

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON JACQUELINE M. BIRN
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Remote CART Captioning

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 17th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Jacqueline Mendels Birn, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2016 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly through mid-August. The museum's website provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. The address is www.ushmm.org.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Jacqueline Mendel Birn's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Jacqueline will share her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Jacqueline questions.

Today's program will be live-streamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's website. All of our April programs have been live-streamed and they are available for you to view at your convenience through our website. Please visit the *First Person* website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

For our web audience, if you would like to use Twitter to ask a question, send a picture, or write a comment during the program, please feel free to do so using #ushmm.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Jacqueline is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

We begin with this portrait of 6-year-old Jacqueline Mendels. Jacqueline was born April 23, 1935, in Paris, France.

France is highlighted on this map of Europe.

Jacqueline was the middle of three children. Here we see Ellen Mendels with two of her three children, daughters Manuela and Jacqueline. Jacqueline is on the right. Ellen was born in Hamburg, Germany. The Mendels lived in Paris and life was quite normal until World War II began.

This is a birthday card that Jacqueline made for her mother in 1941, before the family fled Paris.

Jacqueline's father found two reliable farmers to help the family escape across the demarcation line to the Vichy-controlled Southern zone of France. On this map we see the Northern-occupied and Southern-unoccupied zones in France.

The family lived in the tiny village of Le Got in Southern France for over 29 months. Here we see a contemporary photo of the house where the family hid in two rooms on the upper floor.

After Allied Forces liberated Paris in August 1944, the family resumed their life in Paris. Here we see, from left to right, Manuela and Jacqueline and their mother, Ellen, holding their newborn brother, Franklin, born in 1943.

Jacqueline met her future husband, Richard, in 1957 while he was studying in Paris, and moved to the United States and married in 1958. They lived in New York City where Jacqueline worked as a chemist and Richard taught high school while waiting the required four years to join the Foreign Service because he married a foreign-born person. In order for Richard to join the Foreign Service, Jacqueline had to become an American citizen.

Once Richard began his Foreign Service career, they lived in many places such as Helsinki, Toronto, Hong Kong, Malta and Mexico City, along with several stints in Washington, D.C. Jacqueline worked for the Foreign Service Institute where she taught French and helped prepare Foreign Service Officers going to France or French-speaking countries. Later, Jacqueline trained foreign language instructors.

Both Jacqueline and Richard are now retired. They have two children, Daniel Franklin and Anne Emanuella. They also have a 15-year-old granddaughter whom they enjoy visiting in Toronto, where she lives. She is learning Russian which will be her fourth language.

Jacqueline and Richard live in Bethesda, Maryland. Continuing a family tradition, Jacqueline is an accomplished musician. She is presently the First Cellist Emeritus with the McLean Symphony in McLean, Virginia. She is a member of the Friday Morning Music Club which performs annually at the Kennedy Center and at many other places. She also plays in several trios, quartets and quintets. For the past seven years her Jewish quartet has played at an event here at this museum memorializing the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27th.

As a member of the museum's Speakers Bureau, Jacqueline speaks often about her Holocaust experience, both in the museum and in other settings. She has spoken at such places as the National Security Agency, local schools and universities such as George Washington University and American University here in the District of Columbia. She has also spoken to DACOR, an association of retired U.S. diplomatic and consular officials, and recently she spoke at the State Department.

Jacqueline's volunteer work includes serving as a tour guide for the Permanent Exhibition and editing documents written in French and interpreting for groups of French-speaking Holocaust survivors who visit the museum. She is working with the museum's Remember Me? Project which publicizes the photographs of over 1,000 Jewish children orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents during the Holocaust in an effort to identify and connect them with surviving family members or friends. Jacqueline interviews those identified who are French-speaking. The Remember Me? Project has had some remarkable successes. She is also a contributor to "Echoes of Memory," a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. Jacqueline's memoir, "A dimanche prochain: Memoir of Survival in World War II France," was published in 2013. Following today's program, she will be available to sign copies of her book.

Jacqueline is accompanied today by Jean Rosenthal, a fellow quartet member and friend of 35 years.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Jacqueline Mendels Birn.
>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Jacqueline, welcome and thank you so much for your willingness to be our First Person today. We have a short period of time. You have a lot to share with us. Not as much as is covered in your book but we will touch on as much as we can.

Let's begin first with you telling us what you can, knowing you were so young, about your family and your own early years before the Anschluss.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I was 3 years old. All I remember is that we left our home, on the edge of Paris, and then we came back. But I don't remember anything at all. All I know is that my parents always wanted to protect us and nobody knew what was going to happen.

>> Bill Benson: You were in France but what was your parents' nationalities?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: My father was Dutch. And family ancestors from way back -- you can see if you go to his hometown in Holland, you see Mendels. He came to Paris because a schoolmate told him about a job in business. And that's why he came to Paris in 1926, when he was 21 years old.

>> Bill Benson: And that -- we may talk more about the significance of not being a French citizen a little later.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. Right.

And my mother was from Hamburg, Germany. I don't know if you can see the photos, but her ancestors were all from Hamburg, all Jewish.

Unfortunately -- I should tell you that later but I can tell you now. My grandmother, that I don't remember because the last time I saw her I was 2 years old, my father tried to get her out of Germany and she wouldn't. She would always say, "No, nothing will happen to me." And in 1941, after her apartment was taken over and she was put in what they called a Jew house, all her friends were disappearing. All of that is in my memoir, by the way, from what I was told by my parents. She committed suicide. She took an overdose. They came and decided, indeed, she was dead. She died in her night gown.

The miracle there is that she was buried as a Jew in 1941, in Germany, in the Jewish section of the old cemetery in Hamburg, in the Jewish section. After the war my mother -- but my mother never told us that her mother committed suicide. There is a letter that she wrote. Despite censorship, the letter came to my mother. And she said --

>> Bill Benson: We might actually return to that later as well.

Jacqueline, how large was your extended family?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: On the Dutch side I have grandparents and uncles and aunts, cousins. It was a large family. Unfortunately they were all murdered. So I have nobody.

>> Bill Benson: During that time before the war began but around the time of the Anschluss, I think your father's business was struggling, was having a difficult time financially. Why was that?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: The Great Depression that you had here in America. So for my father, who was importing, exporting goods, various foods, it was very difficult to make a living, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: And that had some repercussions that I know we may talk about again.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. Later.

>> Bill Benson: After the Anschluss, which Hitler annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, your parents left Paris with you and your sister, Manuela, for a short time. Tell us what you can about that even though I know you were very, very young, and about the events that occurred for your family before Germany started World War II, their invasion of Poland, in 1939, that window in 1938, 1939. Why did your parents leave Paris at that point?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Every time Hitler did something that was frightening, my parents decided let's get out of Paris. So there was a second time when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. So we left also. We went to a little town. My parents left us there, the two girls, and went back. And then they came to get us a week after. But they were always there to try and protect us.

>> Bill Benson: You wrote, I think, in your book about going to -- I think it might have been Fontainebleau, you refer to as the appeasement period or the phony war. What was that?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. Actually there was a declaration of war because Poland was attacked and France had that agreement that they were allies with Poland. So both France and Britain actually wanted to stay with Poland. So that was the beginning of World War II.

>> Bill Benson: In that same year, 1939, I believe your parents had you and your sister declared French citizens.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. My father forecast that bad things were going to happen. And instead of us being Dutch -- the French law was very different from the American law. Even though we were born in Paris, we were not French citizens. We were Dutch. So my father took all the necessary steps and we became French citizens just prior to World War II.

Although, if I may go on about that, when Hitler came to power and invaded Paris, and Paris was an open city, then there was an agreement for all of those measure that happened, that occurred later on. And Petain decided natural citizens were losing their French citizenship. So we weren't French anymore; we were Dutch.

>> Bill Benson: So that protection was short-lived.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. And, of course, it was very dangerous. Of course it was dangerous for Jews but foreign Jews were first to be deported.

>> Bill Benson: We mentioned your father, because of the Depression, things were rough for him. In that same year of 1939, your father's father, your grandfather, died in Holland, I believe. He wasn't -- because of the financial circumstances, he wasn't able to go to his memorial service or his funeral.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. Well, my father went but he went alone because we couldn't go, the rest of the family. I have no recollection of my grandfather at all. I know he came to Paris. I have photos that show him in 1938, and my grandmother also. We called them Opa and Oma. I wrote in a way it was a blessing that my grandfather died because his wife, my grandmother, was rounded up and was murdered in the war in 1943.

So that's later, of course. But can you imagine? She was 70 years old. If you go to the Permanent Exhibit, you will see one of those trains. I can't imagine her but she survived three days. And I know that from the Archives and the Germans were so organized and they wrote. And she was deported on I think the 2nd of May and on the 5th of May -- there were three days in between. And she was murdered.

>> Bill Benson: Between deportation and her murder at the Soviet border.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: After war broke out, your family left Paris for a second time and returned again in May 1940, Germany invaded Holland, Luxembourg and Belgium and then quickly followed by invading France in June 1940. Your family then fled Paris for a third time but again returned to Paris.

Tell us what you learned from your parents later why your family decided to return to Paris each time and after that third time now that France has been invaded what life was like in Paris at that time.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: That's a big question.

First of all, we fled. And I remember that because I was almost 5 when the Germans invaded Paris. There were millions of people. It was called -- people came from Belgium and all around because everybody was so scared. And I remember that I had my doll in my arms. My sister had her doll.

I have my doll, by the way. [Laughter] I didn't bring it but it survived all of those things.

My father borrowed a little van from his office. We went south. France is divided by departments, not like states in this country. And in the evening, a knock at the door and said could we have a room for the night. And wonderful people, [Speaking Non-English Language], their last name, they gave us another room. We spent three weeks there and they never accepted any money. They had two girls [Indiscernible]. There is a photo of the four girls. Unfortunately the two girls died now. But my sister and I are alive.

>> Bill Benson: During that exodus from Paris, literally hundreds of thousands of Parisians were fleeing.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: We were very lucky. There was a bombardment. Another survivor, as you know, his grandmother was shot or were getting out of Paris like we did and they didn't survive. So we were very, very lucky.

>> Bill Benson: Did your parents try -- did they consider trying to leave France at any point during that time before the war began?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: People ask that. Well, actually, my father, who had a cousin who emigrated to what was Palestine at that time, they wrote. I have the correspondence in my memoir. He was in Palestine. My father told him -- something I learned by re-reading it in Dutch. He said: I'm going to join the Free Dutch forces and I don't know what Ellen and the girls will do without me. So he considered going, himself. And then France was occupied and then couldn't get out. And my father said at that time, "We're going to live together or we will die together."

>> Bill Benson: Jacqueline, after fleeing with the exodus and spending the three weeks with the family, the family did return to Paris again. Why?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. People ask us that. My father said, "Well, I have to earn a living." They had just closed the apartment and left. So we went back and miraculously there was gasoline left over by the British who had hoped to invade France, to fight the Germans -- and of course it never happened. There was that terrible thing. I'm not going to tell you world history today.

Anyway, yes.

>> Bill Benson: That was gas so he could put in his van to get back.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: So he could get back to Paris.

On the way back -- my parents kept a journal. My sister and my journal, I donated to the museum. Anyway, he wrote that he saw a contingent of Senegalese soldiers that were beaten. Senegal was a French colony at that time. My father wrote, "This is giving us a foretaste of what will happen to us" because that was the occupied part of France. Things were getting bad for all the Jews. And the Senegalese people, they were black people, of course, and so -- yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if many other Jews returned to Paris at that time?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I don't know how many. I have a good friend who survived. They went to Toulouse and stayed there but I cannot give you numbers. I don't know. I know some people -- my father really wanted to get back to his business. But as I probably told you, and it's in my memoir, there was a law that Jews couldn't be dentists, doctors, professors, or anything, and businessmen. So my father had to give up his business. And that was early in the war, 1941.

I have the papers that my father kept. I see his signatures there. It must have been a terrible thing for my father. He had created the business. But he had a very nice associate that he sold his business for a pittance and then he was without an income.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know how your parents managed to make ends meet for you at that time to put food on the table?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Great difficulty. All I know is my father had a business associate in Marseille and he was able to get spaghetti. And we ate spaghetti. And we ate spaghetti. Now, don't ask me if I like spaghetti. [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I won't ask you if you like spaghetti.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. That's what we ate. It was very difficult, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You continued living in those circumstances, in Paris, until the summer of 1942, which is when your parents arranged for the four of you to leave Paris for Vichy or Free France. Tell us about the events that led up to your parents making that decision to flee Paris at that point.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Well, my parents had those wonderful friends, the family. They were Belgian. They kept saying "You have to leave," "You have to leave," "You can't stay. It's too dangerous." Jews were around all the time. And my father had registered us because it was the law. And he kept on saying we'll obey the law and they will leave us alone but that was wishful thinking, of course.

And then came the time when I had to wear the Jewish star. I remember that very clearly. It was big. And it was yellow. I was wearing a green sweater. I told my mother, "That's so pretty," the yellow on my green sweater. I had no --

>> Bill Benson: You were just a little girl.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I didn't understand. But that was on a Sunday morning. And I know another survivor, she had the same experience. She had to wear the -- Sunday morning, her Jewish star, and she was wearing a red dress and she told her mother "That's so pretty" on the red dress to wear the yellow star. So we were not conscious of those things, really.

The first day, which was a Monday, after that, my father took us to school. I was in kindergarten. My sister was two years older, so in a regular school, elementary school. And the teacher, must have been a wonderful woman, called my sister. There's a podium in French classes. And said to the whole class, you have -- I'm sorry. "You have to be very nice to this little girl because she's living in very difficult times." And that was very dangerous of the teacher because the kids went home and said, oh, there's a Jewish kid in my class. And that could have been the end for my sister and for the teacher. Yeah. It was the law to denounce Jews, you know. Yeah.

And there were all kinds of laws, of course. We couldn't go to the park. My sister started swimming. She couldn't go to the swimming pool. We couldn't go to the library. We couldn't go -- I was learning to use my bicycle. We couldn't go to the little park. And we couldn't go to the zoo. And I loved the zoo and the elephants and the monkeys. We were not allowed. We were not allowed anything.

>> Bill Benson: You even had your bicycles taken away.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: No, they stayed in the cellar.

>> Bill Benson: But you weren't allowed to use them.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: No.

>> Bill Benson: You told us about your grandmother who committed suicide. And your mother got that letter from her that was really a farewell letter before she did that.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: There was a very bizarre incident that occurred with somebody from the German Consulate after that. Can you share that with us?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. I don't know much but my mother got a telephone call from somebody at the German Embassy who wanted to meet her. It was very scary.

>> Bill Benson: Because you had no idea what it was about.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: No. My mother went to the cafe, downtown in Paris, and my father went behind her just to see what was happening. And that must have been a good man because he -- did I remember that? He gave money and a ring to my mother. That came from my grandmother.

By the way, I'm wearing my grandmother's key, which is a musical key. It's the F clef and the G clef, and that comes from my grandmother.

>> Bill Benson: That comes from your grandmother. I wish our audience could see that.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents planned their final departure in Paris following a massive and infamous roundup of Jews.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: In Paris. Tell us about those events.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. That roundup, in French it was called, if anybody speaks French here, le vent du printemps, the spring wind. They were planning to round up over 20,000 Jews. And actually there were some good policemen who warned people don't stay in your apartment tonight because there's going to be something really, really bad and people tried to get out.

Actually, Albert, a survivor, his family fled at that time their apartment. We didn't. We stayed in the apartment. I don't know -- my parents would say, oh, they are never going to get us. Actually, they came one week after we fled. So we were told that afterwards.

But, no, we were there. And finally after that roundup, which was 16th and 17th of July, an awful thing, people saying -- there's a movie about the roundup that has been made not so long ago that explains exactly.

Anyway, my parents arranged, my father arranged, for the Dutch club to find two smugglers, in French called passeur, to pass people. He arranged that we would flee. And that was the 30th of July 1942, which is very late in the war.

Actually, the Germans were all over. I remember their green uniforms. I was so scared. And I don't know exactly when but my mother told us, my sister and me, "Don't be scared. If the Germans come to get us, I will give you a little pill and you will die right away and you will never suffer."

This is so terrible to have to tell what she did. Maybe the example of her mother, I don't know. But my sister and I just took it for granted, so we'll die.

>> Bill Benson: So your parents paid for the smugglers, the passeurs. Where did they take you and how did they do that?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: We spent the night with those wonderful friends. My mother had a wedding present thanks to the lady upstairs, Madam Deneux. She had a son who was 15 years old. The son -- they were both only 15 but they were working in the underground. And they bought backpacks. My parents filled their belongings in the backpacks and they bought our train tickets because Jews were not allowed. We were not allowed to travel. We were not allowed to do anything. It was very dangerous.

So we spent the last night at those people, with that family. And the man of the house -- I remember him. His name was Maurice. He took our Jewish stars and he went down to the cellar. And even though it was hot, July, he burned our stars. But my parents had their I.D. card where it said "les Juifs", Jews in French. And then if the police came -- and the police came all the time -- and they said "Papers, please," [Speaking Non-English Language], that would have been the end of it. My sister and I were too young. We didn't have any idea.

Anyway, we spent the last night at our wonderful friends. And my little friend -- I remember her. She's still alive and I see her when I go to Paris. We shared a bed. We had a wonderful time. My parents told us we are going on vacation. And they never told us that it was really a very big departure. And my sister and I were jumping with joy, "We're going on vacation." Because we saw our little friends, it was July, going to the grandmother. So we were going on vacation.

And the next morning, 6:00, we took the first Metro to the train, [Speaking Non-English Language]. I don't know -- the Jews were only allowed in the last train of the Metro. So I don't know whether we took that one. All I know is that we were holding hands, my sister and I, and holding on to our parents.

We got to the train station. There was no incident no police. It was one of those daily miracles. Every day was a miracle. So at the train station my parents took their backpacks and the boys had bought the tickets. And actually, one of them was arrested later on and never came back, had been denounced. One of the two friends. 15 years old. Must have been murdered in one of the camps.

Anyway, we got on the train. I remember very clearly the train wouldn't leave, the train wouldn't leave. And my father became frantic. He went down -- the train had a corridor in those days, these old trains. And he went to the head and he asked the woman there what's going on. And she said, "Oh, they are rounding up Jews on the other side of the track." And they must have had their contingency of Jews that day and finally -- they didn't come to our train. And we left. Very slowly but the train left.

We had to change trains in a town which is at the edge -- well, not quite the edge of the occupied zone, so-called occupied zone. I always say so-called because it became occupied two months after we were away.

Anyway, we had to change trains to go to the place where the smugglers were to meet us. My sister fell. I wrote that in my memoir. To this day my sister remembers the noise and the pain in the back of her head but she didn't have a concussion. Another miracle. If she had had a concussion, and

if we had to go to a hospital, that would have been the end of us because it said Juifs on my parents' I.D.

So the next day we go to the little town. If you had a detail map of France, you would see, it was at the edge of the occupied and non-occupied, signed by Petain and Hitler. The smugglers were supposed to be there to pick us up. They came and said we can't take you. We don't know and I don't know whether they were taking other Jews that night. We were all illegal, of course.

Anyway, we had to go to a hotel. They made an appointment with my parents to meet the 31st of July in the cemetery, next to a church, at midnight.

So we slept in that little hotel. Nothing bad happened. I don't know what we did for food. But the next morning we started walking towards that little town. I remember it was hot. I remember resting under a tree.

There's an interesting -- I just told my husband. I chose a plot to be buried. And my plot is going to be under a tree. That's what I decided.

Anyway, we made it before midnight, I guess. And we met the smugglers. They were there. I have no idea --

>> Bill Benson: Of course, you really had no knowledge that they would actually be there for you.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: That's right. Absolutely not.

>> Bill Benson: Or that they wouldn't denounce you.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: That's right. What you are saying, because smugglers, they took money from the Jews and then they denounced them and got money on the other side.

I have no idea what happened to the smugglers. But now that France, just now, has finally opened the archives, I'm planning to do some research. I want to know -- they were 20 years old. One was the son of a farmer and the other one was the son of a baker, I think. They knew the area very well. They lived on the border of the occupied zone and the non-occupied zone.

So we started walking. It was after midnight. I remember seeing, you know, the Germans were there and we were there. And they were very close, at the border. I remember seeing the tip of their cigarettes. My father remembered that there was a motorcycle coming through. But I didn't notice.

At one time, the smugglers said, "Go down on your knees." But it was summer. And my sister at that said, "I have to do pee pee" and made it sound funny that they had heard that. That would have been the end of us.

They had their bicycle. And one of the smugglers went ahead. He had to signal that -- he was going to whistle, something, to my father to tell him it's clear, go ahead. And the other smuggler put my sister and me on this bicycle. And my parents had to run behind. Imagine.

And also something I don't have here but my parents had gold rings that they had made very heavy. They said they will give their rings to the Germans and they will give us our life. It's a saying in French, [Speaking Non-English Language]. I think you have it in English, too, "Your money or your life." They thought that gold ring would suffice. But it wouldn't have been.

Anyway, we made it across.

>> Bill Benson: Did they take you the little village of Le Got?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Oh, no. They happened way after. I probably don't have time to expand on that.

So we got across. And they took us to the barracks. And the next morning the header, the French contingent, because it was allowed to have French contention, took us. "We can't keep you." They took us under escort to a sub-head of that department. And we checked into a hotel. We didn't know anybody in that little town.

And at 8:00 p.m., knock at the door, police. My parents were under arrest. They were taken. They had to declare that they were of the Jewish race and that they were honest and that they had left Paris because of the situation and they didn't get a visa because it was forbidden for the Jews. And my father said he had 4,000 francs with him and that he had money in Lyon, the Southeast of France. That was probably the money from his associate that I never found out. 50 minutes he was interrogated.

Then my mother was interrogated. She was from Hamburg Germany, became Dutch from marriage. She was of the Jewish race. And that she didn't have a visa. So both my parents were interrogated.

I got the papers from the archives, by the way and they are in my memoir.

And then by escort we were taken to the head of that department. And my parents were interrogated at length. And that was the place where the French police put us in an internment camp. They were deciding and deciding. They took the whole month of August where my parents -- we were in a little hotel but my parents had to report every day and they were deciding. There must have been a good head of that department. He had to write life or death. And maybe because my father said that he had money, I don't know, but they just said go and get lost in the country. We could go 100 kilometers, which is 60 miles.

And my father frantically looked for a place. And that's where we ended up in that tiny place called Le Got. My father always called it a hole, that's how small it was. We had two rooms, upstairs, no water, no electricity, no toilet, no nothing. My father found a pale and we got leaves in the front of the house there, and that's how we managed. And my sister and I went to get water at the pump. Yeah.

I think that lady who lived two flights upstairs from us sent us two straw baskets. So actually I got my doll and my sister got hers. We must have gotten some clothes or something.

>> Bill Benson: You would remain in Le Got for at least --

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: 29 months.

>> Bill Benson: In that little village, or hole as your father said. In the second year you were there, in August 1943, your mother gave birth to your brother, Franklin. And that was, of course, for all kinds of reasons, a very difficult time for your parents.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Terrible. She almost died.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that, if you will.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. So my mother became pregnant. She had a terrible pregnancy. I remember going -- my parents had temporary travel permit, only on Saturdays. If you had something in the middle of the week, tough, you had to wait. My mother was heavily pregnant. She had to go -- I don't know if it was a Saturday. I remember my sister and I, she was wearing a night gown. She didn't have pregnancy clothes, of course. And we were pushing my mother up the hill. And this was very difficult for her. So that was our job to help her.

And finally, then in August, she was ready to give birth. There was some kind of midwife or somebody. And my sister and I, we were sharing a bed, of course, there was no other way. And we heard noise. We woke up. The woman downstairs said, "Go back to sleep," "Go back to sleep." My mother was in great pain and losing blood. It was a breached baby and she had to be transported or she would die.

So the man downstairs, which was actually working for the Germans, but he got a little van and he put my mother and they went to that other department which was, as I said, totally forbidden, called [Speaking Non-English Language]. And there was a hospital, clinic, if you want, where my mother almost died.

We interviewed the doctor. He was a wonderful person. He was treating the German soldiers because they got things happening to them. And on the other side they were taking care of the Jewish woman, my mother. And my brother was born.

>> Bill Benson: He has a very unFrench name he was given, Franklin. Will you tell us a bit about that.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Well, that's because my parents' only hope of survival was, you should know -- maybe some people guess when I say that. And you know why Franklin? Anybody?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: I think they're saying Roosevelt.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. Because Franklin Roosevelt was their only hope of survival. And they trusted Roosevelt and America would come and save us. So they named my brother Franklin.

>> Bill Benson: Of course, having now an infant with you just made things even more difficult and even dangerous.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Certainly. The milk didn't agree with my brother. I guess they didn't -- in the hospital they tell you, oh, what about babies crying all the time. So after three weeks my father and mother came back with the baby. He was so skinny. His legs were like my fingers, something like that. But miraculously, my father found a Nestle Condensed Milk, that you can still see these days. So we got water, my mother diluted, and it agreed with my brother. And he started gaining weight.

>> Bill Benson: We don't have time for you to tell us all that occurred when you were living there for those 29 months in Le Got but you were there for that long of a period. It was a terrible time for them, danger all around. You were protected in some ways in that village. And in particular, I think it was the mayor of the neighboring village. Tell us about him.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. Paul. He was a wonderful man. Whenever there was danger, he came to tell us and we went to the woods. And my father actually spent most of the time in the underground, in a dilapidated house, in hiding.

I was able last year -- of course, he died a long time ago. He died in 1967. And I was able to get him Posthumously the medal, if you want, for the grandchildren of righteous among the nations. So that has been -- yes. It has been declared now. There will be maybe a small ceremony and there will be a medal and a certificate saying that he's righteous among the nations. He really risked his life. He went in the underground himself because it was so dangerous.

But he and my father had long talks, warned us all the time. One time my parents decided we should go to a convent because it would be safer for us, the two girls. And then we were warned, don't go.

>> Bill Benson: To go to a convent to hide there.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. And we were warned don't go. It's a good thing we didn't go -- by foot, of course -- because the convent was raided and they would have found two Jewish girls.

>> Bill Benson: So our audience understands, you made a comment a little bit ago that you had gone to the Vichy France, the unoccupied zone of France, because the Germans were in the occupied zone. But it wasn't unoccupied for long. So in the time you're telling us, now it's occupied by the Germans. So there's danger everywhere.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: So if a German patrol might be coming through the little village, he let you know.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: They did. And the man downstairs was a wonderful young man, and his wife and little baby girl. He was denounced that he had a code word that he knew where weapons were hidden for the underground for the resistance. And the Gestapo came. There were five. Everybody around the house. Everybody said it was for the Mendels family but it wasn't. It was for him. He had his guns like that. He was such a brave man. Instead of saying don't kill me, why don't you see the Jewish family upstairs, he never said a word about us. He was transported. He was tortured. He came back alive. But he was a wonderful man, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: It is a very small village, so everybody knew you were there. Did they know you were Jewish?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I think so. And they knew the family would commit suicide if necessary. My parents kept probably some kind of cyanide, a small pill, on their lapel the whole time. And I told my little friend, whom I saw again, and he remembered that.

>> Bill Benson: And at no time were you denounced by anybody in that village.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: No. There was one time when a girl said -- because I was down in that little -- it was not a street. It was a little trail. And she said, "You should be ashamed to walk with a Jew that's dirty like pig" or something like that. I ran home. I was crying. Why did they say that? So that girl and her parents were anti-Semitic and must have known. But that was the only incident for me.

>> Bill Benson: Your father spent a lot of his time having to hide.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: How were you able to manage in terms of food and just your basics while you were hiding?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: We ate a lot of chestnuts.

>> Bill Benson: Chestnuts this time. Spaghetti in Paris.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. My mother made bread with chestnuts, puree with chestnuts, everything. So we ate chestnuts. I don't eat chestnuts.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: In June 1944, of course, the Allied Forces invaded Normandy, yeah, 1944. And Paris was liberated by the allies in August of 1944. After the liberation of Paris, your father made his way to Paris, leaving you in Le Got. What did he find when he got to Paris after that? And tell us what you remember about the allied invasion and liberation.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I remember because I knew there were -- in English it's D-Day. And I remember being French it's [Speaking Non-English Language]. I was able to write it in my journal, [Speaking Non-English Language]. I was very proud.

>> Bill Benson: The journal you kept then.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. So we knew. My father, happened to be in a tree that day, picking cherries. It was cherry season in June. And when he heard the news, he fell from the tree. [Laughter] But he didn't break anything.

Things were very bad at that time because the Germans were near and trying to go up. And that's when there was a terrible incident, very close to our village. They burnt down the village and my parents knew and the village knew somebody had been denounced. They put all the women and children in a church. They burned the church. They put all the men against the wall and they killed everybody. And to this day this village is a memorial. It has never been rebuilt.

>> Bill Benson: It remains just like it was when they leveled it.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Exactly. And that was happening.

And then the Germans, they came to our village. I was a curious little girl. I remember opening the curtain. My mother said, "Go down on your knees!" Because they could have shot me right there and then. But they went to the village with their trucks, soldiers, etc., to try and attack the allies, of course, the Americans and the British and the Australians that were coming towards Paris. Then finally Paris was liberated. But there was so much killing between the underground and the Germans all along the way. It was a terrible time, really.

But Paris was liberated on the 25th of August 1944. My father made his way -- he said: I have to go and I have to see what my business is like and the apartment. I don't know how he made his way, by foot, bicycle, I have no idea. But he got to Paris mid-November 1944. And our apartment was there. It had been occupied by the Germans the whole time. There was nothing. The concierge said go to the Town Hall and you will see. And my father found a bed of ours and a table of ours and a few items. And his business, there was nothing.

He came back. And then the very end of November the five of us -- it took three days. Now it takes three hours. I remember my brother was crying, he was hungry probably. It was very difficult. But we got back to Paris and we stayed at those wonderful friends that had housed us before we fled. And finally we got to our apartment. I asked my mother, "Where are my toys?" She said, "You are a big girl now. You don't need toys."

>> Bill Benson: Because everything was gone.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: One more question and then we will turn to our audience in the little bit of time we have left.

When the family made it to Paris, as you just described, in November 1944 -- of course the war would continue in Europe until April 1945.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Did your father and your family try to return to normal? What was that like in that period of time?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Very difficult. My father was selling jam from door-to-door.

>> Bill Benson: Selling jam from door-to-door?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yeah. And my sister and I got American secondhand clothes. The Americans were sending clothes. I was so proud I was wearing an American coat.

Then my father went to the Red Cross to find -- he said we survived, to my family in Holland hidden and survived. That's when he found out that his mother, brother, sister, everybody was gone. They were all murdered. Then he stopped looking. He said, "There's no point. They are all dead."

>> Bill Benson: Did anybody else survive at all?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. I have two Dutch cousins that were hidden by a farmer and his wife, wonderful people. They made it. My father went and said, well, we're going to adopt them because their parents had been deported, rounded up and deported, denounced and deported. Then there was a telegram or something that the family in America, in California, was going to adopt them.

Something I didn't say but my sister carried a little pouch on her. And both of us were learning the names of our family so that if we survived and my parents didn't, we would go to California. I don't know how but. I remember.

>> Bill Benson: You remembered the address?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. It was [Speaking Non-English Language], 528 Nevada Avenue. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close our program in a few minutes. We have time for a couple of questions. Before I do that, I would like to let you know that it's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person as the last word. So I will turn, at the end of the program, back to Jacqueline to close the program. When she does that, after she finishes, I'm going to ask you all to stand because our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on stage and take a photo of Jacqueline with you in the background. And then Jacqueline, I'm going to ask if folks can let her head up the stairs because she's going to sign copies of her memoir at the top of the stairs. So we want to make sure she gets up there as quickly as possible.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. Now we're going to turn to our questions. We're going to first take a question from our Twitter audience. And as we're doing that, if any of you in the audience have a question, please go to one of the two microphones. There's one in each aisle. We can see you there and get your question recorded with us if you want to do that.

I'm going to turn to Twitter and see if we have a question from Twitter. Here we do.

Jacqueline, how did you feel about Germans directly following the war? This was from Mr. Steinhart. How do you feel about them now?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: You want me to answer?

>> Bill Benson: I do. If you feel comfortable answering that.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I remember after the war seeing German prisoners, next to the zoo actually. I was 9 years old. I was scared. But now I don't like them. I'm sorry. It depends on their generation. If it's young people, I'll play music with young German people, and that's perfectly ok. But last year when I went to see my daughter, I had to change planes in Bavaria, I didn't like it. It was very hard for me.

>> Bill Benson: I wish we had time to talk to you more about music. You mentioned playing music. That was a passion of yours immediately when you got back to Paris, which you've continued to this day, as well as the meaning of your memoir. Maybe later we'll have another occasion to talk about that.

I think -- oh, we have a young lady here with a question.

>> What was your reaction when you heard the war had ended?

>> Bill Benson: What was your reaction when the heard the war was ended?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I put it in my journal. I was so glad to get back to [Speaking Non-English Language], our suburb. I guess I had had enough of staying in that little village. It was very important to get back home.

>> Bill Benson: And as Jacqueline has said, her father, in hearing the news, was up in the tree picking cherries and when he heard it, he got so excited and fell out of the tree, but fortunately not hurt.

Any other questions from our audience? If not, maybe there's another from our Twitter audience. We might see if there's another question from our Twitter audience. If not, anybody else in the audience?

Ahh, here we go. A brave soul.

>> Can I ask in French?

>> Bill Benson: Only Jacqueline will know, but go ahead.

>> [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: I didn't understand.

>> [Speaking Non-English Language].

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Maybe I put it the wrong way.

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: [Speaking Non-English Language].

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: This is a unique experience here.

>> [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Huh?

>> [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: [Speaking Non-English Language]

>> Bill Benson: Can you share that with us at all?

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: A short version of it?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: What was the happiest time during the war and the worst time?

The happiest time I said was the birth of my brother. And then the worst time was that I want so badly to get back home. And it was so sad to find that there was nothing left.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for that.

I think on that note I'm going to turn to Jacqueline to close our program. Again, at the end, Joel will come up on stage, take a photograph, and then we're going to have Jacqueline head right up the stairs so she can sign copies of her book.

Jacqueline?

>> Jacqueline Mendels Birn: Yes. You heard this very sad story and tragic story because my whole family was murdered. Unfortunately, like you see behind there, there have been murders in Cambodia and in countries in Africa, in the Middle East now. I was hoping that the Holocaust would be the last tragedy on this planet but it's not. I see lots of young people here. And I always say, try and choose a profession where you can help this planet rather than let it go.

And the words of the director of our museum is always: Stand up, don't stand by.

>> [Applause]