happy. It didn't happen so.

Irving was on the lazy side, not ambitious. He was a tailor, but sleeping long siestas and not working. And my sister,

suddenly after the war, from a very dynamic, bright, energetic person, leaned on her husband so much that she lost all initiative, all that energy spent between the deportation of my parents and the end of the war trying to protect us, trying to find locations for us to be hiding, all that energy and that--

[AUDIO OUT]

What happened to my older sister, who was, after all, responsible, at least in her eyes she thought she was responsible of the destiny of the three little sisters. She thought, if Mommy and Daddy come back, she wants to be proud of what she has done for us, how she protected us. But she didn't have the moral fortitude.

And when the war finished, she collapsed. And she's now 57. And she never found the strength to pick up her life again, really.

Do you ever talk to her about the war?

Yes, we-- very, very much because now there are many things that she knew about our first 10 years with our parents, when I was a little girl, many things she knew, she knows, that I want to know and pass to my children. So each time I go to France, which thank God, is often, I pull out of her everything I can.

Where does she live in France?

She lives in Nimes, which is the Riviera, in the South of France. And another sister, the sister that is two years younger than me, lives in Nancy, which is our original hometown. She married a Jewish boy, and they were very successful in the ready-to-wear fashions. They have three stores, three boutiques. And they are not doing bad.

Let's say that Ginette, who is my second-- that sister I'm talking about, Ginette was very young, was 10 when my parents were deported. And she hardly remembers anything. She says there is also like a blank. But she doesn't need to know.

Her present life fills up her life enough that she never turns back to those days. And she doesn't need it either.

She doesn't like to talk about it?

She doesn't need it. While supposedly I am the strong one of the four, but I am the one that is very aggressive about it. I want to know, and I look, and I look. And I can never forgive my older sister that was much older than me and didn't try right after the war to contact all the people that had left at the same time as my parents. That was the time to gather the information. That was the time to look for financial help for all of us.

There are many things that she didn't do. She made a mistake. She hid it-- she just attacked the problem the wrong way. But I was so young, I couldn't do it. So now I want to catch up. I want to do all the things that have not been done. And for example, the names of my parents is on the memorial monument in Israel because I wanted it to be there. The name is in Serge Klarsfeld book because I wanted it to be there.

We don't have a grave, but my parents name is going to be everywhere. And I am going to have now a monument in our hometown. I will pay for it, but it will be there. And my husband supports me. Oh, thank God he supports me. He took off from the office to be here with me because he supports me.

But it's still time, and it's still time to pass it to my children. And this is, of course, this is another chapter. I will talk to the children if we have, at the time, the end. I have to talk about the last daughter, so my last sister.

Who did the third sister marry? What's his name? Ginette married Alex Rozenblum, Rozenblum-- R-O-Z-E-N-B-L-U-M. And they live in Nancy and have one daughter, who is now 20. Of course, I go back very often, and I see them very often.

The youngest sister is now in California, could write a book of her own. She's the one that is the most suffering of the four because she feels she has no roots at all. She doesn't remember having any parents. We found one photo at an uncle's house, and we made copies. And she looks at that photo. It's my mother with her. She's one year old. And she says, see, I did have a mother. There is a photo. I had a mother.

So she tries to pull out from us every little detail. And I give her everything I know. Each time I see her, I tell her more things and more details. Or we draw conclusions about-- coming from my parents behavior, we draw conclusions about their characters, from actions. That's the only way we can do it.

We were too young to know anything. So it's only from actions that you can draw conclusions. And I do it with her. And we try to gather as many photos-- from the police stations, for example, of our hometowns, they had ID photos. We made copies for everybody, for my children also. Everybody now has a few photos because the German confiscated absolutely everything.

As soon as we went into hiding, the Germans emptied our house completely, took everything to Germany. And we didn't find even photos, nothing, nothing, nothing. We had lost-- my parents were quite well financially. We lost everything.

When you went into hiding, what did you take with you?

Nothing.

You didn't take--

Nothing.

Pictures?

Not even a change of underwear, nothing.

Just what you were wearing when you walked out.

Right. Right. Nothing.

Otherwise, it would look like you were going into hiding.

That's right. So when you were moving from one family to another, you couldn't even go with a piece of luggage because it would have looked-- it would have looked suspicious. You were going with just what you were wearing. And depending on people washing your clothes while you were in bed or they will lend a robe, that's the way it was.

I started to have a second dress. I think it was like five months-- a skirt and a pullover, I remember-- five months after leaving our house. But in those days, you didn't care really if you had a change of clothes or not. You couldn't have cared less. It was not important.

And I remained that way for the longest time. After the war, I was already 19, knowing my husband already, almost engaged. And I don't remember looking at one schmatta, one piece of clothing in a window or at anything. I was just not interested, not interested.

Now my younger sister of Los Angeles attempted suicide two times, one at the age of 19 and again at the age of 23.

At 19, where-- was she in Los Angeles?

She was still in France. No. She was still in France unmarried. Then she got married with an American guy that was at the base and came to my older sister's house for Yom Kippur. It was a tradition to invite an army guy from the base or a



student, right? My older sister invited that fellow.

And this was in Nancy?

In Nancy.

And what's his name?

This is Bill Gincig-- G-I-N-C-I-G. And they live now in Van Nuys. And my sister was, at the time, 21, 21 when she met him at that table of Yom Kippur. And she decided, in love or not in love, I must get out of my sister's house. I cannot be dependent anymore. And this is the solution. He seems to like me, so we shall get married.

And she made that plan. And I think it was two months later he asked her to marry him. And the goal, of course, close the bases in France, and they had to come back to Los Angeles, where he has his family. But she married him not in love at all, just to make sure that my sister, my older sister would get rid of her because she felt that wherever she would go, she was always a burden and that she would never, in fact, be in one piece.

She always felt that psychologically she could never recover from all this. And what happened is that, for the first 10 years of their married life, it was like a cold war between them, especially because of the raising the children. All this was making it more complicated. But there was no love.

And my brother-in-law felt it, that she had married him just to get out of my sister's house.

He loved her, but-- [BACKGROUND NOISES]

That's right. And it's only now, so last three years-- they have been married now 20 years. It's maybe the last three or four years, since the children left the house, one to study, the other one left, that they can find something in common and that Monique now became creative, became very affirmative. She was born in 1939. She's now, in '83-- she's 10 years younger than I am. Right?

But she's a woman that has a lot of strength, very creative in the way that she is teaching seminars of quilting. And the work she does is just beautiful. She didn't have any formal education because who would have put her through school? I was the lucky one with a scholarship, but it didn't happen to my other sisters.

So but she's-- she has some kind of strength. She likes herself now. She will not kill herself anymore. She likes herself.

But it took her a long time to find it.

Right. It took her a lifetime, really. She has now two children. One is 22, the other one is 20. The boy is 20 and studies psychiatry. And I think that he will help his mother a lot.

So you're still a very close family.

Oh, yes. We adore each other.

Thank God you have each other, you know?

But it is a miracle. If my parents would just have known that we shall make it.

But they do know. Don't they? Don't you feel they know?

No. I don't believe in it. Unfortunately, I lost all religious faith. I don't believe in God. I cannot believe in God. It's impossible. How can you believe in a God that allowed-- has been permitting the death of two candid philanthropists? If I would tell you the story of my parents, you wouldn't believe it. Our attic had three household furniture.

They had been helping three families of refugees of Germany, putting their furniture in our attic until the war would be finished, saying when the war finishes, it's up there waiting for you. Here, giving them money to get visa to America, doing all the documents for three families that I know of plus all the things my father did constantly because he had all the transportation. He had a big truck, and he had a car. And in those days, it was rare to have that.

Because of that transportation, he was helping constantly people to pass illegally from Germany to France and further to Africa or to America, constantly.

But he didn't think that he had to go because--

He didn't go himself. This-- I knew you would ask me that question. And I cannot understand it, unless he felt an urge to continue helping people. And that was the only way he would be able to do it, by staying where it was, or where the help was needed.

Second, I remember my mother saying, I immigrated from Germany at the age of 19. I have now four children, and I don't want another emigration with four children, not knowing where we are going, building some kind of security for those children. I cannot risk again to start from zero with a baby of two years old. And I remember my mother saying, I cannot leave. I cannot leave.

My father would have left. But I think my mother kept him back. Also, we had relatives already in America, that had been in America since 1922. My mother had a sister.

In 1939, my mother helped a brother of Germany with the documents with the money with the attire, gave my father's suits to send, in 1939, her brother to America. And he's now in Los Angeles. And I pull out from him all the information about the Klinger family, my mother's family, as much as I can because he's in his 70s now.

But my father helped so many people. Our house was always open to everybody. How can I believe that there was a God that allowed such a thing, such an unjust death? How can I believe? It is hard to believe it. Is hard to believe in God after that, unless faith is something that is in you and that you cannot erase once you have it.

Probably my faith was not that strong before. My parents were very assimilated French people. This is what was wrong. Their naivety, their confidence in the French government, it's because they were so assimilated.

Did you go to synagogue?

We went to synagogue only at Rosh ha-Shana in Yom Kippur. I did see the lights for the different deaths in my mother's family. I saw the lights for some Shabbos, right? I saw that. But that was all.

We were raised like little French Children. And my--

You went to public school?

Yes. And my husband still laughs at me. I am the most, the most patriotic French girl because I've been raised that way. Although there is antisemitism in France and I recognize it, but I have been raised with a French literature, French patriotism, and French songs, and so on. And I felt that's the way my parents wanted it.

And this is where they were ridiculously naive, to think that the government was going to protect the foreigners. The French government didn't protect the foreigners.

It doesn't happen.

It never protects Jews in general. And it would happen again in France or here or elsewhere.

Right. It doesn't matter where.

It would happen again. And we have to be careful. I teach my children to have their antennas always out. Why am I in America? We left-- we got married in 1953.

Because of the Korean War, my husband that had run away from the Iron Curtain in 1947, because of the Korean War, his family decided it's not safe to stay in France. Communism is going to spread all over Europe. And all the people that ran away from those countries will be persecuted again.

So my in-laws left to Uruguay, South America. My husband finished his engineering school, stayed two years more than his parents, met me. We got married. We promised his parents that we were not going to endanger my husband's life and stay in France. We emigrated to South America in 1953 and lived for six years in Uruguay.

But as an engineer, my husband didn't have much future. And also, in my eyes Uruguay was not the land where my children would grow up to be mensch, to be people that would have a certain education, would have the exposure necessary to be normal people. After all, Uruguay is still underdeveloped.

So we had a friend in North America, in United States. My husband arranged a contract of work with a bed company in Philadelphia. And because of this all his papers that he already had published and his experience in engineering of six years and so on, he got the job in Philadelphia. And we emigrated.

But my main reason, why did I come to America? Nothing will be good enough for my children. I wanted to be in the best place in the world. And America, in our eyes, was the best place in the world. And I still hope it will be.

Nevertheless, when we had the Civil Rights here, the Civil Rights fights on the streets, on the campus, my oldest daughter was about to enter college. She was 17. And I said, I am threatened. My daughter is going to march for the Black. My daughter is going to march for the wrong cause. In my eyes, the right cause was in Israel.

We shall fight the Arabs, but we have nothing here to do. So we all went to Israel to see if we could emigrate. My oldest daughter looked and looked, and she was about to apply to the university. And she said, Mommy, I will not stay in Israel. I will study in America. You stay here, and I will study in America and join you later.

I said, Isabelle, if you don't stay here with us, we'll all go back to America. And we all went back to America.

How long did you stay in Israel?

Just a few months. We had not liquidated here. We had kept-- we had kept his job and everything. Thank God, where my husband works there is an affiliate, a subsidiary plant in Israel. So he would have kept the same job, just transferred. That's why we could do it.

So he worked while he was in Israel and just transferred back.

Right. So we stayed in America. And one after the other, the first two daughters got married. And now we have no choice. We shall stay where the grandchildren are, and we shall stay here. But let's hope it will forever be the best place for them. But I do teach them, have your antennas always ready.

If you have to run, leave all these material things. Don't hang to material things. Just protect your lives. That's all. Your head on your shoulder is all you need. And they have been raised that way, that material things-- they have a rich daddy, but they don't care. They can be--

They don't go-- be too trusting of security.

None of us, we don't care about material things. We have other values. We care about each other a lot. We never hurt each other. They are adorable children because we never want to hurt each other.

Thank God, my husband still has his parents that survived the ghetto of Lemberg and were hiding, just Anna Frank's story, in a basement for 18 months. But they lived. They are still living. So my children have grandparents on that side living near us at a walking distance. We keep them very near us. Each time we emigrate, we drag them with us. And we are a very, very close family.

You're a [INAUDIBLE] person.

And we made it. We made it.

It seems like you have all your family together.

We have it all together also. I think I came out stronger. When they do analysis of what happened to those people, it's true we were four children living orphans there. I came out stronger because I knew that it depends only on me. It depends only on my intelligence and on my behavior, on my pride. And I was always keeping-- staying on the right track just because I was afraid they would say again, those Jews, again look at what they do.

So I had to be always the best student in the class. And it gave-- I was even a better student after the war than before the war. It gave me just an extraordinary strength, no doubt about it.

But it was not the same for my sisters. And it didn't happen-- to most of the people, it didn't happen that way. I found out just last month a funny story, no, two months ago. I was in France, and my older sister was laying down next to me. And I looked at my legs, and I don't have the same legs she has.

And I said, I wonder where these legs come from. I look at my legs. And she says, how did you know? And I said to her, did you know what? How did you know it?

She looks at me, and she has persisting eyes. And she wants me to say something that I don't know what she wants from me. How did you know, she insists again. Who told you? And I look at her, and suddenly I saw the light, what she wanted from me. I said, don't tell me we don't have the same father.

I said to her, does that explain that my behavior is not at all like yours, that I didn't react the same way as you? What do you know? And she said, I don't know. I don't know. I don't want to say anything. I don't know anything.

She tells me a funny story that I, now that I am 50, over-- I am now what-- I'm 53. I had to wait for a lifetime to have my sister that doesn't know much after all-- if I should believe what she says, she was only 16, after all, when my parents were deported. She puts a grain of doubt in my head, if we have the same father.

Supposedly, the year I was born my mother had an affair. Can you imagine the story?

I'm sorry, [INAUDIBLE].

It's in such a crazy story. So I said to my sister, don't put-- don't damage first the image of my parents, of my mother and father. Second, I don't believe a word of it because the three of you, you have mother's character, who was very sentimental, who was even poetic-- writing poetry in the diary, who was very creative. You have the same character as Mother.

And you're like your father.

But I am-- I have the character of father. And this everybody knows about the character of father. And I recognize myself.

I was going to say, you sound like your father.

Then I look at pictures of my father. I find the nose. I find the cheekbones. And I said to my sister, leave me alone with those stories.

There must have been something. She probably saw your mother smile at somebody when she was 16. And at that age she thought it was--

Supposedly she heard a fight when she was-- we are five years apart. She was five years old. Supposedly she heard a fight between Father and Mother.

Just a fight, or a fight about this?

A fight about the fellow, about the affair and about me being born and my father doubting about me. She remembers, supposedly, this, the discussion if I was the daughter or not.

So maybe your father saw your mother smile at somebody and he said, your--

But it's funny, to arrive at the end of your life and not to be able to check on anything. I have enough problems. I don't want that one too.

No, that's-- you can ignore that. I mean, there's so many different legs in a family, you don't have to have the same legs as your sister.

Anyway, I told the story to my children because I thought it was adding something to my character and to the story of our family that they should know before I go.

It's a part of it.

I have been telling them so many stories that I thought that this one was a funny one to add to it, to the color of it. Anyway-- I was just telling the story of a girlfriend that I had as a little girl and found at the end of the '60s, found again in my own backyard in Philadelphia completely by accident. She's the only person that knew my parents when we were little girls. And our sets of parents were very close friends. She's the only-- my only roots, my only proof that I lived with some parents sometimes somewhere in France.

Tell her name.

And so her name is Ida. Her maiden name was Hoffman-- H-O-F-F-M-A-N-- Firestone is her last name. And she has three sisters that live in America. They all survived the war in terrible circumstances, also in France. But they emigrated to America with their parents. The whole family survived.

What are the parents' names, first names?

Hoffman is the family. Her older sister lives in Washington, in Silver Springs. And her name is Rosa Averbach. And they also have a very interesting story. But they don't feel that they are survivors, although they lived in terrible circumstances during the whole war. But the fact that they all survived as a family, they feel they have been so privileged that they cannot really feel that they are survivors, although they have been marked.

My best girlfriend, in fact, Ida, is very, very marked with full of anxieties, full of problems. And she doesn't realize that it's because of those war years. But we have now, of course, a lot in common. We are always together. We do always things together. Any wedding, any bar mitzvah, we always invite each other. And I always tell her, you are not allowed to get sick. You are not allowed to die because you are my roots.

When did you find her again?

In the late '60s. And I had left in France in '53 sure that she had-- she was dead in the concentration camps because I had

never heard from her anymore. So when we found each other, you should have seen the whole week I was putting bleach in my dishwasher. We were on the telephone all day long, and it was awful. But that's a story that would be interesting to write also.