

SALOMON BERENHOLZ

Born in Paris, France, in March 1926. His parents were born in Warsaw, Poland, and went to France in the early 1920s. They were in the retail business in the town of Coulommiers. His father had a brother, and his mother had two sisters living in Paris. Salomon had a brother two years older than him.

When the war started in 1939, his school was transferred to the town of Vichy, but later evacuated when the Germans entered France. His family moved to Clermont-Ferrand. Salomon finished the lycée in June 1942, and was accepted at “École Supérieure de Commerce” of Clermont-Ferrand.

Salomon’s parents decided to leave France when Hitler took over. Salomon scouted the border with Switzerland, and on his train journey met a Jewish girl his age accompanied by a little boy. Salomon gave the girl advice and later found out that the girl and her brother had managed to cross into Switzerland safely and considered Salomon to have saved their lives. At the same time, Salomon’s brother went to the border with Spain to look for ways to cross illegally.

Salomon’s immediate family decided to go to Spain, while other relatives decided to stay in France. Salomon’s father’s brother (Salomon’s paternal uncle) had two sons. The younger son, two years younger than Salomon, was taken to a Catholic school in the countryside until the end of the war. The other son, who was the same age as Salomon’s older brother, joined the resistance. The rest of Salomon’s family, from his mother’s side, hid during the war and were safe. One of his younger cousins from his mother’s side was also kept at a Catholic institution.

Salomon’s immediate family left Clermont-Ferrand on December 10, 1942, went to Prats-de-Mollo in the French Pyrenees, and were caught by the Spanish “carabineros” police after they crossed illegally into Spain. They were taken to a jail in Figueres, Spain, and were later transferred to another jail in Caldes de Malavella. Salomon’s mother got them released by talking to the governor of Gerona.

From March 15 to April [unspecified day], 1943, they lived in Barcelona. When they started seeing German uniforms on the streets of Barcelona, they felt unsafe and decided to leave for Portugal. They bought visas to Panama, and managed to get transfer visas to Venezuela and travel passes to Vigo, Spain, a port on the Atlantic close to the Portuguese border. On their way to Vigo they stayed in a hotel in Madrid for two days, where Salomon learned some Portuguese from a professor who had taught languages in Vienna.

In Vigo, Salomon’s parents arranged illegal passage into Portugal by boat across the Miño River. They met a Portuguese man on the train to Porto who showed them the city. Then they took a train to Lisbon, where they stayed at a pension until Salomon’s father rented a villa in the nearby town of Oeiras.

Salomon’s family went to a synagogue in Lisbon for the high holidays in September 1943. A man working for the Joint Distribution Committee told Salomon’s father that Salomon’s father’s brother – who was already living in the US – had prepared the necessary papers for Salomon’s family to emigrate to the US. In order to get the papers, Salomon’s father had to declare that the family had crossed the Portuguese border illegally and therefore he had to spend a week in prison.

In late November 1943, Salomon along with his father, mother, and brother took the ship “Joao Belo” out of Lisbon port to Philadelphia with a stop in Porto. It took them around fifteen days to cross the

Atlantic. The FBI interrogated the family upon their arrival in Philadelphia. Afterward, the four went to New York with Salomon's father's brother.

In March 1944, Salomon turned 18 and was drafted into the US military. He was sent to Camp Croft in South Carolina. He stayed in the US military until the end of the war.

Salomon's parents, after a brief time in New York City, opened a business in Philadelphia. Salomon also opened his own business after the war, when he was 20 years old. He got married when he was 24.

Salomon wrote his memories and was interviewed by the Spielberg project.