Key: RH — Renee, née Ruth, Hartz, interviewee
NL — Nora Levin, interviewer
Interview Date: February 28, 1982

Tape one, side one:

NL: This is an interview with Mrs. Renee Hartz, H-A-R-T-Z. This is February 28th, 1982, Nora Levin interviewing. Mrs. Hartz, can you tell me a little about the background of your parents, where they were born, and something about their life before the Hitler period?

RH: They were born right near Mainz. My mother came from Ingelheim, where the big Bayer aspirin fac-, pharmaceutical firms were, and my father came from a very small town called Hechsteim, also near Mainz. And his father was a cattle dealer, whole-, you know, wholesale cattle. And my mother's father was in textiles, wholesale textiles, and he also had a retail store. My mother's family was very well-to-do. And when they married, my father joined, you know, my grandfather's, my mother's father's business. And they were quite well off, you know, before the war.

NL: So they had a fairly comfortable life.

RH: They had a very comfortable life. My mother's family apparently had lived there for many, many generations. They had traced the family as far back, I think, as the 16th Century.

NL: Would you be good enough to spell the name of the town where she came from?

RH: Yes, Ingelheim.

NL: Oh, Ingelheim, yes, that I know. And your father's town?

RH: H-E-C-H-S-T-E-I-M. It's in the Rhineland.

NL: In the Rhineland.

RH: Yes.

NL: Fine.

RH: Not far from Frankfurt, on the Main River.[1]

NL: And their relations with non-Jewish Germans apparently were good?

RH: Were very, very good.

NL: Were good.

RH: Very, very good. As I said, you know, we were always very, very comfortable and they traded with them and they were treated with the highest regard and respected members of the community.

NL: Were there fairly large Jewish communities in either of these towns?

RH: Yes, I bel-, well, I don't know about Hechsteim because it's so small.

NL: But Ingelheim...

RH: But Ingelheim...

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[1] Frankfurt is situated on the Main River not far from its confluence with the Rhine River.

NL: Had a fairly substantial Jewish community.

RH: And so did Mainz, which was...

NL: Mainz of course.

RH: Very close, yes.

NL: And have they told you, did they tell you in the past about the coming dangers, the tremors of the pre-Hitler or early Hitler period?

RH: Yes, what they had told me is that at the very beginning, it was a very strange situation. They saw the Poles and the Russians come—this was before Hitler, you know, who came through Germany because they were persecuted in their countries.

NL: This is the early '30s?

RH: Maybe even earlier.

NL: Late '20s.

RH: They remember when they, you know, when they were little. And they said—that's how well-treated they were in Germany—they said, "These Jews must have done something wrong for being chased out of Poland or Russia."

NL: I see.

RH: And they actually, you know, didn't feel all that sorry for them. That's the irony, you know...

NL: Oh, my. They didn't...

RH: Of that whole era.

NL: Understand that they'd been persecuted.

RH: That's how well-accepted and well-entrenched they were in the community, that they couldn't believe that right, you know, in the country next to them...

NL: It's amazing.

RH: Yes, the...Poles and the Russians, you know, came and, you know, that that kind of [unclear]...

NL: Did that, did their coming disturb relations between themselves and the non-Jewish population? In other words, were they identified as...

RH: I must add that in that area of Germany it was predominantly Catholic. And a lot of them were not Nazis, had not even joined the Party.

NL: Yes. Yes.

RH: A majority of them did not. So it was a very unusual situation. In fact my mother's brother, who was I guess very young at the time was almost, you know, enthralled with Hitler at the very beginning. I mean...

NL: Is that so?

RH: Yes. To that point.

NL: We'll come to that of course.

RH: Yes.

NL: That's very interesting.

RH: So, which of course my father, this is why they left for Palestine. But my uncle then later, he's the one who went to the Saar and eventually was able to save us all.

NL: And what were some of the early signals that your parents perhaps shared with you of the coming difficulties with the rise of Hitler?

RH: Well, I guess...

NL: Was their business affected let's say between '33 and '36?

RH: They never mentioned that the business was affected but obviously, you know, the discrimination was there. And they had family in the larger cities, you know, whose businesses were being more affected.

NL: Were being affected.

RH: Even though because they were in a small village and were so well-accepted. You know, they weren't personally affected.

NL: They weren't.

RH: But all around them and everything that was happening, you know, after Hitler came to power, did scare them, so that they applied to leave even, and this is why I think my father is a survivor of sorts. Because his family laughed at him when he actually, you know, wanted...

NL: That's right.

RH: To go to Palestine. And they said, "Well, they're not going to do anything to us here, you know, in Ingelheim." You know, "All our friends, all our Gentile friends are never going to let this happen. You know, in the big city where people are so indifferent and don't care about each other, that's another situation. But you're crazy to leave." And they did leave a very comfortable life for what was then in Palestine a very rough life.

NL: Oh, yes. Very, very difficult. Meager. And they made this decision in '36 or they were thinking about it?

RH: Well if they left in '36 they must have made the decision as early as '34, '35. I understand it took quite some time to get the papers.

NL: And they were the only Jewish family from that area who made that decision?

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: Was your father, or were your parents very sophisticated politically, do you suppose, Renee?

RH: Politically? No, I don't think politically.

NL: Because it's extraordinary that they were alone in that determination.

RH: But, yes, my father said, you know, "We're not going to make it if we stay here," and he was trying to convince his brothers and sisters. He was one of five. And his parents. His father had died just before the war. He had diabetes and he died of natural causes.

NL: But his mother was still alive.

RH: Yes.

NL: And the rest of the family?

RH: And he said, you know, "Come with us," or even once they were in Palestine they wrote and said, "It's very hard here but at least we have a chance to survive."

NL: And Mother's family also remained in Germany?

RH: Yes.

NL: Sisters?

RH: She had one sister, and the brother in the Saar.

NL: The brother in the Saar. And...

RH: I have to go back to that.

NL: Yes, now, yes, tell us about his situation.

RH: He married the...

NL: What is his name, please?

RH: Oscar Nussbaum.

NL: Oscar Nussbaum.

RH: N-U-S-S-, which is my mother's maiden name. I think he started to work there as a very young man. He must have been 18 when he went to the Saar. And for some reason he had, when the war broke out, that status, which was equivalent to French status. Now I don't know if he was naturalized.

NL: The war meaning WWI?

RH: WWII. WWII.

NL: WWII. Wasn't it under the League of Nations' control?

RH: Yes. But apparently when WWII broke out it was not considered German.

NL: I see.

RH: And he was, all the citizens, all the people who had worked there or had work permits, I'm not sure, I don't think he was naturalized, because that's right, it was...[2]

NL: Just automatic.

RH: It was, automatically he was considered French, and therefore enjoyed the privileges that French Jews enjoyed, which was a lot better than German Jews.

NL: Yes. Of course. And so he too urged the family to leave Germany in the early days.

RH: Yes, he tried to come, well in the early '30s, no, not really. You know, he was just working there and he never thought either that, you know, what would actually happen. It's just that my father was trying to convince my mother's parents to go to Palestine, frankly, not to stay in Europe.

NL: Not to stay in Europe.

RH: Right.

NL: So, was he a Zionist, do you suppose, Renee?

RH: No.

NL: No.

RH: They were not Zionists.

NL: They were not Zionists.

RH: No. And in fact, that's why they couldn't make it. You know, to them...

NL: They didn't have that national motivation.

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[2] The Saarland after WWI was under French administration and was returned in 1935 to Germany after a plebiscite.

RH: No, they didn't have the idealism necessary to stay.

NL: But why Palestine? Why didn't they try to get to, say, America?

RH: They did try. Not that early, I think.

NL: I see.

RH: Once they decided that Palestine was not for them, they did try to, but it was too late.

NL: But in '36? Obviously Palestine seemed the best hope, even though they were not Zionists.

RH: Yes, right.

NL: Did they know any folks there?

RH: Yes, of course.

NL: They, I see.

RH: My father had, and that's the family I visited and who really told me the history of my father's family because my father can't talk about it. The little bit I know about his family I found out through those relatives in Pal-, in Israel.

NL: I see.

RH: He had about six or seven cousins.

NL: I see.

RH: And there, and then his mother's brother had...

NL: They were early pioneers.

RH: Moved, yes, they were early pioneers.

NL: I see.

RH: I mean the children were early pioneers and then they had the parents come. That was my father's aunt and uncle.

NL: And so they urged him.

RH: They urged him to come.

NL: So that was part of the motivation.

RH: And yes, that's how, yes.

NL: Yes. So they left in '36 then?

RH: In '36, yes.

NL: And went straight to Haifa.

RH: Yes. And so, yes.

NL: What did Father do?

RH: He drove a truck, even though, you know, he was a business man eventually. But in Israel[3], of course. I think at first he said that he, the very first few months he sold bread on, with a, he bought a donkey or hired a donkey, I don't know which way then, and just sold bread.

NL: He just sold bread.

RH: He just sold bread. He was just a vendor, a street vendor. Then he worked in a quarry, you know, and that was very hard work. He never had done any physical work.

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[3] Palestine, at that time.

And then he drove a truck. You know, I guess working in the quarry led to driving a truck and carrying these stones back. And that's what he did in Israel...

NL: And...

RH: And that's what was available at the time.

NL: That was what was available.

RH: Yes.

NL: And Mother, of course, was busy at home and then...

RH: Right, right.

NL: Had...

RH: And then became pregnant. And I was a twin and of course there were a lot of uprisings at the time in Palestine.

NL: The anti-Arab...

RH: With the Arabs, yes.

NL: The anti-Jewish riots.

RH: Riots. Right.

NL: Yes.

RH: So...

NL: And was Haifa affected?

RH: Yes, apparently so. They had to come...

NL: And they went from the frying pan into the fire.

RH: Well not yet.

NL: Not yet.

RH: They did that afterwards.

NL: They didn't anticipate these Arab-Jewish difficulties, I suppose.

RH: No. No. I...guess in reading about it they did start around '3-, well, it was always going on.

NL: In the '20s too.

RH: But there were some pretty severe uprisings and, just around that time, '36, '37, '38.

NL: And you and your brother were born in '37?

RH: I'm an only child. I was born in late '37.

NL: But you were a twin?

RH: I was a twin but my twin, that's what I wanted to say. My mother had a very difficult pregnancy and the twin died...

NL: Oh!

RH: When,...she was a girl, when she was four years old.

NL: Oh, my.

RH: So, but the pregnancy was so difficult and, you know, they were anticipating twins, they were looking forward to it, and the loss of that other child was just too much for her. She said, "I can't stay here."

NL: So you stayed there...

RH: "I can't..."

NL: Until you were four?

RH: No, no. I was less than a year old.

NL: When you left Palestine?

RH: Yes. I was born in late ‘37 and they left late summer, ‘38, like September, ‘38.

NL: And where did they go to?

RH: That’s when they went to France.

NL: To France.

RH: Yes. That’s when they went to Paris. So my uncle from the Saar by then had moved to Paris and was able to become a partner in a rainwear manufacturing firm.

NL: And...

RH: And we...

NL: You had some relatives? Your parents had, well, it was your uncle...

RH: That was...

NL: That was the anchor.

RH: Yes, yes, he was the anchor. And then his wife was from the French-German border, French-German-Swiss border near Basil. So, you know, she was essentially, I think she was Swiss at the time, a Swiss citizen.

NL: And how was their life in Paris in ‘39, let’s see, ‘38?

RH: So we arrived in ‘38, and I think my uncle gave my father some odd jobs, you know, at the rainwear factory. So he was able to find a job and to provide the minimum I guess.

NL: And life there was not so hard as it had been in Palestine?

RH: Not at the beginning. Well, no, not before the war...

NL: Not before the war.

RH: War broke out.

NL: Yes. Do you have any memories of...

RH: No, not at all.

NL: Paris at all?

RH: No.

NL: No.

RH: I was only a year old.

NL: One, two.

RH: Yes.

NL: And did your parents, have your parents told you about their experiences up to, let’s say, June of ‘40, just, it was comfortable?

RH: Well, no, up until, no, no, the minute the war broke out, they were...

NL: But up until June of ‘40 they lived relatively safely?

RH: No, no. When the war broke out, apparently, and that’s something my uncle couldn’t help...

NL: You mean in September of ‘39?

RH: In September ‘39...

NL: I see.

RH: They were sent into a camp in Colombes, in the stadium where all the non-French were taken. Now, I'm not sure if that was the beginning, but they always told me, "When the war broke out."

NL: So that's...

RH: So it might have been closer to June.

NL: The war against Poland.

RH: '40, after France fell, I'm pretty sure. They always tell me, "When the war broke out." But it could have been, like you say, in June, 1940, after France fell.

NL: And they weren't able to get French citizenship then?

RH: No, no.

NL: And what was their life like then?

RH: Then my uncle left and his family also left after France was occupied by the Germans. They left Paris.

NL: They left Paris.

RH: Yes.

NL: And where did they go to?

RH: And they first went to Normandy and then to southern France, but again, the underground helped them, you know, the French underground helped them.

NL: And your parents really, excuse me.

RH: Yes.

NL: So, what happened?

RH: And after that they were thrown into this stadium with all aliens. And of course I doubt, I'm pretty, they're pretty sure that a lot of Jews were sent to concentration camp that early on.

NL: This was in Cologne?

RH: In Colombes.

NL: Oh, Colombes.

RH: Stade Colombes, which is a tremendous stadium, sports stadium. And that's where they gathered all the...

NL: And this was in Paris?

RH: In Paris, well, right outside of Paris. They put them all in a big stadium there, yes.

NL: This was not the Velodrome d'Hiver?

RH: No, no.

NL: Something else.

RH: No, no, that's a ways. That was different.

NL: That's...

RH: This was not just Jews. All aliens were sent to this stadium and were processed. Now in that camp or whatever you want to call it, my father found out that he could join the French Foreign Legion and you know, wouldn't be shipped off if he did

that. So he did that. And my mother, apparently they had some money with them, and they tipped off somebody to get her out of there, and joined my aunt in Normandy.

NL: I see. [someone enters] Good morning, how are you? Nice to see you. [talking] Excuse us for a few minutes. [Interview continues.] And did you hear from Father from time to time?

RH: Well, my mother said she really didn't until just before he came back from the French Foreign Legion. No, she didn't hear from him.

NL: And...

RH: So she joined my aunt in Normandy. You know, she knew that they had gone there...

NL: To a farm.

RH: To a farm, yes.

NL: And, a farm operated by non-Jews...

RH: Yes.

NL: Who were helping to hide Jews.

RH: Yes.

NL: And do you have any memory?

RH: Thinking they were French.

NL: Thinking they were French.

RH: Right, don't forget that my uncle...

NL: I see.

RH: You know, from the Saar...

NL: Saar.

RH: That had the French status.

NL: Arranged this.

RH: Yes.

NL: I see. And do you have any memory of that period?

RH: No, no.

NL: You were...

RH: Then they went, we all went south. You know, in the Free Zone.

NL: How long did you stay in the farm?

RH: I think in Normandy, from what I understand, not very long. Less than a year.

NL: And then...

RH: It was near Alençon.

NL: Yes.

RH: And again, that's my aunt's family now. My aunt, you know, being Swiss and French had a lot of relatives in France. So she had a cousin in Alençon and she arranged, you know, for them to live in this farm because they were friends of theirs. It's as simple as that. But they knew they were Jewish.

NL: They did know.

RH: Oh yes. No question about that.

NL: And apparently this was being done by other foreigners for other Jews.

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: And then in what, do you suppose, it was ‘41...

RH: Yes.

NL: That they went south...

RH: Right, they went south.

NL: To the so-called Free Zone.

RH: Because that was the Free Zone. Right, right.

NL: And where, where did they...

RH: Right near Albi.

NL: Albi.

RH: Right.

NL: Yes.

RH: Actually I’m jumping ahead a little bit.

NL: Do you want go back...

RH: There was first Toulouse.

NL: To Toulouse.

RH: That was their first. And again, I think by then they had no family in Toulouse.

NL: Mother was there alone?

RH: She was there with my aunt.

NL: With your aunt.

RH: And again, it’s through connections, you know, that they knew they could stay and they provided. And I’m pretty sure this was part of the resistance network.

NL: And where was your uncle at this point, was he in the underground?

RH: In, no, no, no, my uncle, when I say my aunt I should say my aunt and uncle.

NL: Both.

RH: They were never separated.

NL: They were never separated.

RH: No, no.

NL: But your uncle...

RH: He had, he had...

NL: And had connections with the underground.

RH: Yes. And he had money.

NL: And money.

RH: And the business was in Paris.

NL: Which was of course essential.

RH: I just have to tell you another story about that.

NL: Yes.

RH: What happened when Germany occupied? They took over the business. And they knew they were Jewish, but they were too honest. The other man's name was Rothschild. Not the famous...

NL: The great.

RH: Rothschild, but his name happened to be Rothschild. And he said, "If you manufacture raincoats for us, for the German Army, we will not touch you. You will be [unclear]." And my uncle said, "I will have nothing to do with it."

NL: But imagine.

RH: [unclear] money.

NL: It was a possibility.

RH: Well his partner did it.

NL: His partner did it.

RH: And you know what happened to him? The French shot him the day after liberation, right on the street.

NL: This I can imagine.

RH: So my uncle is now a very wealthy man because he took over the business after the war.

NL: Ah, he was able to recover it.

RH: Oh yes, mmm hmm, and did extremely well. And...

NL: There's some vindication sometimes.

RH: But, yes, but he was able to take out apparently some money before the Germans took it over. And so he had, during the war, a sum of money that he could, you know...

NL: Dispose of.

RH: Buy, bribe, and dispose of, which was a tremendous help to my family.

NL: Of course. Do you have any memories of the south of France?

RH: Yes. But now, yes.

NL: You were then about...

RH: Toulouse I, I was four.

NL: Four.

RH: Yes. And I do remember Toulouse. We had a very, one room apartment. [tape off then on] We came to, you know, *jardin d'enfants*, kindergarten. And of course...

NL: You were saying in Toulouse you went to school.

RH: Yes, I went to school.

NL: And were there other Jewish families?

RH: In Toulouse proper? I know my father's brother's family also came down. And again, through my mother's brother, you know, he was instrumental in getting them down there.

NL: And then from Toulouse you went to...

RH: Then we went into, then my father came back when...

NL: I see.

RH: He could only serve two years. So in '42, when all of France became occupied, he returned. And...

NL: Where had he been?

RH: In Marakesh and Fez, in Morocco.

NL: And how did...

RH: He still talks about it.

NL: He does?

RH: They were the best years of his life. I mean, funny, you know. The thing is, he's a very little man...

NL: He was not at all, he was not in danger, apparently.

RH: No, he didn't feel like he was. He was, they were well treated and that's where his lifetime friends came from afterwards. I mean there were many, many Jews, you know, in the Foreign Legion at that time.

NL: Interesting.

RH: And...

NL: They more or less...

RH: They each had a number.

NL: Saved themselves.

RH: And they still tease about, yes. They saved themselves, that's right. And...

NL: What is this number, an identification?

RH: Yes, they each had a number, but what I mean is, you know, they still tease each other about the number when they get together. And there were many things, and they have very fond memories of that period. They did crazy things, naturally. It was tough in the hot desert and all, but...

NL: There was a camaraderie.

RH: There was a real camaraderie, and especially with their superiors.

NL: They were French...

RH: They played cards together, oh yes, yes.

NL: And there were good relations.

RH: Very good.

NL: How did he find your family, since Mother had...

RH: Well, apparently they were able to get in touch somehow.

NL: Some communication was possible.

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: And then from Toulouse?

RH: I think once my mother was in Toulouse, since it was a free zone. I think that's when communication became possible, Yes.

NL: And you were saying before that you did have some playmates, Jewish playmates?

RH: Yes. In Toulouse, you mean, very early on?

NL: Yes.

RH: No, I don't recall then.

NL: But later?

RH: I remember going to school. I don't remember having Jewish playmates, no.

NL: What was your impression of the school, Renee? Was it a happy time?

RH: Yes, it really, you know, life was almost normal. And you know, I was little and we were told about Pétain. We were being indoctrinated, you know. Because the government, we under-, as little as we were. So when Pétain came to Toulouse, I absolutely insisted and wanted to see him. And my father had just returned from the Foreign Legion. And that I remember. He carried me on his shoulder so I could see Pétain parade through the streets of Toulouse. And...

NL: Did the teacher know you were a Jewish child?

RH: No.

NL: I see.

RH: And my name is not Jewish.

NL: So you didn't feel the brunt of any of the Vichy anti-Jewish measures?

RH: No, no.

NL: And then from Toulouse?

RH: Well, and then, of course, after '42...

NL: After '42.

RH: We were told, my parents were told, "It's much too dangerous to stay in a big city. And again through the network we were sent to a very small town, into, and that's when the hiding period began. We went into hiding.

NL: What was the name of the town?

RH: It was called Saint Juéry. It was really called Arthes, it was so small. A-R-, right near Saint Juér-, A-R-T-H-E-S, near Saint Juéry. E-S, near Saint Juéry, which was near Albi really, Saint Juéry, yes.

NL: And what were your memories of Arthes? [pronounced "Art"]

RH: Arthes [pronounced "Ar-tez"]

NL: Arthes.

RH: Yes, O.K., well we had people, you know, sort of keeping an eye on us. They knew all about it. They knew that we were Jewish and they knew that we were hiding. They didn't accept the full responsibility because apparently again the Resistance provided for an apartment, you know, an apartment, a one-room thing.

NL: Some housing.

RH: Yes. And my father worked at the local factory and I went to school. And my mother went about her business.

NL: Your father then had to disguise his identity too, I presume.

RH: Oh, we had false papers, by the way.

NL: False papers. And they were...

RH: All, the whole time.

NL: I see.

RH: False names, false identity cards, everything was, yes.

NL: I see.

RH: Yes. And the French helped their own Jewish people that way, giving them false papers. And...

NL: So Father worked at the factory?

RH: So he worked under a false name and then of course there were a lot of bombardments at the time, I guess the Germans against the English, in southern France. I forget exactly but I think that's who fought. And there were constant alerts and you know, we had to run into the fields. And it was also at a time where they weren't sure whether they were going to be able to stay in this village and they had to just run from one place to another. Because that's when the French police of course was, you know, looking for Jews all over.

NL: Yes, they were hounding Jews.

RH: Right. And so they decided, or they were told again through, I think that was, again through the resistance, but a lot of religious movements were active and I think that was the Protestant church project, which told us that it would be better for me, you know, being so little, not always being able to [unclear] and I might talk, to put me in a convent.

NL: Now before we go into that, Renee, do you, did your family have any contact with the Italian police or the Italian Army?

RH: Italian? They never mentioned that.

NL: Because I understand that even after all of France was occupied, there for about a year until the fall of Mussolini, the Italian police and army, who were in partial control of southern France, helped Jews and kept the Nazis at bay.

RH: Well, they never mentioned them directly, but I do know, and I do remember people speaking only Italian in the village. In other words, a lot of the workers, you know, because it's a very agricultural area, came from Italy, or were originally from Italy. Now, in a way...

NL: But you don't remember any stories...

RH: I don't remember that.

NL: Of Jews being protected?

RH: No, no. [unclear]

NL: So you must have been in another town.

RH: But I do know that there were a lot of Italian-speaking people around us.

NL: There was a large Italian occupation force there, which shared the occupation of southern France for a time.

RH: I see, yes. And don't forget, that was an area, and I'm absolutely convinced this is why they held such strong resistance. That dates back. That is literally in their cells, to the Albigensians and the Cathars and, you know, and the Inquisition, which, I mean these people had fought the outsider from time immemorial.

NL: And they were very strong.

RH: They were, Yes, overwhelmingly in the resistance. I know that in our village just about every young man was in it.

NL: It's very valuable information.

RH: Yes. Because it's only after the war that I realized, you know, what the French had done. We just thought that all French people were the way they treated us.

NL: Hardly the facts.

RH: Hardly.

NL: And so, you were saying before that a Protestant group suggested that you go to a convent?

RH: Right, right.

NL: And you were then...

RH: And of course all the religious groups I think did work and try to save families. They did. And the Catholic Church, I think, did a lot also. And there was no problem, you know, finding a convent. And there were a lot of Jewish children in the convent. In fact it looked almost like a kidnapping. I mean they were told that my mother should leave me at a certain address, and a sister would come and pick me up. And that I remember. Now I don't know if they told me, I remember that very clearly.

NL: You were left...

RH: Being left on the street. I was four-and-a-half, five? Under five.

NL: And you were left on a street.

RH: Well, my mother I guess saw the...

NL: Nun coming.

RH: The nun coming to pick me up.

NL: But I mean you must have felt...

RH: Yes.

NL: Thoroughly abandoned.

RH: Oh yes. Yes. But she said she would come and see me Sunday, but she never told me that I wouldn't see them for a year.

NL: What was the name of the convent?

RH: It was called Sorèze, S-O-R-È-Z-E.

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is a continuation of an interview with Mrs. Renée Hartz, side two. In case we missed the name of the convent, it was S-O-R-R-...

RH: R-E-Z-E.

NL: And it was in what town?

RH: In Sorèze.

NL: In Sorèze.

RH: Convent de Sorèze and at the time they were, oh they couldn't have been Carmelites because that's a very strict sect. I forget, I'm sorry.

NL: But of course a Catholic order.

RH: Oh yes.

NL: Yes.

RH: Oh yes.

NL: And you were saying?

RH: And today's it's only for men. It's a monastery.

NL: A monastery.

RH: Yes.

NL: And there were, you were saying, a number of Jewish children there.

RH: Oh yes, yes. Well in fact the other French family's children were there. Apparently they were all told this would be best, if you have young children. And then you could save yourself much more easily.

NL: And can you describe your feelings at the time, Renée?

RH: Well there they were the worst. I mean, well, you know, I literally, then I felt that something was terribly wrong. Because even before I went to the convent I was told never, never to say that I'm Jewish to anybody. You know, I was really indoctrinated. We were in a big dorm. I wouldn't eat for a few days. You know, they, and nobody knew that we were Jewish. Only the Mother Superior. I didn't know it at the time. I found that out later.

NL: The nuns themselves didn't?

RH: The nuns themselves did not know, because the Germans apparently had bombed some convents who were hiding German children, eh, Jewish children.

NL: Jewish children. So only the Mother Superior...

RH: So only the Mother Superior really knew and arranged that. And it was a very strict life when you come from, you know, a very warm, a small family life. Even though it was hectic during the war—we didn't have much, but at least we had each other. And...

NL: And did you underst-...

RH: It was an orphanage. That's really, yes.

NL: And you didn't really understand why you were there, I suppose.

RH: I didn't understand, but I understood enough that something must be terribly wrong for me to be there, and that I may never see my parents again.

NL: And that Sunday came and your mother didn't come.

RH: Didn't come.

NL: And...

RH: Yes. And so I remember, I just wouldn't sleep nor eat and you know, and they were very harsh, not knowing why I acted that way.

NL: They were...

RH: They were told, the other nuns were told that we were orphans.

NL: I see.

RH: So...

NL: So they...

RH: They were very harsh. They just told you, "Well, you don't have any parents, and that's why you're here."

NL: Oh, my.

RH: Well.

NL: And did you think that was true, or possible, Renée?

RH: Yes, of course.

NL: There was no way of knowing otherwise.

RH: There was no way...

NL: Were there any...

RH: Except these other friends. You know, that was a little reassuring because the parents of these other children were able to come one Sunday a few weeks after...

NL: I see.

RH: We had been in the convent.

NL: Why do you think your parents couldn't come?

RH: Well because they were not French and they really didn't want to take the risk. But these people were French.

NL: And could they give...

RH: French Jews.

NL: Your friend some news about you?

RH: And of course they absolutely assured me...

NL: I see.

RH: That my parents were fine and they explained, you know, that they were in an area where they had to be very careful and let me know, you know, I was lucky to be there and, but it wasn't much of a consolation when you're under six years old. And then, little by little, you know, I became a devout Catholic. They taught me how to pray and how to say Mary, you know, all the prayers and all.

NL: What was a typical day like, Renée?

RH: Well, we got up very early and went to mass, I guess. And then we had classes. It was very strict. If we didn't know our lessons they would hit us with a ruler on our

fingers. You had to put out your hand like this and you got hit...but anybody. I mean it had nothing to do with me or, you know, just being me. But of course at the beginning since I couldn't concentrate on anything, I got some pretty bad treatment. But it worked. I studied my lessons after that. I didn't want to be hit over the hands.

NL: And then, after lessons, more?

RH: And then we had our meals and then we had a...

NL: Did you get enough to eat?

RH: Well, I think I didn't really care. I guess I had enough. Because I don't remember ever being hungry. I remember not wanting to eat. I don't remember being hungry.

NL: Was there any play time?

RH: Yes.

NL: What did they permit you to do, for example?

RH: Well, you know, it wasn't a real free time. Somebody would take over and it was supervised games.

NL: Supervised games.

RH: Yes. Yes.

NL: Was there any, were there any nuns who were especially warm or...?

RH: I don't recall any one in particular.

NL: Whom you remember as being...

RH: No.

NL: Protective of you?

RH: No.

NL: Did you have any contact with the Mother Superior?

RH: No. No, we just saw her in passing and we were in awe, you know.

NL: So it was pretty austere.

RH: Very austere and very strict.

NL: And awesome.

RH: Very strict. Yes.

NL: And that lasted for about a year.

RH: About a year, yes.

NL: With no direct contact from your parents?

RH: Not really, except these people who came every three months, I would say. They told...

NL: They couldn't even bring messages?

RH: They did bring some cookies and candy. I don't recall any written messages, no. I think my parents were afraid.

NL: They were afraid.

RH: Yes.

NL: And...

RH: Anything in writing, yes.

NL: What was happening to them? When you finally met them, did they tell you?

RH: Well this is apparently when, you know, the French police was cracking down, you know, on the Jews. And that's when they moved from one little place to another. But in that place in Arthes, even though it was very small, people got to know them, and ended up, you know, really protecting us. But there were days where, you know, they said they had to run in the fields or run in the latrines in the middle of the night or things like that. And in fact shortly after I came back, sure enough the police came. And of course that I remember very vividly because it was shortly after I came back—when I was still so scared and so happy to find them and so scared to lose them—that the police did come, and came to the community, the place where we were hidden, spoke to the lady and I could hear the whole conversation, and wanted to see my father. They didn't take children or women. At least not...

NL: This is the French police.

RH: Yes, the French police. They were only interested in the men. And, but since, you know, I wasn't really hiding, I was running around, and they just pushed the woman aside and started interrogating me. "Where is your father?" I said, "I haven't seen him in ages." Like that. "Which way did he go last time you saw him?" So I showed him a way. I just made up this direction. "But it's so long ago you'll never find him," I said. Here, later, I found out my mother had gone in town shopping. She knew nothing about it. But apparently the people in the town had found out and one man had a, people didn't have cars then, had written his bicycle to the factory where my father worked, and told him to quickly get out of there. And he just ran into a field. And the wheat was pretty high at the time. He just hid there until this man told him that he seems to have gone now. And I could hear one man say to another, "We didn't get a single one today. We're surely gonna get fired."

NL: Now, why did you leave the convent after a year? Do you know what negotiations led to that?

RH: The precise? No, I guess I really don't know, and when I ask my parents they said well, they thought, you know, that things would get a little better. And sure enough, you know, a few days after I got back, that's when the police came. We just had no way of knowing that they [unclear].

NL: So this would be now '43, '44.

RH: '4-, yes.

NL: This was still a very bad time.

RH: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

NL: And the whole convent was then emptied out...

RH: Oh, no.

NL: When you left?

RH: Oh, no.

NL: No.

RH: It was a regular convent for orphans.

NL: But I mean...

RH: Only a few...

NL: Emptied of the Jewish children.

RH: It was staggered, I guess.

NL: Staggered.

RH: Yes, so it wouldn't be so obvious, I guess.

NL: And how long, then, did you stay with your parents?

RH: Well after that we were not separated.

NL: You were not separated at all. So that...

RH: Again.

NL: That convent experience was about a year.

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: And in '44, in addition to this one police effort, were there others that followed? Do you remember, Renée?

RH: After that, I don't recall even though my father said they were all around but not in Arthes precisely. But a lot of people did not make it.

NL: Oh yes, the roundups in the south of France.

RH: Yes. And it's only as I said because we were lucky to get there early enough to get to know the people. And maybe through the networking or having had that much, so much help, from everyone in the village. Now those who had just arrived knew, or didn't speak the language, you know, nobody helped them, and they didn't make it.

NL: And Father was able to go back to the factory...

RH: Yes.

NL: After that one...

RH: Well I don't know if...

NL: Flight or...

RH: He stayed out for a while.

NL: But he, ultimately he regained his work.

RH: Yes. Yes. Yes.

NL: And so this menacing kind of life, then, lasted through '44?

RH: Yes, until Paris was liberated, I would say.

NL: You weren't able to go to school?

RH: Yes.

NL: You did go to school.

RH: Yes. I went to school.

NL: And do you have any other impressions of that time that you would want to tell us about?

RH: Well as I said, you know, the, by then, of course I was getting older. And I recall every night the village gathering and talking about the resistance, listening to the BBC, you know, the people who were hiding us. It was very, very difficult to get food.

Again, we were very lucky because it was the countryside and people were helping us, but up to a point. They didn't have much for them. So my mother had just about sold every piece of linen she owned, every piece of silver she owned, for food. You know, she, there was a bartering system in the old fashioned way.

NL: Oh, of course, yes.

RH: And they had been kosher before the war. Of course they were glad to get any piece of meat. And they haven't been kosher since. And you know, and of course it was out of the question. And one night, literally, we, she said, "I'm sorry, but, you know, that's all I had." She had like one or two slices of bread and it had been I guess very rough. It was winter time. They were, you know, very often in the summer and then in the good weather we were able to get the vegetables that the farmers grew in the area. But you know, we had no refrigerator or no way to store anything. So that was in the winter time. So I had, I knew pretty much everybody. I mean I'm very outgoing. And so I went to some people and told them that we didn't have anything to eat, did they have anything. Well they were so shocked. And I had a little apron. And they said, "Of course, open your apron." And I said, "And my father likes wine."

NL: Oh, my dear!

RH: She gave me a bottle of wine.

NL: Oh, my!

RH: Well, when I came home with that stuff, my mother was outraged. She thought I had stolen it.

NL: Oh, oh.

RH: So she said, "Where did you get it?" So anyway, I told her, "This lady," you know, such and such a street. So she followed, I said, "I'll go with you, and you have to return everything and I'll apologize." And this is how we got to know these wonderful people, who from that time on provided us with food and when things were rough, would hide us in their cellar. They...

NL: Would you want to give us their name...

RH: Oh sure.

NL: Renée, because I think...

RH: Yes, Jeanne—I may have a picture—Jeanne et Hennri.

NL: That's...

RH: Jeanne.

NL: J-E-A-N-N-E.

RH: -N-E.

NL: And H-E-N-R-I.

RH: Yes, double n. Hennri.

NL: Hennri.

RH: And I forget their last name. Isn't that stupid? I do forget their last name.[4]

[4] Their last name was Valat. [Noted by R.K. Hartz, 1998]

NL: Oh my.

RH: I always called them Jeanne et Hennri...

NL: So...

RH: Because, well, Fedou, F-E-D-O-U[5], well, see I became very friendly with their daughters, and, who were then teenagers and one was engaged and became a Fedou. And that's who we kept in touch with.

NL: I see.

RH: Now my parents kept in touch with the older people. They were quite, they were in their 60s then, and probably passed away within ten years after the war.

NL: But they were the people who really...

RH: But I kept in touch with the Fedous, oh yes, absolutely, from that time on.

NL: They were peasants? Farmers?

RH: Oh, yes. Yes.

NL: Simple people.

RH: They just had a very simple, yes.

NL: Catholic?

RH: Yes, not very devout.

NL: But good people.

RH: Yes, yes. In fact that also was very helpful when my parents were in hiding, while I was in the convent, when they would hide sometimes in a farm, you know, in a countryside. When Sunday came around, my father was always worried. My mother didn't mind going to church with the women, because the women always went to church. They just did that. But my father hated going to church. And most of the men said, "You go to church?" And he said, "Oh no." "Then I won't either. Let's play cards." [chuckles] So...

NL: So he had some companionship.

RH: Yes, yes. So...yes, that was Lucette, their daughter. Lucette Fedou. And in fact Harry and I visited them, about fifteen years ago. She is now a grandmother. They married very young.

NL: She married pretty young, yes.

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: In thinking back, do you have any explanation for the fierceness of the French police? We have heard some stories of their helping Jews, in Paris, for example, and other large cities, and mixing up records and so on. But in the south of France, apparently, they hounded the Jews, and really were as ferocious as the Nazis were. Do you have any explanation for that, Renée, or understanding of it?

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[5] Applications have been sent to Yad Vashem to recognize the Fedou Family as Righteous Among the Nations. [Noted by R.K. Hartz, 1998]

RH: Well, outside of the obvious historical reason I think there is certainly an antisemitic fiber in the French, you know, which can be traced back...

NL: Yes.

RH: Very far. And you don't need much to bring it to the surface. I mean, most of these people remembered the Dreyfus Affair and they had *L'Action Française*, the newspaper, I think, which was published up until WWII.

NL: Oh, yes.

RH: There were a lot of them who were pro-Hitler before the war, and certainly in the police. That's the type of person who would be attracted to that sort of movement.

NL: You heard no stories of any French policeman who was kindly disposed to Jews in the south?

RH: Well, except the two that came, you know, and that's so personal and it might be a very isolated case. Those two seemed to me, you know, in my mind, and in my very young mind, and maybe distorted because of age—being so young and not being able to pass any judgment—but their heart wasn't in it. I mean they did say, "We're going to lose our jobs," you know, "if we don't find." They could have taken me, and..."

NL: And these were police?

RH: They were police. They were in uniform.

NL: In the town of Arthes?

RH: No, they were not in the town of Arthes. They came from Albi, I guess, from headquarters.

NL: Oh. And when did you encounter them?

RH: You know, when they came to look for my father.

NL: Oh, oh. You considered them fairly benign? In other words, they stopped short...

RH: You know, naturally, that day, I'm sure they probably, after that, got a lot of them and they hardly speak kindly of them, I'm sure. But they were more scared about keeping their jobs...

NL: And having a quota of Jews.

RH: And having a quota than actually being innately ferocious about it.

NL: And so this life, this clandestine life, lasted until the liberation of Paris?

RH: Yes, I remember, what, June '44? No, that was D-Day.

NL: June '44 was D-Day.

RH: Paris was liberated in August.

NL: August, that's right, the summer.

RH: Yes, O.K. Yes, we danced in the streets and I think from that time on things did get much better.

NL: And...

RH: I mean we certainly were not as scared and it seems to me we were not as much in hiding. We lived much more openly.

NL: Openly.

RH: Yes.

NL: And...

RH: And I don't think there were any roundups. I may be wrong. In that immediate area, you know.

NL: Not in that...

RH: In our little area.

NL: And did you stay there...

RH: Yes.

NL: Until the end of the war?

RH: Oh yes, and even afterwards. We moved to Paris in '46, the end of '46.

NL: Did you encounter other Jewish survivors in the south of France, let's say between '44 and '46?

RH: Well, outside the people, you know, of the village, whom we knew and who were French Jews, we were the only non-French Jews who really survived.

NL: And now...

RH: The other Jews who came, as I said, we didn't know them very well.

NL: Most of them perished.

RH: Are dead, yes.

NL: Yes.

RH: Yes, they did not make it.

NL: So you returned to Paris in '4-...

RH: However, the, yes, excuse me. My father's, you know, peop-, the friends whom he met in the French Foreign Legion also were all saved. For some reason they were able, but again they all had, they were either French or had a wife who was French or, you know...

NL: Some French connection.

RH: Cousin, some French connection. They're the ones who made it.

NL: And can you tell me about Mother's and Father's families?

RH: O.K.

NL: They remained in Germany.

RH: Well, they all perished.

NL: They all perished.

RH: They all were sent to concentration camps. My entire father's family went to Auschwitz and didn't return, of course. My mother's parents went to Theresienstadt, and did come back.

NL: They did come back.

RH: Their daughter did not. They survived. And they lived with us after the war, talking very little about it. I was very young. It was a very tense time. And I don't remember it as being pleasant in the sense, you know, of that wonderful reunion. I mean, everybody was so broken down.

NL: The memories were just so dreadful.

RH: Yes, yes.

NL: And the whole world...

RH: And my grandfather didn't live very long afterwards. And they were sent from Theresienstadt to Switzerland, I guess by the Red Cross.

NL: They were very fortunate...

RH: Extremely.

NL: Because, of course, there were very few survivors in Theresienstadt.

RH: In Theresienstadt, yes. Yes.

NL: Do you remember much about your life in Paris in '46? That must have been also a very difficult time.

RH: It was very difficult, and I still wanted to keep my false name. I didn't want to go by my true name. And by the way, Renée I guess is the sign of the relatively, you know, lucky experience that I've had that I've kept my French name. But I was born Ruth.

NL: I see.

RH: Yes. Because I was born in Israel, and my real name is Ruth. In fact even here. Some people know me as Ruth and some people know me as Renée. Because when I first came here I was so happy that Ruth was a common name.

NL: Ah, yes.

RH: In France they don't even know how to pronounce it properly, even the Jews, you know. "Rute", you know.

NL: "Rute".

RH: It sounds awful. It sounds like something else which is a very vulgar term. So I, you know, was never, never called by my true name until I came to the States.

NL: So you were then...

RH: And then because of my profession, you know, I took back my French name. But I didn't mind is what I'm saying. It's not like it brought back such awful memories.

NL: So for a time you didn't want to be a Jewish child.

RH: There was a lot of antisemitism in the school, open antisemitism.

NL: In Paris?

RH: In Paris, when I got back.

NL: I see.

RH: You know, *Sale Juive*.[6] You heard that all the time. And the children, I'm sure, you know, I was only in elementary school. I was still very young. I was six or seven by then. Well, a little older, eight.

NL: But very aware of this.

RH: And the whole time, really, until I came here, I must say. And even today I don't flaunt the fact that I'm Jewish. And...

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[6] *Sale Juive* means "Dirty Jew".

NL: You'd been conditioned so harshly.

RH: Yes, even at the Sorbonne I heard some professors were antisemitic. Now you know, study, I mean diplomas are hard enough to get by, that I would rather he or she didn't know.

NL: Were you identified as a Jewish child in the schools in Paris? Did people know you were Jewish?

RH: Well, certainly not again by my name. But I guess because, you know, my friends were primarily Jewish. Then automatically you're identified as a Jewish child.

NL: Did you feel discrimination against you personally?

RH: Oh I was called *Sale Juive*.

NL: Oh you were called yourself.

RH: Oh yes, oh yes, me and the whole group. I mean by, yes.

NL: I see.

RH: Oh, yes. I was harassed after school.

NL: In Paris?

RH: In Paris, yes. I mean not bad. I was never beaten up or anything. But they took my lunch away or my snack that my mother would give me, you know.

NL: And did your parents feel the antisemitism as well in their adult circles?

RH: Oh yes, yes, yes. And so many people had collaborated and we knew about it. I mean people knew about it, you know. I mean the corner bakery store and the dairy shop owner had denounced, you know. They didn't just collaborate. They just...

NL: Informed.

RH: Informed.

NL: So...

RH: And gave people away.

NL: How long then, did your family stay in Paris?

RH: My parents are still in Paris.

NL: But...

RH: We haven't really...

NL: You then grew up in Paris.

RH: Oh yes. I grew up and was educated in Paris.

NL: And felt the antisemitism throughout that?

RH: I would say throughout that.

NL: Throughout.

RH: I would say, off and on, yes. Until maybe the Alge-, well, and that's different again, you know. We were always a minority and a tremendous minority, after the war. And you just didn't talk much about it. The less said the better. My parents did want me to have a Jewish education and a man by the name, well, who then became the *le grand rabbin de Paris*—in France there is a hierarchy among rabbis—was my teacher. So...

NL: I see.

RH: It was a very interesting case**.** Rabbi Jais, J-A-I-S. And he was an Algerian Jew.

NL: He was an Algerian Jew.

RH: Yes. And I had private tutoring with him.

NL: Oh you must have had a confused time, then, trying on the one hand...

RH: Well, in my mind, I knew that I was Jewish.

NL: But not to express it or manifest it.

RH: Right.

NL: Really.

RH: Right, right.

NL: Did you have any close non-Jewish friends during your growing up time?

RH: Close? No.

NL: No.

RH: My close friends were Jewish. I had acquaintances and I certainly, you know, had them over, of course. In France it's, when I grew up things were more formal in general. You know, it's not like here where the children come and go and...

NL: You don't invite people [unclear].

RH: Yes, come for dinner parties, so.

NL: Yes.

RH: You know, and so my, and as a teenager, when it's, of course it's very important, all my friends were Jewish.

NL: But...

RH: And I joined Jewish organizations. I went to Israel when I was sixteen. You know. And I went, wherever, whatever I did, it was always with a Jewish community.

NL: With the Jewish, yes.

RH: In the Jewish community.

NL: But...

RH: And I, oh, I joined the Scouts, the Jewish Scouts, the *Eclaireurs de France*.[7]

NL: Ah, yes.

RH: That's why I was so interested in what you had written.

NL: Yes, can you tell us something about your experience in the Scouts?

RH: Because, they never told us about what the *Eclaireurs* did during the war.

NL: Oh, you had...

RH: It's not until, you know, I read, or, what you had written...

NL: Yes!

RH: And then what many other people had written.

NL: When did you join the *Eclaireurs*?

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[7] *Les Éclaireurs d'Israélites de France* - the Jewish Scouts, a number of whom fought in the French Resistance movement.

RH: Very young. I mean I guess at nine already. You know, like the Brownies or...

NL: Yes.

RH: It was *Les Petits Ailes*, the little wings we called them.

NL: The little wings.

RH: Yes. I was in that and then...

NL: And what sorts of activities did you have?

RH: Of course that was strictly Jewish.

NL: Yes.

RH: Strictly kosher. My parents by then were no longer kosher and we said the prayer before the meal and after meal. A very, very Jewish atmosphere.

NL: Orthodox?

RH: Orthodox.

NL: Yes.

RH: Ultra Orthodox.

NL: Interesting.

RH: Absolutely.

NL: Was it pro-Zionist?

RH: And whatever we brought, yes. Well...

NL: What a combination!

RH: Yes. But, you know, not fanatically so. It wasn't like, oh, what's the big organization that is so pro-Zionist? I had a friend in it.

NL: The JDL?

RH: It'll come back to me. It was very, students...

NL: *Hadassah*?

RH: No, no, no. For young people.

NL: For young people.

RH: Yes.

NL: Young Judea?

RH: No. No. It'll come back to me.[8]

NL: But it was sympathetic, sympathetic to Palestine.

RH: Oh yes, yes. But you know, they didn't indoctrinate us; this is where we all should go and live. So they weren't Zionists to that degree but you know, the goal of the troop was to, you know, to go to Israel and live on a kibbutz and things like that. But we had wonderful activities throughout the year. And...

NL: Sports and cultural?

RH: Sports. We went on long hikes on Sunday. I have very, very fond memories. This was really, you know, how I probably acquired a very strong Jewish identity after the war, through the, with the *Eclaireurs de France*, which were organized, reorganized,

[8] *Eclaireurs Israelites de France* (EIF); that group was not at all religious before the war. [Noted by R.K. Hartz, 1998]

I guess, shortly af-, I only realize now, you know, how well-organized they must have been, to just...

NL: Ah, yes.

RH: To just take it up again.

NL: They helped many Jews...

RH: Yes.

NL: To find hiding places.

RH: Yes. And how the whole movement just continued naturally. You can never say as if nothing happened. But it was extremely well-organized and they had kept, they were able to recoup, you know, their meeting places and in fact they were smart enough, or probably coincidence, because there was a Jewish Quarter, in the Marais section of Paris, *Place des Vosges*, which is now *the* most expensive area of Paris. This was our meeting grounds. And they had kept, you know, this place, which is now worth literally close to a million dollars. And they had bought it for peanuts apparently before the war. It was easier than paying rent all the time. And now, you know, it gives them a, I think they just sold it, because they said, "Well, we can go elsewhere and take the money."

NL: Go elsewhere.

RH: So, yes, and they also, on the second floor built an Ashkenazi synagogue. A lot of synagogues now in France are Sephardic, because a lot of Jews came from...

NL: Yes.

RH: North Africa.

NL: North Africa. How long did you stay in the *Eclaireurs*?

RH: Oh, I stayed till I was 16. And then I joined the WIZO, which is the Hadassah equivalent.

NL: Young women's society.

RH: You know, youth group. Yes, but there was a youth group.

NL: A youth...

RH: And that's where you met young people and they had dances and socials and very close to here.

NL: So, it was very easy for you, relatively, to find a Jewish milieu...

RH: Right, right.

NL: In which you felt at home.

RH: And they were my friends.

NL: And they were your home.

RH: As my close friends. They were my close friends.

NL: Now, what interests me is there seems to be a paradox, in that so many non-Jews helped to save you, and the Resistance was so sympathetic and supportive, and yet in the general culture, there was a great deal of antisemitism.

Tape two, side one:

NL: This is tape two, side one, continuing our interview with Mrs. Renée Hartz, February 28th, 1982, Nora Levin interviewing. You were saying just now that some of your relatives had tried to come to the States.

RH: Right.

NL: During what period, Renée?

RH: I guess when they really became scared, according to my father. And…

NL: '38?

RH: It was probably after *Kristallnacht*, but apparently some had tried before that and…

NL: Having affidavits, you were saying.

RH: Well, in our case, we had an uncle in New York, whom I met, you know, 25 years ago, and who had sent an affidavit to my parents in particular, you know, in '39, in early '39. And the American consulate made it impossible for them to go to the States.

NL: What happened? What did he do?

RH: Well I guess they tried to process, you know, the papers.

NL: He created barriers?

RH: Created barriers, and kept postponing things. And, "Come back," you know, "two weeks from now."

NL: He was in Paris?

RH: Yes.

NL: The consul was in Paris.

RH: Yes.

NL: This was true, I know, of the consulates in Germany. I had never heard about the American consul in Paris.

RH: Yes, yes. But don't forget, my father was German. He was not…

NL: Ah, yes.

RH: French. So I'm not sure who he went to.

NL: It would still then be the German quota that would be applicable.

RH: Yes, it was the German quota. He had, it was not the French quota.

NL: And so there were obstacles placed in their way.

RH: Yes.

NL: And they never got the necessary papers?

RH: No, no.

NL: We were speaking before about the seeming paradox of having so much antisemitism in general French society and yet the experience of great help on the part of the French Resistance. And you were saying, I think, that a lot depended upon what area one lived in.

RH: Right.

NL: And when you returned to Paris, did your parents move into an all Jewish or generally Jewish neighborhood?

RH: No. There…

NL: No.

RH: There was no such thing in Paris. You can't possibly compare it with, you know, American cities, especially after the war.

NL: Jews were disbursed.

RH: Sure.

NL: Jews were disbursed.

RH: There were very few left and there is a little Jewish quarter, but strictly for the shopping, kosher foods, you know.

NL: I see.

RH: It's called the Rue des Rosiers. But Jews didn't necessarily cluster in that area to live. They came to do their shopping.

NL: So…

RH: And especially the very religious, Orthodox Jews who couldn't find, you know, anything else in other areas of Paris. But Jews always mingled with, you know, with the non-Jews…

NL: Yes.

RH: In their living quarters. There is no such thing as a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in France, even today.

NL: So are you suggesting that if your parents had moved into another area that you might not have felt the sting of antisemitism so much?

RH: No, no, no.

NL: No?

RH: What I was saying is we were just fortunate that during the war we were in a small area of southern France…

NL: I see.

RH: Who didn't really know the word antisemitism. This Hennri whom I mentioned before, and you have to understand that a French peasant is a very educated person. You, I don't think, he's unlike any other peasant that I have encountered in my lifetime. He knew his history from the Lascaux Cave on to, you know, the very latest event. He was glued to his radio set, as I said, the BBC. Because we didn't have one and when we listened to the BBC it was at his house. Knew absolutely every event, every historical date, you know, and every tiny detail of French history. And this is true of every place, even to this day. When you go to a farmhouse in France, you see a collection of history books. That's the first thing you see. They just, they're not interested in geography as much. But history…

NL: How do you account for that?

RH: I think, you know, primarily, this is their land and has been for a very, very long time. They're very proud of it and very interested in it, and they know it. And they make sure that children know it. And this is how it has been perpetuated. So, they had never encountered in that area, they had read about it. They knew the word existed. But they…

NL: This is antisemitism.

RH: Antisemitism. But they actually asked my father, "What exactly is it? What does it mean? What do they have against the Jews? Just because, you know, you're Jewish?"

NL: That's extraordinary. I mean, what about the church…?

RH: And then they had the longest discussion about that.

NL: What about the…?

RH: They're not very, you have to understand also that the average French peasant is not very religious. Like I said, the husband never goes to church.

NL: I see.

RH: That's for women. That's women's stuff. Not interested.

NL: So they weren't indoctrinated by the church then.

RH: No, no, not the peasants.

NL: That's interesting.

RH: No. And also don't forget that it's also in that area that the socialists stem from.

NL: I was going to ask, yes.

RH: Jean Jaures is right near there. And you know, Carcassone area.

NL: Yes.

RH: And as I said, the Albigensians, the Cathars, way back in the 11th Century, had to fight the authorities. So…

NL: Yes, I remember once reading that many of the French peasants are socialists.

RH: Right.

NL: So that it was that…

RH: Right. And that area in particular overwhelmingly voted for Mitterand last year, 97%. It was in all the papers. That is the most majority from the vote.

NL: Oh, how fortunate for your family.

RH: And as I said, all the prominent socialists stem from this area.

NL: And so the family that helped you so much didn't even know the term, "antisemitism".

RH: They didn't even know the term. They had, very few Jews really lived in that immediate area. Those who did, you know, were the Jews who had lived there all their lives. Darius Milhaud's family is from Montpellier, not very far away, where much worse things went on because it's a bigger city. Like you said, where they really hounded the Jews, in that area. But the Jews had lived there literally since the Middle Ages, since, you know, they were so well-accepted under, especially under the Popes of Avignon, where they were quite prosperous. And a lot of the Jews descended from those families.

NL: And so to go back now to your growing up time, you went to a lycée.

RH: Right.

NL: And also experienced some antisemitism there, Renée?

RH: It wasn't overt. It wasn't, you know, really out in the open. But it was definitely there.

NL: Are there such things as quotas of Jewish children?

RH: You had teachers who would return papers for instance. Quotas? I'm sorry.

NL: Yes, in other words, quotas for permissible Jewish enrollment.

RH: Not that I know.

NL: Not official of course, but do you suppose that…

RH: That I've never heard.

NL: The number of Jewish students was limited, or restricted?

RH: That I've never heard. Now after the war that wasn't hard to do. Because how many Jewish children were there left?

NL: Yes, there was such attrition.

RH: So, no, I've never heard that. But some teachers…

NL: Returned papers?

RH: Returned papers. If it was a Jewish child, without comment. If it was an obviously gentile and even, or a child with a noble name, with the "de" in the name, she would get either overly complimented, I mean, she would really stop and compliment her. This was a girls' school at the time.

NL: And it was extended comments.

RH: And it was so obvious…

NL: Yes.

RH: That the girl with the name of Levy or Levi or Kahn or just never even got an acknowledgment that, you know, this paper is well-written or well-done or anything. She still got the good grade.

NL: But no comments.

RH: But no comments.

NL: And this was generally true…

RH: So that's why I say it wasn't really out in the open, but this was a small example of the things that would happen. And the opposite was true. If it was a very poor grade, again, the Jewish child wouldn't get any reprimand, and the non-Jewish child said, "Now, someone with a name like this who's a," oh yeah, "with a French," you know, "with a, such a famous French name like," whatever the name was, "cannot possibly accept this poor grade on this paper." And this was in front of the whole classroom. So it was…

NL: Did you find any…

RH: Sort of a reverse humiliation, you know.

NL: Of course. Were there, there were no teachers, were there no teachers, in your experience, who were even-handed, so to speak?

RH: Oh yes.

NL: There were.

RH: Oh yes. Oh yes. What I'm saying is there were always one or two no matter where I was, who were obviously antisemitic. It didn't take you long to figure it out.

NL: And you gr…?

RH: Oh yes. A lot were.

NL: A lot of them were.

RH: Oh absolutely. Especially in education in France. You know, you always have the fights between the priests and the school teacher. That's a classical theme, even, because it's so true in literature, in French literature. Very amusing books have been written. I don't know if you remember the Don Camillo series, with Fernand.

NL: No.

RH: Yes.

NL: No.

RH: He was the priest, and you know, because the teacher is so often left leaning.

NL: Anti-clerical.

RH: Anti-clerical.

NL: And socialist also.

RH: And leaning to the left.

NL: Yes, yes.

RH: And socialist. And it's not communist. And then you have the mayor. Oh, the mayor is the communist. The teacher is the socialist. And it may sound like a stereotype, but this is so true in France.

NL: And you stayed at the lycée for three years? And so…

RH: Oh, longer than that.

NL: Longer.

RH: Five years.

NL: Five years.

RH: Yes.

NL: And then?

RH: And then I went to the Sorbonne.

NL: And then to the Sorbonne.

RH: Yes.

NL: And you studied, you majored there in French literature?

RH: And then studied, not really. Oddly enough I majored in natural science, biochemistry.

NL: I see.

RH: Yes. I sort of backed into teaching French.

NL: And what were your experiences as a Jew at the Sorbonne?

RH: Again, as I said before, some professors were known to be antisemitic. So, if you didn't have a Jewish name, you know, fine. But they actually flunked some Jewish students. Very few. But there were those who were.

NL: And again, most of your intimate friends were Jewish.

RH: Yes. Yes. By then I, as I said, I'd become very active, you know. After the Scouts it was the youth group and…

NL: WIZO.

RH: And the WIZO, right.

NL: And your parents during those years didn't have any plans to leave France?

RH: No.

NL: They felt rooted there.

RH: Yes.

NL: And…

RH: And quite comfortable.

NL: Comfortable.

RH: And again, thanks to my uncle, my father was able to get into a parallel branch. A brother-in-law opened another branch in the rainwear. And of course, I don't know if you're interested of my parents going back to Germany.

NL: Yes, yes. When did they do that?

RH: Well, they had to do it when they heard that they were eligible for reparation money, under Adenauer.

NL: Excuse me, but could we just spend a minute on the point we raised before, that is about this, the time that your parents learned that their own families had perished?

RH: Oh, right.

NL: And then we'll come to the visit to Germany. Was it in the '40s?

RH: It was just so, the reaction was so strong to me that in my mind I only remember the reaction. I have absolutely no idea whether it was still, I think it was before we moved to Paris. I'm pretty sure. Maybe you can help me with that, but I guess I forgot to ask. I could ask them.

NL: Well I don't think you want to rake that up.

RH: Yes, right.

NL: But...

RH: I try to avoid it. But, you know, my father had an idea because he had written to the village and, you know, no Jews were left and by then word was getting around.

NL: Had he or Mother gotten any word from their folks...

RH: During the war?

NL: In the late '30s, early '40's?

RH: Before the war, I believe, yes.

NL: Some mail.

RH: Yes. And then of course in Palestine and then, and when they were in Paris, yes. But during the war, no. So that they really don't know the details of their [unclear].

NL: They could get those details from Yad Vashem, if ever they express any interest. And I can give you...

RH: Yes. Well I was there last summer and just went to the computer which gives you information about the town and I just punched in Mainz, not Ingelheim. And...

NL: Did you get any information?

RH: Yes, I got a lot of information, but not so much as to how the Jews were arrested during World War II. [unclear]

NL: Well we'll, we can talk about that after the tape, Renée.

RH: Yes.

NL: And so when did Mother and Father decide to go to Germany? Oh, yes, when they heard, you know, that they were entitled to reparations. Of course, they had a lot of proof, unlike the Russian and the Polish Jews. They did take a German-Jewish lawyer in Paris and he said the best thing really would be to go back and try to get some of the records from the town house. I mean he would do it but, you know, he was very busy and there weren't that many in Paris. I think they were all of a sudden overburdened. So, it must have been in the early '50s. And when they went back to the town, people were overwhelmed with joy. They couldn't have been, you know, better received, even though my father was very bitter. And he was invited at the people's houses. You know, people who had been their friends before the war. And they gave back, they apparently after the rest of the family was arrested and, of course, I believe they took the possessions and kindly returned them to my father.

NL: The...

RH: You know, they had all kinds of things.

NL: Livestock?

RH: Livestock, yes.

NL: And his property...

RH: Yeah, it was scattered throughout the village, but they did...

NL: The did make...

RH: They did recuperate quite a bit. Jewelry...

NL: I see.

RH: There were...

NL: Some records? China?

RH: Records, *objets d'art*, you know, we had china.

NL: And the house was still standing?

RH: And the house, yes, in Hechsteim I think it was taken over by some municipal building because my father's family had, as I said, more or less a sort of farm, a small farm. They were in the cattle business. And the same with my mother's house. Somebody lived in that house.

NL: And returned it?

RH: I know that they got paid for their house so, you know, they were, they hadn't taken it over. It was assigned to them by the authorities after the war. And after long, you know, legal negotiations. So that, what I'm saying is, they really weren't truly, they weren't Nazis in those towns, even though my parents say, you know, "You all say

that, but you know you were Nazis." You know, they're not ashamed to tell them, that even though you claim you weren't, you didn't help us very much. But they reluctantly, I think some of them reluctantly...

NL: Cooperated.

RH: Cooperated or were in the army, even though they claim they weren't. My parents don't believe them all. But they certainly were very, very kind to them. And to this day they go back once in a while.

NL: They do.

RH: Since my father had lost his father, you know, before the war, so he has a tomb there. And my mother's father had remarried, so her first mother, her real mother really, the one who perished is her step-mother, I mean the one who was in Theresienstadt is her step-mother. Her real mother had died when she was nine, from an infection. So, you know, she had a tomb there. So they go back and again people are extremely nice. These are now, you know, children of, and grandchildren.

NL: Grandchildren, yes.

RH: And they're always invited at the mayor's house. And you know, and get a very, very warm reception.

NL: Did any other Jewish families survive from those towns?

RH: Yeah, well, only because they either went to Argentina, survive? Not...

NL: Not, not in Europe.

RH: Not the war, not in Europe.

NL: Not in Europe.

RH: And the ones who had left, in Argentina or in the States or Australia or...no. Those who had, who stayed in, none of those have still survived.

NL: And your coming to America, of course, is connected with your engagement and marriage to Harry?

RH: Right. Right.

NL: Were you married in Paris?

RH: We were married here.

NL: You were married here.

RH: Yes. This uncle who had sent my father an affidavit before the war, you know, also said, "Any time you want to come," any one of us, or all three of us; we always had an open invitation. So I finally took him up on it and came. Because when I came over it was '58. You still needed an affidavit and a visa.

NL: You came just for a visit?

RH: Yes, I just came for a visit.

NL: I see.

RH: But you still needed a lot of papers. So I took him up on it, and I had met Harry the year before in Paris very briefly. And we just saw each other again. I really came for, to visit my family in New York.

NL: I see.

RH: And that's how I saw him again. And we became engaged. And being an only child, it was a very tough decision. Luckily I was very young. And maybe, you know...

NL: That made it possible.

RH: A little more adventurous. And I just went ahead and did it.

NL: Oh, it must have been so hard for you.

RH: Yes, yes. Because the Algerian War was going on in France at the time, and the conditions weren't the best in France. And after everything they went through and now my mother felt maybe it's not the worst thing to be in the States, you see? This I think in their mind helped them, even though it was extremely hard being an only child.

NL: Another migration.

RH: And that was before the jet age, you know, when boat crossings were cheaper than plane crossings. So it was literally half a world away.

NL: But, of course, you see each other...

RH: Oh yes.

NL: Quite often.

RH: Almost every year.

NL: Almost every year.

RH: Yes, yes. Yes.

NL: Renée, before we end, are there some words you would like to say to the new generation, young people who will be studying the Holocaust, who may be listening to the tape? Do you have any thoughts or messages you'd like to convey to them?

RH: Well, unfortunately, if you're Jewish, whether you want to recognize it or not, you will always be earmarked as such. [noise; tape off then on]

NL: Yes, you were saying whether one is Jewish, whether one thinks about oneself as being Jewish...

RH: Yes, or not, you have to be forever vigilant, because so many Jews in Europe, and especially German and French Jews, were so well-integrated, were not religious, considered themselves, you know, French and German before being Jewish. And yet when this event happened, this is, they perished just like, they had to fight and you know, many, many of them of course perished because they were Jewish even though they felt at the time that this was strictly secondary. That's number one. And the reason I put that as number one is when I first came over, so many of Harry's friends said that, "I'm an American first, and I'm a Jew second; therefore, you know, Israel or whatever, and Jewish causes is fine and I'll support them, and I'll give them money." But that to me is ludicrous and self-defeating. You really have to be extremely vigilant at all times. And for that matter, you know, if it happens to the Jews it can ha-, and it happened to the Armenians. It can happen to anybody, whoever you are. And you must just teach the lesson.

NL: To accept one's identity.

RH: And accept one's identity but also be sympathetic to your fellow man, so that an absolute erratic, irrational man, you know, like Hitler, shouldn't come to power.

So I have mixed feelings about the Civil Liberties Union. I know that today in France, and in Germany, I believe—correct me if I'm wrong—they have outlawed Nazi parties, neo-Nazi parties. I mean, they make an exception. That's where democracy stops. I mean there are certain things that you just cannot allow to go on. And that's one of them. And maybe conditions are different here, I don't know. Enough, I think. But American history, I do know it intellectually. I'm not sure I have a gut feeling about it, like some of you do, that maybe you can allow these things to happen and not have to worry, but I can't imagine that you do. I can't imagine that you can paint swastikas all over the walls and just say, "Oh, well, it's just a prank."

NL: I agree with you wholly. I myself have given up my membership in the ACLU some fifteen years back because I couldn't square that with what I know about recent history. Any other thoughts, Renée?

RH: Well, you know, obviously the children of today are learning this period of history through this wonderful medium, not just through books and films. And they're lucky enough to still have survivors around. But they have to make sure that their children in turn will know, because when you know the history of antisemitism, it's just so scary that you have to make sure that every person must do their utmost not to let it happen again. And I would agree with Begin, "Never again," I hope.

NL: Thank you very much, Renée.