

DONOR: ANNETTE BUTLER  
INTERVIEWER: LISA WILDER  
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Tape Footage: Background

1-311           Annette was the third of four children.

Her parents came to France before the war when they were in their twenties. At the time, peddling was the only job available to foreigners. They settled in the mining province of Alsace-Lorraine, where many Poles worked. They were of Polish descent and able to communicate with the people in the community.

Alsace-Lorraine was a peaceful province and they lived in harmony.

312-574       Annette lived in a quiet family neighborhood. It was not a Jewish neighborhood but they were close to the synagogue. The children played in the building courtyard. There was a big church across the street. Annette's grandfather would cross to the other side rather than walk in front of it.

Annette's family lived under a military officer. He was a fine man, but his teenage son was anti-semitic and would wait for Annette's grandfather and throw stones at him. Once he urinated on him.

WWII

Anti-semitism existed before 1939. Annette's family was personally affected in September, 1939 when the French police gave them 36 hour notice to leave town. The whole city was evacuated. They lived in Mece, which was a fortified city.

576-703       Annette's aunt sewed knapsacks for each of the children, ranging in age from 10 to four. They packed a change of clothes, and with their mother took a train to stay with Annette's uncles who lived in central France near Vichy. Annette's mother thought they would be home in three weeks. Her father had to stay behind because he was 36 and eligible for the draft.

704-954       When they saw the war was settling in, Annette's father sent his wife their clothes, linen and dishes. They rented an apartment and the Salvation Army equivalent gave them furniture. This was in January, 1940. An aunt with one child accompanied them from Mece.

The children attended the local school. At first there was enough food, and then it was rationed. Annette and her family were considered refugees, and as government wards were allocated a monthly food allowance. Twice a year the Red Cross provided them with a clothing allowance.

956-1114 The rent was cheap at this apartment, but the bathroom was in the basement. Annette was very scared to go down there.

Her father was able to come and live with them for a year. The French government was using people as they were needed, and first took unattached, then childless men. When her father was called up her five-year-old brother would not eat for two days.

Throughout this time the family was able to continue with their schooling and religion.

In early 1942, Annette's father was sent back from the front ill with cancer. He died in January, 1943. The war and the war against the Jews intensified. Annette's family began to hear about the camps and arrests in Poland but did not think it would affect them. They were living in a free industrial town.

### The Occupation

The Germans marched into Paris and kept going. The cities that opposed them became occupied cities. Those that let them in, like Annette's city Krenelferen, were considered open cities and did not have it as bad as the others.

1329-1608 Annette's family still felt pretty secure, but knew things would get worse. Annette's father had been very religious, taught them Hebrew as pre-schoolers, and went to synagogue for Shabbat and all the holidays. In the end of 1942 he received a Hebrew letter from his brother in Palestine talking about what was happening in Poland and Treblinka. He gathered his children around then and told them that although he had always taught them to be proud that they were Jewish, for now they were just to feel Jewish in their hearts and not tell anyone that they were. The children realized then that it was dangerous to say they were Jewish.

In 1942 Annette's mother changed her son's name from David, which was an exclusively Jewish name in France, to Daniel. His cousin David became Dennis.

1609-2217 After Annette's father died, things got bad in town with arrests and mass raids. The children still went to school but they were scared. The Rabbi told them it was too dangerous to sit shiva for their father. The synagogue was closed.

Annette was now 10. They heard that in the occupied cities the Jews were being persecuted and arrested in great numbers.

Near the end of June, friends of Annette's uncle who were with the French police, told him they were all being mobilized and something big was going to happen. The Germans ordered everyone re-register for their ration cards. Many Jews had moved to the open cities. When they re-registered they had to state their religion and their cards were stamped with the word Jew. The Germans then had an updated address for every Jewish family in the city.

Every truck and van in the city then had to be surrendered.

Mid-morning on a Thursday, simultaneously from around the city, the Gestapo led

convoys of French police and collaborators to every block with Jewish families and ordered them out. Some were allowed to get dressed, others were sent out in their nightclothes. Some could take belongings, others not. Everyone was loaded on to trucks at gunpoint. Those who ran away were shot. Children and babies were screaming.

2218-2574 A nine-year-old family friend screamed so loudly that the Gestapo, wanting to keep it quiet for the non-Jewish neighbors, pulled her and her aunt back into the apartment. This way they were saved.

### Close Calls

Because her family knew in advance that something was happening, two of Annette's uncles left town, thinking that only men would be arrested. Annette slept at one of their wife's houses that night in order to help with her baby. This aunt lived in a security building and had bought the caretaker, telling her if the Germans came not to open the door to them and to say the family had run away. The Gestapo arrived at 6:30 a.m. The aunt had made sure all the shutters were closed so it would look like no one was home. But Annette's grandfather, who was staying with this aunt, had opened a shutter slightly to say his prayers. The caretaker refused to open the door, but the Germans began throwing stones, so eventually she let them in. She insisted the family was gone, but they did not believe her because the shutter was open. Annette's aunt, who understood German, was tempted to open the door to the Germans. But the caretaker started washing the stairs, insisting that the family was gone. Inside there was a bottle ready for the baby so she would not cry. Finally the Germans left, saying they would return with reinforcements. The caretaker told Annette's aunt to leave, and they did.

2574-2734 Annette's mother and siblings were worried about her, and vice-versa. A Gentile friend of the mom's had sent her daughter to tell Annette's mother that the Germans were picking up Jews in their block, and that Annette's family should come immediately to her house. Annette's mother did not want to go because her son had a fever. She was finally convinced, and as they crossed town to safety they saw what was going on. By the time they got to the end of their street, they saw the Gestapo at their building. They stayed with their friends.

2754-3012 Annette's mother wanted to find out about Annette. A friend of her friend's lived in the same building as a great-aunt of hers and came to announce that she'd been arrested. She offered to check out the situation where Annette was staying. Annette, her aunt, grandfather and the baby were hiding in the maid's quarters on the sixth floor. The women kept running downstairs for supplies, and on one trip down this woman approached Annette and asked who she was. Annette was sure she was Gestapo and so would not identify herself. Then her aunt came down, and confirmed who they were, and told Annette she had to go with this woman. Annette was absolutely terrified. In those days children did not question adults. She had just turned 11. Riding on the back of this woman's bike, down side streets, she was sure she was going to Gestapo headquarters. Even when she was in front of her friends' building, she thought it was a trick. Then she heard her mother's hysterical screams, and realized she was safe. Annette does not remember anything after that.

In Hiding

3014-3278 The government arranged for children to be sent to neighboring farms in the summer for fresh air. Annette and her brother and one sister had already been assigned farms before the round-up, so they still went on July 1st. The older sister, who was 16, stayed in town with the mother. The other sister and brother were sent to the same village, and Annette was close by. She worked in return for good food, and her and the woman she stayed with liked one another.

At the end of August the children were supposed to return to their parents. But Annette's mother had gone into hiding, renting a single room in the courtyard of a building with her eldest daughter. The uncle's friends in the police had made false identifications for the family, so they now had a French name and no Jewish stamp. The daughter worked as a stenographer and made enough money for her and her mom to live on. Annette's mother came to see the farmers and told them that because they had lived in Lorraine they were in danger. She offered to pay for her children to stay on at the farms and attend the village school. The farmers agreed. The children stayed there 20 months until the end of the war.

3279-3674 After the war Annette was reunited with her remaining family members. Of all her many aunts and uncles, only one couple survived. One aunt had opened the door to the Germans and had died in Auschwitz after being experimented on for sterility by Mengele and then raped by the hierarchy of the Nazis. She lost her mind. They heard about her from a friend who returned from Auschwitz.

Annette's father had five siblings. His sister's husband had some money saved and was able to escape with his family to the frontier with Switzerland before the big raid. He had heard that if you had enough money you could buy your way past the Gestapo. When he was arrested he offered the Gestapo money, and was told it was enough to get his wife and children across but not him. He accepted the deal and his wife and children were saved, and he wasn't.

Annette's mother and sister lived the best they could. Her mother could not go out during the day because she had a strong Jewish/Polish accent. There were raids all the time. She wanted to see her children but had to avoid public places, so she learned the truck routes and in exchange for cigarettes and wine got rides out into the country. Her father-in-law had been arrested in the street during a raid and sent to Auschwitz. Because there was no death certificate, Annette's mother still received his ration card. She also had the ration cards of the uncle who was living in the country with French friends. She bought the wine and cigarettes with these rations.

She wrote the children when she was arriving. They would buy butter and eggs from the farmers which she would sell to other Jews in hiding. With the money she was able to buy clothes for her children.

3674-3752 Annette's mother was selling on the black market. This took lots of courage. In 1944 near the end of the war, the truck she was travelling in to the country was stopped 17 times by the Gestapo in 40 miles. A couple times they looked in back but she was not discovered.

The children felt isolated, but their mother and sister visited often. They had to pay the farmers. They also brought sugar and oil to the farmers.

Mother wrote often, using a code. She called the Gestapo 'the Doctor', and when someone was arrested she wrote that they 'took sick'. This is how Annette and her siblings would know which family members were left for them to go in case their mother was arrested. Also, she sold an expensive ring and sewed one very large bill into the lining of Annette's sister's coat. She was to use this to pay the farmers if the mother stopped coming. The other bill she sewed into the older daughter's undergarments.

3976-4235

Annette and her family worried about one another. They heard a rumor that the Germans were coming to their village and many people panicked because a lot of young French adults were hiding in the forest so they would not be sent to Germany for hard labor. Annette took food at night to the farmer's cousin hiding in the forest.

Annette and her sister and brother, ages 12, 11 and eight, were frightened and decided they had to confide in their teacher. They told him, "We are Jewish and we are very afraid." The teacher told them not to worry, he and the principal already knew and had already made plans to hide them if the Germans came. The Germans never did come. The Allies were on their way and the Germans began retreating.

### Liberation

The allies arrived in Paris, and soon the war was over. The children packed up and their mother picked them up. They went home, and picked up the pieces of their lives. They had lost everything. When they first left home they had not thought to bring photographs, toys or souvenirs. Annette has one picture from her childhood from her uncle in Israel.

They were no longer considered refugees and their government allowance stopped. Their mother had no work experience and her French was bad.

A friend of her husband's who owned a sweater factory before the war had hidden his merchandise during the war. He offered Annette's mother to take some pure wool sweaters and sell them in the country to make money. The people in the country had mined throughout the war and had money, so the sweaters sold easily.

Later she met a jeweller who needed gold that was only available on the black market in Paris. He approached her to deliver a parcel in Paris in exchange for another. She did not ask questions, and was paid very well. She wanted to be able to provide for her children. She would take the eight hour train ride to Paris at night, and return the next afternoon. She continued doing it even when the police got wind of it and it became more dangerous. She was told if she ever felt she was being followed she was to get rid of the parcel. It happened once, but she managed to lose the person following her, return to the train and make the exchange. She quit soon after that. By then she had a nest egg, and could put food on the table.

At the end of the war Annette was 13. She went back to school, finishing up to grade 10, and learning English and Italian. At a Jewish summer camp she replaced

a counsellor who fell ill. This determined her career. She was then offered a job at a Chasidic run home set up by the JDC for children hidden and orphaned during the war. She trained in Paris, then worked at homes outside Paris and in Lyon and Marseilles.

### Canada

4931-5246 Eventually her mother made her leave the Children's Homes. It had become her whole life but did not offer opportunities to meet people. She stayed with a friend in Paris and found a job. She met a friend of a friend who was raised in the Jewish orphanage in Winnipeg. He invited her to Winnipeg, she accepted, and here she met her husband. They have two children ages 21 and 18. She has told them her story.

Annette feels responsible as a survivor to tell her story. She knows how many family members she had before the war and how many she had afterwards. She feels it is her duty to tell about those who are missing.

There was no bravery involved on her part. She was a victim and she escaped persecution. She was often very afraid.

Her grandfather had lived with the family since her dad married.

Annette's mother found out how her own mother died. She was chained to other prisoners, forced to walk one kilometer and thrown into an open fire and burned alive.

Her children want to know and have to know what happened.

There is no special glory in her story.

The Holocaust television show impressed her daughter, and created a bond between her and Annette. It gave her a new, stronger identification with her mother.

5247-end It was very frightening to live in a hostile world not knowing who were your friends and who were your enemies.

In 1943 many North Africans came to France. Annette overheard a schoolmate describing a black man and how frightening he looked and concluding he was a Jew. Annette realized then that her classmates had been told Jews were bad.

While staying on the farm, Annette's brother didn't want to undress in front of his hosts because they would see he was circumcised and know he was Jewish.

One day, the woman Annette stayed with wanted her to go to Church. When Annette hesitated, the woman asked her to recite the Lord's Prayer. Annette was able to do it because the friend who had rescued her on the bike had taught it to her just in case.

Annette does not want her children to ever experience the fear she felt, or have others insult them or hold them for less than human because they are Jewish. That

is what she is fighting for. Her mother showed so much courage and was such a strong role model.

Annette does not think the Holocaust can happen again because Israel exists.