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Summary

Paulette Fink, born 10/22/11 to Jean Weil and Blanche Salomon in Millouse, France. Father a shoe manufacturer and mother a Cordon Bleu Grad. Father came from Alsace but had to leave as he was a Francophile, a “ferocious French chauvinist.” During WW I, mother took Fink and sister to Switzerland while father remained in France. Father apparently head of Deuxieme Bureau (French CIA) during the war. Returned to Paris post war. Sister born 1920. Parents not observant although Fink went to religious school at Reform/Liberal synagogue. Great grandmother was first woman dentist in France and great grandfather deciphered Assyrian scripture in Iraq at behest of Napoleon(?). First husband (never named) was grandson of chief rabbi of Paris. Fink went to a private lycee and to boarding schools in Germany and the UK. Saw signs in Germany re “no Jews allowed” in thirties. Married 1/31/34. Two daughters, Nadine (10/35) and Francelyne (3/39). Husband ran a chain of five and dime stores.

At start of WW II, family living in Brittany while husband was a lieutenant in the army. Husband captured by Germans 6/10/40 but later escaped. Parents and sister fled to North Africa via Spain. Fink, a registered nurse, worked in a hospital in Jouin near Perigeaux. Area under Vichy control, but never wore a star. Joined Resistance group formed by husband after his escape. Husband arrested again after giving away rice and beans. Fink approached Petain, whom she knew personally to get husband released, but he refused because they were Jewish. Fink then found a double agent who called the camp commandant and husband released. Fink took Jewish children and hid them on farms. Her children were hidden in Chambon by Pastor Trocme. Other Jewish children were passed by the Resistance to Switzerland. She helped rescue British/American courier parachutists who brought messages to the resistance, including the son of Samsonite luggage family. Living with 13 family members in a castle near Grenoble. Husband caught after D-Day and died 6/24/44 after being tortured. During war, kids went to Christian schools while other children were cared for in nunneries. Constant fear of informers. Propaganda blamed Jews for war and rationing and many French believed it to be true. Fink did lose a cousin and some of her family members who were picked up. Liberated 8/14/44. Americans set up a hospital on the castle’s grounds.

Postwar, Fink set up housing for children with a little help from the Joint Distribution Committee. Not enough money, so she and others stole a JDC truck and raided a warehouse to obtain supplies. Ended up with 107 kids in one location. JDC impressed with her and arranged to send her to USA to raise funds in 1946 on the USS Thomas Barry, a troop ship, along with 4500 troops. Spent 3 months in NYC and traveled around raising money. Got hundreds of pairs of shoes from a manufacturer in Baltimore. Came back and forth for 8 years for spring UJA fundraisers while still working at the orphanages (1500 kids) in France.

Although “not a Zionist,” Fink became involved with the Palestine Brigade which brought DP’s to the Paris area (Malmaison I and II). In 1948, she became involved with the Brichah arm of the Haganah to smuggle immigrants to Palestine via Cyprus. Worked with “Yitzhak” to bring DP’s from Pappendorf through zones of occupation to Cinecitta in Italy (the Hollywood of Italy) and then to a port near Rome to load them onto ships anchored offshore. Also worked for JDC in Munich and nearby DP camps. Involved in illegal immigration from Libya and Morocco with local JDC head, Nelly Benatar.

While touring USA on fundraising, met second husband in St. Paul. He owned G&K Cleaners. Married 1954. She has 8 grandchildren.

Still (1987) a frequent speaker about hate and antisemitism as she has always felt it was her duty to go on. Children, however, will not go to Germany.