

Interview with ODETTE MEYERS
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Interviewer:
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(Begin Tape 1; Side 1)

Q: WHY DON'T YOU JUST INTRODUCE YOUR NAME AND WHERE YOU'RE FROM?

A: Yes, I'm Odette Meyers and I was born in Paris and my parents had migrated from Poland. My mother from **Warsaw**, my father from **Tomoshof**. They were working class people. We lived in a working class neighborhood. Mostly Jewish neighborhood, the 11th arrondissement had most the majority of foreign born Jews who lived in that neighborhood, but in our particular street, our particular few blocks, there were very few Jews. So it ended up that I went to a school where I was the only Jew. However, I could walk through, you know, three or four blocks in any direction and be totally immersed in the Yiddish speaking Jewish world.

Q: DID YOUR PARENTS SPEAK YIDDISH?

A: Yes, and actually that was my native tongue, my first tongue. They were not religious. They were what they call cultural Jews, but they were deeply, deeply Jewish. They went to all the cultural things. They belonged to Jewish organizations. They were very involved with the libraries reading place, everything of that kind. They were also very involved in following the politics. In that way I know there were some Jews who didn't know what was going on. It wasn't the case with my parents because they really carefully read newspapers, listened to the radio, talked with their friends, so they were aware of what went on politically. So that was the background in my, I had aunts and uncles, cousins, friends, neighbors, it was a very warm, very very warm milieu, a lot of visiting each other, and so on. I was particularly close to my

aunts and uncles on one side. They were five cousins that I was extremely close to. So that was how it was and then

Q: THEN YOU WERE THEY ONLY CHILD?

A: I was the only child. Then when I was only five, my father joined the army. The war started and my father went to volunteer to join the French Army and it was the day after the declaration of war. Ninety-eight percent of the volunteers were Jews from eastern Europe. Foreign Jews.

Q: IN THE FRENCH ARMY?

A: who volunteered immediately to join the French army to fight Fascism and so on. Then he was not taken right away, but almost to basic training and all that and then to his disappointment, he was told he had to be in the Polish part. The Polish brigade something. The Polish army that was functioning within the French army, which he was not looking forward to, as he left Poland because Poland was too anti-semitic and instead he finds himself a soldier with Polish superiors, but

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY THERE WAS A POLISH SECTION FOR THE FRENCH ARMY?

A: France had come to the help of Poland after Poland had been defeated and the Polish army had then been come to exile in France and was under the protection of the French army. They were incorporated in the French army, so they were actually were under the, treated the same way and so on and so on. They had French generals and captains that had subordinate kind of positions, but the reason they

had all those Jews, all those Polish Jews, transferred to the Polish officers is that there were no soldiers, only the officers had left Poland. They needed soldiers, so they were given all those Jewish soldiers, Jewish volunteers. So that's what happened and then the army, as my father tells, was really betrayed and they were because the collaboration was happening on its way, etc.

Q: FROM WITHIN?

A: from within, from within the government. They were given over to the, they were taken into captivity by the Germans without even fighting. That was very upsetting to him. He really wanted to go fight. He was in the camp in a prison, in (70) **Redden**, Brittany, in France for about a year and then was transferred to Germany.

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY, JUST BASICALLY WHY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD WANT TO SORT OF TRADE AWAY THEIR OWN ARMY, WHY WOULD THEY BETRAY THEIR VERY OWN ARMY TO THE GERMANS?

A: That's complicated. The French collaboration is very complicated to explain because we had an army man, **Bychartiena**, who became the head of the Vichy collaborating government, but they really somehow or other thought that they could have arrangements with the Germans. They thought they could make a deal that would keep France in a state of peace and that they would have some autonomy. But the French soldiers, prisoners of war numbered but a **billion and a half (84)** or something like that and they were used as barbers. They were to, then came the Jews. Between the negotiations between the collaborating government and the German occupants where over the prisoners and the Jews, the French prisoners and the Jews. Later on the Germans would say, "Well, if you want

some of your prisoners back, give us Jews." So that became a game and my father was **opposed. (91)**

Q: SO YOU **MEAN PEACE WITH THAT GAIN? (93)**

A: We were somehow or other fitted on all sides in that situation.

Q: YOUR YOUR MOTHER'S IN ALL THIS?

A: I saw my mother immediately join the resistance and the general resistance was a little slow. The Jewish resistance was faster than the first, of course were the women. So, they organized. This was not yet the armed resistance, but the resistance in terms of organizing some sort of response, mutual help, saving the children, hiding the children and so on. Getting a network of communication, **giving** anybody they could across the frontier, so on. Later on, it would, when the armed forces, the armed forces got organized, the Jews joined that too. Then the Jewish resistance group had liaisons with the French resistance and sometimes worked totally within it, but there was a Jewish resistance in Paris.

Q: YOU SPOKE ABOUT THE WOMEN BEGINING TO ORGANIZE FIRST. WERE THOSE JEWISH WOMEN AND GENTILE WOMEN **WHO WERE HELPING EACH OTHER? (109)**

A: Jewish women. At the beginning there were the Jewish women although they quickly assessed the situation and noted who were the Gentile women who would collaborate with them to save children, for instance. There was great cooperation

between the mothers, the women on the middle of the children. A lot of children were saved really though that.

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE BIT HOW MUCH THE PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD BY THE TIME, SORT OF A LITTLE BIT THE PROGRESSION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WAS GOING ON? YOU SAID YOUR PARENTS WERE PARTICULARLY WELL INFORMED, BUT WHAT WAS THE GENERAL SITUATION FOR PEOPLE IN FRANCE TO UNDERSTAND, THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

A: At first, I think people did not understand, the French included. They thought that they were disappointed that the army was defeated and all that but, they thought that there was some kind of armistice or some kind of peace. The Germans in Paris, German soldiers when they first came to Paris were very polite and very nice. They had sandals (127) and spoke French first, so there was feeling that maybe after the war it would not be so bad and people. There was very dangerous in the long run it turned out because people did not run away then who could have at that time. They thought, "well maybe it's not so bad." We can cope with it. Then people got caught up with, you know, food was rationed. There were all kinds of problems. People got caught up in the daily life struggle where they verginary (134). So some people were just like that, but then things got worse. Then things turned. Then Germans began to be rude and (laughter) all of a sudden they didn't speak French so well. You know, the French soldiers who had been in prison in France were sent to Germany. There were concentration camps in France and actually, quite a few more than a dozen. They were beginning to be used for people that the Germans had caught in reprisals, arrested for political reasons and then Jews. That was close. That wasn't Germany. That was right on our territory.

Transneed, the worst of the camps, there were others, was just right outside of Paris, so it wasn't, it was like the Germans in Germany, you know it was like was somebody knew, of course people knew what it was like and some people managed to be liberated. The Jewish organization did their very best to have some contact with the inmates of the camps in France by saying they needed to bring social services, medical assistance, help to orphans, what ever Jewish organizations were set up to do. They did have access to camps and they did bring food and so on. Of course they came out with quite a bit of information. They tried their best to lodge formal complaints with the bureaucracy and all that. So, that you know that was pretty soon. That was 41 when those camps were already functioning and things got worse and worse, but the consciousness of the camps was there and you know, you knew that so and so was sent to this camp or that camp so.

Q: WITHIN FRANCE?

A: Within France, so the French knew there was no question about it. Then they also, of course, very quickly knew all the restrictions against the Jews. They're very anti-semitic people as a whole, not all of them, but the French, popularized, but those were anti-semitic very strongly anti-semitic. Part of it is because, as it is a Catholic country and in the most backward part, they're anti-semitic from like medieval kind of thing. But also because the French are very xenophobic. They don't like foreigners of any kind. They particularly do not like foreign Jews. So restrictions affected the French, everything. If it meant like let's say, the French had a thing about 2% quota of Jews in anything is what they worked out.

Q: BEFORE THE GERMANS

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A: No, no after. In all the professions and incidentally, again, there were all the professions that had anything to do with communication, journalism, radio, everything, movies, Jews were excluded. They were excluded **to the (178)** from certain things and then allowed 2% in other things. Like 2% in the universities, if you can imagine, or in teaching and so on. All the professions, the Jews were really there. And of course there was nothing else for them to do once they lost their job. Businesses were taken away from Jews. They fought with the Germans over the French businesses and got the Germans. They won that one. So they.

Q: OTHER FRENCH PEOPLE WERE FIGHTING WITH THE GERMANS OVER THE JEWISH BUSINESSES?

A: We had something like 20 statutes, you know, limitations that related to Jews. Only 8 of them were from the Germans. All the others were from the Vichy government. And they were more serious than were the German thing. They were more serious.

Q: SO WAS THIS HAPPENING SIMULTANEOUSLY THAT THE GERMANS WERE GETTING RUDER AND THE FRENCH WERE COMING UP WITH MORE OF THEIR OWN RESTRICTIONS? IT WAS HAPPENING HAND IN HAND.

A: Yes, and very very quickly at a maddening speed because we had about 14 months. All the restricted laws that German Jews endured over a period of eight years, we had them in fourteen months. You woke up one day you didn't know what you were not supposed to do. Travel was restricted, curfew on Jews, interdictions. You could not go to any public place. That meant no movie, no restaurant, nothing. You could not mix with the French populace. You couldn't go to stores, etc. at certain particular

hours, which were very inconvenient. Only if your boss let you off of work you could go shopping. Other wise it was a problem. Certainly, you couldn't go to the theater, and so on. And there were signs that said, in parks or playgrounds, that said "forbidden to dogs and Jews". So naturally, we knew, you know, under the circumstances, it was obvious that our situation was different.

Q: BUT IT HAD BEEN SO FAST. HOW DID IT AFFECT THE SPIRITS OF THE PEOPLE TO HAVE THESE WALLS PUT UP, ERECTED ALMOST OVERNIGHT? DID PEOPLE FEEL IMMEDIATELY DEPRESSED ABOUT THEIR SITUATION OR, THE JEWISH PEOPLE WHO WERE HAVING TO LIVE UNDER ALL THESE RESTRICTIONS, HOW DID THEY REACT TO SUCH STRENUOUS RESTRAINTS?

A: Now, I was too young. I was five and all that. Five, six, or, but my mother was in that resistance group, first the Jewish women and then another one. Told me that one of the things the Jewish women resistance group did was kind of social work with Jewish women whose husbands were taken, either prisoner or deported or whatever and they were at a loss as to what to do. They were falling apart and my mother said, my mother worked since she was nine in the world for a living, said these were women who had never worked in their lives. She said she felt very sorry for them because they didn't know how to cope. They weren't used to solving problems. They were used to having their husband there and bring in a salary and take care of them and the family. They were, some of them went crazy. I mean they really did not know what to do. It was too much for them to manage, so that those working class women would go and try to tell them how to literally to do the daily survival thing. My mother said the worst of all was to convince these women to part with their children so that the children be saved because then they would say, "But I have nobody, but

this my child. My husband is gone." They were at a loss. Yes. Those people suffered that one.

BREAK

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I think we are getting close to the worst of the trouble.

Q: YOU MENTIONED ALL THE RESTRICTIONS THE VICHY GOVERNMENT ADDED IN ADDITION TO THE GERMANS. HOW DID THAT AFFECT YOU AS A SCHOOL CHILD? WERE YOU IN SCHOOL ALREADY?

A: Yes, I was already. I got to first grade when the restrictions were at their worst. The worst trouble was when we had to wear a star, yellow star. You had to, everybody over six years old had to wear it. So, I had to wear it and you know, you couldn't hide it. If you tried to hide it, then you weren't, you know. What would happen, you began to get this feeling that whatever it was, even I as a child, it was death or near death, or disappearance. A lot of people were going away. A lot of people disappeared. That's the other thing I remember as a child, incidentally. I would ask my mother, "Are we going to visit so and so?" and she says, "They're gone." Each time I was wondering if there anybody left. Wearing the star was a problem and especially since I was the only Jew in my school. So that when I came there the first day with the star, they began to scream at me to go back to Palestine and since I had not been raised in a religious way, I didn't, I thought Palestine meant Jesus. I couldn't understand. I said, "I'm a Jew, I'm not a Christian. Why should I go back to Palestine?" I didn't even comprehend it. They continued. Finally they got violent,

Q: THE OTHER SCHOOL CHILDREN?

A: The other school children. We had in the schools, we had, it was in Europe the toilets were not toilet seats, they were, it was called a Turkish toilet, like holes in the ground. They finally beat me up and pushed my head in the toilet. I woke up in the infirmary and then the teachers, principals that I always had to be with a teacher. So the rest of time, I could not play during recess with the other children. The adults were protective, but I don't know if they said anything to the children. I'll never know, but I knew from that hour, that was very clear that I was not safe with my peers.

Q: OF COURSE YOU WERE JUST BEGINNING SCHOOL SO YOU DIDN'T HAVE THAT MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH THE CHILDREN BEFORE, BUT HAD YOU BEEN FRIENDS BEFORE?

A: Yes, yes, oh yes. I did. Oh yes. I did because the preschool, kindergarten preschool, was in the same building.

Q: THE SAME CHILDREN?

A: So yes, those were the same children. It was very hurt. That really hurt my feelings. It really stunned me, actually. It really did stun me because those were children I had enjoyed being with and so on.

Q: COULD YOU SAY SOMETHING LIKE, MARIE, WHAT HAPPENED OR IT'S SO STRANGE TO HAVE SOMEONE'S PLAYMATES TURN ON THEM." DID YOU EVER HAVE A CHANCE TO SAY "WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?"

A: No. Those were days in which people didn't talk things out. The other thing, the other memory I have of the star, and it's funny because in truth, we didn't wear it so

long. But it seemed like a long time. It really did. So it must have been **rude** to do when you walked outside in the street with the star, then you were a moving target. The world did feel different even to a child, as I was seven. One time I was walking to school and across the, on the other side where German soldiers very very noisy. I thought they were drunk and noisy and I got scared. I thought, "I'm Jewish", I took my satchel and covered the star, which was against the rule. They came over there and they were giants to me. They were laughing and they were crude, and they were rude always. Then they pulled the satchel, I remember feeling, "This is it. This is the end. I will never see my mother again, nobody I'm finished." They didn't, but they just laughed and they left me alone. However, behind me was an old Jewish woman. Like Jewish women, even the French women would wear buns in those days, the older ladies, buns. They took her, no provocation, they took her her hair and pulled her in the sewer by the hair. Just behind me, you know.

Q: AT THE SAME INCIDENT?

A: The same incident, yes. That was really marked in my memory. I can really see every time I go back to Paris, I see, I go to that spot and I see it. I remember feeling too, as a child, whatever, that this was a piece of yellow cloth that was causing us all that problem, those problems and if I ever get out of it I want to have a gold star of David. Actually I never did. I got silver one, now that I think of it. At my age, one of these days, I have to get a gold one. I don't. I know I thought. But that's what I told my self because gold was the yellow. So that's it and I have to go to school.

Q: DID YOU TELL YOUR MOTHER, "OH MAMA , PLEASE TAKE THE STAR OFF TODAY, OR YOU UNDERSTOOD SOMEHOW THAT IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS TO WEAR IT OR NOT WEAR IT IT SEEMS."

A: Yes. You had to wear it.

Q: JUST BECAUSE THEY KNEW EVERYONE WHO THE JEWS WERE SO THERE WAS REALLY NO HIDING.

A: Well, if you didn't wear it you were immediately taken. It was absolutely against the law not to wear it. Now there were Jews who didn't, but they were taking a lot of risk because if you registered, you had to register and you had to pay for it, to pay for the stars and to wear it and it could not have one stitch loose. You had to wear it all the time. If you didn't, then you could be denounced and since there were so many collaborators, and there were people who were, it wasn't that they were committing care about politics, like the olden new way people. What they discovered was if Jews disappeared, then they could go in and take their apartment, or take their furniture or take their business. So they began to sort of like the idea of Jews disappearing and not necessarily checking into as to what happened to the Jews. That was one reason why so many Jews were denounced, were over objects that my mother told me. There was a family, an entire Jewish family who was in our neighborhood who was denounced for a radio. They never came back. So there was that going on among the French population. The Germans stirred the worst. They stirred up a little greed and this was very dangerous to Jews.

Q: SO IT WAS CLEAR TO ALL OF THE JEWS THAT YOU COULDN'T TRUST EVEN MAYBE PEOPLE THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY TRUSTED. YOU NEVER KNEW HOW MUCH GREED HAD BEEN STIRRED UP FOR?

A: Yes, that's right. It wasn't a question of ideology. It wasn't a question of saying "What do you have against Jews? Why are you anti-semitic?" There was anti-semitism, but I don't think they were among the intellectuals, but among the people. It wasn't that well reasoned.

Q: IT WAS JUST RADIOS AND APARTMENTS?

A: Something nice. They didn't like Jews that funny accents, or they spoke in a language they didn't understand. Something like that. They didn't go to church, so they were pagans. Generally speaking, they could do without the Jews, or they were everywhere, they were ... that kind of thing. But, it wasn't anything you could defend yourself with, with words, you know.

Q: SO THEN YOU WERE GOING TO SCHOOL AND YOUR FATHER HAD, OF COURSE, BEEN TAKEN VERY EARLY, AND YOUR MOTHER WAS DOING THIS KIND OF RESISTANCE WORK. WAS HER RESISTANCE WORK ALREADY, WHAT YOU WOULD CALL DANGEROUS AT THAT POINT, THE FACT THAT SHE WAS DOING THAT, (391) (COULDN'T HEAR ALL) YOUR MOTHER WAS (392) GOING PLACES AND DOING THINGS?

A: Yes, there people knocking at the door, code words, password. They would come in and talk in whispers. One thing I would do as a child. It was very important to me throughout, I know other children had similar experiences, is they would say, they would look at me because I was a child and my mother would say "That's all right. You can talk in front of her. She can keep secrets." I was very proud that I could keep secrets and of course, this was very important in our survival to keep secrets.

You know Jewish children who went into hiding with a false name and false identify that they did not tell. They were some who were 2 - 3 years old. They were told not to tell, no matter what, that they were Jewish and they did not tell. I believe strongly that one reason, one we were aware of danger no matter how young, two there was a sense of solidarity with the adults, with our mothers. Most of our fathers were not around. But with our mothers, you know, to help, and since we couldn't help in grown up ways, one way we could help was in following instructions, so to speak and if we were told not to tell this, we wouldn't tell that, to give this story, we would do it and to know that the adults we loved and trusted and took care of us, could count on us. That, I think is the interesting thing in that it seems I've never seen anything contrary to that. 422

(does she mean comparable instead of contrary?)

Q: DID YOUR MOTHER ACTUALLY TELL YOU NOW, "IF THEY ASK YOU, YOU SAY THIS", OR WERE YOU JUST TOLD TO SAY THAT YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON? IN OTHER WORDS, PEOPLE WERE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR AND THE RESISTANCE WORK. DID SHE EXPLAIN TO YOU IF ANYONE QUESTIONED YOU WHAT YOU WERE TO DO OR DID SHE JUST SAY "SAY THAT YOU KNOW NOTHING?" HOW DID SHE TELL YOU TO HANDLE?

A: I don't exactly remember. I knew this was secret, it does not go out of the house under any conditions, whatever it is.

Q: SIMPLY KEEP YOUR PEACE AND NOT SAY ANYTHING.

A: Yes. You know, although even then the people did not tell their true names and sometimes they did not know each other's true names. There was a great deal of

caution in the resistance, but still. Listening to the BBC secretly and stuff. There was all that. Yes it was dangerous and it became more and more dangerous. Then July '42, mid July '42 we had a surprise, we had had some before, but we had a surprise round up.

Q: HAD YOU BEEN IN SCHOOL UP UNTIL THIS TIME? AND THINGS HAD BEEN BASICALLY FAIRLY NORMAL AS FAR AS YOUR OWN EVERY DAY LIFE BEFORE THIS? EXCEPT FOR ALL THIS, RESISTANCE?

A: Yeah. The danger because there had been the round ups and people had been taken away and so on. Then one morning they came at a very at dawn and they were not the Germans. There were very few Germans among them, but they were the French police. The French police it turned out was more, more merciless than the Germans. When they rounded up the Jews in Paris that day, they took everyone and that meant everyone that meant, there were women giving birth they took them in trucks. There were people dying. There people dead you know on a given morning anything can happen. There were people and so on. They took everybody they could get hold of. There was no mercy. It was a terrible thing because it had been, it was the first time they took children in the round ups. Before it had been more selective and for the French population even to see it did have an impact, but not did not help the Jews, but it did do something to the French in the area. They figured what was going to happen to us, kind of thing. But the Jews were left abandoned. In Paris, we were left saved because of my concierge, who lived downstairs and was an absolutely wonderful person. She is 483 a righteous gentile. She got us out of bed, she had just, what are the words? I don't think she slept well those days out of protectiveness, but because it was so early that five o'clock in the morning they were coming by trucks. She managed, she had got us

out of bed and said "They are coming for you, you know, they are up the streets and trucks." She got us in put us in a closet. Incidentally we got

Q: IN YOUR OWN APARTMENT?

A: No, no. In hers. In hers, which was downstairs. She was like the manager. We had our **stuff (495)** **star?** because we had to have **stuff** and everything. Put us in a closet and then they came.. The minute they came, wonderful lady, looked very typical of a concierge, very round and everything. She said, "How wonderful, you're coming for the Jews. What a good thing to do. Please come in and have a drink. It's such a drag

Q: AT 5:00 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING (LAUGHTER) 503

A: Right. I have my best drink from my country. They always **504** **fay** foresee the French about a particular place where they have a particular cheese or wine. And she told them. She told them all kind of anti-semitic things and flattered them and said what a job and this and that and at last France would be rid of Jews and what not. She carried on so well that actually I think they were glad to be so nicely welcomed and they did sit down and she did serve them to drink and all seemed to be o.k. and she was joking and then at one time though, it was very dangerous business to do, you know. At one time one of them said "Hey, lady, if you didn't tell us the truth", because, she had said "Oh, those Jews you know, now there gone. They're gone to the country. You know, they have a countryhouse. All Jews pretend to be poor, but they really are rich and they have property all over. They're gone." Then they sense, this guy says "Hey, we're going to the apartment and see if you told us the truth and if you didn't you have the same fate as the Jews. You go out." She

started a whole other thing of anti-semitic insult kind of thing about Jews not being good housekeepers and how terrible and the French and the Germans are such clean people. she had to hold up her own nose when she's at our door. Anyway, she carried on in such a way, they forgot. They stopped and had another drink. By the time they left, we were saved, but also on our block there was no Jew that was taken. There were a few other Jews in another building. They were connected through courtyards. There's just left enough time for them to also hide or do something. On the other side, they were all taken. Not many, but there were taken. There was a businessman and so on. So, they were taken from the French I mean you know, commotion, people look out and they didn't do anything. Then this woman's husband took me to the station, subway station, so without the star and to a train station and there I made up, this was a pre-arranged plan in case of such event, that he was supposed to bring me there and there were three other girls, Jewish girls and they were to be brought by so and so, Gentile also, to a train station and one Gentile woman was to escort us to a village in **Vondee** 559

deep into very, very backward, very Catholic, very medieval kind of French country to a particular home, who was taking in Jewish children. So, we were there and all four of us a pre-arranged, we were escorted. Somebody came on the train with us and at that point, of course, I don't know exactly what point, but before we got on the train that were were told, not to say we were Jewish. Then we arrived in the country.

Q: BUT SHE TOOK YOU JUST TO THE SUBWAY STATION?

A: They took me to the sub. No, from the subway it went also to a train station, deposited and made sure there was a relay and there were other people taking care of the rest. But we were all four of us. The oldest was 8 and two of us were 7 and one was 2.

Q: TWO YEARS OLD?

A: She was a sister of another one. We arrived there in this little very small town. The house where we were to stay was facing a seminary, a very famous seminary and the church was up the street. There was a calvary, you know on this side and a nun's school like, almost two blocks from us. We were really in Catholic territory.

Q: A CALVARY MEANS A?

A: Well, it was a, no, it was the a cross that you prayed at. You stopped and all. You
call 602 it a shrine. Then we were taught to **603**
 it. She took us, a very clever, you know those sort of the earth people. She took us
 in all four from the train station. We went through the house. It was not a large
 house. In the room where they ate and cooked and everything, was relatively large,
 we saw there was a meal being cooked. It smelled good. She pointed it to us,
 "There's a meal." Then took us to the yard and in the backyard there were pigeons in
 cages and rabbit. She didn't say anything. She showed us these things. Then she
 took us upstairs to the room and locked us in the room and said, "Now I am going to
 tell you something. You will have to learn something. When you have learned them,
 you can go down and have a good meal and play with the pigeons and the rabbits,
 but not before. She said, "You're going to learn what your story is. Each one tell
 what your story is, your false story". because she knew, o.k. what. We learned the
 sign of the cross, pater nostrum and ave maria, the major prayers. Then she said,
 except for the little one, who was two, who would be kept at home. She had two
 children own her own. The three of us, the bigger ones, would then the next day be
 sent to convent school. She said, "I'm going to tell the principal, the mother superior,

that you were traumatized in a bombardment. That you were really shaken us by that and by separation from your parents and not to expect you to act normally for a couple of weeks. During this time, don't ask questions, pay attention, learn everything and when you come home, you ask me questions. She said in two weeks, though, that's it. You're going to act like Catholic girls, as though you had been Catholic all your life. You have two weeks to learn and you better pay attention. So that's it. So we did it. We went down and had a good meal, we played and so on and we went to Catholic school."

Q: DID YOU WORRY, "OH MAYBE I'LL FORGET MY PRAYERS, OR I WON'T LEARN IT RIGHT?"

A: Oh, yeah. Those first two weeks were really like initiation. My God, seemed so complicated. The thing, the hardest time figuring out was the concept of the Trinity, which I think I never understood.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE GOING TO GO THEN YOU'LL BE GETTING CATECHISM, YOU'D BE GETTING ALL THIS STUFF. THEY ASSUMED YOU KNOW QUITE A LOT ALREADY.

A: Yes, of course. And of course, we had been baptized in the

685 Yes.

Q: YOU'D BE HAVE TO BE TAKING COMMUNION AND GOING EVERY DAY TO THE CHURCH AND ALL THESE KINLDS OF THINGS?

A: Yes.

Q: SO YOU WOULD COME HOME AND DID YOU HAVE QUESTIONS FOR THE MOTHER AND HOW DID YOU DO?

A: Yes. What that bird was, the holy ghost or something. I couldn't understand if that had anything to do with a pigeons in the backyard. But that was very difficult to understand. Other wise I loved it. I must say that I absolutely loved everything connected to the Catholic religion otherwise, except the other thing that was hard to understand, was the concept of hell. Of course, even though I was not brought up in

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(End Tape 1; Side 1)

(Begin Tape 1; Side 2)

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were a religious room.. You know, hair was not the Jewish thing, trinity or holy ghost. So I, in retrospect, I realized that the things I found harder to accept were things that were alien to Judaism, even though I was, had not been raised in it. But I did like, at home we, all the literature the totality of literature in that county there was the lives of the saints. I knew all them all, whether they had their head chopped off or whatever

Q: SO HOW ABOUT THE OTHER TWO GIRLS? DID THEY ALSO DO ALLRIGHT? DIID THEY LEARN WHAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO, TO HELP EACH OTHER, OR FORM ANY KIND OF A FRIENDSHIP WITH EACH OTHER?

A: Yeah. Yes, yes In fact, the two year, the one was two years older than the sister were in one room together, I see all the time, every time I go to Paris. We did form a bond for life. The other one did not fare so well. The one who was my age and we shared a bed. Once she did, she was traumatized. I don't quite know, I think she, indeed had in a bombardment. I'm not sure.

Q: BUT SHE WAS JEWISH?

A: She was Jewish. She had, she discovered, we discovered sin, you know that didn't exist in our background. She was a little chubby. She loved candy and so so she had a thing about gluttony, discovered the sin of gluttony. She used to have convulsions over of guilt that she could not resist candy and so on. She would go into fits. She was a, she really had problems, but she was very good hearted. We were close. What she did was every night she said, we went by our window, which came over the seminary,

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statue of the virgin Mary behind, there was flowers all around and everything. She would say, "Do you remember your mother?" I said "Yeah." So you have to have a picture of your mother in you mind, yes. It was a ritual. So, she said "Ask her to forgive you for all you sins." We went though all of that. How about your father, that was harder to remember him but I had a photo of him as a soldier in my mind

29. So you had to forgive. Then she would do that. Then she would hug and say, "Well, if something happens and we are dead during the night, I just want to say goodbye to you and hope that we find each other in paradise. So every night, fell asleep and figured, well maybe won't wake up, but then when the morning would wake up, I saw that this is paradise, where am I? Then I would look for a chest of drawers because I had all kinds of descriptions of paradise, but it didn't have any chest of drawers. When I saw the chest of drawers then I thought that's all enough for now.

Q: NOT YET?

A: Not yet. I'm still here. This went on for eight months. Every night, incidentally, we had this ritual. She did not fare well later on. She was one of the, she got very frightened of the world. She did fine as long she was inside the home. She did get married and have three children. It was o.k. as long as those children were little. When they started going to school was difficult. If she had to go out and eventually she was in and out of institution and still is.

Q: SO SHE DIDN'T DO WELL?

A: She did not do well. I never saw here again.

Q: AND THE OTHER WOMAN YOU KEPT UP WITH AND THE TWO YEAR OLD?

A: They're fine. The two year old had problems after the war was poor dear because then she was four, five years old then after the war. Because in that village and everywhere around the important food was beans and then meat. For meat it was pork. It happened that her parents were religious. She was so little and we adapted. It was a big thing. Pig every kind of thing, sausage everything. When we came back to Paris her father was also a prisoner of war and he came back, like mine. When the father, the mother was there, the father came back she had her sister. She was so thrilled to have her parents like everybody. The mother was so happy said, "I will make you anything you want to eat. What do you want to eat?" So she asked for pork. Immediately the mother said, "How can you a Jewish child say that?" The child was so upset that she would not eat anything at all. she stopped eating. They had to take her to a childrens' hospital. They kept her there. They sent her to a sanatorium where they said, they offered her some ham. "Here's some nice ham." So the poor child was very confused. It was harder. We had a lot of problems after the war.

Q: BUT YOU COULDN'T EVEN THROUGH ALL THAT SHE HAD SOMEHOW REMEMBERED HER PARENTS?

A: Oh, the parents was no problem remembering I think for any of us, whether you ate pork or not may have slipped some of our minds.

Q: SO YOU COULDN'T OF COURSE THOUGH HAVE LETTERS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT FROM YOU PARENTS? NO COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR PARENTS?

A: Oh, yeah. Our mothers were in Paris, could write, sure. My mother visited once. Later on my mother actually moved. I left this home and then went to live with my mother in another village. We had a false identity, another one, which caused problems because, you know. But that happened often that you, it wasn't just one identity, but you had to keep on changing.

Q: YOU HAD TO REMEMBER WHO YOU WERE?

A: You had to remember that sometimes somebody came around who knew something about you, who had seen you in your other life. Then you were in trouble.

Q: WHO HAD BEEN TAKING CARE OF YOUR MOTHER IN PARIS?

A: She took care of, oh God, well the concierge was there, thank God.

Q: BUT DID SHE STAY IN YOUR OLD APARTMENT?

A: No. She couldn't even do that. It was too dangerous. She was working, one to make her living, two was working in the resistance and the work intensified on the resistance front and also became more dangerous. That point was also a question of getting money and arms for the underground. She was collecting funds. Also got involved making, they weren't false identity cards. They were identify cards from the dying. When somebody died, she would be called to go there and get the cards and all the papers from the family and then it would be transferred to someone in the underground. It was extremely dangerous and especially since she was Jewish not wearing the star. She could be arrested on any count. She was arrested a couple times, released by whatever, a miracle. It was getting worse and a lot of the people

she was working with just, were arrested and sent to camp and never came back. Then she felt like, the few survivors had to double. They had to do more work. They had to do everything. It was very hard. She didn't get to come back to our home very often. She would sleep in shops where she worked. She could only work with Jews because there were no, yeah and there were very few Jews left. Those were left were Jews with special dispensation because of what they were doing in the garment trade was useful to the Germans or they were French Jews who still had some dispensations.

Q: SO SOMEHOW SHE COULD STILL DO SOME KIND OF SERVICES WHERE THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO GIVE HER SOME KIND OF SOME MONIES THOUGH? SHE WOULD BE ABLE TO THE ?

A: Yeah, she was able to get some money. Otherwise, but I mean like she slept sometimes in **closets or awake** **108** was her bed in a closet. She had another place where there were rats and things like that. If she ever went to her own apartment, it was only at night and she never turned on the light and it was only after our concierge, Madame Marie would say it's o.k. She would go pick up the mail. This wonderful concierge also turned into a kind of message headquarters for my mother and those people in the resistance.

Q: SO SHE WAS KIND OF A PART OF THE RESISTANCE?

A: She sent packages to people in camps and she did everything she could. She was very wonderful.

Q: BECAUSE SHE THOUGHT IT WAS THE RIGHT THING OR SHE JUST?

A: Yeah, right. Yeah, she just.

Q: SHE HAD NO CHILDREN OF HER OWN?

A: She had no children of her own and for long reasons, but she got attached to me. she knew me since I was a baby. I was the only child in the house at the time. She decided I was her godchild, so she adopted me as her godchild. I had the holy medals on my crib blanket. But she didn't impose her religion at all. She was very Catholic. She just she said I had to have a blanket with holy medals in it so I could be protected when I was away from her, otherwise she took care of me.

Q: SO WHEN YOU CAME AND SAW HER AGAIN EVENTUALLY, DID YOU SAY THE PATER NOSTROM FOR HER AND DEMONSTRATE ALL YOUR NEW FOUND

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A: No. She would think it would be foolish. She would just want me to be back to my own identity. No she just said.

Q: SO HOW DID PEOPLE GO ABOUT NETWORKING SO THAT YOU COULD FIND SUCH A PLACE FOR YOU TO STAY IN THE FIRST PLACE AND THEN I GUESS YOU FOUND ANOTHER PLACE?

A: Well, there are all kinds of ironies. For instance, my mother, who was in the resistance and involved in this kind of thing, in networking, through groups, resistance, the French resistance were enough to provide gentile addresses of gentile people who could be trusted to take in and the Jewish organizations that had

ways of making sure this was alright of getting the children there. It was extremely complicated and changed throughout the war because circumstances change but as it happened it is just like the shoemaker who didn't have shoes.. My mother, our situation was not directly connected to the resistance. It was very accidentally so. It was a chain of personal thing, although no one, somebody send their child to this person in the country. Somebody who was known of somebody, my family or friends or somebody. So the risk was taken, but it was not like it had been approved by any organization. That was o.k. When we were on our own we did run into a lot of problems because my mother changed her name and pretended to be Check because she has a Yiddish accent. I was French, born in France. I didn't have any problem. I was Catholic. I knew what to do in church. She didn't know anything. I had to teach her things like that. She passed me off as an illegitimate child which was its own problem.

Q: IS THAT THE SECOND PLACE YOU TRIED TO

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A: Yeah, then I had another story at that point I didn't officially have a father. Oh, I forget who my father was, but my mother had conceived me in sin and all that. She thought it would simplify things, but it got me some beatings for being a bastard child. That was just a side affect of the whole thing. We were denounced, that is we were denounced on the suspicion that we were Jewish.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THIS ILLIGITIMATE OTHER

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A: Yes, in that other village complicated thing and we were going to be taken to the Gestapo.

Q: DID YOU KNOW WHO DENOUNCED YOU?

A: Yes. It was a fourteen old orphan, illegitimate kid. There was the complications of village life. He was jealous.

Q: HE WAS JEALOUS BECAUSE?

A: Jealous, well I had my mother. He didn't. He was raised by a stranger something like that. That's what happened. He was working with, all the complications, all the intrigues of village life. Nevertheless it was very dangerous. We were

Q: HE DID GO TO THE POLICE?

A: Yeah. The Gestapo, no police. There, the place was full of Germans, German soldiers.

Q: EVEN THOUGH IT A COUNTRY? THEY WERE JUST 181

A: No, because it was the country and because they were so poor German and so anti-semitic and so collaborationist that it was a privileged area for German soldier who were shell shocked or something, who had gone through a battle. They were sent to recuperate in this particular place. The food was terrific and but the peasants were very pro-German.

Q: SO IT WAS A VERY DANGEROUS PLACE TO BE?

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A: Very dangerous. It was a lion's den. It was a lion's den. They were so anti-semitic, it was medieval. Like if you let a Jew, what did they say? If a Jew cross the threshold of your house even if you didn't know he was Jewish because you couldn't tell. See you couldn't tell a Jew from a non-Jew. It was hard to tell Jews. That proved that Jews were the instruments of Satan because it was an ideal thing for the devil to be disguised, always distracting and so on. He used Jews for that. If a Jew so much as crossed the threshold of your house, you would know that you're dealing with a Jew because someone in your family would die. It was back to thing about Jews bringing death, aside from having killed Christ. I mean, you know there was poisoning wells and so on. It was that kind of a place. It was just so **andrs?** 201

Very backward. It was like Colonial America, cooking in the fireplace. No electricity, nothing. So that was.

Q: HOW LONG WERE YOU IN THAT LION'S DEN OF A VILLAGE?

A: Well you see, the two years were were only 8 kilometers away. But the one where we were in the first place was a little more civilized because it was one of the holy cities of France. It's full of seminaries, as I told you. It's famous for turning out priests. But where we were in the village they were not that spiritual (laughter) but, they were very anti-semitic. It was very very bad. We had a couple of close calls and then we also got quite alienated and I got very beaten up and they wanted to drown me.

Q: THEY WANTED TO DROWN YOU?

A: to drown me. Yeah. It was near

Q: THE YILLAGERS?

A: The children. I was near a little river, wide river but still

Q:

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A: Something you could be drowned in. They took herds of them in the **mass mania**

220. The thing that set it off was our landlord's son who had T.B. when we arrived in the village had died. That therefore proved their suspicion since we occupied the house that belonged to the landlord, that we were Jewish and we had caused the death of that person. So they came for revenge. I managed to get away from being drowned. However, I found out, when I went back forty years later, that he was the biggest, he was about 18, a boy who led the idea of drowning me had shortly after we left, drowned a child. So there was some disorder. I mean the **other French child,** 233 where it was really dangerous. It was really dangerous. We were helped and rescued again by a Baron, an aristocrat.

Q: CAN I JUST GO BACK TO THE BOY WHO DENOUNCED YOU, THE ORPHAN, FOR A MINUTE? WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE GESTAPO DID THE GESTAPO COME FOR YOU AT THAT TIME?

A: No. They went not to the fourteen old, but to check other people that he had on his side and yes. We were going to be taken on a train. We were hours from that happening when the Baron. Then in comes the Baron who had made himself a mayor of the area. There was a cluster of villages. He was the mayor and he said "These people are not Jews and I have the papers to prove it." which he didn't and we were astonished. He called my mother, there. Then he revealed that he was in

the resistance and my mother revealed her thing, that she was in the resistance.

Then everything was right. He said, "Why didn't you say it before? You would have been under our protection."

Q: WHO WOULD SHE HAVE TOLD?

A: Which is a problem, clandestine life is. You don't know supposed to be cautious. He said immediately had some papers forged. He had a seal of authority, not only as the mayor, but in this very backward area as an aristocrat, an aristocrat who was highly thought of and he was the lord of the area, the baron. They respected, it was an old friend so the church and the aristocracy, church and monarch. So aristocrats were important. The priest was very anti-semitic, vicious, but the Baron who represented the old order was really a great patriot and fought in the resistance. So we were under his protection and that was good, except that it still didn't make life comfortable, social life particularly comfortable.

Q: BUT DID THAT ENABLE YOU TO STAY IN THE VILLAGE THOUGH AFTER HE
ACKNOWLEDGED YOU (274)

A: Yes. We remained in the village. But I didn't, I became a bit wild. I didn't want to go to school. It did affect me.

Q: SO DID THEY JUST FORCE YOU TO GO TO SCHOOL?

A: No. My mother finally did something very risky and took me out of the nun's school and put me in the government school. The government school had a total of thirteen students because it was regarded as pagan. It wasn't a good thing to do and my

mother kept trying to behave properly, but she had had it with nun school. They were very, they what do you call it, they punished harshly.

Q: SO YOU SWITCHED TO THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL AND THEN HOW LONG DID THAT GO ALONG?

A: It was great. It was great. I loved that school, absolutely loved it. It was one of those wonderful teachers, like legendary teachers. She made us, the whole system, she didn't have any grading or anything. What she did was she had a bookcase full of wonderful books. She would read from a book and then one of us, who at the end of the week, had progressed the most got to take out that book to read. She would decide who had, so that everyone of us at one point or other did what we could that week. She was just superb. I don't know what she was doing there.

Q: WAITING FOR YOU?

A: Yeah.

Q: SO HOW LONG THEN DID THAT GO ON? HOW ARE WE DOING ALONG IN THE WAR? HOW FAR HAVE WE GONE?

A: Oh, let's finish. It's enough. Then there was the liberation and all of a sudden the peasants were glad. I don't know why they were glad, but they acted glad. They went in the street, liberation, France. They all became very patriotic and we wanted to go back to Paris, but it took a few months before we could do that because Paris was liberated in August. We couldn't return, physically, because there were roads

you couldn't get train, the road were ruined, bridges and trains weren't running and so on. We didn't get back until October.

Q: HADN'T THEY TAKEN OVER YOUR APARTMENT THOUGH?

A: Ah, when we came back everybody else's apartment had been taken and they were, you know. But not us. No, because our Madame Marie had preserved all the way through. Then we found out that in our absence, she had used the apartment judiciously, of course, as a refuge for Jews or partisans. Years afterwards when I went back to Paris people said "You, Madame Marie. If it weren't for her I wouldn't be alive" and people remember hearing about. She was just splendid. Yeah. When we came back, it took two days which I personally don't remember it. I have certain blocks. I don't remember bombardment. I don't remember going back to Paris. I was ten already, but I don't remember. Then I think out of the subway station because my mother had written to our concierge and said we are coming back and we didn't know exactly when. So two days it took us. It should take a good day. We came out of the subway station and there he was waiting. I don't know long he could have waited. The concierge, her husband was actually waiting there. There was no way we could communicate; we'll be a day late or anything. He was, a few words. She was a real chatterbox. He was a man of few words. He just, we were loaded with food from the country to bring back to Paris. He unloaded things and he greeted us and took us. Our apartment was just the way it was.

Q: SO WHEN DID YOU GET TO SEE YOUR FATHER AGAIN?

A: My father came back in July 15, 1945. Quite late. Quite late because he had been liberated by the Russians in **Pomerania**

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in Germany. But in those days, the Red Army didn't have time to do anything. They would just liberate one camp and go to another and go to another. The prisoners were supposed to manage. Somehow or other, they walked. They were also in enemy territory. So they had to go through all of Germany and eventually and they were so with the cows. My father said the worst was to hear to cows that had not been milked crying out. Germans had abandoned everything. **It was the order.** Bridges were blown up and everything was in ruin. Finally he took months and months and months of tracking with a knapsack and staying here and there in the forest all kinds of dangers. Finally they encountered **atarin 367** Red Cross or something like that who took them to the French border. There they had free passes on French trains as soldiers. Appeared suddenly. Paris. Back home. Then, of course, it seemed very strange to me. I was five when I last saw him and here I was 10, 10 and a half and here was this soldier, French soldier. He was in uniform, who was my father.

Q: SO THEN YOU CONTINUED THE REST OF YOUR GROWING UP YEARS IN THAT APARTMENT? YOU STAYED IN PARIS WITH YOUR FAMILY AND YOU GREW UP?

A: Yes. Yes, we remained there. Though in the meantime we lost a lot of people. Almost all our people left in Poland and in Paris, my aunt and uncle with the five children who had been taken, did not come back. The oldest one, who was 18, a boy, had managed to escape the roundup and joined the underground armed forces and was a hero in the resistance. He's honored as such where he fought. Yeah.

Q: SO WERE YOU ABLE TO GO BACK AND THANK THE ONES THAT HELPED AND SORT OF MAKE PEACE AT SOME LATER TIME WITH THOSE EPISODES OF YOUR CHILDHOOD?

A: Yes, but only recently. Only very recently. Only in 1985. What happened after the war when there was just remnants of the communities that survived. They were very eager. They were fussed so much over the Jewish children who had survived because one and a half Jewish children died during the war in total. The French community lost 80,000 Jews out of a total population of 300,000, but of these 80,000 most of them were foreign Jews. So what happened to foreign Jews. The foreign Jews lost half or more of its population, foreign born Jews. French born Jews had some protection up to a point. So what happened that was strange and wonderful and difficult and strange times, I was getting, we were told to go back to normal. So that was not always easy.

Q: HAVE YOU SHARED THIS STORY WITH YOUR OWN CHILDREN AND FAMILY AS YOUR LIFE HAS PROGRESSED OR IS IT SOMETHING 422

A: Yeah. It changed through the years. I always, always told the story of my rescuer. So that was something. As to more details, my husband was very interested, American born husband was very interested and he read all kinds of books I wouldn't even touch. I didn't want to think about it for years. If somebody asked me I told, but there was the strength of the story of my rescuer. Eventually, and that's why I went in 1984 to Washington D.C. to a conference on rescuers, to tell the story of my Madame Marie and one thing led to the other. They wanted me to tell the children. I would tell the story to the children and say "I was very lucky because I had this wonderful rescuer" and the children in their wisdom said "Well if you were so lucky what

happened to those children who were not lucky?" Then I had to get involved in putting it in perspective, in the larger perspective. That was a whole new era. That has happened to me in the last few years. I have done much of that. I did go back and make my peace with my village in 1985. I told them the truth (laughter). I told them who I was because I came back. They did remember me under my false identity.

Q: THEY DID?

A: Yes, they did. It's astonishing.

Q: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO LEAVE US WITH AND THEN I THINK WE'VE COVERED SO MUCH?

A: I think we've covered a lot, too.

Q: Thanks very much.

A: Sure.

453 . 1 hour and 23 minutes stated length of interview.

(End of tape 1, side 2)