

## **Summary of Oral History: CLAIRE NUER**

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**This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]**

This interview with Claire Nuer (and her daughter translating from French) was carried out in San Francisco at the Holocaust Center in 1992. Clair Nuer was born in 1933, the same year Hitler came to power, in Paris, France. Her name at birth was Clair (Chaya) Nuer. After the Holocaust Claire decided to keep her father's last name to keep the Nuer name alive since he and his parents were killed. Her father, Herschele, was born in Poland and came to Paris in his early twenties. Her mother, Susan Rothman, was born in Paris though her parents came originally from Romania. Claire's father worked as a leather craftsman making shoes and leather bags. Her mother also worked and, therefore, Claire was cared for by a nanny who she called "aunt" Lucie. Lucie was later to save Claire's life in hiding. The family lived in the Jewish "ghetto" in the Marais. As a young child, Claire remembered walking on the weekend with her parents and meeting her parents' friends who spoke in Yiddish to one another. Her father could speak French but not read or write it. Claire described her family as "traditional" in religion. They celebrated the sabbath. Her mother believed in God and still did in 1992. Claire described her father as socially conscious and constantly struggling with God.

Life changed for Claire in 1938. Her mother took her to Poland, and she already felt fear and the need to hide. Her father had tried earlier to get French nationality but was refused. He joined the French army – or some workers' brigade made up of foreign Jews and Spaniards – and was treated like a prisoner. The family continued to live in Paris under horrible conditions. Her father was arrested in the street in 1941 during the first roundup. He was taken to a French internment camp, Beaune-la-Rolande, and was kept there for about a year before being deported to an unknown place during the fifth transport, which after the war, Claire's mother discovered to be Auschwitz. While her father was at Beaune-la-Rolande, her mother was able, occasionally, to visit and to exchange mail. Claire said that her father could have escaped but did not, because he said he did not do anything wrong and because he feared for his family.

Claire's father had earlier elicited a promise from "aunt" Lucie that she would protect Claire and her mother no matter what. In fact, Lucie took Claire to her house to live with her and her daughter and son, about thirty kilometers from Paris, while her mother stayed in Paris to work. She saw her mother only once every other month and then only on the train. Mother and daughter were not allowed to hug. Although safe, life was hard for Claire. She lacked a food coupon and therefore was constantly hungry, and she had to work in the fields. She was frequently confronted in the streets with posters of Jews with large noses and pockets filled with money. Like her mother, she had to wear a Yellow Star, though she frequently covered it with a blouse. Claire briefly attended Catholic school but when they discovered that she was Jewish she was told not to return, probably out of fear of being caught by the Nazis. Meanwhile, her mother continued to live and work in Paris. Her boss allowed her to sleep in the

office three times during the week when it was not safe to be home. In late 1943 Claire's mother was fired. Her mother had a cousin in Brittany who was married to a Catholic who was in the resistance. Claire joined her mother and lived there for the rest of the occupation.

Claire reflected that besides a continuing sense of fear she was left with a sense that she could do anything. For example, she taught French despite the fact that she had no diploma and gave birth to her daughter "naturally" without medication.