

Oral History: Ruth Stein, December 4 and 12, 2001

Summary

Ruth Stein, born October 11, 1913 in Vienna, Austria, to Leo and Margarite Altman, describes: moving to Krakow, where her father, a soldier, was assigned; attending school in Krakow and having an anti-Semitic confrontation; her father and she being fervent Zionists and followers of Jabotinsky; her parents being “modern” and not religious except for the major holidays; finishing school and moving to Paris; working for a furrier; having a boyfriend, Fred, and only Jewish friends; returning briefly to Vienna in around 1932-33, marrying her boyfriend, and returning to Paris; being very upset over the rise of antisemitism; losing her job as Jewish businesses in Paris were seized (in about 1942); her mother corresponding from Vienna via postcard; a postcard from her mother saying she expected to be sent to a camp; obtaining false identity papers; renting a room for herself and her daughter while her husband moved in with friends in Nice—the beginning of intermittent separations because she “couldn’t be with a man who didn’t have the guts” to stay with his family; moving to Crotonoy* northern France in 1939 while she was pregnant; her father-in-law being arrested and taken to Auschwitz; moving to Vichy France using her false papers; moving in with a cousin who was married to a gentile; after about three weeks, moving to Nice with just her daughter; [Note: Stein’s accounts of locations and timing of moves between north and south are confusing.]; being detained by police in Nice but given new false papers, which she used until the end of the war; finding out only after the war that her parents perished in the camps; moving back to Paris after the war. [End Part 1] [Note: Part 2, conducted on December 12, begins with discussion of Stein’s activity with the French underground.] Stein describes: using a bicycle to carry messages and, on some occasions, a gun; living on a farm near Villeneuve-sur-Lot; knowing that people were taken away, but not knowing about concentration camps per se; after the war, returning to Paris and working for an aid organization; immigrating to Australia with her daughter and joining cousins who had moved there in 1938; divorcing and remarrying.

*As heard/transliterated