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Summary

Berthe Meghnagi (née Zilberas) was born on September 9, 1933 in Paris, France. Her parents were from Lithuania, arriving in Paris, where they were married, after traveling through Russia during the revolution. They were unofficially adopted by a nobleman, Mr. Chator, who remained important to the family for years. Her father, Charles, was a clothes designer and tailor. Her mother was Ginny (née Skopaïte). Berthe had two brothers, one older and one younger, Serge and Paul. She describes her relations with them and her grandparents. The household was not strictly kosher, speaking multiple languages at home, primarily Yiddish. Berthe considered her family assimilated, but she was aware of antisemitism even as a youth. The family attended a synagogue at the high holidays, but had no interest in Zionism.

She remembers when German troops arrived in Paris. In 1941, they were arrested and detained at Drancy internment camp. Her mother successfully hid jewelry in Berthe's hair. She witnessed deportations of many of the detainees, but after 4.5 months they and others were released on the premise that the French police had ordered their detention, not the Germans. In the autumn, the family fled towards Spain in an open truck through Bayonne, arranged she believes by the Chator family; they also stayed for some months in Tardes. They decided to return as her mother missed Paris. Mr. Chator arranged hiding for her parents while her brothers were sent to a refuge in Chateau Thierry, and Berthe was placed in a convent at Nogent-sur-Marne. Her older brother worked with the Resistance. She describes her fascination of the Folies Bergère that she would often pass when visiting her parent's hiding place. Berthe and the others were now 'passing' as Gentiles; Berthe used the surname Leblanc.

Berthe describes the liberation of Paris and the arrangements by the Chators to reunite the family. Only one member of her father's family survived and few of her mother's family. It took two years to regain their property from a one-armed retired French officer who had taken it over. She resumed schooling with a private tutor. Her younger brother died in a train accident a year after the war.

Berthe reflects on her lost youth and rues the sacrifices she made for her children.

Berthe came to Boston in 1953 where she met and married Robert Meghnagi, whose family had Swiss aristocratic roots. He was an engineer who worked in a classified position with the U.S. government. They had a daughter and son and moved to California in 1972. They divorced after twenty years. She concludes with wishes for less conflict among people and nations, while also reflecting that Gentiles often provided her more kindness in her life than Jews.