

The following is an interview being conducted with Mrs. Annette Berman at the Faith in Humankind Conference at the State Department in Washington, DC, on September the 18th, 1984. The interviewer is Phyllis Dreyfuss.

Can I have your full name, please?

Annette Kupfer Berman.

Where and when were you born?

I was born on May the 3rd, 1924, in France.

Can I have your parents' names, please?

My parents are Fela Kupfer and Henri Kupfer.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I have one sister-- Danuta.

Is she older or younger?

She's younger than I am.

We were discussing what phase of your experience you wanted to preserve for history. And you indicated that you would like to tell the tale of your rescuers. Perhaps you could give us a little bit of background about the occupation, how it affected you personally, and then move into that for us.

The occupation affected us in Paris, as everywhere else in Europe. Slowly, our friends and the male relatives were disappearing. And the shortages were tremendous. But we continued to live normally.

How old were you?

I was 15 when the war started.

And what was your father's occupation? My father had a fine leather tannery. And of course, his business was taken over by a French person in the same profession who took all the profits and ran the business.

My father tried to leave Paris, but was caught on the demarcation line, put in jail. And the commanding-- the German commanding officer of the jail where he was put, as he was-- he was caught swimming a river with other men, had the same last name as my father, and called him into his office and indicated to him that at a certain time there was a chance for him getting out. And he escaped.

Where were you and your mother at this time?

We were in Paris. We stayed. We were still in our apartment. This happened in 1941.

How were you surviving in terms of food and whatever?

My father had just left. We had coupons for food, and we survived like any other French family. However, our neighbors were starting to show some hostility, mostly in the lines for food. My father returned to Paris, and we continued living for a short time.

When the day-- when we were supposed to appear on the street with the yellow Star of David was a very worrisome day

for me. I was 16, and I was worried on the reactions of my friends when I entered my classroom. So some of my friends looked and moved away.

But my best friend, Josette Bernaille, who had been my best friend since kindergarten, burst into tears, came up to me, and hugged me, and asked me if I had another star so she could wear it when we walked back and forth from school. It was quite a long walk-- four times a day a half hour walk from our lycée to our homes.

Josette was my best friend since kindergarten, but we were only best friends in school. Our families did not know each other. We knew each other by sight and said hello if we met on the street occasionally, but we had never spoken. She did not know I was Jewish.

She must have gone home upset and told her parents about it. But we continued our walks. And as the restrictions became worse, when I was not allowed to go to the movies, on our little walks I would get the whole story of the movie. When I couldn't go to a museum, she would bring back postcards for me. And she was extremely solicitous of me.

Then, when the curfew was put in effect, and Jews were not allowed on the streets after 8 o'clock, that day, shortly after 8:00, our doorbell rang, and the whole Bernaille family was standing there.

Who was in the family?

Father, mother, and two daughters. A very similar family to ours.

What was his occupation?

He was an agricultural engineer. I don't believe they had any Jewish friends or had any conception about Judaism. They were of Catholic background, but non-practicing Catholics. And it was very unusual for a French person to come into your home without being introduced and knowing you for a long time.

They brought along a cherry pie and asked if they could share their dessert with us.

What was your parents' first reaction?

My parents' reaction was of great surprise. My parents are originally from Poland. And they just were extremely touched.

I should say my parents had few close gentile friends. Our friends were-- most of them were Jewish.

Were they aware of your close friendship?

Oh yes, yes, yes, because I constantly talked about her. And we were very well known in our school because we were so close that we even took on the same mannerism, and people used to think that we looked alike, which we really didn't, that we were sisters.

So from that day on, the Bernailles came quite often in the evening to share--

When they came the first evening, did they give a reason for their arrival?

No, they just came because we could not go out, and they wanted to keep us company. From that time on, they came quite often.

And as things were getting worse, Monsieur Bernaille adopted the habit of stopping at our apartment to check if anything was new on his way home. They lived about four or five blocks away from where we did.

Was it dangerous or difficult for him at that point in time--

No.

--to have a relationship with you?

No, it was-- it was not difficult nor dangerous. It was certainly time consuming. And we lived on the fourth floor, and lots of steps.

Then, on around the 16th of July, we had just finished taking the written part of the baccalaureate exam, Josette and I. When I came back home from school, my mother asked me to go to market for her.

On my way back from market, I had to cross a very large boulevard. And the policeman directing traffic stopped the traffic when I-- to let me through to his level. Then he started the traffic again and whispered to me that they were going to pick up the Jews that evening.

Had there been any hint?

No, we did not know. Some people might have. We had no idea.

When I told my mother, immediately she sent me to tell the Jewish people we knew in the neighborhood what the policeman had said. And I came back home. And we waited for Monsieur Bernaille. And when he asked what was news that day, we told him.

He immediately said, you cannot spend the night here. You have to come to our apartment-- just overnight. My mother said, maybe-- it's dangerous. Maybe you would just take the girls. And he said, absolutely not. All four of you have to come.

So we devised a way of going there. It was July. We did not want to attract attention nor carry packages. So we put a few layers of clothes on. My sister and I put on our Girl Scout capes to hide the star. And she and I went in first.

How was she reacting to this? Was she scared?

She was-- yes, my sister was very emotional. She was younger than I.

How old was she at the time?

She must have been about-- I was 17. 13. And she is a very sensitive and artistic-- she's a doctor now, but she is sensitive, and-- then. My reaction was, I was a healthy, athletic teenager, and I reacted very differently.

So my sister and I went up to the Bernaille. Then my mother came and then my father came. They had a very nice, comfortable apartment. This was the first time we were in their apartment. But it was an apartment meant for four, not for eight.

We settled down for the night, and the next morning, Monsieur Bernaille went to see what was happening in our apartment.

Do you recall the night that you spent there. Was there a discussion among the adults as to any stories they had heard, or fears or concerns?

No. It was actually-- no. I don't remember if there were any. I know that Josette and I were thrilled to be there. I slept on the floor of the living room, my sister slept on the couch, and my parents slept in their library. There was a couch that could be opened as a bed.

He went to our apartment and found that it had been sealed already. They did come for us that night.

Had the rest of the neighborhood didn't notice?

Yes, everybody. The Jews had been picked up that night. I think this was the night of the 16th or the 17th of July where they had the big roundup of Jews in Paris.

So they people that your mother had spoken with, they appeared not to take any action.

They were all gone. They had no place to go. And so he came back and told us this. And we just were stunned. That's the last we went to our apartment.

We stayed at the Bernailles for one month. They went on doing their business. And while we were alone in the apartment, we sat. We did not walk, because the windows-- pass the windows, nor did we flush the toilets. We just sat and whispered to each other. When they came back, we started to live again.

We had our food coupons for that month, but they ran out pretty soon. They fed us. They did our laundry. And we had a lot of us. There were six women in this apartment for one month. And never a word to make us uncomfortable or unwelcome.

But my parents were getting very nervous and upset, and felt that we were endangering their lives. And they decided that it couldn't last. So they decided to get out, my parents, and make some other arrangements for my sister and me. So one day they went, and they had-- they made arrangements in a convent, which accepted to take us in.

Had they been out during the day--

My parents--

--during that month, or they stayed there--

No, that was the first time.

What kind of preparations did they make to sneak out and not be--

They just, they knew. I don't really remember why. But I know when they came back. And I have two pictures of my parents. They had a picture taken in a machine, thinking maybe they could get some false identity papers. So pictures could never be used, because they were so gaunt on the pictures that you could immediately see that those were hunted people. I do have the pictures.

But when they came back at dinner, they announced that they had made arrangements for my sister and I to enter a convent, and that after we were in, they would just leave and be picked up.

What did the friends have to say to that plan?

Oh, Monsieur Bernaille said, I will never allow it, nor will I allow the girls to go into a convent. He said, if you don't come back, they might never come out of the convent. He said, just be patient. I have ideas, and I will do something about it.

How old was Josette's younger sister?

Josette had an older sister.

An older sister.

Josette's older sister was a year older than I. Josette was my age. And my sister was four years younger than I.

Did the older sister appear to also be in agreement with the entire family--

Yes, she was not as thrilled as the rest of the family, but-- it was a great inconvenience. But this was a family thing.

So Monsieur Bernaille had fought in the First World War as an officer, and in the Second World War. And in the Second World War, he was taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940. And in the prison camp where he was, he met a young schoolteacher from the country.

Now after, when everything was settled and France was occupied, the Germans released certain prisoners of war. They released him because of his age. And I don't really know exactly why, but I think that was the reason. And they released school teachers and farmers. They did not want to disrupt the economy.

So Monsieur Bernaille took a train, and went to see his friend, and told him about us. And the two of them rented an abandoned farmhouse in this village away from-- is a center, on top of a hill, across from the cemetery.

And he came back. He said, I have a place for you to live. Now we have to get you out of Paris. And this was a problem.

So he came upon the idea that since our families were similar in age and size, he-- my mother, my sister, and I, would leave Paris as if we were going on vacation, with their identity papers.

What did your parents have to say to his presentation?

At that point, he would not accept anything that my parents had to say. He did not want to hear that it was dangerous. He was the leader.

So hopefully, since it was vacation time, and the trains were crowded, that whoever checked the papers would not look too closely at the pictures. And that's what we did. And we did get through. Our pictures were checked, our identity papers checked. We went through, boarded the train, got off at La Loupe, took the bus to the village.

How long a trip was this?

It was not too far from Paris. It was maybe an hour on the train, and then a 20-minute ride on the postal truck.

This was your first trip outside of the apartment in a month.

Yes, in a month.

What were your impressions of the city as you left the apartment to go to the train station?

We walked to the train station because-- we took the subway to the train station. The city was the same as we had left, except you couldn't-- you didn't see as many people with the yellow stars.

How strong was your fear during that walk? Were you terrified?

My children often tell me, when I tell them things that happened to me during the war, they say, you never talk about the terror. I guess I blocked it out.

I have spoken to many groups. I teach French in a high school. I have spoken to high school groups. And I'm a very optimistic person. I just, I'm sure I had fears, because I have ulcers which I developed at that time. I realize now. But I have worked with the underground for two years, and I have been in many dangerous situations. But I don't remember the fear.

Do you remember how your parents were during that?

Oh, yes, that I remember. My mother developed a nervous tic which pulled her eye up. And she had that nervous tic till she died. Oh, yes. My parents was-- I do remember. But I don't remember my fear.

When you were on the train, did you have a separate compartment to try and keep hidden, or your sat--

No, we sat like the family. We sat normally, and conversed.

Then Monsieur Bernaille came back. Then they had to get my father out. And he decided that it would be very difficult to get him out alone, that it would have to be the same, the repetition of the same group. So that he endangered his wife and children to get my father out.

They took the papers. His wife, his two daughters, and my father left as a family going on vacation.

Why did he feel a stronger urge to get your father out? What was his--

Not a stronger urge. He just could not feel-- he could not get him out alone because a man alone, you look at the identity papers. But when four people present four identity cards, and you look, a man, a woman, two girls, and you let them through. So that's how my father came out.

And I have often thought, how could you endanger your children's lives? Would I do it?

Did you ask him?

No, they never wanted to talk about it. We could never thank them. We could never talk about it. It was something that they don't want to talk about, that it was normal, natural. What are you talking about?

When you reached the farmhouse--

When we reached the farmhouse, we-- it was empty. No water and no electricity. But we thought the war would be over before the end of the summer. Well, we spent two and a half years there.

And not once were we abandoned, not only by the Bernailles, but now the family, the school teacher and his family, took over. He was also the secretary to the mayor, because the mayor was a farmer and almost illiterate. So he ran the business.

If he knew a farmer killed a cow, secretly, he would refuse to give him his meat coupons, saying, they didn't get here this month. He got us identity, false identity papers. There was not a holiday that we were not invited to their home, like Christmas, or that we were not given a gift of soap or something that was impossible to find.

How did he explain your presence there? Who are you?

Yes, well, you see the French-- the farms were scattered, and of course the farmers knew there was a family there. But there was such shortages of food in Paris. He said, those are people-- he's retired. So my father was only 40 then. And they moved here because of the food shortage.

And no one questioned [CROSS TALK]

No one questioned it for about a year and a half. And then, when stories started coming in, one farmer decided that maybe it would be advantageous for him to denounce us. And he mentioned it to a family from Paris who had a summer home there. He said, you know, I think those people in the pink house are Jews, and I'm going to denounce them, because I'll be paid for that.

And that woman came, stopped at our house, and she said, I don't know who you are, and I don't want to know, but

there is a farmer. This farmer is suspicious and wants to denounce you.

So immediately we told Monsieur Le Mitre, who called-- who called Monsieur Bernaille in Paris. And he came. And the two of them wrote a letter to the farmer in the name of the underground, and Monsieur Bernaille took the letter to Paris so it would be mailed in Paris so it could not be traced. And threatening him that if anything happened to him-- to us, his farm would be burned, and he would be killed. And we never heard from him again.

You say the underground. Among the-- was there involvement?

No. Well, not among the farmers. After we were there about nine months, an American plane was shot down. It was a Mustang, a fighter plane with only one person in it. And we saw clearly the pilot jump.

And it seemed the plane crashed. It seemed very close. And we ran up. It was quite a few miles away. And when my father and I got to the plane, it was already burning, and the Germans were all around it. And so we came back home.

And that afternoon, Monsieur Le Mitre came to our house with his bicycle, his daughter's bicycle. And he asked me if I would go on an errand for him, which I often did, and which I loved.

And I got on the bike and went to the next village, to the bakery shop. And I told the baker what I came for, and the baker said, oh, I don't have it here. Come with me. And he took me to some place outside the village, to a big house.

And there was the American. And I could speak English. I had English in school. At least they thought I could speak English. And I interviewed the American.

How did you know what you were supposed to do?

They told me what to ask him. And I did the best I could. And I was so thrilled. I had never seen an American before.

And after the interview, the baker took me into the kitchen, took out a gun, and told me, you are now in the underground.

How did you feel about that?

I was thrilled. My whole attitude changed. I was fearless, suddenly. Suddenly, I could do something, and if I were caught, it was for a reason, and I didn't care anymore if I were caught or not.

What have you been doing during those nine months before?

Reading. Reading. They had a very well-stocked library which nobody used. And I had my school books, and I read a lot. And our family life was very close. We had no entertainment whatsoever. My father sang. He sang Viennese waltzes, and we waltzed in the kitchen.

And we also had a friend who the Bernailles brought in, one of our friends, a friend of our parents, of my parents, a bachelor older than my parents. They found him roaming the streets. And they brought him out.

What was his name?

His name was Gabriel Albert.

And he arrived how much after you?

He arrived about two months after we were there.

How did they explain his presence in the house?

A friend who joined us. When I read the diary of Anne Frank, I am reminded of many things. I will stay there for one month. But also about our, friend because he was very much like the dentist.

He was so petrified. If I went for milk, if I wasn't back when he thought I should be back, he would become frantic. I was caught and we will all be caught.

And when I was in the underground, he almost lost his mind, because from that time on, they-- I was ally as a agent, an interpreter. And my duties were, for example, if a bridge was to be blown up, I would carry the dynamite and hide it where I was told to.

Going back one moment, you went to the bakery, and came home with a gun and a membership.

No, not a gun. Just a membership.

All right. Now what did your parents say? What was the reaction at home when you told them.

Well, it's a reaction that surprised me. My parents were pleased. My parents were pleased that we were going to do something, that we weren't just sitting there and other people were risking their lives for us.

And they supported me. My mother was very nervous. When I was out at night, she, of course, waited all night. And she had such wonderful intuition.

For example, we had very little clothes-- one pair of pajamas. And mother had decided that we may not wear our pajamas. We are to keep them in case we get caught and go to a concentration camp. We will have pajamas. So my sister and I slept in the same room in the nude.

One evening, my mother said, you know, tonight I think you should sleep in your pajamas. So we did. It was a treat.

And that morning, around 5:00 AM, we woke up, because we felt a presence in the house. And there were German soldiers who walked in through the window. There had been a whole division of Germans camping in the neighborhood. This was towards the end already. And--

There was a division of Germans camping in the--

Yes, and they were spotted from the air and bombed, so that every-- they were assigned homes. We had a Panzer tank and the crew. They lived with us for five weeks.

Did they question who you were or ask for papers?

Again-- no, those were just soldiers. They did not question who we were. Immediately-- I had some German books at home. Immediately, it was decided that I was the only person who could speak German, but my parents could speak German, too. So they could hear.

And they were very correct. They ate with us and slept with us in sleeping bags in the same two rooms we had. They brought food that they took from the farmers. And my mother cooked.

However, after a few days, they told on each other, several of them had syphilis. And when my mother heard this, she boiled all the dishes. And we were so careful. And they were so appreciative of how very clean a family we were.

And they were very indignant and shocked when I had to go out at night, because because of them, it was difficult for me to go out. At that time-- it was towards the end of the war-- one of my jobs was to cut telephone wires if an Aktion was going to go on, or a parachuting, the telephone wires had to be cut so that their headquarters in Chartres could not be notified, and we would have time. They had a special line from the village to the headquarters in Chartres.



Let me ask you something. The bureaucracy that developed in the area you lived in, were there many Nazis that were actually there, or was it friends--

In the village?

In the area where you really were.

No, in that village there was just two patrols of Germans, maybe 16 Germans, and an observation tower, and this telephone line.

All right.

So the bureaucracy, the town was run by Monsieur Le Mitre, and he was my superior in the underground. We could see the school from our house. If he wanted to see me, he would put a white towel in the window. That meant I am to come for orders. If he wanted to come and give me orders, he warned us also by putting a different towel in the window.

But with the Germans, I couldn't go out alone at night on a bicycle. So they provided me with a boyfriend. And he would come for me. And then the two of us would leave.

Who was he?

He was a young farmer whom I know-- whom I knew, and who very early-- when he joined the underground, I had been in it already for quite a while. And he told me that he had just joined. And I said, oh, that's wonderful because I have been in for a while. And he was so hurt that I hadn't trusted him.

Well, how old were you at this point?

At this point I was 19.

[AUDIO DROP]

Were you the only Jewish person in the area that was in the underground?

Yes. Also, the group was larger than I knew. And I knew very little.

How much did you know? What did they convey to you?

A minimum. I knew my superior, Monsieur Le Mitre. I knew Pierre Montaudon, who came for me when I had to go out at night. And I knew the captain from-- he was in another town. Monsieur Hermelin.

And I knew another farmer, an old couple, retired farmers who helped us very much, because we ran out of money very, very soon after we were in the village. My father had some dollars that he had hidden. And when we ran out of money, he gave Monsieur Bernaille the dollars and asked him to sell them for him in Paris because we needed the money. And Monsieur Bernaille sent us money. And Monsieur Le Mitre lend us money, and the farmer would lend us money.

After the war, when we returned to Paris, we had no place to go, we returned to the Bernailles. And after a few days, Monsieur Bernaille took out a box, and there were all the dollars. He didn't know what to do with them. So he had just said nothing but send the money.

When my father, with the first earnings after-- his first earnings after the war, he repaid his debts first. When he send the money, the farmer Monsieur [FRENCH] lend us, he knew we were Jewish, he became very upset. He said, you know I don't need it. Why do you rush? There is no-- there is no need to rush like this. So really, those three families saved our lives.

When you were active in the underground, what was your sister's reaction to this?

My sister-- nothing. Nothing specific that I can remember. My sister was terribly affected by the war, much more than I. She has all kind of psychological problems.

For example, she became a doctor. I don't for what reason. Because of insecurity. She first was an anesthesiologist, and she could not bear being-- leave her patients.

Then she-- she's extremely brilliant. She is a cardiologist. She does research in hypertension. She has a certification in dermatology. She's a physicist. She's constantly studying and always searching for something she still has not found at the age of 55-- a secure niche for herself.

Did it occur to her, or was she the type of child that, when you became active in the underground, did it ever occurred to her that she would like to also follow you?

No. She could not have. She could not have. She did not have that kind of temperament, nor physical resistance. Because it was physically very tiring, too.

I never had a bicycle of my own that fit me. I always rode a man's racing bike. The countryside was very hilly. Going downhill, I could hardly reach the brakes. Going uphill, I could hardly reach the pedals. It was just horrendous.

How often were you given a job to do for the underground?

Oh, almost every other day, mostly towards the end. I helped changing the road signs. When we received arms from England, the parachuting of containers, we all waited in the fields. There were holes dug ahead of time by the men. When the containers were parachuted, the men cut off the parachutes, took the containers, and disappeared, and I was left behind to bury the parachutes. And believe me, it's a heavy-- just to drag a parachute and put it in that hole, all this took time.

When cutting the telephone wires, I did not have the strength. But they said they could not spare the men. They needed them for the battle.

Was anyone caught?

Yes, and one of the girls in another sector who was caught was terribly tortured and killed. It never occurred to me that I could be caught or--

You were invincible.

Yes, I was invincible. I was doing something.

My day of glory came when we helped to liberate Nogent-le-Rotrou. We wanted to liberate it ourselves and not have the Americans liberate it.

What was that?

It was a small town where our headquarters were. And of course, we did not manage to liberate it by ourselves, because the Germans had a good position on top of the roofs, and many of our young men were killed.

I was brought in, put on the-- in front of a house on a stoop and told to wait. Then I was asked to go on the bicycle and ask the Americans who were waiting at the edge of the town to enter, to ask them to lend us a tank, which I did. But we did not get the tank. It had to be-- to go through official channels.

But after the town was liberated, we had taken 11 German prisoners. And while everybody was celebrating, I was given a small machine gun and asked to walk the prisoners to our village-- it must have been 10 miles-- in my wooden shoes, to walk them to the village and have them locked up because they were our prisoners.

How did you feel about the assignment?

That was my moment of glory. And it never occurred to me that if they had turned around and killed me. But they were very, very exhausted and defeated at that time.

So I walked into the village with 11 Germans with their hands on their head, and me carrying the machine gun in one hand, and limping in my wooden shoes. We only kept them a few days because we had no food for them. So we turned them over to the Americans after that.

You said that at one point there were German soldiers actually staying in your home.

Yes.

How did you manage to get out for the evenings without raising tremendous attention?

Well, I had a boyfriend who came to pick me up. And when I came back late at night, they were very indignant. And they asked me to translate for my mother that in Germany, a nice girl is not allowed to spend half the night out with her boyfriend.

They were respectful of you and your sister? There was no problem?

No, they did not-- they did not interfere with us at all. They were just soldiers.

But on June the 5th, the night before D-Day, late at night, they left. And we left also because the whole division left for the front. They did not do anything. They did not bomb our house or molest us at all. We just left and went into the fields.

But they did throw grenades all over the village. They shot every dog because the dogs were wild, running after the tanks. And they did a lot of damage.

As they were leaving.

As they were leaving. But ours did not molest us at all.

However, I had this reputation of being an interpreter. And one of the farmers who also housed a tank and its crew, one of the Germans of his crew took his bicycle and disappeared. So the farmer came to me, and I went to the headquarters with him, and he told me to tell the commanding officer that his bicycle disappeared, and that this soldier probably defected.

And the officer became furious, and grabbed me by my clothes, and shook me against a wall until I lost consciousness. And all I did was interpret. That was the only time I personally was hurt, and not badly, by a German.

Was it ever a question that it was a danger to the underground to have you in it because you were Jewish?

No, because I knew so little. But there were lots of Jews in the underground. Once you are in the underground, it's-- it was dangerous for my parents because I could, under torture, I could talk about them. I knew what I did, but I didn't know who prepared it. I knew very, very little. Just like when my friend told me he joined the underground, he should not have told me.

Now after D-Day, did activities step up very heavily for you in the underground?

Yes, in the underground. But most of all, we were in danger of Germans who were hiding, and who, several times, stray German soldiers came and asked us to take them in.

What did you do? What was your response?

We had nothing. We had nothing. We lived in an empty house with-- we had nothing. We told them we were not the place for them to hide, that they would be better off at the farmers'.

But they threatened. Some of them had guns. And we were very nervous.

And we were liberated. Even though we were only 100 miles south of the coast of Normandy, we were liberated on the 15th of August. And during all the time we stayed in the village, my sister and I attended church. I taught catechism on Thursday. My sister played the organ. And the church was very poorly attended.

Did the priest know?

No, the priest did not know who we were, and he was very happy to have us, because I was teaching catechism and she played the organ. But when he did find out on the 15th of August, which is a Catholic holiday, and we did not come to church, and he saw us afterwards in this little village when the American troops were going through, and he said, you weren't in church today, and I told him we were Jewish, and he never, never talked to us again.

That's an interesting reaction. Did you ever--

I--

--wonder why?

I think he was a sympathizer. He, by himself, gave the metal, brass chandelier to the Germans. I don't know. He was very pleasant to us while we were at church, but very demanding also.

For example, after the first Christmas, he didn't say anything. But when Easter came, he came to our house and said to my parents-- he was not surprised that my parents did not attend, because the French are not terribly religious. He said that we had not gone to confession for so long. And my mother immediately said, oh, Annette is going to Paris for Easter. So she will take communion in our own parish.

And when Easter came, Monsieur Le Mitre was told immediately. I was expedited on a bus with a little suitcase to Monsieur Le Mitre's mother, who lived in another village, and locked up in the basement for five days so that the next communion time I absolutely refused. So Monsieur Le Mitre and Madame Le Mitre Mitre me, and I went to confession and to communion, and I enjoyed the services. I enjoyed the Catholic services. And I think they have made a great mistake when they dropped Latin.

When you went to the mother's house to be hidden, she also was of the same persuasion as her son, more than willing to assist.

Yes, yes. She was an old lady. She lived alone. But I was still put in the basement. And at nighttime, 11 o'clock, I was allowed out.

Whose papers were you traveling on?

I had false identity papers by then, that I was born in Algiers. My name was spelled differently. Instead of K-U-P-F-E-R, it was spelled C-O-U-P-E-F-R-T or something.

However, when I look at my identity card now, it was a real card. It was not a fake. Monsieur Le Mitre had a member of

the underground steal the cards from Chartres.

Where was--

Chartres was a-- we were in the Department of Eure-et-Loir. And Chartres was the seat. So they were real cards and signed legitimately.

But the pictures, my sister and I had to go quite far to have our picture taken so that nobody could trace where it was taken. And it was very cold. And you can see how frozen our faces are.

Also, during those two years, when we had to go to the dentist, we had to go very far, and never to the same dentist. My sister had an infected finger. We had to go on a bicycle. She had her fingernail removed without anesthesia, and then had to ride about 30 miles back on the bicycle.

Even with the good false papers, at that point you were hesitant.

Yes, yes.

Before you got the papers, and you had to go take the photograph, whose papers were you traveling on? What did you?

We had no papers.

What do you remember of that trip?

You see, we came with the papers of our friends, and then he took them back to Paris. But we were in the village. And the secretary of the whole village was Monsieur Le Mitre.

So it worked out. It worked out very well.

Nobody checked. He was the one who was supposed to check.

Was there ever an incident where you went to a dentist or a doctor that you can recall that it came close to a question of who you really were? Was anyone suspicious?

No, because we went to cities. We did not stay in villages. And people-- Chartres is not a big city maybe by American standards, but in France it's a substantial city. And there are many dentists, many people. And we just--

Did you look Jewish, if there is such a thing as looking Jewish?

No. If there is such a thing, no. As I said, I looked very much like my friend Josette.

Did you have contact with them during those two years?

Yes.

Other than they sent money.

They sent money. They sent letters. And they came.

They did come.

They came. Josette and her mother came.

One time, Monsieur Bernaille came. And I don't know. I was feeling especially down. And when I kissed him, I started

to cry.

And he consoled me. And he said, don't cry. Don't cry. I'll do something nice for you.

And two weeks later, Josette came. But you see, she stayed with us. We had a house without a bathroom, without an outhouse, with-- the water was outside of the house. And she stayed with us.

She could have stayed with Le Mitres. They had a bathroom. They had a bathtub. But she stayed with us.

Were they aware of your underground work?

Yes. Because-- yes.

They did.

I don't know if-- no, not Josette.

She did not know.

The father knew.

All right. After liberation, what was your-- when did you return? How quickly did you return?

My father returned immediately to Paris. He followed the army, and, of course, he had no place to go. So he went to the Bernailles. My mother and I waited. And as September was approaching-- it was September. Paris was liberated August 27 or 25. It was September, and I was worried that knowing French red tape, that if I don't register for the university, I will not get in.

And I persuaded my mother to hitchhike to Paris. And we did. Then we--

Who picked you up? What people picked you up?

Americans. Nobody had gasoline. We were picked up by a gasoline truck. And after a few miles, we were stopped by the military police and made to get off because gasoline trucks were not allowed to pick up civilians.

Now you said you had false identity papers at this point.

We had-- at this point we didn't care.

It didn't matter.

It didn't matter. But we had our papers. We had to have something.

So we hitchhiked again.

You were asked to depart from the gasoline truck.

And we tried to hitchhike some more, and nobody picked us up, and it was getting late. So we crossed the road, and we were going back to the village, when we were picked up by a Jeep. And as I got on the Jeep, the driver said, where are you going? And I said-- we really were going to Paris, but nobody picked us up.

And he looked at his gasoline gauge, and he said, I have enough gasoline to take you to Chartres. Would you like to go there? And we said, yes.

When we got to Chartres, we asked people, is there any way of getting to Paris? And someone said there is a truck from Paris that came to pick up flour. And maybe he has room.

So we ran to the truck, and it was piled with flour sacks. And the man said the cab was full. But he said, if you would be willing to lie down on your stomach and be roped on top of the sacks, I will take you. So both my mother and I climbed on top. And--

Where was your sister?

We left her there. She was incapable, incapable of traveling.

Who did she stay with?

With [FRENCH], the old farmer who knew who we were. And we had a dog and a cat that had to be taken care of.

So we--

Roped you on top.

He roped us on top, and we went to Paris. But the roads were terrible. The Germans had passed through, the American tanks. Huge potholes. And every time the truck hit a pothole, the flour just flew.

And we finally arrived in Paris. I was wearing a navy blue suit covered with flour. We immediately went to the Bernailles. And they greeted us warmly.

And we said, have you seen our father? And Monsieur Bernaille said, there is some kind of Jewish holiday today, and he went to the synagogue. And my mother said to me, well, you go to the synagogue and tell him we are here.

When I came to the synagogue, the service was over, and everyone was coming out.

How many everyones were there?

Well, not too many, but there were no services for soldiers, so the Americans brought the Jewish soldiers to the synagogues. And my father was talking to some American soldiers.

And I approached them. And one of those soldiers (SOBBING) is my husband.

Oh, isn't that lovely? That is a very nice ending to a not a wonderful experience. That's beautiful.

I met him on Rosh ha-Shanah.

Oh, isn't that lovely? That really is. And your father had fared well. He'd done fine.

My father was just here last week. He's 86.

Ah! When you were back home and had a chance to talk to people, had many others like yourself survived hidden?

No, very few have survived. Very few.

Did you know anyone that you had been friendly with that had, perhaps, taken the same route. Someone had helped them? Or you were it?

No, in our family, I have an aunt who survived in Poland. But very few of my friends have been-- have survived. If they survived, they survived the concentration camps.

But they did not have a Josette.

They did not survive. And that's why I am glad to tell the story of my friends today, because I guess I have told my story often to non-Jews, but never to Jews, because I had nothing to do with it. I did not survive a camp. I guess I feel guilty that I survived so easily, and that I survived with-- as a whole unit with my parents and my sister.

That kind of survival, however, is the miracle--

Yes.

--of the entire experience. And I'm thrilled that you told the story, because we wish there were more people that had done for others what your people had done for you. That is a story we would like many to hear. So if ever, in the future, someone needs help, we can understand why, and what would motivate someone.

I think what motivated them was pure principle, human principles.

Were they religious?

No, not at all. Not at all. And it's very hard to explain to them that we are religious. I see my friend Josette very often, every time I'm in Paris. I eat with them most every evening. Since my mother died, I stay with my father.

The last April I was there. When I came to dinner, she said to me, I made something very special for you. I said, what is it? Rabbit. I said, rabbit?

She said, yes. When your son, Mark, was here, he told me Jews don't eat rabbit. So I made rabbit for you because you never eat it.

[LAUGHTER]

So it's very hard for them to-- for me to explain to her that we don't eat rabbit, because it's not religiously proper to eat rabbit, because she really would not understand.

So their motives were the motives of people of principle.

Yes.

Which is interesting. Yeah, afterwards, when you were back in Paris, your father, what did he do?

Well, first of all, we stayed with them again for a month. We could not find a place to live.

How were conditions in Paris at that point in terms of food availability and--

It was very difficult, again. Very difficult. Of course, we were free to go and come, but it was still very difficult.

But finally we found an apartment, and they really supported us. And of course, we have been close friends with them ever since. Monsieur Bernaille and Madame Bernaille both passed away now, so the girls are--

Did you ever go back to the village.

No.

No?



No. Oh, I have-- I do see Monsieur and Madame Le Mitre. Monsieur and Madame [FRENCH] died shortly after the war. And I've never gone back to the village. I often wanted to, and I don't know why. I'm scared.

But you maintain contact with them.

Yes, yes. Not as much as with Josette, because they are getting older, and-- but still, when I go to Paris, I always call. And they don't live-- they don't live in the village anymore. They have moved.

And do you ever-- was there ever contact again with any of those you worked with in the other underground, other than him, or that just dispersed, and--

Well, I really didn't know any of them.

Just the few that you were in contact with.

As long as my mother lived, my friend Pierre Montaudon used to come to the house. After she passed away, he hasn't come. Everybody's getting older, also.

This is true. This is true. It's a wonderful story. I'm sorry that they aren't here to tell it, and I'm glad that you were able to, because it should be known.

I'm sorry they are not here also, but I know they would not have told it.

Well, you must tell them, and they will not be pleased, but you must tell them that the story has been told, and that others will hear it.

I will.

And that it will go into the museum. And it's it's something that should be remembered forever. And thank you for sharing it with me.

Thank you.