

Interview with Mrs. Paulette Fink
By Rhonda Lewin
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

- Q: This is Rhoda Lewin interviewing Paulette Fink on June 9, 1987 for the Holocaust Oral History Project. Paulette, could we start by telling us your complete name, including your Jewish name if it's different.
- A: I was born Paulette Way, which you would call Weil in this country. I think that my middle name is Sara but I really never until I got to this country really knew it because the French are not all that conscious of giving a Jewish name, especially not when you're a reform Jew. So that's all I can say about my middle name.
- Q: And when were you born?
- A: I was born October 22, 1911. In the eastern part of France, in a town called Millouse, where my father was from. My father married a Parisian who never got used to living anywhere outside of Paris, so my brother and I were born there, and I left at the age of two and a half, and my brother was two or three months old. Actually, we never lived there, because first of all the first World War caught us; my mother always took us to Switzerland during the summer and we were in Switzerland in August, 1914 when the war broke out. My father immediately got in touch with mother; I don't know what the communication was at the time, but he said, "Don't move. Don't move. Stay put where you are and just wait for my instructions." So this was it; we never left Switzerland all during the war. All my very first education, my first brush with school, was in Switzerland and that's where I learned how to read and how to count and how to write and how to knit, everything that the Swiss children learned. And by the way, I was much more advanced than the children my age when I got back to Paris. It's very interesting.
- Q: You were in the French speaking part of Switzerland, then.
- A: Oh, sure. In Geneva and in Lausanne.
- Q: Could you give me your parents' names?
- A: My mother's name was Blanche Salomon. My father's name was Jean Weil.
- Q: What were their occupations?

A: My father was a shoe manufacturer at the time the war broke out in 1914. In the east of France, in that town of Millouse. He had a very hard time escaping because he was known all over that part of France, which was Alsace, as a traitor to the Germans, because since he was born, German was the official language -- French was not allowed to be taught -- and my father did nothing else in his entire teenage and young man's years than create schools and theatres and clubs in the basements of houses to maintain the French. And he was hunted, of course. He was constantly looked for and when the war broke out he was one of the first people who had to leave, absolutely, because he was one of the first people who would have been immediately taken by the Germans and condemned to death. He had already been condemned before but he escaped and came back and you couldn't stop him, because he was a ferocious French chauvinist. He got out his furniture, everything, to Switzerland under a false name. And that's the way he got out.

Q: And this was during World War I.

A: And he never went back there, either.

Q: And so you never went back.

A: And so he was, for the whole length of the first World War, the head of the Second Bureau, which is the CIA, for France, and Switzerland was the ground for that. The Germans had an enormous spy net, the French had it, the Italians had it, the Belgians, the Dutch, everybody used neutral Switzerland as the spy activity for their country. So it was very, very risky. If they were picked up, if they were arrested, that was the end of it, because it was not allowed. They were neutral and didn't want to have anything to do with either side. But so long as they could deal without being picked up, okay. But he still was picked up at the very end of it. The Armistice was November 11, 1918, and I think my father was picked up about nine days before. The Armistice definitely saved his neck. So the family never had been living a quiet and peaceful life. I think we got from him this definite push into doing things and being involved, and not just watch.

Q: So then after the Armistice, and he was released, you went back to live...

A: Then we went back to Paris. We moved to Paris in 1919, so I was eight years old, and I have a sister who was born in 1920, who is 8 1/2 years difference with me, and who never knew anything else but Paris! My mother was back in Paris; you couldn't live anywhere else!

Q: Could you talk a little about your religious orientation? Was you family observant?

A: My father apparently must have been brought up in a pretty Orthodox way, but by parents who were very, very broad minded. Meaning that I think my grandmother

was keeping kosher and I think their home was a kosher home. But my father was, as a young man, traveling an awful lot. He was actually, I think, a shoe salesman when he was a very young man and the only thing my grandmother was interested in when he was going outside of France -- he was going to Spain, he was going to Italy -- the only thing he had to do was send a card that he was in a Palace Hotel, to make sure that he was in the best hotel in town --which very often was not the best hotel! When my father was in his home, of course, he did what the parents wanted, but he himself never observed anything. And when he got married to mother, mother had absolutely no religious training, none whatsoever. She was brought up more or less by her grandparents. My grandmother (her mother) was the very first woman dentist in France. She was the only woman in dentistry school when she too her degree, and had very little time to bring up her daughter. I can't say the grandparents were completely devoid of any religion, because I understand my great grandfather was a very famous man. I could write a book on him, because he was the first one who deciphered the Assyrian scripture, the cuneiform characters. He was sent on a mission by Napoleon and by all kinds of people to spend years in what was at that time Mesopotamia, which is Iraq today. That's the only country where I'm really dying to go and that's the only one I haven't gone to. I was in Iran and saw a lot of the cuneiform characters that he deciphered. In any event, I understand that on Yom Kippur, he was going to go to the synagogue the night before, and for Kol Nidre, and never moved out of the synagogue the whole night and the whole day. That was absolutely the only thing he ever observed. So that was my mother's grandfather, the one she was brought up by. So she really knew nothing, nothing. And I remember one very funny story about mother being introduced to her future-in-laws, when my Dad took her from Paris to this little town of Millouse. My grandmother, of course, asked her all kinds of questions, and she said, "Well, my child, I hope you cook well, because you know, my son has always had good cooking at home." And so she said, "Oh, yes, because I have a degree from the Cordon Bleu." My grandmother was pretty astounded and then my mother went on saying, "As soon as I move here, and as soon as I'll be settled, I'll invite you to eat one of my most favorite dish, a Lobster a la Americaine." So my grandmother looked at her very calmly and quiet and said. "Well, this, my child we don't eat." So mother didn't catch up anything, she just said, "It's a pretty heavy dish, it's true. But I'll find other dishes that I can cook for you." She never understood why my grandmother said, "This we don't eat." Mother hated to tell that story. Whenever I was telling it she was furious. But the fact is that I thought it was so funny. So as far as our house was concerned, we had no tradition. We never had candles on Friday night. I was brought up in the only Reform temple in Paris, which is called "liberal," and we lived in the street where the Temple was. I fell in love with it. I fell in love with the man who was my teacher, who was a former priest, a very famous man by the name of Aimee Pelier, who has had many books translated here by Stephen Wise, who knew him, and one of the best known books here is called The Unknown Sanctuary. He was a fabulous man, absolutely fabulous. I learned more from him than I ever would have learned from a Jewish scholar, because when a non-Jew possesses a subject, they go much more deeply

into it than a Jew, who takes everything for granted. So he was marvelous. He died during the Occupation and he refused to be buried in a Jewish cemetery because he said he didn't belong. He wasn't born Jewish; he didn't have the right to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. In any event, it is strange, because we are three -- I have a brother and sister -- and I'm the only one who went to Sunday School. I'm the only one who's sung in the chorus of the Temple. I'm the only one who went on and on, staying with it because I was happy with it. My brother was Barmitzvah but I don't think he's ever been in a Temple since, and my sister had absolutely no Sunday School training at all. My parents were already older by then and they were much more lenient and they just didn't care.

Q: Is your brother older than you are?

A: No, I'm the oldest. My brother is 27 months younger and my sister is eight and a half years younger. But the time my sister was born, my father could have almost been her grandfather. He was very much older. He married very late. He married when he was 36 years old. So it was late when he got my sister. But it's a very interesting thing, this involvement with Judaism because for no reason, for no influence at home, for no influence on the part of anybody, beside maybe my preacher had a big influence on me, it's been a very rewarding thing for me to belong to that first synagogue, that Temple. It was very interestingly backed up by Americans. The first president was an American living in France. It was interesting that the French never caught up with it. The French never could stand the idea of a Liberal Temple. The Jewish institutions in France, like in any country in western Europe, are under what we called the "Consistua," the overall umbrella that all the Temples, all the synagogues belong to. The rabbis are placed by the Consistua. You don't go out and find your own rabbi. But it's a little bit like here, too; when you want a rabbi for a synagogue, you call the Yeshiva.

Q: At least you get a couple of choices. They send out a candidate or three.

A: But there they have to be assigned. You can ask for a preference if you happen to know someone, but most of the time. You don't know who is available. Anyway, the only one who never got a pension, the only one who never had anything to do with it, and they wanted nothing to do with him, was my rabbi. It was very pathetic. My husband was the grandson of the chief rabbi of Paris. He didn't have much of a Jewish education (chuckling). Friday night they were going to their grandfather for dinner, and he lived with his grandfather for many, many years because his father was remarried and he didn't want to live with his stepmother! His father was a widower when my husband was 17 years old, so he lived with his grandfather. He had a fantastic pride as a Jew and a fantastic desire to be respected as a Jew, and one of the reasons why we never left France -- and we could have gone everywhere else, we could have come to America -- but my husband said, "No. As a Jew my duty is to stay here. We're not going to run like rats. We are just going to stay here and fight our way. We are not going to run away when the boat is sinking." He had a very deep sense of being a Jew. And

that had nothing to do with Jewish education but as a Jewish human being, highly proud of it.

Q: And also, I think, highly proud of being a Frenchman.

A: Very chauvinistic and very Jewish.

Q: Can you tell me about your education?

A: I went to the school to which all of us go, meaning that we don't have what we have here, meaning that you switch from two to three different schools. We have one school. The only thing that we have outside of our one school is the kindergarten, which is not at all compulsory. You can or you can't go; this is up to the parents. And then we go to a school, the opposite from here. Your last grade is twelve. Our first grade is twelve. After kindergarten the first grade is 12. And the grade of the Baccalaureate, the grade of matriculation is first -- "post-exam" is philosophy or science, depending what you choose --so we end up with "first". You stay in the same school, from the twelve to the one, which is never true here. Here you go to kindergarten and to a grammar school and to a junior high; all these we don't know.

Q: And of course this was a private school.

A: In my time it was. It was a Lycee. At that time you paid a tuition and you of course bought your books and everything else. Today I understand that it's practically free. I don't think that you pay for it anymore.

Q: Now, it was not a religious school? It was not church-connected? In France you didn't have religious instruction in the schools?

A: Yes, we do. Catholic, of course. Don't forget that France is 95% Catholic, 3 and 1/2% Protestant and 1 and 1/2% Jewish.

Q: Well, what would happen in school when it was time for religion class? Would you go to the class and get the Catholic instruction? Or would you be excused?

A: No, no. You could go to a religious school. There were a tremendous amount of Jesuit schools, a lot of convents and monasteries. The Catholic could choose to go into a Catholic college. But in the regular French education, we had a regular separation of church and state.

Q: I know in some countries like in Poland, every day in school there'd be a religion class.

A: Poland! You can never compare! That's why people say to me. "You came from Europe," I say, "I never came from Europe. What do you mean by Europe?"

There is no such thing as Europe.” Western Europe is a world, and eastern Europe is another world, and there is absolutely nothing in common. We have no practice in common, no philosophy in common, no values in common, nothing.

Q: Can you tell me, now, you were already in your teens when the Nazis came to power. What do you remember? Was your family listening to the radio, reading newspapers?

A: I was beyond my teens because this was in '31; I was twenty years old. In my family and in many French families, the parents are very strict about language, and in school you have to take two languages, what we call a first and a second, plus Latin and plus Greek. And especially me, who was in Humanities, I had German as a first language and English as a second, because my parents always said German is much harder than English, so German should be the first language. So I went to Germany for a year in boarding school and I went to England a year and a half in boarding school. So at that time I was already in post-graduate work. I was in Germany the end of '32 and the beginning of '33. And I remember being taken to the pool and I saw a sign at the door of the swimming pool, “Keine Hunde, Keine Juden.” “No dogs, no Jews.” This I can see as if it was yesterday. I can see that in my eyes. My father telegraphed immediately to come home. So I left. So I never spent my whole year, really in Germany. So what! This was Germany. What in the world can happen to us in France? Come back quick. Leave them behind. There was nothing. Even when they came and told us stories that were not believable. We knew a couple in Vienna who finally arrived in Paris, maybe in '37, '38. And I remember her telling us that a beauty parlor happened to be across the street from the military barracks. They were waiting for the girls to come out of the beauty parlor having had a manicure, and so forth, and they were giving them the toothbrushes and making them clean the yard of the barracks. Well, we listened to that, and we believed or we didn't believe. I'm not sure how much we believed.

Q: And that's Austria.

A: But not us. How did anything like this happen? It's not possible. Then we started to be loaded with refugees. They came from all over. They came from Romania, from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia. They had moved already most of them to Germany because they thought, well, this is already leaving behind all the Eastern European countries. So they were moving to Germany and not thinking that in Germany it would be very bad. The last resort was France. That was freedom. If they were able to do it, they came to France.

Q: Now, this was prior to 1939?

A: That was from the beginning of Nazism, '34, '35. In France at the beginning it got very tough because the French had a concentration camp in the south of France for all the Germans. After all, Germany was the enemy. And they didn't

care whether he was a Catholic, a Protestant or a Jew, he was a German. And a lot of people died in those camps. There was no torture, there was no gas chamber, or anything like this, but they were treated very bad and starved, they had very little food and if they, God forbid, got sick, there was no way to get treated. My father had one business connection in Frankfurt and they were able to escape as soon as they could. When I was in boarding school in Frankfurt they had been wonderful to me. She wasn't Jewish, but he was a Jew. And he was put in this camp in Zurst and it was just unbelievable. He got a sinus infection and nobody would give him any pills or whatever it was that could have helped, and no doctor, and he died. He died there. So it was really rough. That was even before the Germans. This was during the '39-'40 war, during what you Americans call the Phony War; after that, the people were of course no more secure there than they were anywhere else, because the first ones they went after were those people. They couldn't speak French, they had an accent, they didn't know anybody where they could hide, they didn't know where to put their kids away. They were an easy prey. They (the Germans) didn't go after the French for quite a long time. They just took all the refugees first.

Q: To backtrack a minute, when did you get married?

A: I got married the 31st of January, 1934. So that was a year and a half after Hitler came into power in Germany. And between 1934 and 1939, there wasn't a peaceful year. Not one. In '34, while we were on our honeymoon, there were terrible strikes in Paris. They had locked their bosses in the factories and all the workers were down below and preventing anybody from lifting food to them or anything. There were big riots. In '35 Leon Blum came into power. In '36 it was, absolutely, a year of the worst anti-Semitism. The fact that we had a Jewish Prime Minister was very bad. He was very definitely elected by a great portion of the people but he wasn't accepted. He made all kinds of reform. He wanted people to have Saturday, Sunday free when the French always worked on Saturday, and when this created a riot, then he said, "We will have Sunday and Monday." And that was not good, either. The people decided that no country can live with five days a week. Things were very bad. In '38, that was unique! My husband was an officer in the French army, and he was away five months in '38; he was mobilized. All of the officers were taken for five months, because that was the time of Chamberlain. Remember this whole thing?

Q: Yes. "Peace in our time."

A: And we thought we had finally avoided the war. Some of us definitely felt we had been betrayed and we had been sold out but we avoided the war, but it was avoided only until the middle of '39. I was married 1934 and my husband was killed in June 1944. I was married ten years, and we had five years of unbelievable riots and turmoil, and five years of French Underground.

Q: And you also had two children during that time.

A: Two daughters. One was born October '35 and the other was born in March '39, three months before the war broke out.

Q: So at this time you and your husband were living in Paris.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And what kind of business was he in?

A: My husband was proprietor of a big chain of five and ten stores and traveled a lot. We even lived in a few different towns before we finally got back to Paris in '39. We were happy to have finally, at last, settled in Paris, because it allowed my daughter to be born in Paris. And four months later we were in the middle of the war! I had a wonderful nurse for my children, from the time I expected my first one, until actually the middle of the occupation; she never wanted to leave me. My parents had rented a house on the beach in Brittany. So we all went to that resort in Brittany and that's where the war caught us. My father at the time was mayor of a town in the east part of France and he didn't want to leave his City Hall. No matter how close the Germans came, he wasn't leaving until there was no alternative.

When we lost that so-called war, it took everybody by shock. They absolutely overran the Maginot Line, which we thought we were well protected by having. But it was nothing, after all. It was open on one side and closed on the other, so it was easy enough to come through the open side. The Germans went around it and came into Belgium, and between the time they entered Belgium and the time they came into Paris, it was six days. At that time we lived in Brittany in that house, and my parents continued to rent it for a year, and finally in the middle of '40, between my sister and I, we finally convinced my father to leave his City Hall and come. The Germans were already advancing, and of my husband, I had no news. My husband was picked up, I think, June 10, when the Germans came from Belgium into France. My husband was only a lieutenant in the French army, but this was the time when the French army had a very dignified way of behaving. All the high officers -- generals, captains, colonels -- left with his own private car to go to pick up his family and run! My husband who was only a lieutenant, was in charge of the whole battalion, and they were told, "Leave your arms behind and flee." My husband refused. He refused to flee, and he refused to leave his arms behind, so he was picked up and he was a prisoner. He was taken as prisoner on June 10, and it was the end. When De Gaulle made his appeal on June 17 from London, it was already all over. I was on the front line. I was a Red Cross nurse, so I had very easy access to the news, what the Red Cross was doing, even in the camps in Germany. But I could not get any news. I never got any news. I didn't know what happened. I didn't know where he was. Well, at that time -- it's a long chain of events, I can't go through it too much, it's too many details -- my parents left with my sister, and they crossed Spain to North Africa, and to

Morocco. After they had been there for quite a few weeks, my parents insisted so much that I decided, well, not knowing where my husband is, and what happened, I can't stay alone in France with my two young kids, I have to go. I started to get a passport and everything else, and to join my parents. At that time we were completely disorganized because the Germans had traced a line between the two parts of France, the so-called free part and the so-called occupied part, and we were in the free part. I was mobilized, and I had a place where to join my group. So I went there with my nurse and the two kids. Everybody was invading the roads and nobody could pass by; the people had absolutely swarmed all the roads in France, trying to go south, to leave. The Germans were coming from the north and from the east.

Q: And they wanted to go south to Free France.

A: I got to Jouin, where I was supposed to go. We had requisitioned a big high school that we transformed into a hospital. For nine days I was alone with a surgeon and a doctor. The road was blocked above the line, and nobody else was able to come. We received wounded soldiers by the thousands, because the only thing that the Italians ever contributed after they joined the Nazis, declared war on France, were tiny little arrows that were poisoned. These little arrows pierced the cars, and they pierced the army that was on foot, and the tanks, and everything else, they went through everything. The only thing that they couldn't go through was a mattress. So immediately we got orders. If you go anywhere and you have a car and you use it, put one or two mattresses on top. That's what saved our lives. We had two mattresses on top of the roof.

Q: Can we back up for just a minute? Had you taken nurse's training?

A: Yes, I was a Red Cross nurse. But that is an entirely different thing again. In France there are two organizations of Red Cross. One was called "Help to Military Wounded," the other was called "French Federation of Red Cross." The two of them had a three-year program. The first year you were a first aid nurse, the second year you were much more posted, at the end of three years you were registered. I was a registered nurse.

Q: But you had never intended to become a nurse.

A: You can't. You can never make a living out of it. You can be the head of what we called a light ambulance. It's a small military hospital like the one that the Americans, for instance, started. When they started to come in they put up some tents and made what we called a light ambulance. You could, if you wanted to, go into nursing school and take then a professional nursing degree; I never knew anybody who did that. At the beginning of the war in '39, when we were at the beach resort there, a friend of mine and myself, we formed 49 girls to send to the front line. Trained them as Red Cross nurses. I was very involved in that. So at the beginning, when I was assigned to that high school, at that time, this was

terribly hard because we were night and day, and it was just awful. The only thing we got were the boys who had been completely wounded by those arrows. But we had absolutely no infections, because they had done nothing for eight months. They ate very well, they were living outside, they were playing football across the line, with the Germans. They were playing football with them!

Q: Which is why we called it the “Phony War.”

A: Nobody had any infection. We were very lucky. We really were, because everything that could happen happened. In a few days the Germans just pushed themselves in and then the Italians.

Q: Now where in Brittany were you staying? And where was this hospital, the school that you took over?

A: The resort? It’s called Le Balle. It’s a big, beach resort on the southern coast of Brittany. Where the hospital was is a place called Perigeaux; it’s about seventy miles from Bordeaux.

Q: You said you were in this hospital at first, and then what happened?

A: I stayed there as long as I possibly could, from June until the beginning of September. I knew a lot of people by then and one of my friends was at the railroad station at night. She was also Red Cross but she was distributing coffee and cookies and stuff like this, and every time a train was coming in, it was bringing people from the east and from the north, people fleeing the Germans up there. Don’t forget, this was still the beginning of 1940, this was really at the beginning. They were not organized yet to stop people from going. I saw her one day and I explained to her that I intended to leave. I told her that I was getting my passport and that I was going to Morocco. I had secured transportation. There was not very much going but there was still a few ways to go. One night she was going from window to window, to distribute coffee and so forth, and all of a sudden my husband jumped out of one of the cars and she looked at him and she said, “Oh my gosh. Do you know that your wife left?” Your wife was here with the children but she left and went to Morocco.

Q: But you hadn’t left yet.

A: I was going two or three days later.

Q: So then, what...

A: He escaped four times, and finally made it the fourth time. Four times he escaped from a prisoner of war camp. It was possible to send one of those crazy cards from prisoner of war camp to the occupied zone -- not to the free zone -- so he wrote somebody in the occupied zone, and that somebody knew where I was!

Knew that I was down there and that I was the head of that hospital. That's the way he came down there.

Q: So there you were reunited.

A: It was unbelievable.

Q: You had the two little girls with you then.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: At the hospital?

A: No. My nurse was with the children in a hotel, because I knew everybody there and in the hotel they gave them a room, almost two rooms, and there was an enormous bathroom and in that bathroom they put a little stove, to be able to cook for the kids. There was no way to go to a restaurant. If you wanted to go to a restaurant you sometimes had to queue up for three hours. There were only a few places open, there was no food, everything was rationed. The people who owned that hotel were very old friends of mine, and they were providing things to cook with. So she fed the children and never went down to a restaurant, and I was in the hospital.

Q: Now, at what point, then did the Germans really begin to take control? What happened next?

A: They took control of the occupied zone. In Perigeaux, every day there was news, false news. They are putting the line through us. No, they're going to put the line beyond us. No, they're going to include us in the line, because this is France. Okay, the line was here. It was cutting France from east to west, putting Normandy, Brittany, the whole northern part of France, the eastern part of Alsace-Lorraine, beyond that, their line. This part here is free. But they didn't cut like this, because they wanted an opening on the Mediterranean. So it cut like this, and so the whole part of Bordeaux, the whole southwest of France was in.

Q: You were close to the Mediterranean, but the Germans wanted to have a strip along the Mediterranean.

A: No, we were parallel to the Atlantic. The Atlantic is here. But the Mediterranean is there. They wanted that line to go down to the Mediterranean. So we didn't get in. But from that time on, it was finished. You could absolutely not cross; you couldn't get your relatives from the other side. The number of people that were arrested trying to cross was pathetic. And we were under Petain, in Vichy, France. He absolutely, completely sold out to the Germans. There was a very good article in the Minneapolis Tribune about two, three weeks ago, with a picture of Petain. Did you see that? It's a wonderful article, about how he

betrayed France, how he betrayed the trust of his countrymen. We were completely under his rule and under what he allowed us to do. He made us declare ourselves to the police station, and his big lie was that if you were French for more than five generations, you've got nothing to risk; you're protected. So we all went, and declared ourselves.

Q: But they did ask you whether you were Jews.

A: (Sigh) Believe me, we were completely trapped. Many of us never worried. We were never compelled to wear the Star of David like they did in the occupied zone. Never. But we had to be declared at the police station. And they always maintained that when we could prove that we were French for at least five generations there would be no persecution. On the contrary, we would be protected.

Q: And you had to have identity cards, then.

A: Oh sure. In the underground, we changed all the time. We changed identification cards, we changed ration cards. I don't know how many names I carried. It was very tricky because it was not at all just pick up a name, you know. You can decide tomorrow your name is Smith, but it doesn't go like that. You had to carry identity of a living person. Or one who just died. We had an entire net of people who were in charge of finding who was sick in a hospital, or in a mental hospital, or who had just died. Way far away from where we lived, of course. And get the entire pedigree of that person.

Q: You had just started to talk about being part of the underground. You were also saying while we were turning the tape that people used to tend to think that everybody who was caught in the Holocaust was in a concentration camp. Can you tell me -- did you decide to enlist in the Resistance, or did it just happen? How did you become part of this?

A: There was no enlisting. (Laughter)

Q: I know. But tell me how you became a part of it.

A: There was absolutely no organization. There was absolutely nothing that had any rules, or rhyme or reason. This was something that was 100% volunteer action, prompted by De Gaulle when he started on June 17 to talk from London, saying that we lost a battle, but we didn't lose the war, and that we just had to fight now to regain that battle. He started the very first group of French Resistance -- with nothing. People react! Sabotage everything you can, infiltrate anywhere you can, and do everything you can to stop their war machine, stop their manufacturing, stop their -- they had taken over all the factories, and all the fields, and all the farms, and absolutely everything -- so stop them wherever you can, sabotage everything they're doing. But on your own, completely on your own. Of course

you know, in a situation like this, the leaders discover themselves. So a leader shows up and another leader shows up. When my husband escaped, the very first thing he did was to immediately form a nucleus and what he did was, where we were at the time, there was one of his five and ten cent stores that was part of his supervision, and he took it over. He took it over because at that time, the people were mobilized, or the people didn't come back, or the people were prisoner. He took that store over, and he found in the attic of that store tons of dried beans -- what you call Boston Beans here -- lentils, green peas -- all that stuff in enormous sacks. That was September 1940. Already the ration cards had been started the end of June by the Germans, and then of course it was established even more strongly by Vichy. Nobody was getting any of that. No noodles, no rice, no peas, no nothing. Nothing of that was distributed. My husband put in an ad in the paper on Sunday. "Monday morning, 8:00 in the morning, tons of this, this, this and that will be distributed. Free." People were queuing up by the thousands. He gave the whole thing out. Everything was given away. He gave the whole thing out. Everything was given away. Everything was gone by the time he was arrested.

Q: So then when they arrested him, what happened?

A: They arrested him, he was put in a fortress and he -- I can't go on because if I would tell you the details -- but I went to Vichy. I was terribly scared that he couldn't withstand it. Whenever there was a clash, when anything happened, between the French Resistance and the German, immediately they were picking up the hostages. In the prisons, this is where they were making their revenge. For any German who had been shot -- very often, they'd been shot among themselves, because they were fighting over a girl in a bar or something like this -- immediately the Resistance was held responsible. So I went to Vichy. I knew Petain. I happened to know him because he knew my sister-in-law very well. He lived in the same apartment house as my sister-in-law and he was at my brother's wedding. So I knew very well who he was and he knew who I was, and I was finally introduced, and he put his arm around me, and he said, "what can I do for you, my child? Anything I can do? So I told him point blank, I said, "You can give the order to the fortress so-and-so to release my husband." So he looked at me and says, "My poor child. I am so sorry. If only you wouldn't be Jewish." That was Marshal Petain. So anyway, I was able to find somebody. The underground was very well informed at the time. We had a few very trustworthy people and in Vichy we had a few men who were working double game, but you had to find them. And one of them I was told, told that if I would succeed nowhere with Petain, I should go see so-and-so. So I went; I had the code word and I was introduced to him. I gave my code word and he was very cold and very remote at the time. They were very suspicious. I told him my story and said it was also very dangerous for me because if he wasn't really the guy I thought he was, I was in trouble. But you had to trust when you were given a certain name. Finally he trusted me, and then he took me out for lunch and he said, "Now what? Now what is it?" So I told him the whole thing and told him who I was and what

had happened, and he said, "Okay." So we went back to his office, he called the commandant who had command of that fortress, and he says, "Here is Marshal Petain's office. So-and-so ordered to release so-and-so." That night he was out.

Q: They just opened the gate and let him out? Or did somebody go pick him up?

A: He was very far from where I was and he had no transportation, nothing. We could absolutely not move. It was terrible. To go to Vichy I must have had five people picking me up. I went into a fruit truck at one time. I remember that it smelled of peaches. I remember I went into a kind of tractor that was passing on the road. They took me. Little by little like this I finally got to Vichy. But there was no train. There was no car, no gas, no nothing. At one time for a little while I had a car. They let us transform the gas tank into consuming wood, putting an enormous tank in the back of the car and then you were burning wood, and what the wood was producing could ignite the car. It's unbelievable. But then we couldn't keep any car on the road. There was no way. We were bicycling everywhere we were going. I bicycled once over 200 km. Sometimes I wonder, how in the world did I ever do that? This kind of involvement into the work. But first of all, I didn't do anything on my own. I was really my husband's message carrier. We were getting all our messages from De Gaulle through the BBC in London, what to do and where to go. Each one of us had a Resistance name, like whenever they were calling on the radio for "Walnut Tree," you knew it was you. You were told where the parachute would be and bring you down some arms. So I was very often taking the message but we had to be very careful, too, because the Germans were coming with a kind of electronic device on their car and pick up the people who were taking the message.

Q: Now, the messages were in code.

A: It was all in code. But they were listening, and they could pick up in the street who was listening to them.

Q: Who had a radio? You weren't supposed to have a radio. The Germans had confiscated them.

A: First of all it jammed terribly. It was very hard sometimes to get the message. But some of us were in charge of getting them, and passing them on to the right people. It was not always possible. Sometimes you were getting a parachute case of things, and the Germans got the message before you did. So many times we were getting parts of machine guns, and the next parachute would have the end of the parts to mount the machine guns, and we never got the second one. So you were getting into things without knowing what you were doing. You were camping this, running there, carrying this, carrying that. And then I got involved with the children. This was a whole organization of people, a chain with many links, and we were passing them from one to another, a whole chain -- I can't say anything else really --of priests and nuns and monasteries and convents and

Catholic schools and all this business, where we were passing the children from one to the other, and at the end, they placed them in different farms and the people were very happy to take them because they became farm hands. They weren't paid for the work they were doing, and all they had to do was to feed them. On the farms they had at least enough food. It wasn't plenty, because the Germans assigned them a quota of wheat and a quota of corn and a quota of fruits and a quota of anything, so they were left just what they needed for their own sake.

Q: Now, these were Jewish children.

A: They were Jewish kids. That was a big story in itself. When you read Phillip Hallie's book and you read about Chambon, Chambon is a very well known place of mine, because my kids were hidden there at one time. What happened with Pastor Trocme, you see, he was one of those who was getting people to come to him and ask for asylum. He was one of those who had found places to hide them. They were hidden in the village, hidden away from the village. He was the rotating wheel of this whole thing. They were coming from Germany, and how they knew about him, I never knew. I never knew how they discovered that he was there and he was able to help. So they arrived in that village up in the mountain. But Pastor Trocme's helpers paid dearly, too. Some of their families were deported. Nobody could do that, you know, and be safe. Nobody. Some of my friends who were not Jewish at all were taken to concentration camps for taking messages, for being discovered taking messages from the BBC.

Q: You mean, when you were working in the underground, it wasn't just Jews?

A: Oh, no. That was never sectarian. There was a Jewish Resistance. In France there were no Jewish country clubs and no Jewish sections of town, and no Jewish quotas in the university, but there was a Jewish scout movement. Baden-Powell was a Protestant and he started the movement. The Catholics were led by a priest, the Protestants were pretty strong in their faith, so the Jewish Scout movement developed because of that. The chief, the master of the Jewish Scout movement was a fabulous guy, and he created his own Resistance movement. I was never attached to them or never involved with them, but they did a fantastic job. They had camps for children in the middle of France, in the middle west, as far removed as possible from any possible persecution. They were moving, of course, those camps around. He finally emigrated to Israel very soon after the state was created, maybe even before, with Haganah. He died a stupid death. He was an electric engineer, a radio engineer, and he was swimming in the Mediterranean in Israel and he drowned. It's unbelievable after all the years in Resistance. Anyway, they were wonderful and they did a fabulous job in hiding Jewish kids. My chief was not Jewish at all. She was a fabulous woman who had contacts in Switzerland and she was mainly passing them to Switzerland. Then we couldn't, and then we could...it was very temperamental, the whole passing of children to Switzerland. Sometimes they were put in camps in Switzerland. But when we tried to pass them to Spain it was very bad. We were betrayed by the

very people we paid to pass them. We found kids in Paris and in the occupied zone who had been left behind when the parents were taken. That was the big trick of the Germans. By leaving the children behind they knew they were lost because they didn't have any contact; they knew nothing. Those people were from Poland, from Hungary, from Romania, all refugees who had come to France. They lived in a Jewish section of Paris, they lived among themselves, they spoke Yiddish among themselves. None of us understood them. All we knew is that we found children that had been left behind when the parents had been picked up that morning. That they did purposely because where would those kids go? What would they do, those kids? And children were taken from the railroad station when they were packing the railroad cars. Some children were dragged out of there.

Q: And some parents, I would hope, left their children. Some parents also sent their children out?

A: Thousands of children were taken with the parents. What you saw at the Barbie trial just now, that was very close to where we lived. We lived in a place called Iszeu, between Grenoble and Lyon. In the meantime, you were constantly called upon to do something. For instance, we also had another chain with dozens of links to hide the paratroopers when they were coming down from Britain. There were a lot of Canadians and some Americans who were coming through Britain and they parachuted in France and they were carriers of messages and missions, and we had a chain where they were picked up at the point where they were dropped, and then (laughs) we had crazy stuff. We were immediately using the silk of the parachute to make shirts for them, because they had military shirts on and they would have been discovered, so we had people who specialized in making shirts with the parachute silk. They were going from here to there to there to there to there, and they were bringing the chief from this house to the next, and from that house to this, and you had no right to see them. One day I was in Denver speaking, and my chairman was the man who manufactures Samsonite; when I started to tell my story, he said, "Now wait a minute, you must be one of those who hid my son." Samson is really the son --he called Samsonite from his name --and said this Samson was parachuted. He was in our chain. He was picked up, housed during the night, left the next morning.

Q: It's a very small world. So it was this very large informal network. How did you get the messages that you were supposed to do something?

A: You had to take your bicycle and you had to go, usually, up in the mountain where the camps were. For a long time you could keep camps in the mountain until the Germans decided that they had no way to know where they were unless they were coming with planes. So they found them by flying over. So then you had to change the whole thing again. But you had to pass on to whoever you were told to pass on. You knew of course where to go and what to do. All our transportation was done by bicycle.

- Q: And somebody would come to your home, or you'd meet them in the market?
- A: No. We were very careful about that. My husband, when he started at the end of '40, he started by being a quartermaster. He organized a quartermaster corps in the mountains of the southwest, with the five and ten cent stores that he had under his fingers. You see, the Germans with Petain wouldn't let you pick up anything, because everything was under ration. You needed for instance a three-months ration to get a blanket, or something like that. So he organized that corps to bring blankets and shirts and pants and God-knows-what, and tents; all of this we were providing for the boys who were up in camps and wherever we organized. Then we had another job. At the end of '42 we were getting money from Algiers and that money was used for helping the family of the breadwinner when the father or the brother or the husband was in the Resistance. We were helping the woman, and the children, but they were Algerian francs, and we got into all kinds of trouble to finally get them changed. We had a friend who got picked up and never returned because in parachuting arms, we were getting American cigarettes and Band-Aids and gauze and things like this, around the case, and inside. One friend was caught having a cup of coffee at the bistro; he left in the ashtray an American butt.
- Q: That little thing.
- A: The things that you never expect, you never think about. This is the way my husband was caught. After D-Day, after the 6th of June, 1944, when De Gaulle was giving orders and Eisenhower was giving orders, and everyone was saying, "You go out now, and work in the open, and do as much harm as you can possibly do." And he did! And he got caught. So this was rough. (Sighs) This was really rough.
- Q: And so then when he was caught, you didn't ever see him again. Did you know when he was killed?
- A: Oh, sure. One friend of mine who was for a long time our provider of false cards and false papers, came by bicycle those famous 200 kms, from where he was to where I was. He came with bad news. He said that he had been badly "wounded," and he never said a word the whole day. I was living at the time with my father-in-law-his father-and my sister-in-law. My brother-in-law; we were fourteen in one house at that time, and believe me, if the Germans had circled that house, there would have been fourteen of us out! We were protected by the priest and protected by some fabulous people in that village. Without that we never could have resisted there. But our friend came, and never said anything, and never said anything, and finally at the end of the day he had to come out with the truth. And I immediately went into the garage to pick up my bicycle and said, "I'm going." And he said. "You're not going. You cannot go, it's not possible. Where he is, you can't go. There is absolutely no way. Every mile is the

Resistance or the Germans and you cannot go.” So I didn’t go there. I didn’t serve any purpose by going then, unfortunately. As soon as the liberation day came -- he was killed June 24 and we were liberated August 14 -- I took the kids and we went up there and he had been buried under “unknown” because they didn’t know his name. He was carrying so many false names, they didn’t know his real name. They wanted me to recognize him, and I refused. He was tortured for over twelve hours and I refused to recognize him. I didn’t want to keep that in my mind. He was staying with a wonderful old Catholic woman who constantly had housed members of the Resistance. Whenever they were on a mission they would spend the night there and go from her house, and she would give them coffee and all before they went. She came with me and she said, “My child, you have to do it. The religion says that you have to recognize him.” I said, “Not my religion. In my religion nothing says that I have to recognize him.”

Q: That’s right. It says that you are not supposed to.

A: Is it not strange? The Catholics apparently have this as a...it’s a commandment.

Q: You said earlier that your husband always refused to leave when he could. When would you have had the opportunity to leave?

A: When we came back. When he escaped and when I was still in the hospital.

Q: When you were about to leave for Morocco.

A: There was no reason why we couldn’t have joined my parents. I was going with the children and it was easy enough for him to come too. We could have left very easily.

Q: And what did he say?

A: He said he wouldn’t leave France. He just wouldn’t. There was absolutely no way that he could leave the task to other people. We were still at war and we were certainly far from being liberated and if we don’t all work for it we’ll never make it. We were terribly influenced by De Gaulle. For him he was a God. De Gaulle had said you fight and you sabotage and you do everything you can to prevent the war machine. You should know the number of boys we had in the factory team, among the workers, who were planted by us, and who were sabotaging the machine. The entire chain didn’t work anymore, and they couldn’t arrest 200 people; they couldn’t pick out who did it. And that was the main job of so many of them, to just stop them (the Germans) from taking everything away. At liberation we didn’t have one acre of vineyards left. We had no wheat left. We had no fields left with anything. They had absolutely taken everything. And then when I heard here the people tell me, “Those poor German children who starved during the war, after all you have to pity them, too.” I said, “The German

children starved? How could they starve with all the things they stole from everybody around? They stole everything from every country they occupied!"

Q: Let's back up a minute, and talk about the children. You had been staying with the children in this small town with the nurse. When did they leave?

A: We had an entire network of what you would call today social workers, but we were all of us volunteers, and all of us were doing things by trying to guess what to do. But the thing we did was to keep a record of all the kids we had, if we had found them with the parents, if we knew the parents' name, if we had found them alone. The very first thing we were always asking was their name, so we had records of their names. And we had records of where we put them, where they were hidden, in what farm they were working. The farmers had given them their own name and the farmers never knew their real name.

Q: Now these were children in about what age bracket? Were there babies?

A: I don't remember having anything smaller than about two years old, at least not in my hands. Most babies, the mother had the baby in their arms, and they left with them.

Q: What would you do with a two year old or a three year old? They couldn't really work.

A: It wasn't that hard. The Catholics really took care of them. They were fabulous. They stayed in convents, all over the place. We had one unbelievable man in Lyon, just where Klaus Barbie was, who was the instrument of all the people. I always suspected him as being Jewish. He had a Jewish name. His name was Father -- you see how you forget -- Father -- and he had a very Jewish name. Anyway, he was absolutely fabulous. He was the one who knew exactly what to do according to the age. You couldn't put them in a family if they were too young. So they were kept in places and taken care of by nuns.

Q: You must have thought all this time that maybe you would get caught.

A: That I would be caught?

Q: Yes. When you were with the Resistance. And so what about your children?

A: All of us, we all had that fear. There was nothing that prevented me to be denounced. When we were in that village, the fourteen of us, all we needed was one guy from the French malice, the one that was trained by the Gestapo. This was the way hundreds and thousands of Jews have been taken, by being denounced. And people have done crazy things. A couple of my friends, they are here today, but his brother, they took him a week or ten days before the end. They had everything planned. It was fantastic. They were in an apartment near

Chambon, and they had two entrances. They had an obvious entrance with that number on the door, and they had a back entrance that nobody could find because it was going through another house into another apartment and not connected at all with this one. And somebody knocked at the door and impulsively he went to the door. He had planned for years this whole thing of running the other way, It's like everything that you did was hanging by a thread. Everything you did. One day I went in that village where we were all hidden. My kids were in school and somebody came from the priests' residence. I don't remember whether it was his maid or who came and said to me, "Run to the school, because the Germans are going to encircle." So I ran and took the kids. One of the biggest tricks of the Germans was to come into the classroom and say to the children with a big smile, "Go on, children, we're very interested in what you learn and what your teacher is teaching you. Sit down and we'll just listen." Then they would ask, "Everybody here goes to Sunday School?" The kids would raise their hands. Where the kids were going to Sunday School but were not Christian, they knew it! Then they would say, "Not that one." The number of kids that were taken like this was unbelievable. My kids went to Christian Sunday School. The priest took them there immediately. But I remember my daughter coming one day to the house on a Sunday and she said, "Mother, I'm willing to do anything you want. I'm willing to go to Sunday School, I'm willing to make the sign of the cross, but today was too much." "What happened today?" "The Bishop came from Grenoble and we had to kiss the ring on his finger. That's too much."

Q: (Laughter) How old was she then?

A: Nine.

Q: Was that Francie?

A: No, that wasn't Francelyne. It was Nadine, my oldest one. My little one was much less conscious of all that because they were three years apart. Francelyne was born in '39. We thought we were so well hidden. The mayor of the village had a daughter exactly her age and they were pretty good friends. One day they came back from school and the mother invited Nadine to stay for chocolate and cookies. She brought them the chocolate and cookies and they were sitting on the ground in the garden, and the little girl said to Nadine, "You know, this is really something, when you think that this soil here, this ground, that's where David and Goliath used to walk 2,000 years ago when it was Gaul. They walked on that soil." So Nadine, very pensive, said, "Yes, that's true." So she looks at her and says, "Not you. You come from the Wandering Jew."

Q: So even at that age they were very aware.

A: You thought you were so well protected and so well hidden, because nobody knew who you were. So all this was enough, you know; all this had to be listened to by somebody or there had to be a gardener there who heard it and was willing

to be an informer. So you were constantly fearing for your life. There was no such thing as being free, thinking that here you were well hidden and everything was okay. They were picking up people when they were queuing up in stores. You queue up at a store to get your bread or whatever it is and they come and make a check.

Q: Now was your husband running the business, the five and dime, and selling things? What were you living on?

A: After that, nothing. (Laughter) with my father-in-law. My father-in-law had rented this big place there, a castle. It was a castle near Grenoble that had been abandoned by people who apparently were collaborators and who had run away, because they were the prey of the Resistance, and so they ran away. So we rented it from an agency. He took care of all of us. We had absolutely nothing.

Q: So he had enough money to continue to buy food?

A: He did, but it was murder. It really was. If it had lasted any longer, first of all no one would have had means to live any more, and secondly we could no longer hide because we had been hiding for so long and changing names so many times. It just could no longer go. We were so full of false hope. Churchill at one time in 1943 had the planes flying very low and sending "fall leaves" in paper. And inside it says, "With the end of the fall season we'll be there." And that was about a year and a half before. You could no longer hope. It was just unbelievable. You didn't know where to go any more. The Parisians are different from the farmers and different from the village people --and when we were getting anywhere they were suspicious immediately. "Who are these people? Why are they here? Why don't they stay where they belong?" Immediately they were suspicious. My father-in-law was a very, very well known doctor in Paris. The first thing he did everywhere we went was always to declare himself for what he was, that he was a doctor. Whatever they need, don't hesitate, come to the house, and if you need help at night, I'll go to your place. And he did. He did that for the length of the war. He was treating everybody around.

Q: Whether he had medicines or not...

A: Ha, ha. That was something else. To get medication. I know certain things that are so unbelievable. The first time my children saw a banana they start to eat it with the peel. They had never seen a banana before. When Nadine came here with me in January, 1946, we went to New York, and somebody asked her -- she couldn't understand a word of English--"What do you find the difference here, between Paris and New York?" So she thinks for a while and she said, "Well, I'll tell you, there are box of chocolate in the window in France, also and there are boxes of chocolate here in the windows, but here they are full and in France they are empty."

Q: You said the children were in Chambon. They were with Pastor Trocme?

A: They were. We lived so many places. The town that is right under Chambon is called St. Etienne. When my husband came back to me after he escaped, this is where we went. We went to St. Etienne because another way he would have gone back to Paris, but I absolutely forbade it. There was absolutely no way to be an escaped prisoner of war and to be Jewish and to go and put yourself "in the mouth of the wolf," as we say in French. We had to stay in St. Etienne because he could use that store. He was always looking where he could use the store to try to get things out of it. So we were in St. Etienne in 1941 and things started to get rough, to the point where I was constantly fearing for the children to go to school. My little one was staying at home but I was afraid that Nadine would be picked up on the way to kindergarten. Somebody had told me about Pastor Trocme and so I went up there. It was the resort of St. Etienne. We used to drive there on Sunday, and we lived in St. Etienne before the war, so I knew this whole area very well. It's a shame I don't have time now; I would show you pictures. In any event, I one day asked him what to do and he said, "Bring them up, bring them up here." This was a place known for the children's homes. It had many of them. My kids were in one of them. They were marvelous. They were very, very devout Protestant people and the Protestants in France were marvelous because they had been persecuted by the French and they knew what persecution meant -- the Catholics never did--so you could always be helped by them. So we did that many times. We left the area and came back, took them back there again. It was really their haven but I couldn't always do it. One night I went up there because they had told me that the Germans would come. One of the peasants took us in a cart with hay, and we left, and we went nowhere. We went, and wait, and when the alert was gone, we came back. It was like this all the time. That day I went to school to pick them up, I put them both on my bicycle and we were up in the mountain. We stayed there with a farmer who was wonderful with me. The main thing with the farmers was the swapping. For instance, my husband had kept yards and yards of a kind of blue jean material -- it was mattress ticking actually - - and this was my biggest swapping. If I gave them enough to make a jumpsuit or whatever it was they wear, they would give me some butter and some eggs and some milk. The only thing was not to be arrested on the road going back, because if the Germans found you with half a pound of potato they put you in jail. With half a pound of potato! Nobody understands that, you know. When I came here, people in this country told me, "Oh, we also had rations. Very often we only had chicken!" So when we got up there in the mountain, the farmer immediately said, "You stay here until they're gone. When they leave the village you go back." Then he showed me, down in the valley, a big estate, and he said, "You know who that belonged to?" "No," I said. And he said, "Well that belonged to Jews and the Germans just took it over." I said, "That's interesting. Why did they take it over?" "Those people deserve nothing else." Just like that. So I looked at him and I said, "Do you know who you're talking to?" I went all the way. I decided, what do I risk? What is he going to do, denounce me? When I said that to him, he said, "No, I don't believe it." I said, "what don't you believe? Did you ever

see any? Did you ever talk to any?" He said, "Of course not." I said, "Now you know."

Q: And you were with your two little girls.

A: He didn't know. Their propaganda was so unbelievable; there was so much stuffing on a daily basis, there were at least three programs a day, against the Jews. The Jews were responsible for the war. The Jews were responsible for rationing. The Jews were responsible that the French suffered so much and have nothing to eat. It was all the fault of the Jews.

Q: And some people believed that.

A: The farmers? What do they know? It was living really from day to day for at least four years. At the end of it, when the thing was over, there wasn't one single person that could really say that they hadn't been hit. Not one. Everyone had lost a parent or brother or sister or husband. Everybody.

Q: How did your family fare?

A: My parents were here, in this country. I lost cousins. I lost one cousin I was very close to, who tried to pass the line with his wife and five children; and they were all picked up. I had lost my husband. If you had seen Paris the day of liberation and the day when General De Clerq went down the Champs Elysee with General De Gaulle, if you had seen the faces of the people, the very young people who were screaming at the Americans and sending flowers and candles. All the people my age, everybody was crying. It was unbelievable, because you were liberated. But you were liberated for what? With a country that was completely bare, that had nothing left? You had no food, you had nothing to back you up. And when they just now celebrated the forty years of the Marshall Plan, I'm telling you, nobody knows what the Marshall Plan did, nobody. Because when Marshall saw what had happened and when he saw how completely bare the countryside had been left, he realized that only if there was help to help themselves, and replant and rebuild, that Europe would be saved. Without that, there was no way. How were you going to restart all your vineyards, how were you going to restart all your fields? How were you going to start having again food to feed millions? There was no way.

Q: This was General George C. Marshall, after the war, just for the record. You were not in Paris for liberation day?

A: No, I was in and out of Paris, but I never lived there during the occupation.

Q: What was liberation like for you? How did you get the news?

- A: I was there. We liberated Grenoble the same day Paris was liberated. Where we had this house for fourteen of us, 20 km. from our house was another part of my family, an aunt and cousins. One of my cousins was picked up. He was on a mission in Bordeaux and the Germans picked him up and he was put in a freighter car and he had in his mouth a little tiny knife like this. For days and days he bored a tiny hole with this little knife and he was able to push the bar of the freight car and he jumped, and of course they immediately saw him -- because they were on the roof of the freight car -- and they shot at him, but he was able to run and run so quickly that the guys did not have time to jump out of the train and really follow him.
- Q: This house where fourteen of you lived. How big was that?
- A: A castle. A gorgeous place.
- Q: So you had plenty of room.
- A: It had at least six bedrooms.
- Q: With fireplaces, furniture...
- A: Thank God for the fireplace. The fourteen of us used to stay there around that fire at night, that one and only room that had a fireplace. And when we were going out to get to bed, the sheets were absolutely wet from the cold and the humidity. There was no other way to warm up, to heat anything. No way. Some of them were doing correspondence schooling, some of them were going to school right there. Everybody was doing something. I had two cousins who were doctors who were there, and my father-in-law was a doctor, and all of them were running around in the country helping people. It was unbelievable.
- Q: And what was it like? The liberation?
- A: What was it like? Well, it was to see the Germans sitting at the café that morning, and in the afternoon, the Americans. They chased them out. They were shooting at each other like crazy and it was the same thing in Paris. When they got into Paris they were shooting at the Americans and at the Free French and they were shooting back, of course, and there was a lot of wounded and a lot of killed that time. They were shooting from the roof top; they didn't give up easily.
- Q: But then they ran and there were the Americans.
- A: That was unbelievable, unbelievable. That we saw with our own eyes.
- Q: You could speak some English? Did you talk to any of the Americans?

- A: Oh, yes. My father-in-law, being a doctor, they immediately contacted him and asked him if they could use a part of our property to set up tents and to have a hospital. So we had a hospital, really, on the property there where we were, and so we were immediately very close with all of them. They helped us, we helped them, and of course, the main thing was that we got some of those K-rations. Nobody knew what that was. I'm sure today I wouldn't even open one of those cans, but this was something unbelievable! It had Hershey bars and it had...oh..it was unbelievable.
- Q: A can of Spam.
- A: (Laughter) It was awful, but it was so good. They wanted really to have meals. They wanted meals coming from a kitchen. They were able to get a lot of things that we couldn't get. We were still on ration cards. When we left in January, 1946, I came with my oldest daughter and left my youngest one behind, because I just came for three months here...
- Q: How did that happen? How did you arrange to come here?
- A: That was very, very quick. We were liberated in August, '44, and by December, '44, maybe January, '45, I got involved with one person who had big plans to organize a "children of liberation," and started children's homes. And the only way we could do that was by contacting something that I had never heard about before, called the "Joint." I was the only one who spoke English fluently so I went to see the head of the "Joint."
- Q: Which was the Joint Distribution Committee.
- A: The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee -- JDC -- which everybody knew as the "Joint." Dr. Schwartz was the head of it at the time and I introduced myself and told him that this was our plan. We knew of hundreds of children that our social worker can get back and once we get them back, we need money. We can requisition some homes, we knew the Germans had just vacated, but we need money. There was nobody in France who could give us anything. All the money was in America! Everybody who had money and who was anybody was here in America. So we had no sources of money, and Dr. Schwartz looked at me and he said, "Well, Madame, we will help, providing that you can prove what you can do. Prove what you can do and we'll help." And I said, "But how can I prove anything and start without the money?" "I'm sure you'll find a way." He didn't give me anything! So we requisitioned one house that we knew had belonged to a Jewish woman, whose name was Guggenheim, and this used to be a house that she had on the premises of Napoleon's summer home, and it was left for unwed mothers. That was her hobby. Not Jewish unwed mothers. We didn't give a damn about Mrs. Guggenheim or anything; we just went into the place. And by hook and crook we found cots and we found mattresses and springs, and we raided a furniture store, a furniture warehouse. We did everything. We had done

much worse than that, so what we did then was nothing. (Laughs) We finally got almost a hundred beds together.

Q: And you didn't buy these things, you "requisitioned" them.

A: Buy? With what? We didn't have any money. So we raided a warehouse one night and then we also stole one of the JDC trucks to carry stuff! During the night we went to get it. Oh, we did much better than that. In Worm one day we carried people under illegal boards on the JDC truck that we stole during the night. In any event, we finally established enough to get those kids back. Now when it came to send the social workers to get those kids, when they told them that their name was Goldberg and not Smith, and they were Jewish, they spat at their face. Some of the social workers came back and said, "We're not going to go on. We cannot go on; they spit in our face, they don't believe they are Jewish, they don't want to be Jewish."

Q: These were the children.

A: So we kidnapped them. We really did, because the people that they were farm hands for never adopted them, of course, but they didn't want to let them go.

Q: And you had kept the records.

A: We had the records. We knew who they were and we knew where to get them. It was really a terrible problem. We got one woman by the name of Mrs. Fink, I remember, a very nice old Jewish woman and she came and she taught the kids Yiddish songs. It was really unbelievable. She wanted them to feel some Yiddishkeit, and none of us could do that. None of us spoke Yiddish. But those kids, little by little, gave up their reticence. They were so vindictive. They were constantly on the defensive. It was terrible. So anyway, the first month I had all those kids together, I had made debts everywhere. Every grocery store, they let me charge. I said to all of them, "I can't pay anything now, but I'll pay at the end of the month." They believed me. After all, they were children, and they didn't want to let those children starve. At the end of the month I went to see Dr. Schwartz and I said, "Now I need money. I have 107 kids. What am I going to do? I've no money." So he came to see the house and he said it's okay. So we got 60% of our budget. Like everything that the JDC did, they gave 60% and you have to find the other 40%. You have to go yourself on a campaign to find it, contact people, to help do whatever you can. They never give 100%; they never did.

Q: You should ask for more to begin with. (Laughter)

A: So one day I went to Dr. Schwartz at the end of '45 and I said to him, "I can't go on. The Americans are wonderful. They send me shoes, so I get 60 pairs of shoes for a hundred kids. Who am I going to give the shoes to? Why this one and not

that one?" So he looked at me and he said, "Do you want to go there? Do you want to get the money? You go to America and see what you can do. As far as I'm concerned there is nothing more I can do. We have a policy, the policy is the same for every country we help. Sixty percent of your budget we can provide for, but we can't do anything more." And that's the way I came, for three months. I came with my older daughter because Francelyne was easier to leave behind. She was more adaptable and I left her in that children's home. One of my counselors was a wonderful girl and she said to me, "Look, I'm telling you, I'll take care of her, I'll never leave her alone. She'll be under my guard all the time, my guidance. You don't have to worry." Then I was waiting for my father-in-law to come back, who was in the south of France; he was going to get back his apartment in Paris. And I was waiting for my parents to come back from America; I knew they would come here. We came on the Thomas Barry, which was a troop ship, and we loaded the ship in LeHavre -- LeHavre was completely destroyed -- and on the dock there was an enormous Red Cross tent with a big red cross on top and they were distributing coffee and hot chocolate to the soldiers. There were 4,500 troops on that troop ship. It was the beginning of January. It was bitterly cold. It was awful. The wind was blowing; we were frozen. Nadine was shaking, with her hands clapping like this, so I went into the tent and said to one of the Red Cross women there, "My child is frozen to death. Will you please give her a cup of chocolate?" And she looked at me and she said, "You are a civilian. We take care of the army." I have to tell you that I never gave a cent to the Red Cross here. I was absolutely beside myself. So we finally got put in, but they must have loaded 4,000 troops before they took us in. We were put in the officers' quarters and we were given the prison, because the prison had ten cells and we were ten civilians, so each of us got a cell! I learned something there that I never forget --every "soldier" was three soldiers, sharing the same bed. One bed for three soldiers. So we are immediately given the instructions, that we are in the officers' mess, the officers' dining room, and that dinner will be served at 6:30. It was maybe 5:00 So we are told where the dining room is, and we go and it's rather a small dining room with white on white tablecloths, gorgeous, an enormous platter of cold cuts in the middle of each table and cheeses of all kinds and big baskets of fruits, and there was my daughter, and she looks and she looks, and she started to cry. I couldn't stop her. "What is it?" "Mother, I told you. I told you not to give our ration card before we left. See, now we won't be able to get anything!" She couldn't believe it, she couldn't believe that there was such a thing as getting food for free, food you didn't have to have a coupon for.

Q: She was nine years old.

A: She was nine years old. She had never seen white bread in her life. Never. It was white bread -- you know, those American sliced breads -- and all that cheese and all those cold cuts. And then at one time she was terribly sick and she didn't eat anything at all for a whole day and that night we had chicken in the dining room, so the next day when she felt better I said To The steward, "Could I get some cold chicken from last night?" Because that's the only thing that's really

light that she could digest.” So he said to me, “Cold chicken? Where?” I said, “We had that last night.” “Oh madame, everything that’s left from last night went into the ocean.” Ohhh, I tell you this was unbelievable. All this which everyone takes for granted, for us was such a cultural shock. Just unbelievable. So we had all kinds of experience like this. We went on Broadway once and we were looking for a pair of shoes. She had never had a pair of shoes in four years. Every shoe was left as it was, the foot was getting bigger, so we were making a hole at the end to let the toe grow through, and changing the sole by putting a wooden sole on. The kids never had a leather sole on a shoe. Everything they had was turned inside. They had coats when the war broke out. So okay, those coats became jackets, but you put the inside of the coat out, so that it would look a little less shabby. Everything was like that. So we got to Broadway and bought a pair of shoes and I don’t know what they’re telling me and what they’re showing me. What do you call those white and brown shoes?

Q: Oh, saddle shoes.

A: Saddle shoes. So they showed her that, in brown and white or black and white. So she looked at that and she said, “I don’t like it.” So the guy says to her, and I have to translate, “But all the children wear that.” So, when I translate that to her she says, “Tell him that is the reason why I won’t.” She was a fashion individualist and she couldn’t stand that, to be told that everybody wears that. She said, “Then I should do it? Because everybody else does?” Another time we were in a drugstore and somebody was with me and said, well, let her have an ice cream soda. So I asked the man for an ice cream soda. So she looks at that big glass, like this, and she looks at him putting a scoop of ice cream in it, and he looked at her eyes and he said, “She won’t like it?” So I said, “She’s never had one.” “She never had one?” And I said, “No.” So he put three ice cream scoops in it! (Laughter) And he said, “Let her have one for all these years.” She looked at that with enormous eyes. She couldn’t believe what she was seeing.

Q: So Joint paid your way over, your ship fare?

A: Then I worked here. I worked for three months. I covered 42 states.

Q: They sent you on a lecture tour.

A: They didn’t send me. When I got here I was told to see Mr. Moe Levitt at the JDC office in New York, and he was waiting for me because Dr. Schwartz had told him, I came in my own. I didn’t come with their money. I came on my own, because I wanted my children’s homes to get going. At that time we already had eleven houses! We ended up with 1,500 kids. We got money. When I came here I started to campaign among all the French people I knew were in New York, and got money from them. I also spoke in Baltimore, and when I was through speaking and all the pledges were in, I saw that they were shush-shushing among themselves; it was a men’s meeting, a dinner meeting, and I don’t know what they

are saying, what they're doing, and after about fifteen minutes the chairman presented me with a check for \$500 and he said, "You are coming tomorrow morning. We are going to pick you up at the hotel, take you to the shoe factory and we're going to give you as many pairs of shoes as you need for your house. And here is a check for \$500 for it." So I went and I picked up 110 pairs of shoes and I am so thrilled I am just beside myself. I get back from Baltimore and the day I get back to New York, I get a call from Mr. Moe Levitt that he's expecting me. So I go to the office and ho, what I got, he gave me such hell. "How can you do that? Because you happen to be in America and you represent your organization. We have an organization like yours in every country in the world. They are in Belgium, in Holland and in Italy. They're all over the place. So because you're here, you're going to get 110 pairs of shoes. What about the others?"

Q: And you said?

A: He gave me 25 pairs. I could go on and on like this, believe me, endlessly. So I went back, and I came back, and I went back, and I came back, and I did that for eight years, everything for the children, until I met my husband.

Q: Now, how often were you coming over here?

A: I was coming for the spring campaign every year.

Q: For the Joint?

A: For UJA.

Q: UJA -- United Jewish Appeal. And you would have speaking engagements in various cities.

A: Sometimes I was speaking three times a day. I had a breakfast meeting, a lunch and a dinner. Sometimes I only had a dinner but I had the television and the radio and God knows what in between, and interviews with the paper. I just never stopped talking.

Q: They set this up for you and in exchange you were still working for the orphanages?

A: I hadn't given up. I couldn't stay here more than a certain amount of months. I had people taking care of it. I had some wonderful counselors and I was mainly involved in that one house. But I can tell you a story that you would never believe. We were hiding, of course, Jewish kids, but with no other thought but waiting for the parents to come back. And none of the parents came back. And that we couldn't convey to them. It was impossible. Some of those kids never adapted; they could never get through the idea that their parents would not come

back. "Why not? If our parents were taken somewhere, why don't they come back?" Some of the kids came back from camps, because they were not always hidden; we got kids from Buchenwald. They were all checked in at a center in Paris, an informal center. Every child was checked in, name, address, parents' names and everything, and where they would be kept in Paris. All my kids were checked in there. We had some children who refused to go to school, who refused to get out of the house. They refused to do anything because if the parents would come and look for them, they wouldn't find them.

Q: What kind of counseling did you have for these children? How did you try to help them, these children who couldn't adjust?

A: They went to school. I had one child, it was terrible. He was screaming during the night. He never knew that, but he was screaming, "They're burning, it smells, it smells, burn, don't you see the smoke?" Things like this, that he never knew he was doing. The other kids were begging me to take him out. I didn't know what to do with him. I was putting him here, there and the other place. The business of Palestine was very far from my mind. I really had no contact with it and had nothing to do with it, and never any activity that had anything to do with Palestine. Nothing.

Q: You were not a Zionist?

A: Zionist! What's Zionist? The French have two very famous phrases. They said, "Anybody who wants to be a Zionist, wants to be an ambassador in Washington." And the other phrase was, "A Zionist is a man who talks with another one to see which is the first one they send to Palestine." This is all I ever knew about Zionism. Anyway, one night, sometime in '45, I'm already sleeping. It's about 2 o'clock in the morning. I had a room in many of the houses but I was there in the first one we started. We had this big property, an enormous yard around. By the way, we were the first ones to use the ORT people in Paris. Each child was given a plot of ground, and they were watching things grow. That was the first house they ever had that in Paris. Anyway at 2 o'clock in the morning, like this at the door (knocks on table) I can remember so vividly. It was a Sunday night, and I had received my allocation from the JDC Friday. There was no way to get that to the bank, neither Saturday or Sunday, so I had a lot of money in the house. I said that's it! There are people who know that, and who comes in the middle of the night, like this? So I open my window. I'm above the entrance door. I see forms of men. It's pitch black. I say, "What do you want?" "Open the door." "I don't open any door," I said. "What do you want?" "Open the door." "I don't open any door" So I closed my window and called the police. The police come and with a big spotlight, they throw the light on those three men, and here on the arm they have "Palestinian Brigade" and I don't know who they are, I have no idea. But when I saw that, I decide they're something, and I said, "Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I didn't expect them, I didn't know they were coming. I'm sorry and now I know that I should open my door and I should have them for the night." The police

were absolutely besides themselves because the first thing they said, "What's those two trucks outside there? There are two trucks in front of the gate of your property. What are they?" So I said I wouldn't know, so one of the men said, "They're sick people, that we are taking to the hospital. They come from a D.P. camp." So the police didn't know whether they should be angry or they should do something, but they didn't know what to do, and they left. And what I got! The one who was the chief of the three said to me, "Do you mean that we've gone through the four occupation zones -- we went through the Russian zone, the French zone, the British zone, the American zone and we finally get to Paris and to a Jewish home, and you call the police." But I said, "I don't know who you are, why you're here, and what it's all about." He said, "You've been notified." I said, "No, I haven't. I have not been notified." This was six miles from Paris, it's a suburb of Paris, and this is where Napoleon had his summer home, and we had two homes there. One was called "Malmaison 1" and one was called "Malmaison 2." "Malmaison 2" had been notified, but they didn't know that. They asked where "Malmaison 2" was, and they were sent to me. In the meantime, what do I do? They want to unload the people. And they have almost 200 people in those trucks. They want to unload them, leave them with me overnight or a part of the day, because they have in their truck a double bottom, and in the double bottom it's full of arms. They want to go to Marseille as fast as they can, without any witness, unload their arms, come back of course empty, and pick them up. And they're taking them to an illegal boat which they're expecting to arrive somewhere. Well, what do we do? Those people were exhausted. When the kids saw them and saw how bad they looked, they all got up, and they gave them their beds. They refused to use their beds, they refused to take a piece of bread, they refused everything. They waited. They stood there and they waited until the guys came back. It was unbelievable. Those things never happened again, until the state was created. I did one of those in January, and the state was created five months later. I did one of those from Italy, and believe me, we loaded a boat. The people who haven't lived that period don't know. It was unbelievable, what the arm of Haganah that was called "Brichah" was doing in Europe. And Brichah was doing all the illegal immigration. All of the Aliyah Bet was done by them. They were absolutely unbelievable! Most of the people went to Cyprus, but they got away. And we emptied the D.P. camps long before we were given permission. So this was a funny way to be broken into Zionism.

Q: Did you work with Haganah?

A: I worked with Brichah. I did a lot of Aliyah Bet. I did it from Italy. I did it from Austria.

Q: You're getting tired, I think. Would you want to talk about it now?

A: You mean in public? In public I don't talk too much about it. The kind of work we did?

A: Yes.

A: Oh, it was fantastic. After the Exodus was picked up, and after the British brought them back to the north of Germany in a camp called Poppendorf, then Brichah started to take people out of there. The British were monsters. They took the people from the Exodus and put them on those three boats and those three boats were taken from Emilite all the way up near Hamburg -- Poppendorf. And the British pushed them out of the boats with the butt of their rifles. It was unbelievable.

Q: And these were survivors. These were people who had been in camps.

A: From refugee camps. And they were all released, but if they were on the list of Haganah they were going; if they happened to be on the list of Irgun, they were never going, and they didn't know the difference. The people in the camp were subject to all kinds of political party pressure. All kinds. They didn't know from anything, no more than me. What did I know that there were 36 political parties, and each one had a hand in doing something, and one who was listed with the Stern gang or with the Irgun never got there. Only the ones with Haganah were leaving. And these are the ones who were taken to Cyprus. Most of the time it was rare that the boat was really landing in Palestine. Very rare. Most of the time it was Cyprus. But, at the time of the Poppendorf thing, there was a fabulous guy in Munich whose name was Yitzhak. Don't ask me anything else, that's all I know. I've always wanted to find him. I would have loved to find him again. Yitzhak was in charge of this whole transport. He was a little guy. You wouldn't give him five cents, but he was capable of doing something courageous. He was tiny and small and thin. So they took me with them. We got three trucks of people who had been taken out of Poppendorf and they had to cross at least three borders, at least three zones of occupation. The goal was to get to a camp in Italy, because the boat that was going to load them was on the Italian coast. They passed easily the American border. They passed the French border. Then comes the Russian, and at the Russian border, the guy is absolutely inhuman. He is not going to let them go through. "Your papers!" And Yitzhak, clever, picks up from his wallet his Hebrew birth certificate, written in Hebrew. Apparently, for an illiterate Russian, the Hebrew letters looked like the Russian letters enough for him to think that that's an order for passage. He doesn't know, he can't read anyway, but he recognizes if it's written in English or if it's written in Russian. It was "nyet" and "nyet" and "nyet" until he saw that paper, and then he opened the barricade and we went through. We got to Chiave near Milano and I think we stayed there overnight. Then from there we went to Cinecitta. That was the Hollywood of Rome. That's where all the films are made in Italy. We were given by the Italian government half of that "Hollywood." It was a sight. Unfortunately, I never took a picture. One part of it there were people in costumes, and filming already movies and so forth. The other part were our people in rags. We left them there in that camp. We had tents there, and they were fed, and we didn't know really when we would get a boat without checking

into a hotel. I stayed there one day, and half the night, and I get a phone call, "Get ready immediately. We're ready to go." So I go down to the hotel and they picked us up. We had three trucks. We went about 70 kms north of Rome. We had a fabulous girl. She was Italian and she found the place where we could load the boats. The boat could never come in. The boat was always at least three miles away, in the deep sea. When we got there, there was already many fires on the beach and the boys from Haganah were there, and they were going in the water, and it was bitterly cold in the water. I know exactly when it was -- January 31, '48. That's what I said, it was five months before liberation. And I know exactly when it was because I was married January 31, so it was my wedding anniversary that night. We take the people out of one bus, take ten of them out, and the boys have inflated those rubber boats that belonged to the American army. We put them on those rubber boats with one strong man -- there were many, many old people --s one strong enough to hold onto the rope. And what the boys had done before we got there with the trucks, is that they had made a link between the gangplank that was built on the beach and that boat that was two miles or three miles away. The rope was extended between the deck of the boat and the dock. It was pitch black. There could be no moon and no stars, otherwise they could never do that. It had to be a moonless night. We were shipping them. You didn't know where they went.

Q: They just vanished.

A: It was unbelievable. They were holding that rope and just going in the complete darkness. They had no idea where they went. They just followed that rope. They got on board ship. We must have unloaded almost two buses, and when the boys were pushing those boats in the water, the water was ice cold, so they were running in and getting to the fire, and getting warmed up, and drinking coffee, and another gang was going; than that gang was coming back. The man who was directing them was an older man. He was about sixty. It was very interesting because you could see the respect that those boys had for him. The minute he was giving an order it was done, just like that. Then suddenly the sea became awful. The waves were so high, we had to stop. We just couldn't go any more. When they told me to go to the bus and tell them that we couldn't load them...wow. So we had to take that one bus back to Cinecitta and I think the boat stayed there two nights, two more nights before we could load. It was during the vernal equinox and the sea was just...you couldn't put in those little rubber boats. It was impossible. But the number of older people there...there was an old man who was carrying a Torah under his arm. The nerve they had to be willing to do that in the darkness of the night.

Q: How did you happen to be there? Who were you working for?

A: I was involved because those three boys came to my house. The man who really had the idea of doing it was a strong Zionist, and little by little we became the receptacle of those illegal entries into France, to take them to Marseille so they

could board those illegal boats. I got very well acquainted with a lot of them and then I went to Munich because I wanted to for a while work with the JDC there. So I was there at the end of '47. That's the year I went to Theresienstadt and Prague and I went to I don't know how many D.P. camps all over Austria, and everywhere. I got acquainted with all of them, in the different places where they were, so every time I was asking to go along, they always said yes.

Q: You were a very adventurous person, always. You involve yourself. You don't sit back and watch.

A: When you had lived through the Occupation, you know, nothing was scary. Nothing could have been worse than the Occupation. You could be hooked by the British or the Russians, but what could they do to you? They couldn't do much. And it was fascinating, because those people had waited and waited. One bunch that we picked up from Munich, I spent the Friday night before with them, and the old man who was carrying the Torah was the one who had conducted the Shabbat service.

Q: Meanwhile your children...

A: The only trouble was my Yiddish. How could I be Jewish and not speak Yiddish, that they could never understand. "You're not Jewish," they said. "I'm Jewish but I don't speak Yiddish," I said. "How can you not speak Yiddish?" "Because I don't speak Yiddish." I could speak German with them, they would understand my German, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. For me it was a massacre of the German language. (Laughs) There was a group there from a certain place in Lithuania and they were saying "bitte, bitte" something and I couldn't understand. They were asking me, "bitte?" Why in the world were they asking me? "Weider" means "the two of us" in German. I couldn't translate it into real German. That happened to me all the time.

Q: So then for eight years after the war, which takes us up to 1954...

A: I was married in September, '54.

Q: You were working with the orphanage, the children's home, and after the state of Israel was created, there was no more of this.

A: No more illegal immigration.

Q: Were you still involved in the Zionist movement then?

A: Not everything was legal. We did a lot of illegal immigration, from Libya, from Morocco. Our illegal immigration from Libya was absolutely something unbelievable. If we hadn't done that I don't know what would have happened. If we had left the Jews in Libya. They were loaded at night on board ship and then

the government asked us one thing -- to leave some silversmiths, because the Jews in Tripoli were fabulous silversmiths. All of them. And apparently the Libyans were not good at it. So the government asked us to leave a certain number of those silversmiths to teach the Libyans, but gave us the absolute pledge that we would be able to take them. I don't remember if they wanted them three months, or whatever. This was done with papers signed, and everything else. But then we took them out.

Q: This was referred to as Operation Magic Carpet wasn't it?

A: No, I don't think we ever had a name for the operation in Libya. We had one from Ethiopia, we had one from Yemen, of course the Magic Carpet, but I don't remember having a name for the one in Libya. Because this was not plane, this was boats. We only gave a name to the plane transport. There, we never transported them by plane.

Q: What was your job assignment? What actually did you do?

A: I went with the director of the JDC in Rome. We both flew into Tripoli and we met there someone whose name was Nelly Benetar. She was the head of the entire JDC working in Libya. I got involved in this operation of emptying places. They were actually transported from Benghazi into Tripoli at night, and then they were kept, very often in children's rooms. It was amazing that we were able to actually load people from the docks there in Tripoli.

Q: So you would be arranging transportation, notifying people when to show up.

A: Everything. You were doing everything. Sometimes you were just going to feed them.

Q: But in each community there would be some sort of Jewish center that you could contact.

A: They came from the different villages into the big city, like we did in Morocco. We took them from the Atlas mountains and put them into Casablanca, and took them out. I don't think that there are any Jews left in Tripoli.

Q: So you were a career mother, and Francelyne and Nadine were still back in Paris. How much of the time were you gone?

A: This wasn't the best thing, because the kids very often resented it. I really left them alone a lot. It was very rough. They'd been schlepped in so many places, it was terrible. A young girl that was one of my kids after liberation in one of the children's homes -- but that's another story, a long one -- I was able to find that her mother had a sister here in Detroit, and we finally got the papers to bring her over. She was already doing medical study in France when I brought her over.

Anyway, I took her to New York and I kept her with me and she went to Hunter College. And she was very unhappy there because those people only had a son, and she felt very foreign to them because they spoke Yiddish among themselves, and she was terribly shocked by that. She stayed in my apartment in New York and stayed with the kids so that was good, because at least they were able to have a normal life. They went to a French school in New York.

Q: Now what year was this that you brought the children over?

A: '50? '51?

Q: Had you wanted to emigrate to the United States?

A: No!

Q: How did that happen?

A: Well, because I married an American. If I wouldn't have married an American, I wouldn't have. My whole family lived in Paris, nieces and nephews and sisters and brother-in-law. I don't have anybody here.

Q: So you were on a speaking engagement and you met...how did you meet your husband?

A: It was very prosaic. The first time, one of my very first meetings was here, and I spoke here. I still have the American Jewish World of April '46, and there was a regional conference of the JDC. At that time JDC used to have regional conferences which was a marvelous device because they were educational, with no fundraising, and the people learned something. After that they learned nothing, because when we had to pitch for money, we didn't have the time to educate them. We pitched emotionally to get money, and that was it. Chairman of Hospitality at that meeting was Midge Berger. So Midge said after the meeting, "What are you doing? I understand that you're speaking in St. Paul tomorrow." I said, "Yes, I think so." I didn't know what St. Paul was compared to Minneapolis, but I said, "I think so, how do I get there?" So she said, "That's easy enough, but what are you doing now?" It was about 3:30, a quarter to four, and the convention was over, it had lasted the whole day. I said, "I don't know. Nothing." So she said, "Well if you don't mind, come into my house. My beds aren't made because I left very early this morning, but if you don't mind coming back with me we'll take care of you. We'll go out for dinner." I said, "All right, I'll make the beds with you." So I made the beds with her. (Laughs) One day I awarded her an award from the bond drive here. I think I was chairman of the drive that year. After I gave her the award she had to answer and thank, so she said, "Little did I know that one day after she helped me make the bed, that she would also wash my linen."

- Q: So there you were, washing Midge Berger's sheets?
- A: When I became G & K! (Mrs. Fink's American husband owns G & K Launderers and Cleaners). She said, "I never knew when she helped me make the bed, one day she would wash my laundry!" If I was speaking in Duluth or if I was speaking in Iowa, she always said, "Whenever you're in the neighborhood and you can manage to come for the weekend, you should drop in here." That way we became very close friends. My parents came and they met my parents here and then they went to Paris and they met my parents in Paris, and my father and Ben Berger became very good friends. Ben was always after me. "You can't go on with your life like this; it's ridiculous. You should get married." I said, "Leave me alone." He always wanted me to meet people. I said, "Look, I have no desire to start all over again." My life was so different from what it would be here. I couldn't see how I could settle here like this. I just couldn't see it. I was waiting really for the kids to be in college. My oldest one was already a freshman when I met him. My little one was going to finish high school and she wasn't even here. That year she was in Paris; she stayed with my parents the whole year. I think I had spoken in Sioux Falls, and I stopped at the Minneapolis airport for an hour or two, and Midge came to the airport. Then I took my plane for Duluth. I was coming back the next day, so she said, "Do you want a date?" And I said, "Please don't start that again with that business. I'd much rather enjoy being with you." All I knew in Minneapolis was the airport and Schiek's restaurant. That's all I knew. And the Calhoun Beach. So I said, "Look, I enjoy being with you, and if you take me out for dinner it's okay." Well, she didn't say yes or no. But then when I came back she picked me up at the airport again, it was Saturday morning, and she said she got a date with somebody who was supposed to go fishing but when he heard that they have a French friend who was coming, he got piqued and wanted to know who she was. He had never met a French woman before, I think. And that's the way I met him. So he never heard me speak and he said that if he had heard me speak he never would have looked at me. Because he thought I was one of those women who look down on men when they speak!
- Q: Well, of course, I remember him as a television personality. He was a speaker too.
- A: We still go places today where the people see him and say, "Oh, I know you. I remember you from television." I think, it's so funny when the people come up with that. How can you remember that? It's so old, really 30, 32 years ago.
- Q: You obviously do have a book inside you. We should talk again. But we have some of these questions, sort of winding it up, because this is going to be a book that's designed for high school students to learn about the Holocaust. Can you tell me what it means to you to be a survivor? Have you thought about that?
- A: First of all, what it has meant, mainly, was this involvement of mine. I don't think that I would ever have gone on and on and on the way I did, if I didn't feel

that it was my duty to go on. I have always felt that if we have been spared, if we have been able to live through it, we have a duty in talking about it. I've always said that. I don't believe in keeping quiet, and not explain it. The one thing that I'm sorry about is I did a lot of speaking in front of non-Jewish groups, but not enough. Not enough. I'm very sorry that we haven't reached enough non-Jewish groups. There was so much to tell them and so much to teach them. We haven't done that enough. There we have really failed. And I'm not the only one who's asked about it. We have the Council, Federation, even the Minnesota Council, they should have provided us with a platform to speak to non-Jews. It's a shame.

Q: What would you tell them? When you speak to a group of non-Jews, what do you tell them about the Holocaust?

A: (Laughs) It's easy enough to show them what anti-Semitism leads to. And what every hate group leads to. What can be achieved by pushing and propagandizing and influencing people in hating a certain group of people. They don't have to be just the Jews. You teach people to hate the blacks. From hate automatically comes Holocaust. And there is absolutely no way out. A holocaust of a certain kind. But it's a holocaust. Look at the holocaust in South Africa. I mean, this is a holocaust.

Q: Can you describe to me your general feelings about human nature, about people, about Germans? Do you have any?

A: That's a bad question. For me it's almost an impossibility to be able to find myself on German soil. The strange thing is that it had repercussions too for my children. My children won't go through Germany. They won't go anywhere where it means going through or stepping on German soil. They won't. I'll tell you one thing that happened to my oldest one, Nadine. When we were in N.Y. the first year, we were invited by the Hunter College president to come and speak. I welcomed that very much because I think that this is one of my greatest attachments even today, to speak to the young people, the young leadership. This is who needs me, not my generation. We were invited to lunch, and after lunch we went into a big gymnasium and we saw children making CARE packages. So my daughter, who still didn't speak a word of English, said, "What are they doing? Where are they sending that to?" So I asked the president and he said, "This is going to the poor German children who have been starved for so many years." She listens to that, she becomes red in the face. And she's ten years old. He looked at her and he said, "You don't approve?" And always with me in between she said, "Oh, no." And he said to her, "You would be facing a German child. You wouldn't shake hands with that child?" And she said, "No." So he said, "You can't carry hate like this." So she looked at me and she said, "Mother, would you tell him that that German child, it might be her father who killed mine?" This is it. You cannot change them. When Nadine finished school, when she was graduated from Minnesota she went on a European tour with some of the

students and she went with them until that tour took a trip on the Rhine. Then she stopped.

Q: You were going to back track and tell me about your family and the German branch of it.

A: There's one branch of Germans and I have a cousin, she's a descendent of that branch. When they all lived in Berlin they were very prominent people there, and the brothers and the mother and everybody applied to go to South Africa because I think that one of her brothers at the time had a business there. They went, but she never wanted to leave Berlin. She was like all of us, "Nothing can happen to me." And when she finally decided to go, South Africa had absolutely closed the immigration, so she couldn't go. She went to England and from England she finally came to America, and she lived in New York all these years. Then one day she called me here and she said, "What would you think if I moved to Minneapolis?" I said, "My God, what are you going to do in Minneapolis? You'll never get used to it. You lived in Berlin and from there you went to New York and London." "I don't know, I'm getting so scared of New York, so petrified to go out and I don't go out at night any more. I just don't do anything here any more. Maybe in Minneapolis I would have a freer life, and I would maybe enjoy it." So I said, "Come and look." So there's all kinds of people like this. Francelyne was in Paris two years ago and she was coming back here and I was staying longer, and she was on Air France, and she left, and all of a sudden two or three hours later I get a call from her in Paris. "Where are you calling me from? You left." You know when you leave Paris, you cross the ocean twenty minutes later. "Where are you? In Frankfurt. And if you don't think I'm sick about it, I am sick. We had plane trouble. The only thing he did was to come here. It was the easiest way."

Q: So she was in Germany.

A: You will never change that. No matter how much we are told that it shouldn't exist and you shouldn't be that way, the pain is too hard, the hurt is too profound. When I know how they tortured my husband and what they did to him and what they did to all the people they had in their grip. When you think of Barbie, an absolute bastard. He was a man who tortured, himself, one of the biggest persons in the French resistance, Jean Moulin, an unbelievable person. He was a writer, he was a leader of an entire movement, and Barbie tortured him himself and killed him himself. They made a word in German, which is called "schadenfreunde" and that means "the joy of doing harm." And that's the Germans. The joy of doing harm. This is a people, emotionally they lose their mind when they listen to Beethoven they lose their mind. They're so emotional, they're so sentimental. So the brutality on the other end, how does that go? In Bayreuth when they play Wagner, you should see them. They can't breathe, they're so emotionally taken. And then they can go and do the things they did. It's not to be believed what they did. The Chinese torture was nothing compared to what they devised. Where do

you find the idea of taking the skin of people to make lampshades? And make soap. Where do you get that taught to you? It's unbelievable. It's a people of such opposite extremes that you can't understand them. They're highly intelligent, very skilled engineers, very skilled in their profession, and then you can see them in the bierstube. If you see them drinking beer in one of their basement places, they have no bounds. They scream and they sing and they're not civilized. They're not civilized!

Q: You've been to Germany.

A: Oh, yes, many times. I was in school in Germany.

Q: But after the war?

A: No, I was in Munich in '47 when the JDC asked me to go, but then I went from D.P. camp to D.P. camp.

Q: But other than that you haven't been back since? You wouldn't go back?

A: We were in Salzburg, in Austria, five or six years ago. We stayed in Salzburg for about a week and we did an awful lot of sightseeing around it, and one day my sister and I were driving and we wanted to go to a certain mountain resort that's fabulous to see and there was no way unless we would have spent the whole day driving to get there, and we couldn't even come back that night. There was no way of avoiding to cross a little corner of Germany and all of a sudden my husband looks at the road and he sees a sign, "Berchtesgaden." He looks at us and he says, "What are you doing? You mean we are in Berchtesgaden?" And we say we are not now; we are just passing through to get back here, instead of going like this, which would have been a tremendous amount of driving. He didn't allow us to stop, nothing. I would have liked to take the bus and go on to the top, because they don't let you drive to the top. You can drive your car to a platform and there they take you by bus to the "Eagle's Nest" up there.

Q: Hitler's retreat, yes.

Would you say your belief in Judaism or in God has changed because of the things that happened?

A: No. I have always been a fatalist. I feel the way I always did. I feel that what I am, I am, and I am proud of what I am, but I would never make any big fuss about it, by saying I'm Jewish. I think that any Christian is as good as I am, and what I am, I want to be. My belief as a youngster, when I used to go to Temple regularly and I used to sing in the choir for all the High Holidays, I'm the same way today with Temple. I have always believed that there is someone, there is some protection. I got it about ten days ago; I almost got killed in my car. Rosalind

said to me, "Mother, there was somebody above." I didn't see it; there was an arrow that I had to wait to make a left turn, it was green and I turned.

Q: Be careful of those things. Do you read books about the Holocaust or see movies about the Holocaust?

A: No, no. I refuse to see Shoah. I just won't. I know all that by heart, I know everything that happened, I lived it. I have been involved so much with the ones who got back, and that we tried to rehabilitate, to put back on their feet.

Q: But do you think these should exist for other people?

A: Oh, absolutely. I understand that Shoah is absolutely a "must." You don't think so?

Q: It's not my interview. We'll talk about it afterwards. It's interesting who is going to see it. I think a lot of non-Jews are seeing it.

A: That's what I hope.

Q: Do you have any photos, mementos, anything that you would be willing to share with us if we put up an exhibit? Do you have any photos from pre-war, during the war and immediately after?

A: I have pictures from the Chambon, for instance, with the kids there, and pre-war I have a lot of pictures. But so much of my stuff is in Palm Springs. There I was able to give them a lot of stuff but I would have to really look there just to find it. Here I have tons of clippings, but tons. I was just looking last night into a big basket that I have, and I couldn't remember what was in that big basket. It's all clippings. There's one that I just found from the St. Louis Jewish World from 1960. I think that my photo album where I have the Chambon pictures are here, because I one day showed them to Nelly (Nelly Trocme Blackburn Hewett). I think they're here. I'll have to look.

Q: That would be wonderful, if we could have something like that, perhaps, in the book.

A: I'm sure I have a picture of the children with their father, the last pictures that were taken,

Q: It's as though you've lived two lives, in a way.

A: (Laughs) Even more than two lives. It's very strange; I've never been understood by anybody in France, about my involvement here. They don't understand it. They can't understand that I should be involved with the Jews and

with the Zionists and with the movement. It was very good what we did during the war, but why do you have to go on? My own family.

Q: And what do you suppose makes you go on?

A: Nothing would stop me. As I said, I don't think that any of us who's gone through it and came out of it has a right to stop! I'm very unhappy when I don't do enough.

Q: But they don't feel that way. It's Paulette.

A: A lot of them were not there. Among the fourteen of us who were together -- I had my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law -- they don't blame me for doing it, but some of them do. Some of them think I am nuts.

Q: Perhaps it's because they went back to Paris. And it was easier for them to go back.

A: All they did was to leave the countryside to go back home. In France you never felt the need to assert yourself as a Jew, in my time. People will say to me, well, what about the Dreyfus affair? I said, "Now wait a minute. The Dreyfus affair happened at the turn of the century. The people who were involved in it, all the French population, felt a terrible sense of guilt. But terrible. After the whole thing cleared up, after Zola and after everything, they felt terribly guilty." And my generation benefited from that. You see, I never had any feeling of anti-Semitism, I was never called a dirty Jew. I never heard that I was different because I was Jewish. Never! I had a life absolutely exempted from any of that. And so when the war broke out and when the occupation took place, to convince me that I was more Jewish than French and that I had something to fear because I was Jewish, I couldn't! It's very strange! The people who like my parents lived the Dreyfus affair, and lived before it, will say the year of the Dreyfus affair was really rough for the Jews, because they were in the hands of the Action Francaise, the French Action, that was headed by Moros, who was a vicious anti-Semite. And my parents, of course, always felt it. But as far as we were concerned -- we had a very Jewish name -- I had as many non-Jewish friends as Jewish friends. There was no such thing as just being among Jews. Why should you only have Jewish friends? We had a much more broader kind of experience in life, than to be centered among just our own. And even today I'm much happier in a non-sectarian club. In Palm Springs we live in a club which is maybe 60-40 or something like this. I feel that this is better. It's more normal. Why should you only be with the people who feel the way you do and think the way you do? You don't get any broader perspective that way. You can't. But here you have to defend yourself much more. You see, I never felt the need for defending myself. When I came here for the first time and I was told that there were certain areas where the Jews could not build a house and there were clubs where you Jews could not belong and there was a quota in university and colleges, I never heard of

that. In France, if you have the means to belong to a club, and you have two sponsors, you belong. Nobody asks you what church you belong to. I mean, it was unbelievable to me. It might very well change. Who knows? Today the world is so full of racial hatred in spite of so-called programs that was made.

Q: I know Francelyne is married and lives here in Minneapolis.

A: And Nadine lives in Boston.

Q: And how many children do they each have?

A: Nadine has two boys and Francelyne six children.

Q: So you have a lot of grandchildren.

A: We have seventeen altogether.

Q: When I'm interviewing someone, I usually say at the end, "What did I forget to ask you."

A: Well, I expected that we could go on in a lot of directions, but I think that the most important thing is to carry the message to whoever -- and I don't care who it is -- who has really felt the pressure and the prejudice that we lived through.