

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

CLAUDETTE KENNEDY

Interviewed by Natasha Burchardt

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



IMPORTANT

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Cassette 1, Side A

Reel 1, Side 1

First of all if you would tell me your name?

My name is Claudette Kennedy.

And where you were born?

I was born in a Parisian suburb called Bourg-la-Reine, in 1910. And was then called Raphaël.

Did you grow up there?

I was born and bred there. I grew up until I was 27, when I went to Paris and then got married.

Can you tell me a little bit about your father?

My father was a teacher. In the lycée. Which was a Parisian lycée, although it was geographically not within the boundaries of the city. The Lycée Lakanal, which is actually rather famous because many famous people were educated there. Such as Péguy and many more. He came originally from an Alsatian family. But his father had fled Alsace when he was 20 or so, when - in 1870, when he should have been conscripted by the Germany army. And he went - my grandfather I mean, went - and he was also a teacher and settled in the centre of France, le Puy. And then in Clermont-Ferrand, which are two towns just in the Massif Central, where he taught and where my father was educated, until he was sent as a boarder to the Lycée Lakanal, where he was going to teach later.

Was your father religious?

No. Not at all.

Not at all?

No, we are a free thinking family.

What about your grandfather?

My grandfather - my father's father was not religious at all. My mother's parents, especially her mother, were extremely religious. She had a hard time because people who surrounded her were not religious. In particular her brother Emil Durkheim, who was a famous sociologist. And who also was a free thinker. So my grandmother on the maternal side was the only one who was actually religious. I suppose my grandfather was religious too, but he died when I was 4, so I haven't known him.

When you say that your father was a free thinker, how did this manifest itself?

It manifested itself by teaching me more principles based on purely ideal principles. That is to say that one had to be good to be worth being a human being. And one had to help people, as far as possible. And to be honest. And these sort of basic principles, and work. My father was not a militant, but he was - his sympathy was socialist.

When you say he wasn't a militant, what did he do in the political sphere?

Well although he - he - he bought a socialist newspaper, and in his conversation I suppose he - he expressed his ideas. But I don't think he did anything more.

Did he have a lot of non-Jewish friends as well as Jewish friends?

Oh yes. We lived in a non-Jewish community really. This little town where - there were a great majority of university people. And - we lived in that community. There was only - one other Jewish family. Who happened to - work for the...I mean the father Jules Isaac was a historian, whose family also was - part of his family was destroyed in Auschwitz. And worked as a war-work very much for the reconciliation of Christians and Jews. But - I don't think any distinction was made between me and the other schoolfriends, except that of course I didn't do my 'première communion'. And - There were - when I look backward I think there were differences, but I wasn't conscious of them then. I really became - I only became conscious as a student later on, when in the course of the conversation one of my fellow students, who didn't know I was Jewish, said something derogatory about Jews and I - reacted of course, I said, "But I am a Jew. I am a Jewish girl." She was very embarrassed and it opened to me - a world of anti-semitism. I mean it made me conscious that - there were people who treated the Jew - who thought of the Jews as somebody apart and bumptious.

And how old would you have been then?

18 about. There was - when I look backward I think there was nevertheless some Jewish influence in my upbringing, insofar as my cousins of course were all Jews. And - they knew - my cousins in Paris - lived much more in a Jewish circle. And when I was invited to one of these big parties in Paris - I felt rather - cut off because I didn't know them. But they seemed to all know each other.

You are talking about your mother's family now?

Yes, it's my mother. My mother's family, who lived ... my upbringing really.

Where did your mother's family come from?

Epinal in the Vosges, which is a town which was never occupied by the Germans, therefore has always remained French. That's where my grandmother was born too.

And your mother lived there until she married?

Yes.

Did your mother ever have any paid work?

No.

And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had one sister. Whose husband was - half Jew and - he joined the Resistance and was killed in - Mauthausen. I'm getting muddled now. I'm not sure whether it was Mauthausen or ..

Never mind about that at the moment. I still wanted to think about your mother and your early life at home.

Well, my early life, until I was a student - was a very happy life in this - community.

What sort of a house did you have?

Very modest. But comfortable. We had a maid always. And - on Thursday afternoon I would - generally be either invited to a friend or have a friend come in to tea with me. On Sunday either we - went for walks with my father - he always liked walking - or were invited to some other family to tea. I went to school in a little school nearby, just round the corner from us, and which had been founded mainly for the - for the university families. Because in this little town there was only a convent and there was this big lycée for boys, but there was no proper State school for girls. I think the original idea came from Madame Curie actually, who lived nearby too. They - founded this little 'cours', 'le cours Fiorian'. Which actually has produced, also in spite of this small number, a great number of famous - not a great number - a few, famous people, where there was a family atmosphere. Where all the teachers knew my parents, and would visit them socially. Many of my friends were the children of friends of my parents. Actually there is one who lives in Oxford, one of them.

Was there anything that marked your house out as special from ... Was it any way different from any of the other houses around?

No. It was a - suburb - Paris suburban house.

Was your sister younger or older than you?

Older.

How much older?

5 years older.

What was her name?

Madeleine. She was called Mar(?).

And did she go to the same school as you?

Oh yes. Until she - until the Baccau. At that time they didn't do scientific Baccau. She went to the Lycée in Paris.

So you were brought up very freely, you and your sister?

Oh yes. Very freely. We used to go - go and visit friends. Neighbours and - it was a very free atmosphere in the house.

Did you have any other family around apart from your parents and your sister?

In Paris. But not in Bourg-la-Reine. Yes, in Paris, my father's sisters lived in Paris. For first - and her daughter, her husband and her daughter, my - my - aunt, one of my father's sisters, had become famous as being a - having inspired the poet Péguy. You have heard of Péguy?. She was the one of whom he talks in all his verses. Blanche Rafaël. My - other relations - well my grandmother lived in Epinal until her death. And -

Did you see much of her?

Every year we went and spent some time there. And of course there I was highly conscious of my Jewishness, because - I was conscious of my Jewishness because my grandmother was such a - a - devout - religious woman. And she came to us a month a year, so I saw quite a bit of her.

How did things change when she came to stay with you?

Oh well - it was a bit difficult because my father didn't want to - the religion to interfere with our daily life. We had of course to change the menu. And wait until she has finished her prayers, but that was all. And actually she had also friends in Bourg-la-Reine that she visited, but all her nieces lived in Paris. Yes, in Paris I had no direct relations, but my mother's cousins lived in Paris with all their families. So I had some - sort of family in Paris, not direct, but second degree. And family whose children are still now my friends. There was a very strong family feeling in the Durkheim family. Which still survives now. Because my grandmother had a very strong personality, so everybody wanted to go and visit her. But I had an uncle, a doctor, in Epinal, who lived there all his life. And who would go and visit her. And then my - one of the nephew lived there. And the other one who was a famous anthropologist used to go there for the holidays. Because his mother lived there too. So in Epinal I had lots of cousins. And then I had another uncle who was killed in Auschwitz with his wife, who was a - don't know what you call it - he was a Treasurer, the - you would call it in English - the County Treasurer. It is called in French 'Trésorier-Payeur Général'. And who lived of course in various cities. The last one being in Amiens. Because Trésorier-Payeur Generaux were always promoted to a more and more important city. And he also would come and visit my grandmother. So the centre of the family - of my mother's family, was Epinal.

Can you tell me a bit about how you would spend a typical evening at home when you were a child?

Oh yes. Reading. My father was working, usually marking school papers. My mother was darning. And I would play. As soon as I was a little bit older I had to do homework. And - read a book.

So reading was a really important activity in your family?

Oh yes, reading was certainly very important.

And your parents took a good interest in your progress?

Oh yes. Oh my goodness, yes. I had to report to him my marks at school. And why did I do so badly. If I did well, praise me. My sister was better scholastically than me.

What would you get praised for in particular?

Well, it wasn't really - it was wrong to say praise. They looked as if they were happy. One shouldn't expect - praise. Well one - I don't know really. I did some dancing. I learnt some classical dance. I think they were really pleased when I - was asked to do some demonstration. But - They would never praise me. They would think that it is bad for you to be praised. Oh, when I had a good mark in maths they were very pleased. But they never gave me a reward. If it was good, that was just as it should be. If it was bad it was bad.

What language did you speak at home. Did you always speak French?

Of course. We didn't know any other language.

You didn't speak Yiddish at all?

No. Not even my grandparents. I think my father's parents may have spoken it. But I have never known them, so I don't know. And I don't - I - I'm not sure, because my aunt couldn't speak Yiddish, so it's impossible. I read that in a book, but I think that was wrong, because my aunts couldn't speak Yiddish at all, they didn't understand a word. My grandmother couldn't speak Yiddish. And nobody spoke anything but French.

So you were telling me it wasn't until you were 18 that you really came across anti-semitism. And that was because you were really living in a very non-Jewish community?

Mmm.

Can you tell me a bit more about that incident. When you were 18?

Well, we were sitting - I don't remember exactly. I do remember that incident. We were some students talking together in a room. And one girl, I remember who it was, said "oh, I can't bear the Jews". Something like that. She obviously never met any Jews before. She didn't know that we had done our degree together. Yes - it was in the course of our degree and we were studying together. And she had not noticed ever that I was Jewish. Never occurred to her.

So when had you met her? What age did you leave school? How did you come to be doing this degree?

Oh I left school - when I was 18. I must have been 20 then, when this incident occurred. It was during the course of my studies. Because I had invited her to Paris, we had a marine lab, it was in this lab in Brittany.

How soon did you decide what your degree would be?

My degree in Biology? Just the summer after I left school. Everybody put their heads together, what really I would like to do. And then we had a friend who became a professor, a friend, who said, "One day you want to do Pharmacy, one day you want to do Medicine, then you want to do Philosophy", which my parents opposed. Philosophy was what I really wanted to study. But they thought it would be too hard for me. And this professor friend said, "Why don't you try to do Biology, Zoology". And he invited me to go to this marine station in Brittany to see whether I would like it. And I was very happy there. I said, "Yes", and I started right away.

So this girl was doing Biology with you?

Oh yes.

Going back a little. Did you ever have any holidays while you were a child?

Oh yes. That was sacrosanct, the holiday. Every year we went for two months. My father really - at the Lycée, had two months holiday. And we would rent a house in the seaside for the - well - there has been the war. Of course the First World War has been declared. There had been a big break until I was 4. But after that - absolutely sacrosanct. And even during the war we went - we would let our own house and rent a house at the sea. And usually with other friends. We would go to the same place.

Which place did you go to?

When I was little we went to Chamonix and Brittany. And then the first time we went somewhere else it was when we went to the Pyrénées. When I was 13.

What can you remember about that?

About the Pyrénées. Well, I was 13, I remember it very well. For the first time I saw the mountains. And my sister was not with us because she had been sent to England that year to learn English. As I was going to be sent five years later. There was an

English lady with us. And I discovered the mountains and that I could walk to the cliffs. So that was my first step in mountaineering, which I did later.

Would you like to tell me a bit about your mountaineering career?

Ah. Instead of renting a house by the sea, as we had done in the previous years. One year we decided to rent a house near Chamonix, which is the greatest centre for mountaineering. And I started with my family to do some easy climbing. I happened to find that I loved it. And gradually - I - went first with my father and a guide, and then with some friends, to do some rock climbing and ice walking. I mean glacier - excursions, which are many. And I loved it. But it was very hard. And I remember thinking sometimes "why do I do it. It hurts". Everything hurts, you know. The cold on your nose and -. Nevertheless when two days later my friend would say "would you come walking with me", I would never refuse her. It was a sort of intoxication I suppose. But I think it has been a - a very good training in many ways. Because of the deprivation you - you had to experience. You were hungry and cold. I think it has helped me in my later experiences in concentration camp. I was also rather proud of being good. I was not reliable. Sometimes I was very good and sometime I wasn't. But - on the whole, I was pretty good. Not first class. And I never done any difficult climbing without a guide. But the pleasure it was to come back and - to smooth your skin, which was so - That's something I remember, the skin so dry afterwards. And taking something hot and sweet. It was - the complexity of the reward and the - beauty. Yes, I talked about the effort. But it's in such incredible beauty. It's really - oh, I can't explain really. It's just an enormous love. Once when you were climbing and especially when you had arrived. And also the feeling of having overcome such difficulties and being at the summit is a - a joy that cannot be compared to anything else.

And it was your father who started you on this?

Mmm. He only went because - he was scared at first. I don't think he really liked it very much. Soon as I was among other friends he stopped. But my parents were very - you asked me what they praised me for - they were very proud of my mountaineering. Even though I wasn't an ace in any way. I mean there were a lot of women who were - much more - experienced. But among our friends I was one of the best.

And was this an activity that went on all through your teenage years?

Well - teenage, yes. Well one year I came to England so it was interrupted. To learn English.

End of Cassette 1, Side A

Cassette 1, Side B
Reel 1, Side 1, continued

Yes - when I started further studies I couldn't go on for such long holidays, because I used to work by the sea, because I was learning biology. So part of my holiday was always spent in Brittany in the little town called Roscoff. Where there was a little biology laboratory. It was not as big as it is now, but it was already very important. And - yes, then later I got married and I didn't do it anymore.

Can you tell me a bit about the friends you used to climb with then?

Well the friends with whom I climbed with were not my friends - I went around with usually.

Tell me about your friends.

Well at that stage of my life, my friends were, they were really the girls at school. And then - the girls and boys in the Sorbonne, where I studied.

Was that really when you first came in contact with boys?

When I first came into contact with boys was in my last year of school, because in my little school there was no second 'préparat' [class for the 2nd Baccalaure] and you had to go to the - to the boys' school. And that was a bit of a shock. Boys - apart from my family - because in Epinal I had two boy cousins with whom I got on very well with them. One of them is dead and the other one I still - extraordinarily friendly indeed, although we live miles apart. The boys - the first contact was during that year at school and I fell in love with one of my fellow students and it was a real crisis in my life. And I was 16 then, or 17.

Why was this a crisis?

Oh - because my schoolwork suffered for it. And - I failed my Baccalauréat, I had to do it again, or I didn't even try, because my father thought I had to mature and it was not necessary to - to - to try, and it was better that I would take another year, during which - I was back on my feet so to speak. And I went on working. And then - I had several boys, with whom I went out. But we didn't go out the way they go out now. We would meet to go to an exhibition or - go for a dance. Always private dances. Apart from the school dances. Or the - some - society, university or society. I think I never went to a public dance. I went to - some balls organised by the school when I was older. But usually it was private - dances, with some friends. And then I had two groups of friends, definitely. Because I was invited in this Jewish circle of my cousins in Paris. And I had my friends in Bourg-la-Reine. And when I look back I feel that my Jewishness interfered in my development. Because of this distinction between the two kinds of parties I went to. In Paris I was rather lost. Because I was invited because I was a cousin or - the daughter of a friend of my mother. I - and my friends in Bourg-la-Reine didn't have the same sort of - occasions. And the parties were different too. They were much more family-like in Bourg-la-Reine and much more friendlier than those in Paris. The Jewish family and friends were much

wealthier than we were. We were university people and not very well off. So I always felt a bit - I enjoyed going there in some ways, because it was nice and - But I was never relaxed really, I always felt a bit of a stranger.

Did your parents then disapprove of your falling in love when you were 16?

I don't think so. I think they thought it was an experience I had to go through. They - tried to talk to me - to make me more realistic about it. But - I don't think they - stopped it really. I believe they thought it would pass, it would go.

And that is what happened?

Mmm. Very much so. I - I - was. His family were more or less - had some - common friends with my parents, which facilitated things.

And how did things go on from then?

From then - I - I went - I was in the Sorbonne as a student. So I had life - of any other student. And - the friends with whom I was in - as a student, were not Jewish. And I believe that they felt my Jewishness: they accepted me as a friend, but this was to an extent - I don't think none of them would have married me. There had been someone in the Sorbonne who was not Jewish - and would have married me, but he was killed in the mountaineering - But - later on, when I went around with all these friends, we went around together - I remember one of them was Jewish, but - he was just a friend. I believe that the others - with whom I was so close - were conscious of my Jewishness. And I did - one of my best friends from that period - later on - refused to let me have her flat when I was in danger. You know the best way in Paris when the Jews were arrested was to change your identity and live in a flat - which was empty. Her husband was a war prisoner. And when he came back he reproached his wife very much for not lending me her flat. But it has been for me a terrible shock that this woman hadn't lent me her flat. And when I came back I wrote to her a terrible letter, which has - opened her eyes I think too late, and made a very strong impression upon her. And we were never able to resume our friendship. Even though the husband tried to do that. There was a - a - ditch between us. Because I had trusted her and we were so close during our studies and that she hadn't been able to hold her hand to help me then. And she did it because she thought her husband - she didn't want to - to take the risk for her husband who was a war prisoner. She thought that maybe if she lent her flat to a Jewish family her husband in his camp would suffer for it. That's what she explained afterwards. It's very, very difficult to - describe the abyss that was created at the time of the occupation. You had to be a bit of a hero to help the Jews really. I understand it a bit better now than I did in 1946.

You were telling me about this man who would have married you, but he was killed?

Yes.

Did he mean a lot to you?

Yes, I think so. He was older than me. He was actually - he was just entered in the Department. He meant a lot to me. But I don't know whether as much as everybody thought he did. And - our friends - the professor and his wife - they - were very pushing in that direction. They liked that young man very much. They liked me very much. They had sort of brought me up into zoology, and they would have wished - Anyway, I don't know what would have happened if he had come back from this - ascension. But they said - they said that they had stayed in Chamonix to wait for me to come. We arrived later in Chamonix, and the weather was not very good and his companion was impatient to go climb. And they went in spite of my father's warnings that the clouds above the Mont Blanc were always a bad sign. And they went. I was - we were going with my parents and his sister and a friend on a little excursion, and a priest came to meet us to tell us about the tempest, storm, that - had taken them by surprise, that had stopped them in their ascension and - they - one of them came back - there were two of them. They had parted. One of them managed to come back, but he didn't.

How did it affect you?

Well I - it affected me insofar as - I knew I wouldn't get married for a while. I had always a lot of offers. I was very attractive apparently in those days and there was always some men around me. Actually I was brought up in such a simple or strict way - I don't know if you'd say simple or strict - that I don't think I was aware of the effect I had on a man. And I was not aware of - I'm sure I wasn't - of - a nice - visualise - the future - in a romantic sort of way. The man who I would marry - I don't know exactly what I felt, what I visualised. But none of the people who approached me - were - But I think it is because I didn't take up the hints when they were timidly approaching. I remained a little girl for really many years.

Tell me about how you came to meet your future husband?

Well, that was much later. In fact I married comparatively late, I was 28. And most of my friends were married. And I met him in a group of friends. I had a girlfriend who got married and they had friends. And it was a Jewish group really. My first husband was Jewish. And one of the points in common we had was that we both had decided we would never marry a Jewish partner. But it so happened that we did meet. It was mostly a group of Polytechnicians.

End of Reel 1, Side 1

Reel 1, Side 2

Can you tell me a bit about your meeting with your first husband?

I met him with other friends. A friend of mine was married to a Polytechnician. And there was a - a group of friends - Oh, it is not at all this Polytechnic really. It was - a group which was called the 'Bouillant Roulant' in French, meaning "the rolling book". A friend of mine, every fortnight would receive some friends, and we would discuss a book. And that's where we met. But it so happened that he was the friend of a - husband of a friend of mine. Who also was a Polytechnician.

Because one of the things you said, which was rather striking, was that you both had decided that you weren't going to marry Jews?

That's right.

Why was that then?

Because we thought that the best way to get - completely - what do you say. Not integrated. Assimilated. Was to marry a non-Jew. My parents had the same idea. That by always remaining within the same circles you created a kind of - isolated group within the society. And that was not good. That if you wanted to be completely incorporated in society, where you have lived, where you were born and bred, you had to come out of the family circle, so to speak.

But then your passion for each other over-rode this intention?

That's right. Well we just - found - that we - we were attracted to each other. And we laughed at it. We both said "too bad, we -" - each of us told the other that we had intended not to marry a Jew. And - well we didn't think anymore about it really.

What was your parents attitude then?

My parents were - I think they were a bit disappointed that I had married a Jew. Because they also wanted to - enlarge the family circle. But I was rather old, having had for many years - these difficulties I think I mentioned. On many occasions - I had gone out with some man, but when it came to get married they wouldn't ask me. And later on I fell in love with somebody for two years. I had an unhappy experience. So I think my parents were very pleased that at last I was settled. Because after all I was greatly interested in my work and I thought - well, I'll get married if the occasion occurs. But I didn't think much more about it.

You didn't in fact tell me what your doctorate was in?

In Biology. In Zoology. Marine Biology. For that - for my studies I had to spend about a month or twice in once a year, by the sea, where there is a big lab. Which is still bigger now, in Roscoff. And - I loved my studies, I was greatly interested, and I had many friends and - That was my life really.

You wanted to go on to the war years, didn't you?

Yes. Well because otherwise I think there will be too many interviews. But that's of course - no, it's not that much later. So - oh yes I - I, for a few months, after having met Pierre, I went out with him to exhibitions, etcetera. Oh, I went for my study to Roscoff. And he stayed in Paris. In August. The month of August. And I was very depressed at that time I remember. I wanted - I didn't know what I wanted to do. I remember there was a ball - well a fancy ball, a great attraction in Roscoff, where you were dressed up with newspaper and algae and that sort of thing. And I didn't want to take part. And a friend of mine - forced me to come, and I enjoyed it. My parents

were spending their holiday nearby and were very pleased that I had gone there. And then we arranged, Pierre and I, in September - oh, I think I'm mixing two kind of holidays, sorry. Sorry. I had arranged with a friend - a colleague as well, to go on holiday in the mountains. At Altefroide, which is in South Alps, South of the Alps. And - after a week or two she decided she wanted to visit a friend in Corsica, which I didn't want to. In the meantime my future husband wrote that he was coming to the south of France, would be with some friends - near Prainousquier, and why didn't we meet. So - that's what we did. We met in Nice. And we had the greatest joy meeting each other again. And we joined his friends, who actually were also friends with me. And I sent a note to my - my friend who was back from Corsica that she should join us there. And we had a marvellous time - at - I can't remember the name now - the place. Not far from St Tropez. And while the others were laying on the beach - as I am a very active person and Pierre also was, we took long walks in the Garrique. And nearly decided we would get engaged.

What date was this?

That is September 1938. Munich is the date, isn't it. It is the year of Munich. We went - then we left my friend in her little car, and that was when Hitler was vociferating his threat to the Jews. This is the first time that he - I heard him saying that he wanted all the Jews to be - killed.

Exterminated?

Exterminated. It was a nightmare this trip, from the South of France to Paris. It was beautiful weather. I was very happy in my heart because of this - affection which had grown between Pierre and I. And - this - bomb I would say - at each hotel we stopped for lunch or for tea, the wireless was on very loud and we heard the voice of Hitler. Then we went back to Paris, I went to my parents with whom I lived. And - well - I fell ill actually. Pierre came very much to see me. And we got engaged in spite of the imminent danger of a war. We thought it better to settle matters. And we thought if the war breaks out we shall get married immediately. We got engaged. And there was all this discussion about Munich. We were like anybody else, divided. Because we could feel that we were being betrayed, and on the other hand it was an immediate relief that war hadn't broken out. And that it was postponed. Hoping that if it was postponed maybe it would be - things would settle down. So even though we had some heavy heart, because of the danger of the external situation, we had very happy months of October and November. And in December we got married. A civilian register office - marriage. Preceded by reception. So that it was - as if nothing - was threatening us, of course except the knowledge of it.

Were you at that time conscious of your Jewishness?

I didn't think much about it really. I didn't think at all about it. Since most of our friends were not Jews anyway. Except all our cousins and - But I could say about our Jewishness. The best friend of Pierre - who was not a Jew, was very reactionary. It is something which was more important than my Jewishness was my political awareness. In the lab my Professor was a Communist. And he was a friend. He had an effect upon me. I was not a Communist at all in those days. But I was Socialist

like my parents, and - more than my parents. But my husband - well the one who now was my husband, who was not political at all. And he didn't want to take part in any - demonstration or belonging to any group. However, his friend - who was older than him, who was a 'préfet', had been very much opposed to him marrying me because I was a student of Marcel Prenant, the Communist Professor, well known Communist Professor. You can take the name Marcel Prenant, because he played a very important part in my life. Unfortunately I lent my book to somebody who came to interview me recently. Not my book - my copy of his book, of his memoirs. And - I think it's interesting, because this man who was so reckless, and going to protect my husband all his life, because he was older, and my husband had lost his father while he was working with that man, who was a Prefect, you know, Prefect, he's a very important situation in France. And he was - later on I'm mixing things. But I - I hate that man so much. That man who had objected to Pierre marrying me for - political and supposedly nationalist reasons was a collaborator during the war, had a very important post, and what's more having heard that Pierre was arrested - and later...

End of Cassette 1, Side B

Cassette 2, Side A
Reel 1, Side 2, continued

... Pierre was arrested. Never lifted a finger to help us in any way, to see if we had enough money to eat and things like that. So - I think it shows how these people - some of these people who have collaborated were - in fact purely interested in their own - good, in their own interest. Anyway, coming back to our story. Then - we got married. But the difficulty in my marriage is that my - mother-in-law had to live with us. Because she had no money. She had been ruined before. And her husband had died as I mentioned incidentally. And that of course made life a bit difficult. As it always does in a - for a young couple. And actually that was the main objection of my parents to my marrying Pierre. Because of my mother-in-law. Who - ultimately was a great help to me. Anyway, that was - we married end of December. Life was - really quite happy in spite of this little - difficulty. And we went on holiday in August. And of course the - external situation was getting worse and worse. When we came back - I was expecting a baby by then. I expected my baby very shortly after being married. So in September, when things were darker and darker - we decided that I shouldn't stay - well I didn't decide, they decided that I shouldn't stay in Paris.

Who were 'they'?

They. Friends and Pierre, that I shouldn't have the danger, because there is a war, invasion, etcetera, and protect myself and my future baby. And a friend from the Sorbonne - who - offered to take me to her sister, who had a - an estate in Normandy in the middle of the countryside, near Caen. And they had a car, which was not that frequent these days. So she offered to take me there. We were hoping for a short time - we were still hoping that things would settle. So - I went. And of course Pierre was - mobilised. He had to -

Join the army?

Yes, because he was an officer anyway. And there started a very stark life, you know, with Pierre away. And me in the middle of the countryside. Expecting a baby any minute.

Where were you then?

In Normandy. In this estate in the countryside. Near Caen. But of course it was a phoney war. And nothing much happened, except that Pierre was terribly bored. Finally - however, he didn't want me to come back to Paris because we were always expecting things would change. And there would be danger in Paris. So I stayed there. And - I had my baby in a convent. Because all the doctors were away, mobilised. And - I couldn't find a place in a clinic. I had to go to Caen for the birth. Which was twenty kilometres from where we were. I remember I started having labour pains. I had time to go and collect some socks which - wool socks which I had knitted and wanted to send to Pierre. And I had my baby in that convent. The place is now completely destroyed. In bombing. And Pierre could come and had leave. Oh, that was - oh, I was so happy. I couldn't believe it that I would see him then. He

just turned up without warning. I shall always remember the noise of his steps on the stairs. I thought I recognised them. A cousin of mine was visiting me. She also remembers it, because it was really so unexpected. But he came for three or four days. And the good nuns allowed him to sleep in my room. And I went back to my friends. My mother had joined me for the birth. Had come. And my mother didn't get on that well with the friend. Anyway, I couldn't stay there doing nothing. Because I had my job in the lab. But - our lab was evacuated to Bordeaux. Where it happened that Pierre's sister lived. Lives. Still does. So - I went to Bordeaux - with my mother and my baby. And we spent the winter there. The only interruption was I had managed to go and visit Pierre. While things were so quiet he was posted in Alsace. But I managed to get a permit to visit him. And - of course on the 10th of May - 1939, was the invasion of Poland and the advance of the German armies. And very quickly the communications between Pierre and me were interrupted. We couldn't write any longer. There was - no - no post. May, June - yes - for six weeks I remember I had no news. Until one day - I heard that he had arrived in a small town called Auch with all his men. He hadn't been made prisoner. Quite miraculously. You know so many French people were made - French soldiers - one million of French soldiers were made prisoners. And many officers, I am ashamed to say, had abandoned their men. But Pierre brought his men. Who showed their gratitude afterwards. And they were all in Auch. And he asked me to come and join him there. So - oh well, I forgot to mention that while being in Bordeaux, and the arrival in Bordeaux - you must have read about it - of all the - first we had the Belgians - and then all the French from the north. Everybody coming to the south of France, where they thought they would be safer. Bordeaux was choc-a-bloc, you couldn't move. And you would meet friends or relations without being any more surprised that they were there. It was an extraordinary atmosphere. The whole of France had - converged to these parts. Our little flat was full ..

Full of people?

Yes, we had to pick as many as we could. We couldn't pick many because we lived in a very small flat which we had miraculously found. So from there - we - took a train. My mother-in-law came with me, who was - quite elderly. Well, I thought she was elderly, she was younger than I am now. And my baby. A cousin of mine had this marvellous idea to give me a hammock. So - the baby could sleep in a hammock, because there was no question of anybody sitting down in the trains, the trains were all choc-a-bloc. After a long journey I arrived in Auch where Pierre was. With his men. Of course it is hard to describe the happiness to be reunited. But at that - day, he had been posted to another town, so we had to move again. And we -

Where is Auch in fact?

In...not quite south, in the west of France. South of the centre if you like. We were to go to Mirande. Which was a smaller town. Which is very famous for the fruits. And then we were billeted in a farm. And I must say I had a few days very happy there. We were on the farm with Pierre and the baby. And we could have food there, more than we had had. And Pierre had the job of - I can't find my English word - of - counting - getting all the material from the army, you know, for the men who were demobilised, to give their clothes, their military clothes back, and there was the

material they had been given. Or they had got during this last weeks of the war. Inventory. Inventor. Inventory. Yes. And we didn't think very much of the future. But I was personally inclined to stay there and to try and find a little job. Because we knew that the Germans were in Paris. I didn't feel like going back to Paris at all. I would have been quite happy to - be a delivery woman and that Pierre would have had a job in the post office or something. But to stay there. So did Pierre. But then came a note from the Ministry, which was still French, in spite of the Germans being there, ordering him to go back to Paris immediately. He was in Paris responsible for the navigation of the ..

Barges?

Barges. So he thought it his duty to obey. And he thought by going back he would save - things from the Germans. And also that he would help feeding Parisians. Because any - provisions could only come by - barges. Because all the roads and the bridges had been so destroyed during the - by the bombing. So we went back to Paris. A dismal arrival. Paris, our home, with Germans in the streets. And hardly anybody we knew there. We got home. And - Pierre got - started work at his job. I went once to visit my parents flat because they had remained in Bordeaux. Or near Bordeaux. And that day some Germans had - visited the flat above, which was the flat of a professor who had done a lot for - German - French/German friendship between the two wars. So there had been some traitors among them, so they knew the flat very well because they didn't even ask what floor. And I was there alone visiting my parents' flat. And upstairs I could hear the books dropping and - being thrown down the stairs. So it was my first contact with the - technique of the Germans. I waited for them to be gone. And I went home again. And life got on until Pierre lost his job. Because there was a new law in November - I have the date somewhere - when anybody - any Jew in contact with the public was to be dismissed. So this job which - anybody who is a civil servant in France thinks they are safe for life - and there we were - he had lost his job...

That was not something you anticipated?

At all. Still less that - they had said that - if you had five generations in France you were safe, so the Germans would not - do anything to the Jews who were French, who had been French for five generations. So we had our family tree, showing our five generations. And so we felt - rather safe. But we - didn't at that time take part in the Resistance, I am always ashamed to say. We were only concerned with - protecting ourself here and there, and protecting the baby and our new home. He found a job, thanks to an engineer, M. Freycinet (his ancestor, M. Freycinet, had taken part to defend Dreyfus actually). I don't know how he got in touch - oh yes, first there were some friends who had offered us to - to go to the Free Zone, because France was divided then you know. Only the north of France was occupied. And so - somebody - there were already - some nets of Resistance, who had arranged for us to go. And to pass the line of demarcation you had to walk of course. And the idea to do that with my mother-in-law and the baby - and it was always very dangerous anyway - frightened us. We were not politically or - aware really, when I come to think of it. If I - was in such a situation with all the knowledge I have now, well - I certainly would behave differently. We thought that by keeping quiet - in our corner -

You thought it would pass you by?

Yes. It was passed by many French people mind you, but not all by any means. I am not the only French person who has been arrested - by any means. Unlike what the other people think. Anyway, the - nevertheless we could be aware of the danger. And we accepted hospitality from a friend who took us in their flat. What we wanted actually was a flat of our own and take a false name, which was the best way of hiding. I tried two people, two friends, who I thought very dedicated friends. And for different reasons they refused to let me have their flat. Which was a terrible blow. One of them was a sister where I had taken refuge in 1938. And her sister has never recovered from it. She was - so upset that her sister hadn't let her go back to Normandy, where perhaps we would have been safe. I don't know. But as I say, another friend took us in their flat. But it was obviously very embarrassing to be at this friends, and - with the baby, who was now a - nearly two years. It was 1940 now. So we decided to go back home, to be home. That was what we wanted more - most - more than anything. I remember - you can talk of premonition, going out on my bicycle on the 11th of December 1941. And feeling very oppressed and thinking really, "We are mad, we must move out". But on 12th of December 1941 - as I mentioned in my book - the Germans came to arrest my husband. That night they arrested 300 French-born people and mostly who had - who were - in a rather - prominent position. I mean - either teachers or engineers - or a composer. The brother of the one who became the Prime Minister, Debray, Robert Debray. That sort of people. So - at 4 in the morning the bell rang - well I repeat it by heart because I am writing it down for my book - that it is heard. The bell rang, I went to open the door. The baby was crying because he was a bit ill. Unfortunately, Pierre came to join me at the door. But in any case he couldn't have escaped because there was somebody standing at the door downstairs. And they took him away. And I tried very hard to - go out and see where he was going. But the streets were black and I couldn't see anything. When I came back I tried to phone my friends. But the phone had been cut. Which was a precaution they always did when they arrested people. So I couldn't do anything - I phoned later from some friends. My parents came, but - what could be done, he had gone. And we had no idea where to. For how long or anything. Meanwhile one has always to look after the baby and laugh and smile at him. And then to go and try to get some food. And that's what the life was for the following weeks, or even months. Very quickly I heard, I don't know exactly how, that they were in Compiègne, where there was a detention camp where there were political prisoners and White Russians. And - after - a few days I had been there, I was in the lab, a colleague of mine who was a White Russian, whose husband was in Compiègne, told me that he had got in touch with Pierre. He heard that there were Jews - French Jews had been transported there. And he enquired and found out that my husband was there. Even though he didn't know him, but he knew me. They were separated by a wall, but they started corresponding by sending bits of paper over the wall. So - from December to - till January here they were. They had been kept somewhere before. From January to March - that's how - I - kept in touch with Pierre. Trying of course to get him liberated. I always thought that Pierre Bloch would be liberated. I couldn't yet quite make my mind that he would be arrested like anybody else, because he was such an important person. In fact I - I didn't know at all how to manage - several of them, eight or nine, managed to be liberated. Robert Debray, for instance, the brother of

Debray who became Prime Minister - got liberated because - I mean the brother of a doctor - the uncle of the - I said the brother, the uncle of the Prime Minister - got liberated because Dr. Debray - who later was a great resistant - who was a very famous doctor, had saved the life of the son of the Japanese Emperor I think. And so the Japanese Emperor interfered and - Robert Debray was liberated. And the others, I don't know exactly how, but I am sure there were still ways if you knew how to - because as I say, I was terribly naive. And when I think of it I feel that the firm for whom my husband worked - who, incidentally, was doing works for the Germans as well as protecting some Jews like my husband - hinted that they would give me some money if I found the way to - to pay for his release and to - I can't find the words I mean -

Bribe?

To bribe somebody. But I didn't take the hint, I only realised it afterwards. Until the 27th of March when somebody phoned me - who had been in Compiègne, and saw them marching towards the station. So that is a date when they were deported. And they also told me that Pierre by that time Pierre was already very weak. And had difficulties in walking from the camp to the - to the station. The camp was not - well it used to be barracks. Royalieu it was called, outside Compiègne. And then no more news. And I couldn't believe it - that is what I am writing in my book. I am repeating my words because they still are in my mind because I wrote them yesterday. I couldn't believe that in the 20th century somebody could vanish like that - from the earth without leaving any trace. And I was expecting a letter any day now. Every day I thought it would come. But it never came. And of course I was very busy - keeping up my work, sort of at - The research I did there were not very - interesting, but at least attending the lab and trying to get food, queueing for the food - and - looking after the baby. Although my mother-in-law by then was looking after him more than me. On the - I think the 18th of May - I will have to check again - Maurice is the name of my baby, who is now 57, was a bit ill, so I thought it was a good occasion not to go to the lab. And I was determined to investigate - to enquire - where Pierre was. I thought after three months of disappearance surely I am entitled to know where he is. Of course he died the 8th of April. But I knew that many - many months later. So - I couldn't speak German. So I - asked a man from the firm where Pierre worked, who had told me that he could speak German, that he would be to my disposal to help me for any - effort I could have to - any - step I would want to take. So Maurice had been a bit ill, but not very ill, I told - my mother-in-law, as the fever having gone down, "I am going out for a couple of hours". And together with that man I went to the - we went to the Commandant of the Wehrmacht. Which I thought was head of all people - you see how naive I was, I wasn't really conscious of the difference between Wehrmacht and - Gestapo. And then we were received very politely. We were even taken to some offices in an office. And they told us - "well - it is very sad that we - sorry Madame Bloch, but we can't do anything for you. All the civilian - prisoners are the responsibility of the S.S. Whose headquarters are at the Avenue Foch. You'd better go and see them there". As we were going out I could see that my companion was not terribly - hot. I realise it more now than I did at the time, because I was so determined to - to hear news from Pierre. And I had such a short time, it was today or never, because it was an occasion being not at the lab and not queueing for anything. I was - blind. And as soon as we go, and of course this

poor man was not going to let me down. So off we went to Avenue Foch. And at the entrance there was a - sentry, who asked who we wanted. He said, "Oh, you want to go in, alright".

End of Cassette 2, Side A

Cassette 2, Side B
Reel 1, Side 2, continued

And eventually I was got - I was taken - panicking. And I said "oh, I'm not so sure I want to go". "Oh no", he said, "now you are here you cannot go. You have to go in". So we were shown in directly to Danecker, who was then responsible for the Jews in Paris. Capitaine Danecker. Who received us with - what situation can you say - shouts. Not looking at us - looking at me, because the sight of a Jew would soil - the - sight of an S.S. And shouting at me "Juden, Juden". I didn't know what he said, because I couldn't understand a word of German at that time. But I could hear the - could hear the voice. And after a few - I suppose insults, I'm sure it must have been, they took me in a little room next to the office where they were. Which probably was a - this house where they were was a big private house, which probably had belonged to some Jewish family and which they have taken over and transformed into - a head office. And it was really quite extraordinary, because there I was in a little room, which didn't look like a jail or anything. The only sign of my being - a prisoner, was that the - there was no handle - no door handles. They had removed the door handles. That was really my first step of - being deprived of liberty. Through the door I heard - my poor companion being insulted. And he had great difficulties in being freed. But as the - firm for whom he worked - were doing important works for the Germans, after telephoning them he managed to be released. As for me, I was left there in this little room. I don't know for how long. But for very long. I don't even remember whether I was given anything to eat or to drink. I don't remember. And I really didn't know what was going to happen to me. Whether I would be able to go tonight and sleep in my bed. I was still - confident that I would after they would check on my papers. Because I had my identity card stamped 'Juden'. It was in order. And it was stamped. But that was an illusion. And I think they brought somebody else there too in the room. I don't remember whether it is at that stage that they had a maid, so to speak, or whether she came later.

End of Cassette 2, Side B

End of Reel 1, Side 2

Cassette 3, Side A

Reel 2, Side 1

I was taken to the nearest police station. It was a strange experience. And I heard that Laval was coming to visit, and they had to take some special measure. And I found a book that a prisoner in the cell left. Stendhal. I read - I had to - to - to take the time, to spend the time as much as I could, I couldn't do anything else. In the morning I found it extraordinary because I was in the district where my cousins lived. And I was there, so close, unable to go. And gradually the consciousness of - being restrained in my movements became more complete. The same men came in the course of the morning to collect me. And I begged them to let me call at home, because they - nobody knew where I was of course. And they agreed. And the noise of my key going in the door of course gave an immense hope to my family. My parents had arrived of course to - support my mother-in-law and the baby. So as soon as I opened the door I shouted "No, I am arrested". And I went into the room and I saw these three elderly people bent over the cot. And of course - well - you can imagine - The men were polite. But they couldn't do anything they said. I had to take some clothes. And they were taking me to the depot, which is a place where people - oh, - custody, it is called in English. They took me in custody. In the basement of the Court of Justice. Where there are cells. And - at night they are looked after by nuns, who are - were the most cruel people I ever met. The - in the evening - when we were let out of our cells, to be all together, I met there two friends. One of which was my friend - and still is. And her friend was France Bloch, who later on was decapitated in Germany, because she had been caught - as being responsible for an active act of Resistance. Both had been caught, but France - probably had the gravest - act of accusation. And with France it's not because she died in such circumstances. But she knew she was in much greater danger than me. But she talked to me - so kindly, trying to - make me see that it was - we were all part of the fight for liberty and for the country. And she had a little boy of the same age as mine. She was really an extraordinary woman. And she showed it until the last minute. Her jailer came in touch with her family after the war to say how much she admired her during the night before the execution. So - I was not - we were just for a little while together, and then I was put in a - in a cell with - I think ten other women. There was hardly room for laying down. And given, the food, you know, through the door, like you see in pictures. And given buckets as the only hygienic facility. But - I was never called to be interrogated. Anyway I wouldn't have been able to say anything. And after a few days somebody managed to interfere for my - on my behalf. And I was removed from custody and taken to a - detention camp. 'Les Tourelles' it is called. Which was to be barracks. But it was a place best known for its swimming pool. A book has just been written about it, in which I have written, but - the book hasn't arrived yet, otherwise I could show you about 'Les Tourelles'. There - conditions were pretty good. It was more like a strict school than a prison. There were - oh, I don't know, about a hundred women. Divided into two. Those who had been arrested like me for nothing so to speak, except being Jewish or some for having done black market. And some having been arrested for political reasons. We were allowed to receive visitors. My parents came with my child. Twice a week. For a month. And I was still very optimistic, I thought that after a while they would release me. But one day Danecker, the one who had arrested me, came. And all the women in their 40's had to go in the yard, in rows, and were called by name, and were never

allowed to go back to the other comfortable dormitories where we had been. We were taken to another building in the same compound. And without any facilities, beds or chairs or anything. And we were left there, I can't remember if it was for two or three days. Until one morning they called us to gather in the yard. All the prisoners who were not going were consigned - were - not allowed to look through the window, they had to have the windows closed. Nevertheless we started singing. And some at the window they sang with us. And it was early in the morning, it must have been 6 in the morning or something like that. And we were led outside. And one gendarme - we were still with French police - one gendarme was weeping. I don't think any of them liked this business to have to herd us - that way. But - it was their job. Two buses were waiting for us at the gate. We were pushed into them. And it was a really extraordinary experience to be imprisoned in an ordinary bus, going along the streets of Paris with all the passers-by - hurrying for going shopping or going to work. And there we were going we didn't know where to. In fact this bus took us to the - station. A goods station. At Drancy.

End of Cassette 3, Side A

Cassette 4, Side A
Reel 2, Side 1, continued

But from Drancy there was a - camp for all the other Jews. For all the Jews and has been afterwards for everybody through the war. Came - arrived - hundreds of men who had been detained in - in Drancy - I know came to join us. And we were - the station is not called Drancy, the goods station. Don't remember what it's called. It's near Drancy. And we were pushed into - trains, goods trains. You know, on which you put horses, so many and - I don't know whether you have those in England, but in France it's typical - this - carriages, goods carriages. With sliding doors. You must have seen pictures of them. My convoy was not as bad as the convoys later because there were only 60 of us in each - in the carriage, so - we could lay down. And we had been allowed to take some provisions with us. But no food - no drink. We didn't have any drink because we had only the provisions that our parents had brought us when they visited us. Sardine tins and - a few things like that. They had - in fact not much to bring us anyway. They slid the doors closed, locked them. It was only very small windows. And the train moved on. The atmosphere in this train you can - not imagine. Some people were calm. Those who had been arrested for political reasons were the most - the strongest and started singing for a while. Which I found unbearable. Again, now I would understand it much better. Some were shrieking. Hysterically. And the journey went on in that way. After three days and three nights, we stopped - oh, well - while we were in France we drilled a hole with a nail file and we - threw some little bits of paper with our parents' address, and actually mine arrived. My parents received it to know that I was on my way towards the East. In Germany they opened the door. And on another platform some Red Cross - German Red Cross women were standing, in grey, their uniform was grey. And we shouted in all languages, "water, water". Because we had with us many refugees who could speak German. But they just ignored us. After three days and three nights of agony - and cries - At that time I had kept my head, it's from that moment that I really became a much stronger woman. Because I spent all sorts of time looking after sick people. Somebody said they remembered me going from one to another and even from one carriage to another. I was so silly until the war and then I became - it was a transformation, you know, I became quite a strong woman after that, from then onwards. Without modesty I should say I have a fantastic reputation now in France you know. Wherever I go - it's - After three days and three nights - we could see that we were going towards the East. We could see that we went through Germany. We could see the trees, it was - so nice. Through the little holes, the little windows, we managed to see - a bit. And my hope grew that we were going to Auschwitz, where I would meet my husband. How did I know that he was in Auschwitz?

I was going to ask you that. How did you know?

Did I know the name? There is a gap in my memory there. Because I remember very well saying "oh, we are going - towards Auschwitz". Or was it towards - Poland, generally speaking. I can't remember that. Sorry. Just a gap.

Maybe it will come to you?

Maybe. When finally - after three days and three nights the door slid open. Oh, a very important detail, I forgot to say that at the station the - the Germans took over from the French police. We were within the hands of S.S. I didn't know that they were S.S., but they were. The gendarme had given us over.

At Drancy?

Yes. At Drancy. On the platform. Sorry, it was - [Le Bourget] They slid the doors open. And there were all these soldiers with dogs, shouting at us, making us get out of the - carriages, leaving all of our belongings behind. Including our handbags. And - brutally it was - making us go - five by five. Keeping only aside the sick. But there were only very few at that stage. Only really those who were sick were put aside, you know, later on, two-thirds of the convoy would be sent to the gas chamber. There were women working on the railway, who shouted "walk, walk, at any cost walk". And that was translated to us. We didn't understand it, because of course there was a lorry taking the sick and old - everybody was exhausted and they would have liked to be carried to the - in a lorry. Which was a case in the convoy - the lorries took people directly to the gas chamber. But at that time there was only one little gas chamber, they were not yet built. And in a way it was in Auschwitz, not in Birkenau. That is '42, on the first convoy you see, from France. We arrived 25th of June 1942. Which is extremely early. My number - you may have seen it, is seven thousand, nine hundred and sixty three. Which is a very small number, and without any letter. Then they made us march five by five. It was going to be the way we would walk - for the rest of our prisoner-life, with the guns - directed towards us. I remember I - I turned round - I will say that in my papers - and I saw this black spot towards me - because I - I really didn't believe it. Well - I don't know whether I believed it or not. At that stage one is too - dazzled. There is no word to say what you - what you feel after three days and three nights and the circumstances and arriving deprived of everything. Just - another life started. We walked past a gate over which was written up "Arbeit Nacht Frei". This has become famous. Past some stone buildings, which were the buildings where the S.S. worked, sat and worked. And - made to stand in front of some trestle - you know -

Trestle tables?

Trestle tables. Where we were to take all our clothes and - orderly - "Here are the shirts. Here are the petticoats". And then the jewellery, including the wedding ring. Then we were completely naked. Waiting for what's going on. And they shaved us. We couldn't recognise each other. And then the proceedings stopped. Hess - he was called Hess, the Commandant of the camp was called Hess. Like Rudolf Hess. Whether it is the same spelling, I think so. I've got his - defence here, so I could check. Wanted to enjoy the sight of the first French women arriving in his camp. He came with his retinue. And enjoyed especially those of us who had some red varnish on their toes. After they were satisfied we were taken to a sort of shower. Terribly hot and then terribly cold. And then given some uniform, old Russian uniforms, from Russian soldiers who had been detained there, against the Geneva - agreements. And who had died there. In one of these uniforms we found a medal, a religious medal. And at last it was time to go into the camp. We thought we would be entitled to a rest. But we were made to work immediately, carrying bundles of laundry. Until - I

don't know what time, because from that moment onwards there was no time because - in a concentration camp there is no time. Until the Commando from outside came in and told us in what sort of place we had arrived. We couldn't believe it. Telling us that the few sick people who had been taken away were going to be gassed and incinerated. We couldn't believe it. Of course I couldn't understand a thing of what they were saying because there were no French people. They were mostly Slovakian girls. And a few Poles. Jewish Poles. And after all this information we were made to stand - it was called 'Zähl Appel'. And in my innocence I thought they said "c'est l'appel". I said, "Why do they speak French for that". In German 'Zähl' means to count. And there we were made to stand, several of us, and several of the others collapsed. Because you had to stand for - I don't know - an hour or so. And when at last we were allowed to break - to - oh, I can't find the word now - I must ask the German word for that because it illustrates it better. There was a rush towards the barracks. Which were built - stone houses there in Auschwitz. And where there were some - I don't know why my English words don't come. - You know, beds on top of each other.

Bunks?

Bunks. We thought these bunks it would be possible to have a rest in it. But in fact we had to fight to have a bunk. And - we couldn't have a bunk for ourselves, we had to share it, it was very narrow. Then some sort of food came. Some liquid. And some bread. In the evening that was the usual - meal. A kind of tea. Which was not tea of course. Bread with something - either a bit of margarine or a bit of sausage. Possibly made with the blood of the victims. Exhausted, we finally managed to find a place where to rest our head and to lay down more or less. Not for very long because early in the morning - sounded shouts "Aufstehen". Get up. It was accompanied with - blows for those who didn't get up fast enough. Again we had - we were given some kind of - tea. With no bread or anything. For those who hadn't kept some from the night before there was nothing. And rushed out for another Appell. Not as long as the one in the evening. But long enough. And after the appel - in my time - because from a book I read it was different later - people - there were some Aufsehrinnens, meaning overseers, who were standing around. And people rushed to one or another. We went to the one which had not too many people. And we soon knew why there were not so many who rushed to hers, because she was needing - for - one of the hardest jobs. We were set again in rows of five. Made to walk with our wooden shoes. Past the gate, where the S.S. were sitting - happily. Where later there was going to be an orchestra, but there was no orchestra yet - in these days - it was the beginning. And we started walking. It was very hot. With our bare head. Our feet. And we were - after a short while we were ordered to take our shoes off. Again this is an order, I don't know why, which was not given later. Probably because people didn't have enough shoes - any shoes, also shoes that didn't fit them. Because the following convoys were not given Russian uniform, but - old clothes from the new arrivals. Evening dresses or whatever, that - they didn't have any use for were distributed to the new arrivals. Who had survived the first selection at the arrival, at the entrance of the camp. Anyway, I'm telling my own story. That's how it was at that stage. And we walked to a place, stopped at a shed where one had to take the tools, pickaxes, wheelbarrows and spades. Again as the newcomers didn't know the difference between a pickaxe and a spade, how much harder it was to work with a

pickaxe. So pickaxe was left to us. We were by that time only two or three from my arrival, because we had been disseminated at the time of distribution of the work. And -

So there were no other French-speaking people?

I think - yes, there was one. We were two of us had - kept together all the time. At that time - as long as she lived. Which was not very long. Yes, those first days she was with me. She was the one with whom I had shared everything while we were in detention. I didn't describe our life in the detention, but - because it would make things too long. And I don't think it was very interesting. But as I say I have written it down for a book which is published, but apparently it was sent to me, I haven't received it yet. Life in that camp in Paris. I skipped it for you. I don't think it is very interesting. Well yes, it is. But I cannot tell you everything. Yes, it has interesting aspects. Anyway, now we are in Auschwitz. At the place of work. Which consisted in - what is called in German 'Planierung'. To level the ground, where they had fought and the houses were in ruins. And the soil was very uneven after the works - or - I don't know why, but the soil was very uneven, and they wanted to have it 'Planierung', so as to build some houses for later on for the soldiers. You can imagine what it is in these conditions to lift the pickaxe - which would be something I couldn't do at this minute, even when I was younger it was - I would have found it hard. But in these conditions. But you had to do it. Actually - the S.S. in charge didn't watch us very closely. Except when the surveyor would come riding along. At that time from the distance they saw him and they started harrassing us and telling us to get on with the work. We had to - to - dig the soil and then to load some wheelbarrow to move - push the wheelbarrow to some carts. And to load the carts which were taking the gravels away. Some food was brought to us at lunchtime. A sort of soup. Which was to be our food from then onwards. We had soup for lunch and that was it. And - at the same time in the afternoon - I don't know the time - we were again - 'antreten' - I remember now. Antreten meaning to be in rows. Auftreten is to break the rows. And some people would break the rows by - You understand what I mean by 'break' - When you are in a row and you don't need to be in a row anymore. To dismantle the rows. It's called 'Auftreten'. 'Antretan' meaning you had to stand in a row. And walk back towards the camp. And then was the Appell. The roll-call. And the same - proceeding as the day before. Rush for work, the food - and short sleep. Obviously one couldn't live very long in that regime. And - every day some of us had already died. After six weeks, out of the seventy, twelve were left. And I myself was really - extremely weak - certainly - ready to die. But then what a miracle occurred, as I describe it in my paper. Together with two other women from the same convoy as me, we were taken to the Aryan - that is the non-Jewish block - to join the 'Kommando' of 'Pflanzenzucht'. That was thanks to a - Czech woman who was a secretary of the head of agriculture of the camp. Who was very Francophile. Knew that there had been a French arrival for the first time. And in those days we were given titles - for jobs in France. She had noticed that three of us had been a scientist. And there was a fourth one, a Slovakian, who had friends in the place, I don't know who she had. And the four of us were taken to the block where non-Jews lived. And from that block we were - enrolled in a - 'Kommando', 'the Pflanzenzucht'. Research for plants. Because the Germans, when they invaded the Ukraine, noticed that there were fields of a kind of dandelion, called 'Taraxacum kok-saghyz'. Even

when they had had corn, they had replaced the corn by this dandelion. Because this - dandelion was specially rich in rubber. You know if you have any dandelion if you cut the stem it sticks a bit. But this one had more. And it was sufficient to add a bit of this rubber to synthetic rubber to give it the properties of natural rubber. And of course rubber was a very important problem for the Germans, as it had been for the Russians. Because they didn't have anymore - source of proper rubber. And in Auschwitz, near Auschwitz, they had built by - by the prisoners, a factory of synthetic rubber, the Buna. Which is something very - famous, for German synthetic rubber. So having this factory of Buna, to grow with cheap workmanship a lot of dandelion, sounded a very good idea - to Himmler. Even Himmler, who was responsible for concentration camps. And the head of the agriculture was directly dependent to Himmler. So - and this head of agriculture was an agricultural engineer. But he didn't know much - he was not a very great scientist. But he thought it was a marvellous way of saving his skin, other than going to fight. So he was very keen on organising - in organising a culture of this 'Taraxacum kok-saghyz' to save the Third Reich, by giving them rubber for their tyres. So - in this block for non-Jews food was distributed in a more civilised way. We didn't have to fight for our soup. We each had a bunk. And we were given a striped dress. Which was this uniform. And from there we would go to a village in the morning, walk to a village, where there was - we were to - to grow this dandelion. But in fact it was very hard work because the other members of this Kommando were Poles, Polish women, who had been brought from Ravensbrücke. And we were supervised by two Ukrainians, civilian prisoners.

End of Cassette 4, Side A

Cassette 4, Side B
Reel 2, Side 1, continued

But there was less carrying of trays of earth and plants and planting all day in any sort of weather. And then when we came back to the camp we had to stand towards the Appell. And the work was very hard. I think that will be enough for today, won't it.

Are you very tired?

I feel that I am tired. Sorry.

End of Reel 2, Side 1

Reel 2, Side 2

You remember that last time we were talking about your experiences at the rubber factory. That was where we broke off. So shall we go on with the story from there?

I cannot remember exactly whether I told you how Caesar decided to have a lab built.

No, you didn't tell me about that.

Oh. Alright. I told you that we were taken -

To the Aryan block?

Oh, that's long before. I left at the Aryan block?

Yes, you were working. And as Jewesses you were given the very hard work. That is where we stopped?

When Caesar, the head of Landwirtschaft, who was our boss, Obersturmbannführer Caesar, found a microscope, and he was - very interested. And I told him, "Oh, with a microscope I can show you something". And I - there were slides with the microscope. And with some red ink and some of the - whatever it is they put in the groove to disinfect - was it potassium or lime or something like that? I managed to make a slide of a leaf - having cleaned it with this potassium and stained it with some red ink. And showed it to - Oh no, this was not from a leaf, sorry, that time. It was from a drop of water, with little protozoa, little algae. Which I stained with red ink and I put it under the microscope and he was - he thought it was marvellous. And then I explained to him that I could study the 'Taraxacum kok-saggyz' much better if I was to do it in a scientific manner. He agreed, he thought it would have appealed to Himmler, who was also so keen that this culture of rubber plant would develop, because, you know, - I probably told you the whole object of the exercise was that a little of the rubber extracted from this dandelion - just a little of this rubber added to the synthetic rubber which they made in Buna a few miles away, improved the Buna very much. Because you get only a very small amount of rubber, of the latex, and then you have to extract it. That's what the Russians did, they have found that in the

Ukraine, that's why they had decided to grow this dandelion. Didn't I tell you that before.

No.

Oh, that is the important point. Is that Caesar, who had no - no - desire to go to the Russian front had found this - idea - very attractive, and Himmler had agreed, so that he would have an important job to grow this dandelion, which would help the German effort. Because Germany was very short of rubber. Sorry, I am getting a bit jumble mumble. Because I didn't know exactly where I left. Anyhow, Caesar having been impressed by my slide, asked me what I needed. And I said I needed a razor and some elder pith. I don't know if you know that to make a botanical slide you have to hold the stem of the leaf in a - a piece of elder base, and then you cut it with a razor. And to my great surprise he agreed and sent me to the camp, to 'Canada'. 'Canada' was the name for the place where they accumulated all the clothes and objects which the victims had brought. And that's where they sorted them out, what was useful for Germany and what could be useful within the camp. And you could find everything there. When they took me there I was really stunned. After so many months being deprived of any - to - to see all these things, I would have liked to take anything. Forgetting where they came from. But of course I was not to do that because you would be searched when you came out. And - I did find a razor quite easily. Which was the object. And I was - I was accompanied by two S.S.'s of course, who watched me. And I went back to Raisko, which was the centre for growing the - Taraxacum, where we worked, where we had been planting and trying to grow this famous Taraxacum. And I managed to make a slide of the leaf, which Caesar admired still more. And from that day on he allowed me to stay to organise a kind of club. So as to study - the development of the - rubber, of the latex - inside of the stem, because until now all the results had been very poor. The beautiful roots which we received from the Ukraine degenerated. Which was not very surprising, because the soil was acid and in the Ukraine it was alkali. But I persuaded him that by following the development of the latex, I might find something about how to grow richer roots of latex. Gradually he built a lab. One of the buildings was transformed into a lab. And he - he brought some more people. By that time I had heard that - I don't know whether I mentioned it - that a friend of mine was in the camp, a chemist.

No, you didn't mention that.

Oh. A French woman was sent to the Stabsgebäude - I haven't told you that I was now sleeping in the Stabsgebäude? Didn't I? Oh, that is a shame if I didn't.

The Aryan block you said you were in?

Oh well, that was in Birkenau. The Aryan block. So - I was really getting out of - Can you make it a paragraph and then go back to it. You can do that? Sorry. At the Aryan block we were still in Birkenau. Still with lice and - poor conditions of life. To say the least. And typhus was spreading. It spread so much that the S.S.'s were also contaminated. And our chief and his wife got typhus. So his wife died, so we didn't see him for several weeks, and we were left in Birkenau in the Aryan block, but in Birkenau. And - one of us died too. We were in a worse and

worse state, like anyone who lived there. Where life was impossible, even for Aryans, even though it was - better, as I explained, than in the Jewish blocks. But after Caesar had recovered he came back and saw us in this pitiful state and decided that we should be moved to the Stabsgebäude, which was a building where the Aufsehrinnen lived, and - and - a basement - the secretaries, all those women who were in contact with the S.S., lived. So that it was clean, so that they would not contaminate the S.S.'s. I'll lend you the book. Haven't I lent you the book 'Secretaries of Death', which describes the life in the Stabsgebäude? So in the Stabsgebäude we were very much better. Clean and with our soup served regularly. From the Stabsgebäude we continued going to Raisko where we were, doing this hard work. But nevertheless it was much better. And while we were there I heard a French woman turned up. And she told me that she was a Communist Party member, who together with a group of French women, non-Jews, had been sent to Auschwitz. That has been the only transport of non-Jewish French women. They were in that transport - Communists, some black marketeers and some Gaullists too. They all came from Romainville, a former workers' prison, where they had been jailed. And among these French women was one of my best friends, the one I had already met before being deported. So she was a chemist. I told Caesar, "What luck, we have a chemist who will be able to help us in our research about Taraxacum." He agreed to get her to come as well as two other women. Another one was a chemist - the one who was - the French one who was - had been sent, not by me, but had been sent by actually the Resistance, had managed to send the youngest. This French woman told me of some names - another one was a chemist and another one was the daughter of Paul Langevin, a physicist, world famous. So I asked Caesar to get the three women to us. And actually gradually I made it my business to get as many women as possible. Asking always for some more help or some specialist gardeners who would grow the kok-saghyz especially for us, etcetera. And the - that's how we - he organised a whole department. I could order slides and the petrie glasses and this sort of thing.

How many people did you have working with you in the end?

I can't remember the number. I've got it somewhere. I have to tell you.

About how many?

There were now three sections. The Botanic with me. We were about ten. The chemistry under my friend's direction. There were also about ten. And ten who were selecting the seeds, supposedly the plants for us to grow. After a while - he had a camp - there was a camp, a small camp built on the spot, where we grew. Half of the women were working with me, in the camp, which was called 'Pflanzenzucht'. And the other half were 'Gartnerei'. They worked for growing vegetables for the S.S. families who lived on the camps.

What does 'Gartnerei' mean?

'Garten' is a garden. We had the 'Gartnerei' and the 'Pflanzenzucht'. So for about fifteen months I had a rather - exceptional life. Caesar being - in fact - faithful to me, having built up a good pretext for - in the eyes of Himmler, we all belonged to Himmler, the Concentration Camp. And we received visits - visits from various

officers, who it was rather easy to dazzle with our experiments. And we took advantage of all the vegetables which were grown for the S.S. to pinch some. It was all the time a - a - our main occupation. However, I got on to do some scientific work. But at a very slow pace. And after a while I realised that the Russians had done exactly the same research and it was all known. But at first we didn't have any books anywhere. So for fifteen months we lived in this little camp. Was where life was really possible. We could wash. We - nobody pinched anything of what was given for our soup, so we had a soup. Very regularly. Except two or three days when there were crises. Of course we were always living on the edge of a knife, if I may say. Because it was sufficient to be found out with an onion or a carrot to be sent back to Birkenau. A friend of mine was sent like that back to Birkenau. I was caught with a cucumber. But - Caesar was so keen on keeping me, who had built this lab, that it transformed then into digging the latrines of the S.S. for a whole Sunday. Which was a great relief of course. By the way, did I ever tell you in the previous interview about my experience in the Bunker?

I don't think so.

That was when I was in the Stabsgebäude. I hope you will be able to put some order in all my stories. Having had such a long interval, I am afraid .. Do you want me to interrupt and tell you about it?

Yes, do, yes.

Or do you prefer that I say it in the end.

No, you can put it in here.

While we were in the Stabsgebäude, when this French woman came, she discovered that I had no pants. Because Jews were not allowed to wear any pants under their clothes. She thought it was horrific that a French woman was going like that. And the first thing she did was to organise - I must have given you that name - it was to pinch - it was the words within the camp. To organise, meaning pinching, she organised some pants that just the Aryans wore, and the same evening there was an inspection of underclothes. When the Blockälteste - I mean the woman who was responsible for our block, fortunately was a prostitute, discovered I had pants, she got into a fury. And reported me to the authorities. And after a few days of waiting to know what my punishment was, I was called in front of a sort of - court - and condemned to eight days in the Bunker. Bunker being the prison within the camp. So after a few days of my condemnation I was taken to the Bunker. The Blockälteste had to give me a loaf of bread to take with me. And this was an extraordinary experience. We were - I was taken to a - a cell, where there were eight women. Who had - who were Aryan. Jews when they were caught usually were sent to the gas chambers. Because of my special position that I had the honour of being sent to - Well a few resistant Jews had been in the Bunker too. Those who were with me had been caught for having - done some - trade of jewellery which they had taken from the - 'Canada'. And some had slept with some guards. That sort of offences. I didn't know exactly what they did. There was one who was a prostitute by profession. And I don't know what the professions of the others were, but certainly very - not very moral

professions - because they had all occupied important posts within the camp, and now were low down. So it was a - a - really an experience to live for eight days with these sort of people. And we had some soup every other day. And there was room for a lay down on - for lying down on the floor. So I spent my time mostly lying down and dreaming. I dreamt of grapes with such an intensity that I thought I was eating them. Which gave - me a want for grapes, which still lasts perhaps. Not as intensely as it did when I came out of the camp. I could have eaten the whole box of grapes. And singing. They were very offended because I cannot sing. Anyway, after a week I was taken back to the Stabsgebäude. And life resumed. And so that is a bracket from...

That was an earlier experience?

Well, we were - before the development of the lab. Well, it is all about contemporary because at that time I already - I was already having some power. Anyway, I therefore had about fifteen months of an extraordinary life. We were - we had a - ..

Bunks?

I mean one each, and with - you know, space. Specially me, because I was in a room where there were only eight, because of my position, and my friend also. The others had like a ward in hospital, if you like. And - we - on Sundays we usually were - free. And we celebrated our birthdays. We also - the Poles were very good. There were a lot of Poles. And they were giving us - concerts of singing and - their singing was good. We thought the French should do something. And - I remembered 'La Malade Imaginaire' by Molière. And I wrote it from my head. Well, not word for word obviously, but more or less. And we had with us - one of us had been the secretary of a great actor - French actor, Jouvet. And we put up a - a show of 'La Malade Imaginaire', which had been very famous ever since. Mind you some Sundays we were searched and there was - no possibility of doing anything. The clothes we had were brought by men who had been sent from the 'Canada'. That was nighties and things like that. Or pieces of cloth. Or pieces of paper. We had some black paper in the lab which made the huts. But there were - did I tell you when we were in Birkenau when I was in the Aryan block, how I watched a selection.

No, tell me about that.

And the selections at the entrance of the camp.

I think you told me about the selections at the entrance of the camp, yes.

One of the first Sundays when I was transferred into the Aryan block. I could see in the distance the S.S. sitting in sort of rows. And prisoners being brought and having to run between these two rows of S.S. And there was a little trestle they had to jump over. And anyone who couldn't run or jump over these trestles was taken out to the block 25. Did I tell you about the block 25.

No.

Oh, I am sorry. It has been too long of an interval. The block 25 was a block where the S.S. sent the women who they - destined for the gas chambers. Because they couldn't work the gas chambers until they had the right number of people to make it worthwhile. So they sent the sick or dying or sometimes not actually dying, very conscious, into that block where they were given no food nor drink. A block very well guarded. Where from we would see from time to time lorries coming with the Red Cross and they would load all the women who had been interned in that block, to take them to the gas chamber.

Did you understand at the time that that was what was happening?

Yes. We did - we knew all about everything. But all we could do is always to fight so that our friends wouldn't be taken. But a French woman once defied the guards and wanted to give them something to eat, to drink. And the S.S. in charge said "oh, you are interested Madame. Please, come in". And she was - she was not a Jew. She was one of the Communist group. And she was taken to the gas chamber with the others. So to say it was impossible to do anything - Life in this uncomfortable situation consisted of - a) trying to get as many members as possible and b) to send some of our carrots to the camp. There were always Commandos who would come from the main camp to work - these fields which were completely - uncultivated.

End of Cassette 4, Side B

Cassette 5, Side A
Reel 2, Side 2, continued

...These fields which were completely - uncultivated, to make them into beds to - to do some - what I have done the first day, destroying houses. So that we had communication with the main camp. There are these - commandos, and you know, and with the Resistance they were - liaison established with laundry - vans, which were afterwards searched throughly,[sic] thoroughly. Anyway, this lasted for fifteen months. And - until they found - a scientist, Dr Böhm, who found that our scientific work was not very exciting and at a very slow pace. Of course he took it out on me because - I was responsible for the camp. You know he was a colleague really. He had been doing research - not only in Germany but even in England, in Cambridge. So - he really was the object of my hate, personal, more than any of all the uneducated people who were in charge of us. At first we -

How do you spell his name?

Böhm. Philip Böhm. I have tried to find him after the war. I have had no luck. Some people say that he was killed at the end of the war. Some people say he has just vanished. He was not in Nuremburg anywhere. Well Caesar went to Nuremburg and wrote to me at that time. And was acquitted. Because Caesar in fact protected us all the time. He even allowed us to have our hair grow for a while.

Did you feel it was right that he should be acquitted?

Oh - don't ask me, that is a question of conscience. For a long time I didn't answer his letter. After a lot of discussing with friends. Because he had protected me. There is no doubt about it. But - he did it for his own - interests really. I believe. I have thought whether I was right in not - answering or not. He had married again in between, with a student of chemistry who was trying to do her PhD with my friend who was directing the chemistry. And this - woman was killed during the - flight of the S.S. after the dispersion. So had he had not enough punishment? I don't know. I - I am not God, I cannot judge.

I am sorry, I interrupted you, you were talking about Dr Böhm?

Yes. Who decided that we should do some more real research. And - brought me back more as a technician than as the Head of the Department. And became stricter and stricter with me. And I don't know - to - to - remind me of - my position he sent me to spread manure in the field on one icy day. Life became rather tough for me, relatively, comparatively with the Birkenau how it was. And I don't know what would have happened if by that time - we are now - oh, something else terrible happened to us. In August - '44 - I've got the date somewhere, actually I prepared it. There was a - speech on the BBC - telling about these French communists who were in Auschwitz. You know there were some very famous - Marie-Claude Vaillant Couturier, she is still alive. After the war she became the Vice-President of the Chambre des Députés. There was the wife of Casanova who was - later on Minister. There were several - very famous Communist women. Danielle Casanova was a dentist who died in Auschwitz of typhus for not accepting her favourite regime, but

going back to her friends all the time. Actually, there is a street, Danielle Casanova, in Paris now. Anyway, there was - they had in this speech in the - on the BBC, naming all these women. Which resulted that they - all the French women, and actually - all the Aryans except the Poles, were taken out of Auschwitz. So you can imagine what the - despair was for me, because we were - we had been living as a family. They had adopted me. I was a member of their family, and they were - they all were taken away from me.

You were telling me about your friends all being taken away and how despairing you were?

Yes. And we thought at that time that it was really the end of us as they were taking all the Aryans out of Auschwitz. That they would blow up the - the camp, or just liquidate us. Like they were doing now by thousands. When the Hungarians had come they didn't have enough room in the gas chambers, so they burnt the old people and children in ditches. So they had experience of that kind of liquidation. We thought it was our turn. We gave our last wishes to our friends, hoping that they would go home at least. But we didn't have any hope - much hope for ourselves. Anyhow - but of course they had to replace these women who had gone. And among them I had found a young French woman, Simone Franck, now Floersheim, who has become my friend until this day. And some others had been more or less important to me because they were friends of friends. Or because they were part of the same Communist group. But - life nevertheless continued, even though it was more and more unpleasant for me. That was in - I said August '44. It must have been August '44. But I could confirm the date. - I should have made some notes before talking to you.

Tell me as you remember it?

Then the news came through that the Russians were approaching. And that we had known of the landing of the allies. But of course we also had known that - the Germans had advanced again in '44. In January. And we thought that the good news of the landing was only temporary, and that the Germans were going to - push again. But finally we heard about the approach of the Russians. And of course various rumours circulated in the camp that the whole camp was going to be exterminated. So they were going to set us free. Until one day they decided to take us - west, to flee. They got rid of some of the gas chambers. Not to leave marks of so many. And - one day they told us to stay at home, not to go to work. And - they - went - and around 5 o'clock we saw this enormous procession, five by five, of all the prisoners who were still in the camp, walking in the snow. That was in January '45. A really terrible cold. You wouldn't believe it, but it was minus 20. I had no shoes at that stage. But - there was such a solidarity amongst us. Somebody, I don't know - opened the door of our barrack where we were waiting for - what will happen to us. And said "here is a pair of boots for Madame Bloch". It was just like a miracle for me. A - they were too small unfortunately, and I had later my feet frozen, which I suffer still. But however, it was better than nothing. I had only clogs before. Anyway, the procession came and we had to join the procession. Starting around 5 o'clock in the evening. Walking in the night. In the distance we could see some - some lights from the bombing somewhere, fighting somewhere. But we were walking

and walking. Our guards were not very much happier than us, they were also walking on each side of the column. We stopped at last in a little church. Where we were allowed to - to - sit for a while. And that's where my feet were so frozen that I couldn't take my boots off. And we crossed the next day, Katowice, I think. A town anyway. Which was so extraordinary to - to see - people still - having normal occupations, going shopping. Not many, but there were some in the street. And there we were walking through the streets. We walked like that for three days. At one stage we found a fountain and we were so thirsty that we went and drank. But then the water fell on my feet which were already so sore, and the water froze immediately and that made my feet still worse. But at that place where we had the fountain, somebody had the courage to give us a teaspoon - a big spoon full of sugar, which was marvellous. Because the only food we had had was food we had taken with us. Which was for Simone - Simone is my new friend - the Frenchwoman who had come and joined our commando at that stage and with whom I had become so friendly. We had a loaf and two onions. And - she has never forgiven me. I said, "We mustn't eat the loaf immediately. We don't know how long we are going to walk". And - so we ate a bit of it, kept the rest for the next day. And we fell asleep and when we woke up the bread had been stolen. And she had said "I wanted to eat the whole loaf". Really to eat - not to be hungry for a while. So she was right.

And so were you?

Well - we still discuss it 50 years later. Oh. So to speak, because we are very close. Well, I saved her life because it was very difficult, she had no qualification. I saved the life of many like that you know, and - taking some risks because when they discovered, Caesar got into a terrible fury when I - when he discovered that the woman I had qualified as special guarder of chemists, were in fact shopkeepers or - wife of a miner. The wife of a miner was marvellous - she became also - she is dead now from cancer, but she also became a great friend. And her - I had only - saved her at first for a nationalism, because there were no more Frenchwomen, and you know how we are, French Jews, we - we have a - special - a special attachment - to our fellow French. You must have heard, because of the French, immigrants have suffered from this attitude. And I now understand it so well. But anyway, I saved her - she says. But I think she saved me on many other occasions. So we walked for three days. Stopping - very rarely. And we arrived at this station - after the name of the place at the frontier of Germany. And there was a train. Also a goods train. With no top. And they piled us into that train. And I don't remember much about that journey because I lost my - reason. I thought I was in a boat. I describe it - but unfortunately I have lost the article, which was published in a paper of mine, feelings at that time - which I will just - after coming back, but I cannot be as accurate as I was in those days. And then we couldn't sit down because we were too many. So we took turn. When somebody fainted we - were allowed to sit down. And when it was my turn to sit down I thought I was in a comfortable armchair. And we were so thirsty. That we were trying to grab, when the train stopped, some icicles, which of course burnt our - mouth. And finally we arrived in Ravensbrück. Some of the Auschwitz inmates who had been transported to Ravensbrück, there were people from various camps and the camp was so full that there was absolutely no room. So we were left in the snow for a long while. Personally I laid down in the snow - nearly fell asleep. But they told us to get up and Simone got me up. And we were a group of French

women. We were now called "Frenchwomen". And we were taken in a tent - they had erected for some of the newcomers. And shortly afterwards - the French women who had been - who had left Auschwitz, found out that we had arrived and in fact they had been in Ravensbrück ever since they had left Auschwitz. And of course they came to see us and brought us a bit of food. We lived like that for a fortnight in these tents. In the terrible cold and - with very little food and - still less drink. I had always more than the others because my friends always brought me some, the ones with whom I had been Raïsko, which I shared with Simone of course.

End of Cassette 5, Side A

End of Reel 2, Side 2

Cassette 6, Side A

Reel 3, Side 1

You had the chance to stay at Ravensbrück, but there was no room for Simone?

Yes, so I followed my companions. And we were taken by train from Malchow, which is near to Berlin, to another camp in Leipzig [a women's annexe of Buchenwald]. On the way we were submitted to a bomb - bombardment, which were - obviously they were aiming at the railway. The S.S.'s were so frightened, that they would take shelter anywhere, and it would have been possible to escape then. But where to, we were in Germany. We laid down and Simone laid over me saying, "You have a son to look after - I have nobody". She had lost her mother and her sister at arrival at the camp. Anyway, the bombs didn't reach us, none of us was wounded or killed. And we went back to the train, onto the train, and - I don't know exactly how long we stayed on this train. But we arrived in - to Leipzig and were taken to a small camp. From Ravensbrück we had been divided, not all of the Auschwitz - prisoners were taken to the same camps. Actually Malchow was a very small camp. The others were taken to other camps. And then - and from Malchow - from Malchow we were taken to Leipzig which was an Arbeit camp, not a Concentration Camp. Where conditions were much better than the ones we had known before. If not luxurious. And the food of course was getting more sparse because of all the new arrivals. But there there was a group of - French women, all Gaullist - two were Communist too, but non-Jewish women, who had been sent there for Resistance. And who adopted Simone and me - in their family, you know, we always lived by family groups. I think I should have emphasised the importance of the family in - in High School. Which played a very important part. And - we lived there in Leipzig without working. They didn't know very much what to do with us. The Russians were approaching. So were the Allies. Leipzig was in the fork. And after ten days or so we were - put again on the road to walk. To walk where to we didn't know. Nor did the S.S. actually. We - but nevertheless they were still escorting us at both sides of the column. At this stage we stopped near a bridge, which was bombed. And there - we thought it was marvellous. We thought the - the bridge would collapse and the Germans would run away. And we had a feeling that - We went on walking. But after walking one day and one night - Simone, who had much more energy than me, said "now, that's enough, we are going to escape". So did the other French women with whom we were walking. And actually we were lucky, the two S.S.'s who were on either side of us escaped themselves. Some of them were losing their confidence and could see that they were - that they had lost. But we were so used to obey that part of the contingent of the walking women ran to join the - the section who was still escorted. And I'm not sure that I wouldn't have done it. After three years of - of obedience. But anyway - we didn't. We just rushed into - there were bushes, we chose a part where there were bushes. We rushed into the bushes, hid behind the bushes, unnoticed. I forgot that before that I had tried to - to jump out of the row to pick some cobyas up. And the S.S. shot at me. All the women were scared. I don't know whether he missed me or whether he didn't want to kill me. But that was a bit of an experience on the way. I had learned that the cobyas taste very nice - 'rape' you call it in English. And I had just skipped aside. There were several incidents of that sort - Anyway, so now we are walking from Leipzig to an unknown destination. And a day and night after walking in woodlands we were in a more open

country, with shrubs. And we jumped aside taking advantage of the two S.S.'s we had, who had left us.

Was this just a group of Frenchwomen?

Yes. Some others have done too, but ..

You were with the French women?

Yes. There were - thirteen of us. So we were in different bushes. Behind different shrubs. But we managed to get together and the first thing we decided is to part, because that was much too many to - go on unnoticed. So we divided our group into one of six and one of seven, with somebody speaking German and speaking English in each group. We were in a group of six. Simone and me and four other women. And - we got rid of our striped dresses. We had - crossed a village where some Ukranian women had thrown some clothes to us. Which we had been carrying on our arm. And Simone and me we had a skirt Simone had made with a blanket. Picking bits of the wool - I don't know exactly how she sewed it, but of course we didn't have any needle, but she managed to do something. So we got rid of our - we didn't get rid of it, but over our striped dresses we put these sort of clothes, which were more rags than clothes. And asked - a farm, saying that we had been "ausgebombt". That we had been working as - forced labour and we had been "ausgebombt" and that we wanted shelter. And then we arrived at a farm after having been refused - where there was a French prisoner - a Belgian prisoner called Victor, who had been working on the farm while the husband was away at war. And - he was absolutely staggered to see French women. That was the first French women he saw after five years. He had been made prisoner the first year of the war. That was when prisoners had been French men and Belgian. So he took us in into the pigstye and the first thing he wanted was us to wash. We were of course in a terrible state of dirt ... So he went to fetch a pail of water and when he came back what was his surprise to see these six French women leaning over the pig - what do you call it -

Trough?

Trough, that's the word. Pig trough, eating the potatoes which were in it. He stopped, and dropped his pail and said, "What! Are you that hungry?" Anyway, he made us wash. Took us to another building, because he was not sufficiently - he didn't trust enough the woman to tell her about us. So he took us to a remote out-building and later on brought us some soup. And we feel asleep on the concrete floor. And in the morning he came to wake us up - because the farm was in fact next to a S.S. post, and having heard that there were women who had escaped, the S.S. were searching in the farms around. So - off we went immediately. He told us what direction to take, where there was a ditch and bushes. So we ran there. And from the ditch we could see on the top the farm with the S.S. arriving. And interrogating the Belgian prisoner who showed him the opposite direction to which we went in. There was a little maid, Polish maid, who didn't know anything about - and they were showing in the other direction. But Victor slapped her on the face, saying "oh, don't listen to her, she is so foolish". We have heard all that afterwards. We saw only the gesture. And at that time there was a - a plane - a plane alarm -

Air raid?

Air raid. So all the S.S. went back to their shelters. And meanwhile we crept along in the ditch until we were out of sight. And when we were out, we climbed out on the other side of the hill. And sat down knowing - Oh, Victor had given us some potatoes. Are you interested right away in this journey back. You are.

Yes, definitely.

We sat down and wondered what to do. And further up there was a group of - soldiers, which we couldn't recognise as being not S.S. Who were watching us - old men who were posted on the top of hills to watch the - alarms. And I never knew very much about danger. I went there. And the other girls were scared thinking that they were going to take me again. I could speak German by that time. I had learnt German in the beginning. And I asked them for some - matches, because we had picked some dandelions and nettles and we had found some water, so we wanted to make some soup. I don't know what container we had, I can't remember. But the only thing which we didn't have was matches. And I asked for some matches. And then I told him that we had been "ausgebombt" and that we were hungry. And they gave us some more potatoes. Yes, we didn't have potatoes at that time. That soup was supposed to be only herbal soup. They gave us some potatoes and some matches. So I came back, triumphant, and we made some soup. And then we started walking and we started a life which I always called 'complete freedom'. We had no money, no identity, nowhere to live, no food. And we just had to walk in nature. The weather was rather nice. It was - April, wasn't it, yes. Yes, end of April. End of April '45. And we - we lived like that for a fortnight. Asking farmers to give us something to eat and permission to sleep in their -

Building?

Barns. In their barns. Which was very comfortable to sleep in a barn. I have never done it since. I wonder was I as comfortable as I remember. Some of them were very reluctant. Some of them refused. But some of them accepted because there was a rumour by then that the war would go on with the Americans against the Russians. They were terribly scared of the approach of the Russians, but not so much of the approach of the Americans. And they thought that if they sheltered some foreigners they - it would be a help for them in the eyes of the Americans. So in one place they kept us for three days. Giving us not only cooked potatoes but something to eat with it. It was some white cheese one day, a bit of gherkin another day, it was a feast. But they got impatient because as I mentioned it before, in fact the allies were not moving anymore. Because they were discussing where to stop in that division, Leipzig, Dresden. So not having new news they got impatient and after a few days they would - let us - they would send us away. Until - but always we picked some potatoes, because they were - it was the time of planting, there were potatoe plants, potatoe seeds. So we could always find a way of cooking them. Until we finally arrived to a village - where there was an Englishman. A village where - in all the windows there were sheets and handkerchiefs showing that they were surrendering. And there was an Englishman who was collecting all the weapons. Before that we had met - Victor,

who had been so - sent - with all his fellow prisoners, started moving towards France. And they had given us money and tins of spaghetti, which made us sick. Not me, but some of them were sick because they had eaten too much of it. It was an extraordinary atmosphere. There were people running all over the place in all directions. We were walking towards west. - Well, we were not walking necessarily towards west, we wanted to get back to - to Leipzig, where we would be repatriated. And some walking towards west. First - east. And the Germans, some S.S. wearing their insignia and scattering around. When we went to this first village there was an Englishman who was very nice, but he told us "you must go away from this village because there are so many people, there is absolutely nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep". He showed us the direction in which we should go. And we went on walking. And we were always hoping to find the - the line of battle where the Germans and Russians were facing. But we never could. In fact they were not fighting anymore at that time. There were Americans, Russians and Germans, and they were not fighting because Americans and Russians were discussing who would occupy the parts - Chemnitz was the place where they were telling us to go to. On the way - in our way we found - of course I had terrible difficulty to walk because my feet are swollen and frozen to bits. I had to lean over the others. I threw away my dress, I couldn't carry anything. I have got a dress, but it's not mine, it's the one of another friend, of one of us. We found a cart which took me - house-cart - because I couldn't walk. And we arrived to a - well, we slept in barns, as I say, for a long time. But then we arrived in a town - and before - just before the town it so happened that I met a man, a Frenchman, who was in American uniform, who talked to us. And he happened to be the son of a colleague of my father's. He was with the Americans as an interpreter. Boucher he was called. So we all thought that he was going to take me in a jeep back to Paris straight away. But he didn't do anything of the sort. But he recommended us to the Mayor of the village in which we were. And they found - it was very difficult to find any place to sleep, but they found some bunks in a school for us. And tickets for a train. So we had a train. We could take a train. But before that we had another adventure which was pleasant. In a village - we - were very hungry. I went to see the Mayor of that village. And took to him and he was very nice, and I think he was in fact a Resistance, concealed Resistance. And he gave us bread tickets - bread coupons, and we went to the bakery. After five years it was the first time I had the coupons. And they gave us some bread, but they didn't have much even for the coupon in the morning. So the baker gave us some soup that day. So that gave us - strength to go on. Going back to this little town where we had been recommended by the Frenchman. We slept in the school as I said before. And the next morning we had a train which took us to - a town the name of which I could give you, I can't remember which town it is. Which was occupied by the Americans.

You were still in the region of Leipzig?

Yes. But it was not Leipzig yet, it was - I cannot remember the name, but it is written down. And - there - we didn't know what to do when we had arrived in that town. And two or three of us sat down and the ones who were speaking the best English went to enquire, thinking they would go to the American headquarters to ask for help or something like that. And in this jeep they met the seven women from whom we had parted when we escaped. Who told them that they had been taken up by - in a - hotel, which had been transformed into a hospital for French prisoners.

And that they were looked after by these French prisoners and the captain, and there surely they would take us too. Which they did. So we went to that - hotel. Well, it was just transformed into dormitories, because it had been transformed into a hospital. And we had a bath. It hurt that bath, because we were so - had - the water was - not at all the joy that you had been looking forward to. And we had food, for three days and three nights we lived like queens, because the men - made us wash their washing. But still we were just getting back to a human life when the - the - French captain came back with the news that they were going to be repatriated by the Americans and they had asked for us to be with them, but it had been refused. So they had to go and leave us behind. And with our own means in this hotel. And shortly - they left us some food and some money, but the day after or two days after, when we woke up, it was the Russians who were there. That's why they had been taken away, the French prisoners. Because the Russians were to occupy that part. So we were a bit scared after having heard so many stories about Russian soldier army. But we were very well treated ourselves. We were very lucky. They came and they were - rather high. But when they - a non-commissioned officer arrived and the soldiers were getting a bit - nuisance, he stopped them. And took them away. They were just there having drunk a few bottles, showing us their loot. They were so proud of their watches. One watch, two watches, three watches on their arm. And as I say, they were becoming - like soldiers who see women for the first time after fighting so hard. But then the - the officer put them to reason. So - and also in the evening the - an officer came to ask us to help them, it was just that they wanted to be helped as interpreter. Because one of us, Lise London, whose husband was a Czech who had been a Minister who had been in jail, who wrote this film, 'The Investigation', could speak Russian. So they asked her to come and be interpreter, and I think it was mostly to know where the wine was in the hotel. Anyway, you know we were always very scared, but they were always very decent with us. And - then the 8th of May occurred ..

End of Cassette 6, Side A

Cassette 7, Side A
Reel 3, Side 1, continued

And then the 8th of May occurred and we heard on the radio of German - the German - all of the hotel was scared stiff by that time - allowed us to listen to his radio, and we heard the bells of Notre Dame from that hotel, on the radio. Of course it was a terrific moment. But the next day we said "well, now we have the armistice, it is all very nice, but we want to go home". So Lise, who could speak Russian, went to the headquarters to ask the Russians what they could do for us. They said that all they could do would be to take us to Kiev from where we probably would eventually be repatriated. But of course that wouldn't suit us. We wanted to go west, we didn't want to go back east. So they agreed that they would accompany us to a river which was a - limit between the Russian occupied part and the American. And we crossed it - what do you say - we crossed it on foot. And we arrived in the American zone. And - we went up to - some Americans. The first thing they did was to give us some tins of food to eat. And another thing that Simone never forgave me that I thought it was so lovely because these tins were warm. And I thought they must be these magical tins, we must give the tins back. I hadn't seen a tin for so long. But - that was more or less what they could do. They sent us to a camp because there were so many people who had converged into Leipzig. That they could not - accommodate everybody. Nor find lodgings. They had made a sort of camp. I don't know what it was called, the camp. But we didn't want to sleep in a camp again. And they were rather suspicious of all the ex-deportees. Because among everybody were so many communists you see. And de Gaulle in France wanted to have his elections before all the communists came back. So in fact as deportees we were not given priority. We were supposed to - to wait for our turn. But I don't know exactly how, we managed not to go to the camp, we went to the camp just for one meal, but the idea of queueing to have our soup was just unbearable. So we just - went out and found somebody who was in charge of repatriating the French. And they put us in an hotel. One room for 13. And we were - we stayed there only a couple of days. And we were given a place in a train. Which was for - war prisoners. We were put in a - a goods train actually, but with a lot of woollen blankets. But there was no food. All they could give us was cigarettes. Where from that moment I have smoked and have never stopped. And then in the compartment there were all these war prisoners who came to visit us. And they didn't have more food than us. The train was going so slowly that some men jumped off the train and killed some chickens on the farm which they had found along the line. And the next time the train stopped they would make a fire and cook the chicken and give us a bit. The journey from Leipzig to Paris lasted 8 days. From the moment we were in France we had food because women would come with baskets full of eggs and we - And finally we arrived at the Gare de L'Est, where there was a band. But - oh yes, before arriving, we had stopped at the frontier. And were interrogated. Given a bit of money and an identity paper. And from that moment I was overwhelmed with anxiety. Until then the fight had been so - taking me all my energy. I was not really thinking that much of - who shall I find. Because I knew that the - at the end in Auschwitz there had been several convoys of - from Paris. But from the moment I had a paper I was becoming again a citizen, if you like. A - it just fell over me, "Where is my son, where are my parents?" And the rest of the journey was - really awful. I mean not awful physically, but awful - psychologically. And when we finally arrived at the Gare de L'Est, with this band of

women who were embracing us and not a single face I knew, it was worse - still. And they put us in buses and what I remember clearly is women having high hats, very high hats. And there were barrows full of cherries. It was May '45 - it was about 15th, 17th of May, I think. I have the date somewhere. And the buses took us to the Hotel Lutetia (?). Where there were volunteers who were sitting behind desks, asking everybody where - what was their last address. And when it came to my turn there was a girl. When she heard my name, Claudette Bloch, she shouted, she rushed and said "I am going to phone them". I shouted through the room, "Who is them?" "Your son, your mother-in-law and your parents". So I - it was the first time I really collapsed. And a short time afterwards my parents arrived. And that moment I had been - they couldn't bring my son because he had measles. A first disappointment, and then when I saw my parents - they asked me - my mother asked me about my younger brother with whom she was - very close. I said "oh, they were deported - ". "With uncle". "Oh yes, but it doesn't matter, they were burnt". "Gassed and burnt". And my mother fainted. That was really the beginning of the gap which was going to exist and probably still exists between us, and those who haven't had the same experiences. And I heard also that - if they hadn't been standing at the Gare de L'Est, as so many people had been, it's because the last two days they had been standing waiting for my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, who had been sent to Mauthausen fairly late, with the Resistance. And who hadn't come back. And it had been such an experience that they couldn't - bear the same experience waiting for Auschwitz. So much more so that Marie-ELisa the friend, the chemist friend, who is still my friend - had been repatriated a month earlier. You know the one I had left in Ravensbrück. They had been repatriated from - they had gone to Mauthausen from Ravensbrück, when Ravensbrück was finally - evacuated. And from Mathausen - the Swedish Red Cross had been allowed to come and collect them before the armistice. End of April. She came back I think the 30th of April or something. And had gone to see my parents. And had told them that there was very little hope of my coming back. Since we had disappeared from Ravensbrück we had been taken to an unknown destination. And actually my brother-in-law who was in Mauthausen, working in an outside commando, died on the - day of the armistice on the 8th of May. He was too weak. They had been walked to join the - the lorries of the Swedish Red Cross. And died on his arrival in Auschwitz - in Mauthausen. And Marie-Elisa's brother died in Bergen-Belsen. But coming back to myself. There I was, back, still very obedient, waiting for I don't know what. And finally my father said, "Why shouldn't we go home". And we went home. I was so tired. I don't know whether there was no taxi or what, but I remember that there was a - whirl. They didn't realise in what state I was, and I didn't realise in what state they were. And I - we had dreamt so much of this first meal we would have when we would be in freedom, and my parents had saved their coupon of meat and there was a little bit of joint and they had bought a few cherries, these cherries which had fascinated me, which apparently were terribly expensive, and cooked them, because - she thought I shouldn't - I couldn't have anything uncooked - and I was dying for fresh fruit - so that... And of course I didn't like to embrace much my son, because I was covered with lice. When we had slept in various places we had collected lice. And - I think it's something which has - shocked permanently my son, because he had seen photos of a pretty mother with pretty clothes, and there was this woman in rags who kept her distance because of her lice. However, I - and of course when I arrived my mother-in-law didn't know that my husband, her son, was - would never come back. My parents knew, Marie-Elisa

had told them. But my parents in fact didn't like to say so to my mother-in-law before I came back. So of course this day which we had foreseen as a day of joy, was a day of sorrow and - and disappointment. And a great happiness all the same, with very complex - sentiments. The days that followed were no better because very soon it was - they had already organised a little - group of ex-Auschwitz - of Auschwitz survivors. So really soon the news that I had come back was spread. And there was a queue of families who came to ask me what happened to their - their husband or - children. And when I told them they would just collapse. I can remember the dining room, people queueing to know what was going on. And collapsing. Until - my sister-in-law - the sister of my husband, very courageously came from Bordeaux and stopped any visitor. And bought for me some lipstick. Which I thought was really a sign of another life. When I received it, I said "oh, it's nice, we'll share it shall we". I couldn't believe that it was all for me. But from that moment I recovered. And started more or less life again.

Tell me a little bit more about your life afterwards?

Well, the one thing is that it was very difficult to walk. Because of my frozen feet. And I had to find a pair of shoes. And - the decision to make, what shall I do with my life? Was I going to stay with my mother-in-law - who had nothing - nobody to go to? Her daughter perhaps, but she had family difficulties. Then I went back to the - to the lab. My Professor, of course, Marcel Prenant, had been in Neuengamme, and had come back after having had typhus etcetera. So I got a warm welcome. And I don't know exactly how to describe my life ever since. Because it wasn't - familiar - friends, surroundings, with so many people missing. And all my own values having changed so much. I was myself another person - after these experiences. And people around me were also different. There were those who hadn't helped me. Whom I thought were loyal friends. There were some who had helped me. And then suddenly there are closer ties between all those who had suffered, that is all the Jews. I certainly lead more time with Jewish friends or relations.

Because you hadn't done that very much before?

No. I think I mentioned it to you.

And how did your relationship with your son develop?

Well, he was a - whether it was in his nature or whether it was due to circumstances - he was a very temperamental child. He had - how do you say, bouts of - of anger - tantrums. He had tantrums. However, it was a very normal mother child relation. We were certainly - I was entirely devoted to him. I felt that I had a great duty towards those families who hadn't had their people coming back. And - well, he went to school. We had these friends with whom he had lived for a year, who were of a great help of course. Because for ten months he - when it was - greatest danger, he had lived with some Catholic friends. Where I still go when I go to Paris, that's where I stay. Actually, she was - she is Catholic. But he is only half. He was half Jew. And his name was Jewish. So it was very brave for him to take Maurice and to go on like that. But he was a very important engineer. His father was - it was his father who was Jewish, and of course his name was Jewish. His father was - in danger and

had to hide. But he himself married to a non-Jew and being half, was not - was - seemed to be rather - safe. As far as I know they had friends from the Resistance coming to visit them. And Maurice was - after a while - rather locked in a back room, he was not shown to the visitors. And he was told to have another name, 'Berget'. Actually - did I tell you the story about Maurice - name. Once they wanted to test him to know whether they could bring him to be with other people. And it was somebody in the Resistance. But Maurice - who Maurice didn't know. So the man said, "Oh, hello little boy. What is your name?" And he said, "My name is Maurice Berget, but my little name is Bloch". So of course they - after that they never tried to - to expose him to any - indiscrete person. I don't know who helped me more in those days. I think it was my friends from Auschwitz who - Yes, when I come to think of it that is what it was. We remained very close.

End of Reel 3, Side 1

Reel 3, Side 2

The only incident I personally watched was as we were taken to the room where we could wash. There was blood all along the passage and in front of the basins where we washed. And we learnt afterwards that it was a group of men who had been shot in the back while washing, only because there was no more room in the Bunker, and there were some more prisoners to come. And I visited the Bunker after the war when I came - when I went to Auschwitz after the war. And there were rooms of torture where people could only stand. Where there was only a little hole through which they were given food from time to time. It was a - a place not like the one I've described, it was a place of unimaginable - kinds of torture. Where people have lived for weeks. Sometimes died and sometimes survived, to be interrogated afterwards and sometimes at the end of it being hanged.

Yes, I can understand that that was the most terrible place ..?

I have never told you either about Mala, who escaped, was recaptured and hanged. It's a Belgian woman. But I haven't watched it myself and it is a very - heroic story. I mean there have been so many - acts of resistance within the camp, which are not sufficiently publicised, and which I probably should have mentioned. But I have tried to tell you my own story.

Yes, that is what I wanted you to tell me. And you have only hinted at your own heroism?

Well, that's what they say, that I have been heroic sometime. And it's rather curious because I'm not a heroic person, but as I say, in the camp one has another personality.

And afterwards you felt this affinity to people who had been in the camps?

Yes.

And separation from all the rest of the world?

That's right. Yes.

Even now - I have forgotten the German which I only learnt by ear. And - when I meet German people - since I lived in Oxford it hasn't happened to me, but before that it has happened that I met Poles who had - could speak German. Always in the language they speak we can understand each other. Not only have we got a kind of vocabulary, there are several words like the one I mentioned 'organisieren', which is international. But there are quite a few words which make it easier to understand someone who has been in camp. Besides, there is also - a kind of approach to life, I suppose, which is common and which makes communication easier. I think I communicate with ex-prisoners whatever their background is. Better than with anybody else.

Just skipping a lot. How was it that you came to come to England?

Ah. Well. Originally the idea was of a common friend, an Australian scientist, who was working in Cambridge. And - a communist. I was communist at that time. I had been a communist for - five years after the war. Having been helped so much by the communists, they had behaved so beautifully, French communist women in Auschwitz. This scientist, who was a communist as well - came to Paris from Cambridge, for scientific purpose, which happened to be in my field. So I discussed with him. And he invited me to their flat, which they had borrowed from another colleague, for dinner. And they just said, "Ah, but you cannot continue to lead that life, you are too young. And - we have a friend in Cambridge who is divorced and who is alone and cannot survive by himself, he's been divorced for several years. You should meet." Anyway, I didn't take it seriously, but I was supposed to come to Cambridge for - scientific - for seeing Professor Keilinx. I couldn't go there, I fell ill at that time. So the Australian friends had gone - back to Australia. But the year after I came to Cambridge for a conference of Biochemistry, international conference. And we had some common friends, colleagues, - probably had heard the remark of our Australian friend. - Oh, just a coincidence anyway, at this congress I met my husband. And we fell in love and got married a year later. That's it. Just biology. And - communist.

You married and stayed in England?

Oh yes. I came to England.

But you travelled often to France?

I still do.

And have many, many French friends?

Yes. Indeed. I brought my son of course.

You brought your son to England. Maurice?

Yes. Maurice is now Professor at the London School of Economics.

How old was Maurice when he came to England?

10. He couldn't speak a single English word. It has been terribly hard. As I told you, he had tantrums. The psychologist said that it does help him really. He had tantrums with us too in England. But he got over it. I think school in England suited him better than the Lycée Francaise in France. He had to spend a year just learning English. And then had difficulties at school. And then developed very much. And - went to the London School of Economics, where now he is a professor. At the minute he is not at the London School of Economics. I am very - getting very impatient because he has spent six months in Madagascar. Well, he hasn't finished his six months.

And did he marry?

Oh yes. He is married. He has two children, grown-up children. He married an English girl, very nice. I wouldn't say she is my favourite daughter-in-law, because we shouldn't ever say that. Being older than the others, so close to her. And these days we communicate more, because as I say Maurice has been away for six months. And he has a daughter who is 20 and a son who is 17. And - and they get on very well with the - other generation. John had a son, who didn't live with us, has never lived with us. Who has had a difficult life, but now he is alright. And he is married and has three children. And - we - John and I had two children. Who are married. And took 12 years to have children, so that we have these little ones these days. Which is a shame, because they are so lovely, and - I am too tired to really take them for a day or two, I can only take them for a few hours. But anyway, all these people get on very well one with another. At Christmas, Easter, we were all together. And besides they see each other without us. They always insist that they don't always join their parents.

Did you speak to your children about your experiences, or not?

Oh yes. When James - that is a new generation - was at school, he organised that I would go and talk to his school about it.

Your grandchild?

No, my child.

James?

Yes, James.

My grandchild - I didn't want to embarrass, because I didn't know what the attitude of their father would be. And this last time he came - and he was without his parents, and we discussed it. And he said "oh, but I'm going to tell -" - He is in lower sixth. He does engineering, but they have their general culture or knowledge or something. And he likes his master very much. He said, "Oh, I'm going to talk to him, I think you should come and talk to our schools". It was the first time he said such a thing.

End of Cassette 7, Side A

Cassette 7, Side B

Reel 3, Side 2

But Adrienne never did. She always - escapes. She seems to be more of an escapist, not to want to know more about it. Because I remember one day - oh, she was much younger - I tried to explain to her that John was not her grandfather. She was very young. Her mother had said that I could do that. She said, "Yes, but I don't know this man - Daddy's father".

Maurice's daughter?

Yes. She said "I can still call him grandad". And I said "of course. He is your grandad because he has seen you since you were born. But he is not really your grandfather". And she was a little girl. I don't know what she thinks about him now. She never mentions it. She is rather an escapist. She - she keeps herself to herself, she - she is really concerned with social problems. But Maurice isn't one to do anything about it either. He thinks there are so many other problems and he doesn't like to - bring attention to himself. He never wants to say anything. He sent us one of his colleagues when she had to spend the night, because she had to work in Oxford. And - she didn't know I had been to Auschwitz - he was rather a close colleague - and she knew her husband. She didn't know that we were related to Durkheim. Durkheim, you know, the sociologist. She was absolutely...

I didn't know you were related to Durkheim either.

But I don't think it's any important to you. Well, it's not important, I know, for Maurice.

You mean that Maurice doesn't talk about personal things at all?

He doesn't talk.

Closes off?

Yes. Durkheim was my uncle. Great uncle. Actually - I don't know whether you are interested. You may be interested in my genealogy. A cousin of mine found in a book photos of the graves of our ancestors. In Alsace. In the Durkheim side.

And how have your interests developed since you've come to England. It's a long, long time. How long have you been in England now?

Oh - 39 years, a long time. I have been forced to do some teaching of French language first, because we had no money, I had no more a job at that time. And then I started teaching literature as well and I did a lot of teaching of French in Cambridge. And my interest is in literature I think now. And my grandchildren and children. I think my children and grandchildren have occupied most of my personality. I have had so many difficulties. That I had this trouble for everything. Because in Paris I was surrounded with parents and cousins and friends. And here I was completely isolated. John's parents didn't want to recognise the - our children. Well, John's

father, - John's mother did - John's father, because of them being Jewish. He thought it was really terrible that the children would never know what they were, Jewish or not Jewish. They would never be accepted anywhere. And it was - terrible. He was - he was much kinder to Maurice than to the others, because with Maurice he knew where he stood, he was a Jewish person. And then one of John's brother-in-law was so much against Communism that he didn't want to see us from a distance. It's all finished now, we are friendly. But it was very hard on me coming from France where I was surrounded with friends and affection.

So you were very, very isolated?

Yes. Well, some friends came and helped me. Especially one of them who was very nice to me indeed. And then the one who was here whose wife died last year of cancer, they were very friendly with us too. And we didn't have any money. It was a - we had difficulties with John's first wife. We had difficulties. But - we survived. I had some good times. John now has retired. He has - I think he should be satisfied, he never is. I mean he is a Fellow of the Royal Society. He had a chair. What else do you want? Now he is going to write a book. What you want is to be younger. Be more alert.

When did you move to Oxford?

Five years ago.

And you lived in Cambridge until you...?

No. If we had lived in Cambridge until then, we would have stayed in Cambridge. Because our life is there really. The - unit for which John worked, he was not teaching, he was Research Professor, Scientific Research Council, Literature Research Council. And when the Professor, who was 90 last Monday, retired, the unit is dissolved. And he was given a chair in Imperial College, in the department of research. And the Department of Research for Zoology of Imperial College is in Ascot. So we lived 12 years in Ascot, 13 years. Which was not terribly convenient for me. And he didn't like it very much, but - there it was, his work. It was not too bad really: a very nice house. I didn't like very much the atmosphere. But we had friends in Reading. And then the Professor here offered him a room if he wanted to do his research in Oxford. And he said it would be much better for Claudette, so we moved. It was not very happy for John, because as a retired Professor to a Department, you are an outsider. And he has never recovered from that I think. For me of course I have a very nice life here. I have a daughter who lives in Oxford. And I belong to a class now, a little private class, where we discuss books every week. During winter terms. Which is very hard work. I have to read a book a week. We found this house after some difficulties. I had been ill in between, I had been very ill. But now we have this little house. So what else do you want? Except that getting older I miss France more and more.

You do?

Yes. Specially the language. I've never managed to master English really well.

When did you learn English?

At school. And - I was sent to - England for two months to learn English. My father was a linguist and he wanted us to speak English. My sister spoke English better than me. But what I suffer from mostly is to be old - don't like it.

What aspects of being old don't you like?

Not to be - alert. Not to be able to do everything, straight away: to do everything so slowly. To think I have to see such friends they are there. And I want to go to Prague these days. John says that will be crazy of me, and taking that trip by myself, because my friend Anny, who I mentioned, - or I didn't mention to you, I mention it in my papers - has had an infant. She came to see us - two years ago, so - And her children have become friendly with my children, James. James went to visit her children. Not be able to take my grandchildren, as I said. And - to fall asleep when I read. It's awful.

So you have been fighting against getting old?

Well, I think now I'm not fighting so much. Well, they say I will be better, they are going to do the cataract operation, so I see better. They say I shall not be so giddy, I don't know. But I start falling asleep on my book, or feeling giddy after an hour. It's awful when I have an idea I want to pursue or to write for a long time, it's awful. I mean and not being able to do it.

Talking of what you've written. Have you written much about your experiences. You have, haven't you?

Mmm.

Do you have any of those papers?

I am trying to do it properly now.

Will you let me know?

Yes. But I gave you my little summary, haven't I. The 30 pages.

I think you did, but I've been looking, but I can't find it. Do you have another copy?

Yes, yes. I'll give you one downstairs. Because it's a good summary.

When did you write that?

Oh - a year or so ago. Because it's supposed - still supposed to be published. I'll show you the book which has been published of the Stabsgebäude girls, it's called 'Secretaries of Death'. I can lend it to you if you like. And the girl who published it, an American girl, wanted to do the same with people who had had some - an

extraordinary life - You have read Primo Levi? Well, people like Primo Levi who haven't had - or like me - you can't compare me to Primo Levi - who had special experiences in camps. She thought she would make a book of that. And she asked us all to write our little story. And now she's not publishing it. And now she's trying to ask Mrs Maxwell to publish it.

So it's got into difficulties?

Yes. I wrote it in that sort of summary way because it was supposed to be one of - many.

But now you are thinking of writing something .. A whole book?

I have written 10 pages so far. Not very far.

It's very difficult to do, isn't it. Do you find talking easier than writing, or writing easier than talking?

Oh, I think I prefer to write because I can cross out and come back to it.

Because you like it to be right?

It's only thing - physically I find it difficult. After an hour, as I say, I'm tired. I'm giddy. I asked the doctor about this giddiness, but he can't find anything. I wish he would do my sinuses. I had X-ray and - nothing, I'm just old. Some people are - very alert. I have been alert for a long time. I'm not anymore.

How long have you noticed this?

Oh - it comes gradually, you cannot give a date.

You seem very alert to me

Yes, that's what they -

But you feel different?

Oh yes. Indeed. After an hour's walk there is nothing I can do now. And I walk with a stick. I jump in my car ever so easily.

Instead of walking?

Yes. Well it was cycling mostly. But John made me give my bicycle away. I wish I could have cycled again, but - I didn't like John's objection to do it because I thought if I fall I may break something quite easily. But I would like to cycle again.

How long is it since you cycled?

Oh, now it's - I had the disease - Menière's. I lost my balance. But the doctor said after it was finished I could have cycled. Three years ago. And also I received an awning in my back. All that within three years when it was time to move to Oxford. There was a great wind and - I was shopping, and the awning fell on my chest. Didn't break anything, but I was in great pain for a long time. So I think that's what - yes, so it is this last five years that I've grown older, because of these two accidents. Yes, that's it, when I got the stick I was very active.

Do you have reunions of people who were in the camps?

Yes, every year. I went there in January. No, it was in February this year, but usually it's in January for the liberation of the camp.

And how do you feel about these reunions?

Well this year for the first time I felt a bit estranged. The first time I went - I didn't used to go, I went two years ago, it was marvellous. I met people I hadn't met for a long time. And last year - I think I didn't go last year. I also feel a bit embarrassed because so many people come - because I was in a good position I have helped many people. And - so many people came to me that I didn't recognise or I didn't remember. But I - certainly we sat in a corner as a family from High School and felt very much like a family still. I phone Marie-Elisa very often and she phones me. And Simone too. Marie-Elisa cannot come anymore because she is full of arthritis, to a terrible extent, she can hardly walk. She's well in herself - she would be well in herself but she is - paralysed by this arthritis. Her legs are that thick. She is really in a terrible state. But her mind is perfectly alert, she keeps - she is very active in the Amicale des Anciens d'Auschwitz and Fédération. We have the newspapers and she writes and she does study. Now she is preparing an article about - Resistance and Revolution Française, because everything is around the Revolution Française these days in France. And she is preparing an article. She couldn't walk at all during this Easter holiday and that's what she did.

And what does Simone do?

Simone is 10 years younger. She lost her husband. She had a business, which was very sad, because I think she should have been an academic. And she's very active in anti-racism - League of Human Rights. I don't know exactly what she does. She also has grandchildren. But they don't live in the same town, but she goes there nearly every weekend. And she has a flat in south of France. Which she would like us to occupy more often. And I don't like it at all really, which is sad. So she goes there and sees friends. I hope she is coming here in August. She has already been here. She travels sometimes, I mean she doesn't do anything special, she has sold her business long ago. She has been militant at the time of the Socialist Party. But I don't think she does much now. Simone and Marie-Elisa and Anny in Prague are the ones I see most of, or talk to.

Anny?

Anny in Prague. Anny is a - a non-Jew German-Sudet by origin. And she - she was engaged to a Jew and they were arrested as they were trying to escape from Czechoslovakia. She is Czech. And she was sent to Auschwitz and she had a special position because in Auschwitz as non-Jews they were - a few German politicians - but very few non-Jews - oh yes, there were non-Jew Poles. But very few non-Jew German or - she was a 'Rein' or 'Rein' blood anyway. o she was the secretary of Caesar. And that's how she chose us. Her husband is dead now. And she has three children. And one of them, as I said, has become a friend of James and Mary.

End of Cassette 7, Side B

End of Reel 3, Side 2

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