A Dimanche Prochain

A Memoir of Survival in World War II France

Jacqueline Mendels Birn



Praise For

A Dimanche Prochain: A Memoir of Survival in World War II France

Jacqueline Mendels Birn has written an impressive, moving story of her family's remarkable survival in France during the Nazi occupation. It reads like a fast-paced novel, but there is nothing fictional about it. Indeed, her book should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand the dark history of France from its invasion in 1940 to its liberation at the end of 1944.

Through her eyes and deft accounting we see history unfold, from the moment her father was required to register his family at the Paris City Hall, with cards bearing a large red stamp of "JUIF" (Jew), and she, her sister and parents were forced to wear a yellow Jewish star on their clothing. We get a first hand account of the chilling roundup of 13,000 Parisian Jews on July 16-17, 1942 in the Vel' d'Hiv bicycle arena, prior to their deportation to Drancy and then Auschwitz, and how her family was spared.

We see through her eyes how they escaped Paris with the help of friends and the silence of neighbors crossing on August 1, 1942 into so-called "Free France", only to be arrested and put under surveillance in a tiny village for 29 months. When Germany occupied all of France, she and her family lived under constant threat of being denounced by the local population and found by German troops.

We learn how her mother kept cyanide pills for the family to take if they were captured by Nazi troops, at the same time as her parents reaffirmed life by giving birth to Jacqueline's brother in August 1943, naming him Franklin, because their only hope of survival was with President Roosevelt. Each Sunday morning, her parents lifted their glasses with the saying "A dimanche prochain", hoping to live another week until the next Sunday.

Their return to Paris was bittersweet, as they learned that many members of their family were murdered in concentration camps. This remarkable story has all the best elements of our human existence - heroism, courage, and humanity.

Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat
Ambassador Eizenstat was Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State on Holocaust-Era Issues in the Clinton Administration, and was principally responsible for putting belated justice for Holocaust survivors on the world's agenda, negotiating over $8 billion in benefits for survivors and families of victims, from the Swiss, Germans, Austrians, French, and several Central and Eastern European countries. He recounts this in his own book, *Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor and the Unfinished Business of World War II.*

This book describes the extraordinary survival of the author's parents, sister, brother and herself in wartime France. Steeped in documentary evidence, her late father's detailed postwar interview, contemporary journals, and most importantly her own and her family's memories, this clear-eyed account brings to life the ordeal of a tiny handful among the millions of persecuted Jews during the Holocaust. Jacqueline Birn admirably presents a picture of everyday life as well as the broader perspective on what happened to Jews under German occupation and French collaboration. And she also, making understandable this remarkable story of survival, relates the crucial help provided by some kind and principled souls, and most importantly the adaptability, courage, persistence, and good luck of her parents, who defied Nazi efforts to wipe them off the face of the earth. This is a precious memoir, and deserves to be widely read.

Michael R. Marrus
Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto
Author, with Robert O. Paxton, of *Vichy France and the Jews*

In her compelling memoir, Jacqueline Mendels Birn opens a window onto her past as she retraces her childhood in Nazi-occupied France. With great sensitivity, she shares the powerful story of her family's survival, while inviting us to pause and ponder the ordeal of the Jews during World War II in France. Treating as it does a specific group of victims, this memoir eschews historical generalities as it joins together the tragedy of the historical moment and a deeply personal story. Family photographs interspersed in the course of the narrative signal the permanent absence of loved ones who perished in the Holocaust. Their faces, which punctuate the text, haunt these pages with a spectral presence, representing the traces of a community that once existed but has now vanished. As Jacqueline Birn unravels her memories of the war, her readers will come literally to feel the enormity of the Holocaust. Her memoir bridges the gap between past and present, becoming the symbolic sepulcher that her deceased family members were denied. A Dimanche Prochain *is both a deeply personal memoir and the repository for the names and suffering of the victims whose lives it vividly portrays.*

Audrey Brunetaux
Assistant Professor of French at Colby College

Jacqueline Mendels Birn's personal history of her survival as a Jewish child in Vichy France is as moving as it is engaging. The story she tells portrays the horrors of the Holocaust, the painful and often traumatic daily existence of those fortunate enough to have escaped deportation to a concentration camp, and the ways in which a family coped with living through a nightmare. Despite everything, Birn tells us, her family created for her, in Paris and in the tiny village of Le Got, where they spent the worst years of the war, a happy childhood. This is a tribute to the quiet heroism of the Mendels. In her lively recounting of the many adventures and close calls her family experienced, Jacqueline Birn is warm in her praise of those who helped them survive. Yet there runs through this memoir a current of sadness as she recalls the many members of her family and good friends who were lost in the Holocaust. A Dimanche Prochain *is a story that readers will not soon forget.*

Michael S. Koppisch
Professor of French, Emeritus at Michigan State University

Jacqueline Mendels Birn's book is a rare recounting of the survival of a Jewish family in Vichy France through a "conspiracy of goodness" that extended from Parisian neighbors and friends to the grace of simple villagers who watched over and protected the family to the war's end. It is a daughter's grateful tribute to parents whose resourcefulness and courage kept the family together and alive, and to the righteous Christians whose extraordinary decency and compassion contributed to their survival. Supported by documents, personal journals, and letters from their extended family in the Netherlands and Germany, almost all of whom perished, this thoughtful and loving memoir is a significant contribution to the history of Jewish survival in France during the Holocaust.

Liliane Kshensky Baxter, Ph.D.
Director, Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education
The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum

A Dimanche Prochain

A Memoir of Survival in World War II France

Jacqueline Mendels Birn

Published by Jacqueline Mendels Birn
United States
2013
www.jacquelinemendelsbirn.com

Text Copyright © Jacqueline Mendels Birn 2013
All rights reserved.
Images Copyright © Jacqueline Mendels Birn and/or Jessica Mendels 2013
except where otherwise noted.
All rights reserved.

In reference to the image on page 90, the views or opinions expressed in this book, and the context in which the image provided by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is used, do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of, nor imply approval or endorsement by, the USHMM.

Birn, Jacqueline Mendels
A Dimanche Prochain: A Memoir of Survival in WWII France/Jacqueline Mendels Birn
p. cm.
Includes bibliography and references.
ISBN: 978-0-9896367-0-4

1. Jacqueline Mendels Birn. 2. Jews - France - Paris – Biography 3. Jewish children in the Holocaust - France – Paris 4. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) - Economic aspects - Aryanization - Personal Narratives 5. World War 1939 -1945- Jews - France - Périgueux (Dordogne) - Forced labor 6. Jewish Property -Europe – France 7. World War, 1939-1945 - Underground Movements – France 8. Jews - Holland - Amsterdam - Almelo - History - 20th Century 9. Jews - Germany - Hamburg – History 10. France - History - German Occupation 1940-1945

I. Title

Printed in the United States of America
Set in Garamond
Designed by Jessica Mendels and Chand Nirankari

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials.
Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

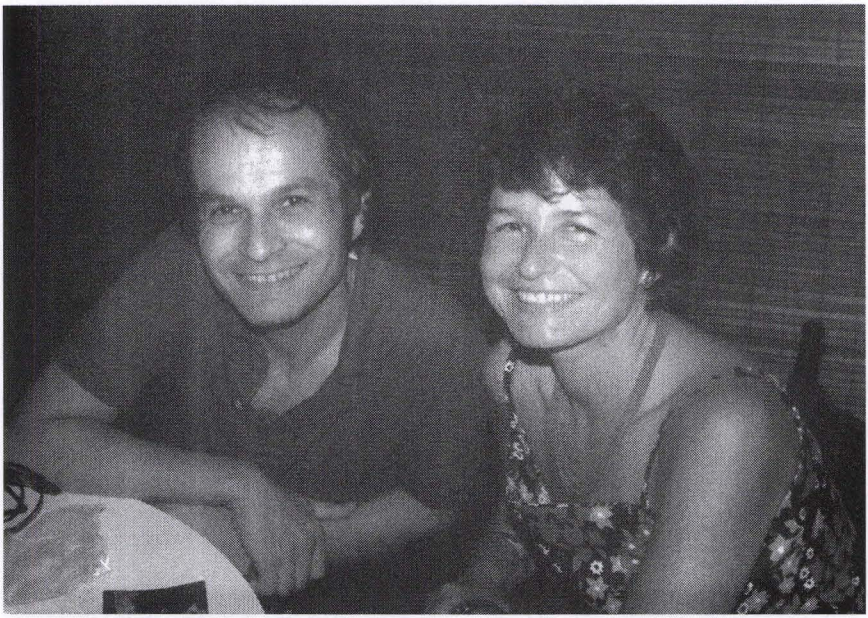


Contents

Dedication	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The Mendels Family	9
Chapter 2. The Hess Family	23
Chapter 3. Life in Paris During the 1930s	37
Chapter 4. The War and Measures Against the Jews	53
Chapter 5. Fleeing Paris	79
Chapter 6. Living in Le Got, Dordogne	101
Chapter 7. Franklin's birth	135
Chapter 8. The Last Year in Le Got and Our Return to Paris	153
Chapter 9. The Mendels Family: Deportation or Survival	173
Epilogue	201
Acknowledgements	209
Selected Bibliography	211
Selected Filmography	213
About the Author	215

Dedication

This story is dedicated to the memory of my beloved brother Franklin.[1]

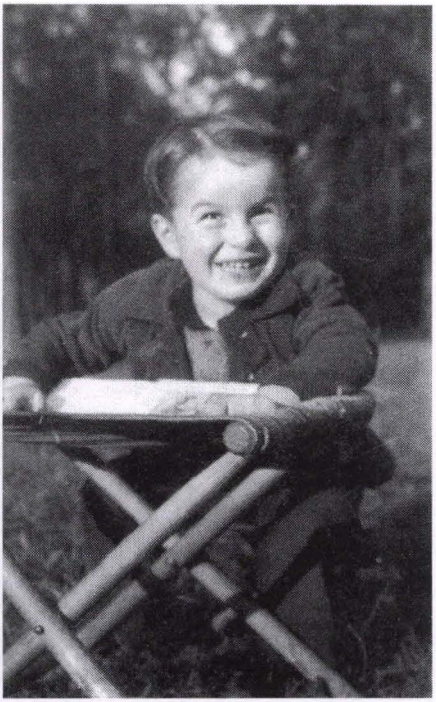


Franklin and Jacqueline, 1981.

[1] If my brother Franklin were alive, he would be the happiest grandfather of a little boy, Levi Mendels-Cleary. Jessica Mendels, his older daughter, gave birth to Levi on October 27, 2011.



Franklin, April 1946.



Franklin, October 1946.



Franklin, March 1950.



Franklin, 1950.

This story is also dedicated to the memory of my two grandmothers. My maternal grandmother Sophie ("Omi") Hess, took her own life on November 21, 1941 in Hamburg at the age of 64, rather than submit to deportation to a concentration camp. My paternal grandmother Thekla ("Oma") Mendels, was rounded up and sent to the transit camp of Westerbork, Holland, and then shipped with so many thousands of others to the extermination camp of Sobibor, where she was murdered on March 5th, 1943 at the age of 70, three days after her departure from Westerbork on a cattle car.



My grandmother Sophie Hess, Hamburg, 1920s.



My grandmother Thekla Mendels, 1927.

Finally, this story commemorates the murders of 199 members of the Mendels, Meibergen, and Hess extended families who were murdered in Sobibor, Auschwitz, Monowitz and other death camps. (See chapter 9, list of family members who perished.) There are likely even more members of the family who were murdered.

Introduction

Since I was a teenager, I have been interested in the events of WWII, and I have wanted to know how my immediate family survived in Paris and in hiding in the South of France while most of my family in Holland perished. Thanks to what miracles and what circumstances of luck, coincidence and goodness of our friends and neighbors were we saved? I was born four years before the beginning of the war and was too young to understand what was happening at the time. It was not until after the war, when I started to read and learn about the atrocities of WWII, that I began to have nightmares. I remember going to movies at some point a year or two after the war and watching newsreels that were presented before the movie started in those days, showing the concentration camps with some of the survivors as well as images of skeletons and piles of corpses. I usually had a fever the next morning when I woke up.

My parents never talked about their worries, their fright, their anguished decisions and suffering during those terrible years except for anecdotal stories that they told us years later. At the time, the family's experiences were explained to my older sister and me as being normal. Our lives were full of the joy and adventures of growing up. We knew that there was a war going on, and I also knew that the Germans were bad and dangerous people and were doing "bad things" to the Jews, but our parents hid their distress from us, and we never witnessed their anxiety or their tears. Only now, as I write my memoirs, do I realize the bravery, the heroism, and the strength that my parents must have had in their attempt to survive their ordeal and save their children. They did not give up, even under the worst of circumstances. Thanks to their courage and persistence, to

the generosity of many others, and to a good dose of luck, we survived!

Every time I am asked to speak about my family and about the Jews during WWII, (at schools, at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute where I worked for 28 years, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where I am a volunteer member of the Speakers Bureau, at universities around the U.S., at synagogues, at federal institutions and other venues such as friends' houses), I gain a deeper understanding of the Shoah as I reflect on the increasing evidence being uncovered by historians and biographers, from archives, interviews, and other research on this topic. I speak to my audience, not with joy, but out of a sense of duty. I hope to be able to convey to them the difference between good and evil. There were good people during WWII, but there were also many evil people. I want to teach the young generation to fight evil, to choose a profession where they can help, and to "stand up, not stand by."

I remember the first time I spoke privately about my life during WWII. It happened shortly after I arrived in New York, and I became engaged to Richard, now my husband of 55 years. It was in December 1957. My future parents-in-law arranged a party at their home to introduce me to Richard's father's family (the Birns) and his mother's family (the Vogels). We were sitting in the Birns' living room at 106 Pinehurst Avenue in Manhattan, and they started asking me questions about WWII and how we were able to survive through those horrible years. I explained what I knew then. I had not done any research, but I remembered quite vividly how we crossed the demarcation line and how we ended up in the little village of Le Got, in the French *département* (district) of Dordogne. I also told them about the joy I felt when my brother Franklin was born. Speaking to my future family made me realize how little American Jews knew about what European Jews had gone through during WWII.

My parents, my sister Manuela, my brother Franklin and I went back to Le Got in the 1950s. We went to see the farmer who had helped us and chatted with his whole family. I don't remember if we saw any other people in the village. I returned to Le Got in 1976 with my husband and our children, Daniel and Anne-Emanuelle, on a trip through France on our way back from Malta, where Richard had been assigned for three years at the American Embassy in Valletta. We saw the house where we had lived, the railway station and the school in the village of Mazeyrolles nearby. Our son Daniel took many photos. On that visit we did not meet anyone that I knew from the war, but I wanted my family to see the village where our lives were saved. My daughter Anne-Emanuelle, who

was in high school at the time, wrote a very beautiful story about that visit. She revisited Le Got in July 1993 with my niece Valerie, Franklin's younger daughter, and they found the Château Salomon that had been converted into the hospital where Franklin was born.

Since my marriage in1958, I have read extensively and I keep on learning more about WWII, about the fate of the Jews, and about Jews in France and in Europe during the war. Through interviews with old friends of our parents and with other family members, I have reconstructed the story of our family's survival.

In 1977 Michael Marrus, Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto, came upon the following interview of my father, "Odyssey of a Jewish family in France 1940-1944", which had been conducted in German by a good friend of our family, Alix Stiel-Preece. He was doing research at the Wiener Library in London for the book he was writing with Professor Robert Paxton on Vichy France and the Jews (*"Vichy et les Juifs"*, Ed. Calmann-Lévy, 1981). We had met him when we lived in Toronto between 1969 and 1973, and my husband Richard was Consul at the American Consulate General. I had told him the story of our survival and the birth of my brother Franklin. Upon reading the details in the "Odyssey" he realized that it was our story. He forwarded the Odyssey to me care of the State Department and it reached us at our next post. Until then I had no idea that the document existed. It has been an invaluable resource to me.

Family Frits Mendels

Odyssey of a Jewish Family in France 1940-1944 (English version)*

On June 10th, 1940, as German troops were approaching Paris, my wife, my two daughters, Manuela 7 years old and Jacqueline 5 years old, left the Paris suburb of St. Mandé where we had been living. We packed a few barest necessities into our car, as well as a few objects that we assumed might be useful should our "trip" last a long time. A typewriter and a sewing machine might be useful to earn money, for no one knew what the immediate future would bring.

We drove to the southwest of France, near the town of Niort. There we stayed for several days (several weeks) *in a small town* (Celles-sur-Belle). *We slept in the home of friendly residents* (the family Rivière with their two daughters, Janine and Rolande*) who refused to take payment for their hospitality. Then came the ter-*

rible news that France had capitulated to the Germans. There was a cease-fire but at the same time Charles de Gaulle declared (on June 18, from London) *that France would continue to fight and if not on French soil, then from outside France's borders.*

For the moment the war was over, (he meant the armistice was signed) *and since we had left an apartment behind in Paris we drove back. On the road back, we saw the first German officers beating black prisoners* (*"Les tirailleurs sénégalais"*, African soldiers). *That gave us a foretaste of what was waiting for us. In a small village near Niort stood an abandoned English train full of gasoline for the English air force* (RAF). *The French wanted to blow up the wagon so that the gasoline would not fall into the hands of the Germans… During the night, however, all the villagers came with bottles, cans, jugs, etc., opened the jerry cans and carried off as much of the gasoline as they could. Thus we drove home with English gas in the tank, and the villagers had put another two jerry cans in the car for us.*

After the cease-fire, (and the armistice that was signed between Hitler and Pétain), *France was divided into two zones: the northern part that was occupied by the Germans, and the southern part that for the moment remained free.*

We arrived in Paris without incident and found our apartment untouched, but we were horrified to find Germans everywhere. Yet we tried to resume our normal life.

Life, however, became more and more difficult. Soon the Germans started to enforce new laws concerning the Jews. No Jew was allowed to own a business. I therefore sold my food import business to a friend. I saw him everyday to keep informed about the business, to give him advice, hiding in my own office to see what went on. Then, Jews were no longer allowed to own a radio. So we went and bought a very old radio and gave it to the Germans while we gave our good radio to neighbors to keep for us. All this time the French treated us fabulously. I was Dutch by birth and my wife German, and without the help of the French we would surely not have survived the war.

The Jews were no longer allowed to shop during the day, only after 6pm were the shops open to them. It was hoped that by then not much food would be left to buy. But the owners of the shops that we frequented knew us and saved and put aside whatever we needed. Frequently this limitation turned in our favor, because we did not have to stand in long lines at the store and yet received all the fresh food we needed. This behavior on the part of the French was not necessarily because they sympathized with the Jews, but out of hatred for the Germans. In 1942 the Germans decided that Jews must wear the Star of David. The "rafles" (roundups) *began, and we felt that it was time to leave Paris again.*

Through acquaintances we were able to contact a "passeur", a person who, for a certain fee, would smuggle people or goods from one zone to the other. In our case it was two adolescents, one the son of a baker, the other a farmer's son. We made the necessary arrangements and then prepared our departure. Many of our valuables and furniture we took for safekeeping to our neighbors and friends. Then, with our two children and a heavy heart, we left our home for the second time.

First we went to the house of friends in Paris and there we burned our Jewish stars. Then we (took the métro and) *went to the train station where the previous day our friends' teenager boys had brought our backpacks to the consignment room; they had also bought our train tickets ahead of time – all of this so as not to attract attention to us. We had some moments of excitement and fear when the train failed to depart as scheduled. Then a woman passenger explained to us that the train was late because the Germans had searched another train and found Jews in it.*

Finally we did depart and got off the train in Angoulême, we changed trains and got off the train in St. Aulaye where we met the two boys. They had other plans for transport that same evening but made an appointment with us for the following evening at 9pm (actually, it was at midnight) *behind the church* (in the cemetery).

Meanwhile we went to a hotel and rested. The next evening we appeared at the appointed hour with our backpacks and a paper bag containing our hats!! I still cannot fathom why we took these hats along, but in times like these one probably has strange intuitions.

One of the boys led us through the fields, while the other one on a bicycle kept an eye out for German patrols. We had agreed that he would whistle if he sighted any Germans and then we would immediately lie (on the ground). *Thus we trekked through the fields* (and the forest) *in the dark with the two children. Suddenly there was a whistle – later on we learned that there had been a German on a motorcycle. We threw ourselves down; everything was deadly quiet. Suddenly our older daughter Manuela cried out: "I have to go potty!" but we were lucky, soon we heard another whistle, which meant all was clear. We then continued our walk into the unknown.*

When we approached the demarcation line, the boy on the bicycle took the two girls on his bike, so that we could go faster. Soon we reached the other side, we paid the two boys and we now felt secure. How long would it last?

Soon we heard French voices. There in a ditch were the soldiers of the border patrol

of the armistice army. This was the border post between the two zones and we were welcomed in a friendly manner. Temporary beds were prepared for us and we were given a meal to eat. And thus we spent our first night on unoccupied ground.

The next morning the commander telephoned and a military car came to take us to the next city, the sous-préfecture of Ribérac (county seat). *There we were also well received. We were helped to find a hotel room and since we were very tired, we rested.*

I must add here that one of my business associates lived in Lyon and had deposited jewelry and money in my name at his bank. We were therefore not without means and were able to live for a while without monetary worry.

Our rest was not to last long. In the evening there was a sudden knock on the hotel door: Police! We were foreigners, we were there without special permission, without a "laissez-passer" needed to pass into the unoccupied zone. We were told that we had to come to the police station (where we were interrogated). *The next morning the gendarmes took us to the police station in Périgueux. Still no peace. The officials there were mostly from Alsace. The atmosphere was morose and pessimistic. We stayed in a hotel. We would have liked to go to Lyon where we had friends, but we were not allowed to leave the area. We were not allowed to live in a city; we had to go to the countryside. We were unable to get a "laissez-passer". Finally, with the help of an agency we found an apartment* (two rooms) *in a small house in a village nearby. The village was so small, there were only about 30 houses, but our hosts were kind, dear people and the mayor of the town gave us travel permits to go to the next town, false papers, a food card (*food tickets*), and in general, helped us in many ways. There we lived in peace from September 1942 to November 1944.*

Our third child was born there with terrible complications for my wife. The hospital was an hour away from our home. On our way there in the ambulance we had a small accident or breakdown. While my wife had to stay in the hospital for 21 days, I not only worried terribly for her life, but I had to care for the girls by myself. We named our newborn son Franklin after Franklin Roosevelt, who at that time was our only hope.

The situation in France in general worsened. The country was no longer divided into two zones, but was completely occupied by the Germans.

In the village where we were living there were no other immigrants (or refugees) *but all around us in the other villages were many refugees. On September 17, 1943 all Jewish men were to report with a sleeping bag to the French authorities. I hid myself in*

the area and thank my lucky stars that I escaped this danger. All the men were sent to Germany for forced labor (Service de Travail Obligatoire - STO) *or deported.*

After the landing of the Allies on D-day, the danger became even greater. The Germans came to the neighboring villages and burned churches, and since the maquisards were nearby, we could not sleep at night for fear that they would also come to our small village (and there would be killings on both sides). *It was at this time that hundreds of men, women and children in Oradour were locked into a church and shot, burned or hanged.*

Whenever German patrols were sighted the whole district worked together. All the train stations were called (that was the only way to communicate as they were the only ones to have a telephone) *and warned which village was in danger. We then would hide in the forest until the danger had passed.*

We still wonder how we managed to live through all that, especially with an infant.

By July 1944 the Germans left the southwest of France (after the landing of the Allies in the south of France) *and when Paris was liberated on August 25, 1944, we began to think about returning home.*

First we needed identity papers, because our old papers had been buried when the mayor gave us false papers. This time we were very well received at that Périgueux police station, and we received real identification papers.

In November 1944 we finally arrived back in Paris. We were fortunate indeed to find our apartment, which had been occupied by Germans, with most of our furniture still there.

(In the next two years, we found out that most of our close family had perished in concentration camps, in Auschwitz and Sobibor and other camps).

*(Information in parentheses added by Jacqueline.)

My niece, Jessica Mendels, the elder daughter of my brother Franklin, wanted to learn more about her father, who died tragically in 1988. Six years after his death, Jessica and Anne-Emanuelle went to Paris, Périgueux and Le Got in Dordogne to find out more about the events surrounding our family's experience during the war. In May 1997 they went to Hamburg, Almelo and Amsterdam, to track

the stories of other family members. Jessica wanted to make a documentary film about her father and these terrible years. In August 1997, Jessica invited Manuela, Anne-Emanuelle and me to go to Le Got to interview the people who were still alive from the war years. Jessica hired a small crew to document our interviews. We have about 65 hours of interviews and for the past several years I have watched these videos to add information to my story. I will be forever thankful to Jessica and Anne-Emanuelle for their dedication to this project and for leading me to the point where I could recreate the story of our survival.

In writing this book, I have relied on my and Manuela's memories, on the writings of my father and mother in the journals of their three children, and on the documents of family and friends, as well as documents found in the archives in Périgueux, Dordogne. I have also been inspired and educated by many documentary films, newspaper articles and books, some of which are listed in the filmography and bibliography.

It is difficult for me to forgive and forget what happened to the Jews and to my family in WWII. When I meet children and grandchildren of Germans, I always think about what their parents or grandparents did during the war. In 2001, I read in an opinion piece in the New York Times about how Elie Wiesel felt that we must not and cannot forget the Jewish tragedy of the twentieth century. However, he approved the honor given by the United Jewish Appeal to a high official from the Bertelsmann Company, successor of the German company that published Nazi propaganda. This official, born in 1953, is contributing to Jewish causes and "he has never been accused of saying or doing anything to hurt or offend Jews." Professor Wiesel, who suffered so much, feels that we cannot condemn the children of the perpetrators.[1] Still, to this day, whenever I see a freight train, it makes me shiver and I think of all those Jews who were packed in similar trains and shipped to the death camps. I also fear German shepherds, the dogs used by the Germans to sniff out, terrorize and attack Jews.

I always say that of the 6 million Jews who were murdered, there are 6 million stories to tell. There are also all the stories of the many Jews who, miraculously, managed to survive; stories of Jews helping other Jews, stories of Jews helping non-Jews, stories of non-Jews helping Jews. There were innumerable tragedies, not only among Jews, but among gypsies, homosexuals, *résistants*, and other victim groups. As long as I live, I feel that I must speak out so people can understand what happened and what was done to innocent people.

---

[1] Wiesel, Elie. "Only the guilty are guilty, not their sons." The New York Times May 5, 2001.

Chapter 1
The Mendels Family

My father came from a large, extended family that settled in Holland in the 18th century or before. It is possible that their ancestors were expelled from Spain with the Spanish Inquisition decree of 1492 against the Jews, however we have not found a direct link with Sephardic Jews from Spain.

From various archival resources, our family has been able to compile the family tree on the following pages.[1]



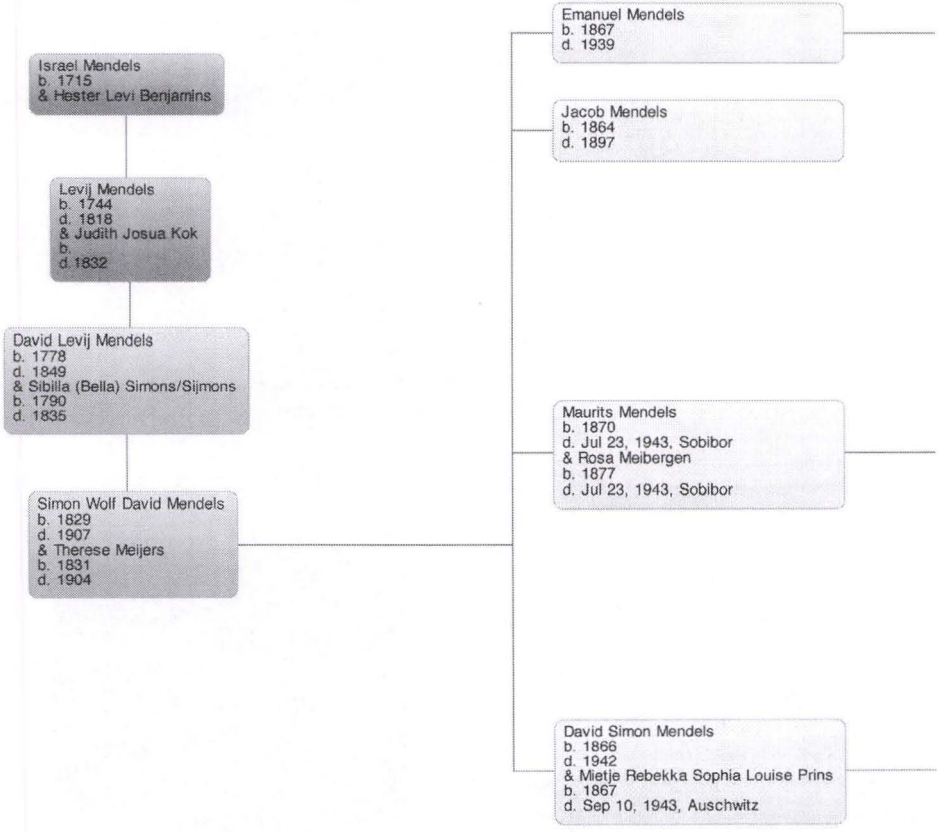
Therese (Meijers) Mendels and Simon Wolf David Mendels, Almelo, 1890.

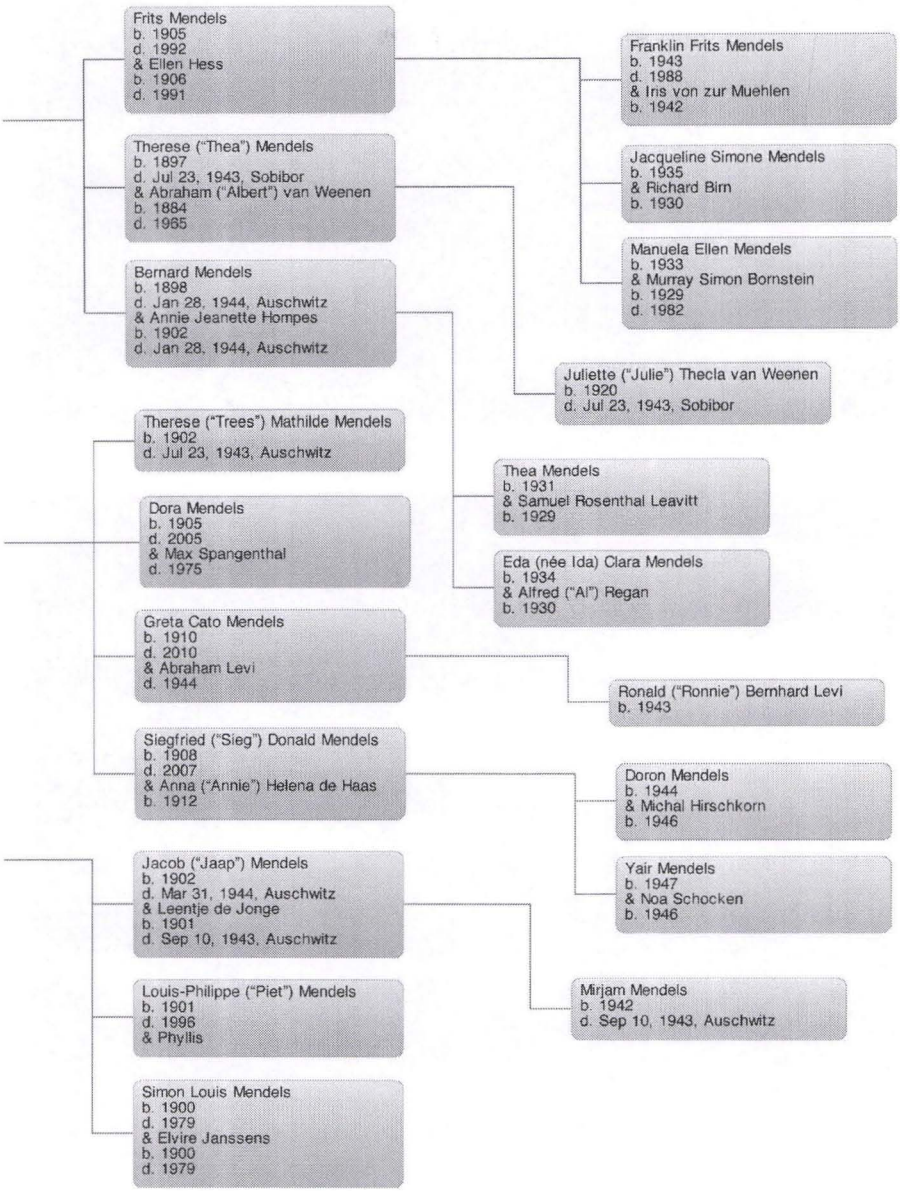


David Simon Mendels and Mietje Rebekka (Prins) Mendels, June 1932.

[1] Extensive research was done in the Dutch archives by my daughter Anne-Emanuelle Birn and my niece Jessica Mendels in 1997. My father and his cousin Simon did research in the archives in Almelo in the 1970s. Jessica Mendels did exhaustive research online in 2013 and was able to significantly expand the family tree.

Mendels Family Tree




Frits Mendels
b. 1905
d. 1992
& Ellen Hess
b. 1906
d. 1991
Franklin Frits Mendels
b. 1943
d. 1988
& Iris von zur Muehlen
b. 1942
Therese ("Thea") Mendels
b. 1897
d. Jul 23, 1943, Sobibor
& Abraham ("Albert") van Weenen
b. 1884
d. 1965
Jacqueline Simone Mendels
b. 1935
& Richard Birn
b. 1930
Manuela Ellen Mendels
b. 1933
& Murray Simon Bornstein
b. 1929
d. 1982
Bernard Mendels
b. 1898
d. Jan 28, 1944, Auschwitz
& Annie Jeanette Hompes
b. 1902
d. Jan 28, 1944, Auschwitz
Juliette ("Julie") Thecla van Weenen
b. 1920
d. Jul 23, 1943, Sobibor
Therese ("Trees") Mathilde Mendels
b. 1902
d. Jul 23, 1943, Auschwitz
Thea Mendels
b. 1931
& Samuel Rosenthal Leavitt
b. 1929
Dora Mendels
b. 1905
d. 2005
& Max Spangenthal
d. 1975
Eda (née Ida) Clara Mendels
b. 1934
& Alfred ("Al") Regan
b. 1930
Greta Cato Mendels
b. 1910
d. 2010
& Abraham Levi
d. 1944
Ronald ("Ronnie") Bernhard Levi
b. 1943
Siegfried ("Sieg") Donald Mendels
b. 1908
d. 2007
& Anna ("Annie") Helena de Haas
b. 1912
Doron Mendels
b. 1944
& Michal Hirschkorn
b. 1946
Yair Mendels
b. 1947
& Noa Schocken
b. 1946
Jacob ("Jaap") Mendels
b. 1902
d. Mar 31, 1944, Auschwitz
& Leentje de Jonge
b. 1901
d. Sep 10, 1943, Auschwitz
Mirjam Mendels
b. 1942
d. Sep 10, 1943, Auschwitz
Louis-Philippe ("Piet") Mendels
b. 1901
d. 1996
& Phyllis
Simon Louis Mendels
b. 1900
d. 1979
& Elvire Janssens
b. 1900
d. 1979



Maurits and Rosa Mendels with their children Therese, Dora, Greta, and Siegfried, approximately 1935.



Erna Meibergen, 2 years old, with cousins Hilda, Therese, Tiene, Dora, Siegfried ("Sieg"), and Greta, in Almelo, 1915. (Photo sent to me by Bob Strietman, the son of Erna.)



Thekla, Bernard (age 9), Frits (age 3), Therese ("Thea") (age 11), and Emanuel, 1908.

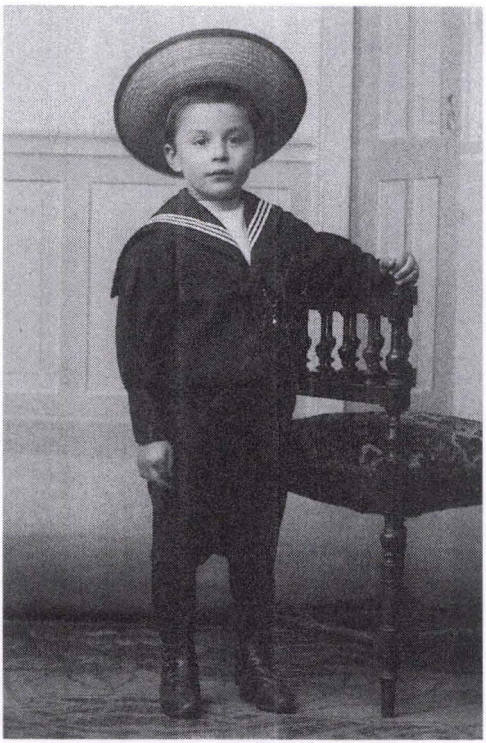
My father Frits was born in 1905, the youngest of three siblings. His sister, Therese ("Thea"), was the oldest child, and then came his brother Bernard.

My father recalled his childhood in interviews with Anne-Emanuelle in 1991 and with me when he came for a visit to Washington in 1991. There were many small details and stories that help to paint the picture of what life was like at that time.

He and his brother slept in the same bed. The family lived on a small street in Almelo. Their next-door neighbor was a cigar maker. Frits recounted reaching out of their window to steal fruit from his garden. That first house on *Ada straat* had an outhouse and no indoor plumbing. My grandfather and great uncle's business was doing well, and they moved, a few years later, to two attached houses on *Wierdensche straat*, the main street in Almelo, close to the town hall.

My father recalled that they had one or maybe two maids. Once the doctor came to the house because the maid became ill with some kind of infectious disease, perhaps influenza. The children could not go to school during that time for fear of spreading the disease.

My father was a teaser. He learned to ride a bike from his father's youngest em-



Frits in a sailor suit, 5 years old, Almelo, October 31, 1910.

ployee who ran errands on a bike. Once he hid the bike from that employee. The two brothers also teased their older sister Therese ("Thea"). There was a canal in front of the school and workers came out to have lunch in front of the school. The boys played ball in front of the canal and the ball would fall in the water.

Once, my father threw sand into a window. A man came out and caught a big boy and took him to the police, blaming him. But my father confessed and he was no longer allowed to leave school alone, he had to be with a teacher.

My father had a happy childhood with all of his cousins and friends in Almelo. My father's cousins Simon, Louis-Philippe ("Piet") and Jacob, children of David and Mietje Rebekka, were described as "little devils." His other cousins (the children of Maurits and Rosa), all played together.

We have an album of photos of family activities such as tennis games and beach parties with my father's relatives and friends. The children went to school on ice skates on the frozen canals in Holland. My father's cousin Dora was the same age as he was and lived in the house next door. She was a wonderful playmate and wrote that they were like brother and sister. Once a week my grandfather Emanuel played bridge – he was not to be disturbed then. My father was a boy scout, in the Kiwi patrol. He learned to tie knots and make book covers. (He always covered our schoolbooks during and after the war. He had a wonderful way of doing it, and I learned that method from him). He had beautiful handwriting that he retained all his life. After he died, his cousins Dora and Siegfried ("Sieg"), in their condolence letters to us mentioned how they always admired his handwriting. He also learned how to read maps, and I remember how he taught us children how to read the Michelin maps accurately and to fold the maps in the

right folds when we traveled by car going on vacation after the war.

My father studied for his Bar Mitzvah in Almelo but, as he told me, he did not particularly enjoy his Jewish studies, learning and memorizing all the prayers in Hebrew with an old man every afternoon. He found the studies boring. My father's grandparents were very religious and his mother was also very religious; she kept two sets of dishes for the year and two sets for Passover (Pesach) – separate sets for *fleischig* (meat dishes) and *milschig* (dairy). My father's uncle Maurits was more active in Jewish affairs than Emanuel. His other uncle David always wore a yarmulke. Dora Mendels, in her family history, also mentioned that her grandparents and her parents were very religious. My father said that there were no problems between Jews and non-Jews in Almelo, and the Jews in Almelo did not live in Jewish neighborhoods.

Almelo was an industrial town with numerous textile factories. My father's uncle David had a very nice shoe store and sold fancy shoes. My father's grandparents were shoemakers; they repaired shoes and also made new shoes. My grandfather Emanuel Mendels died in August 1939 in his sleep, probably of a heart attack. My father wrote in my baby journal how sad he was that his father had died. He said that he went alone to Holland for the funeral.

My paternal grandmother Thekla (Marx) Mendels, came from Dürren, a town near Cologne, Germany. Her marriage to my grandfather Emanuel Mendels had been arranged by a *Schatchen* (a Jewish matchmaker). My father told me that when he was 5 years old, his mother, Thekla, took him to see her father Bernhard Marx, in Dürren, who was sick. He had a long white beard. In the hallway to his bedroom, there was a tall armoire on top of which perched a stuffed rooster and my father remembered being very scared. This trip was a big event for my father. My grandmother Thekla had three sisters.[2,3] My grandmother followed *Kashrut* laws (food laws for a strictly kosher Jewish home). She soaked meat for 24 hours in an earthenware jar before cooking it and my father always told us that he remembered that the meat did not taste good. It was very bland.

I don't remember meeting my paternal grandparents, although there are photos that show that I met them as a young child in the late 1930s. They came to Paris to see us. I wonder how Thekla felt about eating in my mother's non-kosher kitchen.

Emanuel ("Mannie") and his brother Maurits ("Mau") had worked together

---

[2] They were Olga, Bertha and Frieda. Bertha married Salomon ("Soli") Vles, a Dutch man also and they had two sons, Erich and Alfred. According to my father, Olga Marx Goldberg and her husband Dr. Goldberg had 4 sons, Max, Hans, Werner, and Walter.

[3] I discovered in 2009 that Olga (Marx) Goldberg miraculously survived the camp of Terezin and moved to New York City. (see Chapter 10)

since 1894 in Almelo, Holland when they started their business "Mendels Brothers, Bakery Supplies and Flour". Their office and warehouse was called "Mercurius". At first the two families lived in the same house. Then, they moved to twin houses, more modern and with indoor plumbing, near the town hall.



Thekla ("Oma") and Emanuel ("Opa") Mendels, 1933.



Rosa and Maurits Mendels, 1930s.



Photo taken in 1937 in Paris of my grandmother Thekla (Marx) Mendels, with Manuela and me.

Once a week on Monday, Maurits went to the Commercial Stock Exchange in Amsterdam to order supplies for the business. The other days he stayed in the office and Emanuel traveled for business. Bulk goods were also sold in the office and warehouse. At the Stock Exchange, he met a man who convinced him and his brother to move to Amsterdam. His name was Bram Glazer. Thus in 1916, the two brothers and their families moved to Amsterdam to be near the commodities market and big business and finance opportunities. They rented an apartment for the two families. Until they became associated with Glazer, their business had been doing well in Almelo. Unfortunately Glazer gave them some very bad advice: to invest in wheat from the United States and sell it to Germany. But within a few years things would unravel with economic depression in the 1920s and very high unemployment and inflation following World War I. German businesses that had been buying wheat from the Mendels brothers were not able to pay them for the merchandise they had bought. The two brothers and their partner Bram Glazer thought that the only way to recuperate their losses was to go to Germany and try to do business there, selling wheat directly to Germany and recuperating their losses while living in Germany.

So, my father's parents, Emanuel and Thekla, his uncle Maurits, and his wife Rosa with their families left Holland for Hamburg, Germany in 1920. Hamburg

happened to be Bram Glazer's wife's hometown. The Mendels brothers had no special reason to choose Hamburg as the city where they would settle down, except perhaps that it was a large port city and it was not far from Almelo or Amsterdam.

At first, my father stayed alone in Amsterdam, going to high school and living in a *pension* (a boarding house). But he was lonely and missed his parents so he followed them to Hamburg around 1922 before he finished high school. His brother and sister had also gone to Hamburg as did his cousins, all of whom returned to Holland or went elsewhere much before the Mendels brothers and their wives because they did not enjoy living in Germany. (Dora, in her memoirs, mentioned antisemitism as the main reason for leaving Germany.)



The twin houses on Wierdensche straat in Almelo in the 1920s where the 2 brothers and their families lived.

My father's first job in Hamburg was as a junior employee in a bank. Then he worked for a Dutch businessman, Ben Elzas, in the leather business. But Elzas had three sons, business was bad, and there was no future for my father there, as Elzas told him. Around 1932, my grandfather Emanuel, his brother Maurits and their wives decided to go back to Holland. With the continuation of the world-wide depression, their business was not improving and they were nearly bankrupt. The brothers never mentioned their financial difficulties to their children. Antisemitism also made Maurits and Rosa, and Emanuel and Thekla, decide to leave and go back to Holland. According to Dora's memoirs, they all moved into the same apartment with their children in Amsterdam. The two brothers were not able to restart their business in Holland and suffered from lack of money until the end of their lives.

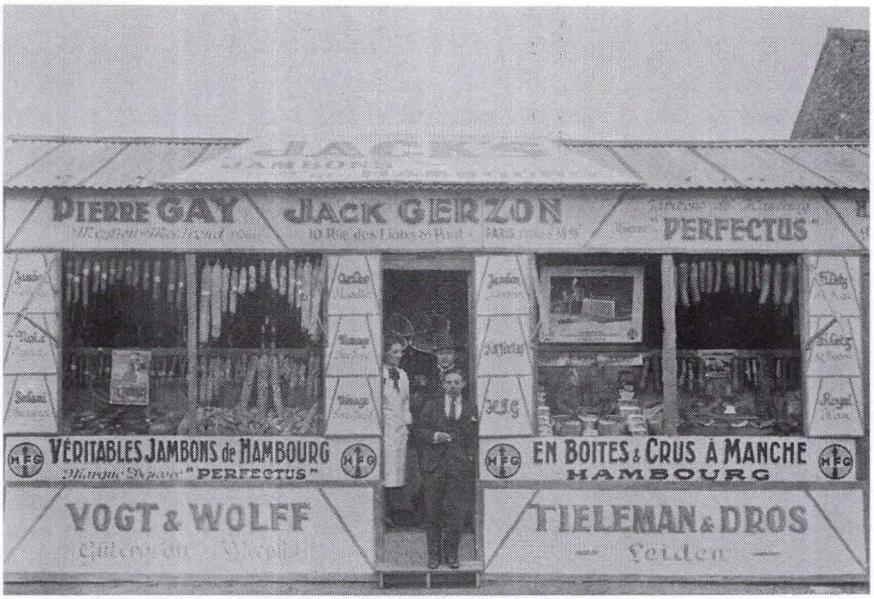
My father stayed in Hamburg until 1926. He had already decided that he would not go back to Holland. In the 1920s and 30s, many young men and women emigrated from Holland because the country was overcrowded and there were few opportunities for a career in Holland. My father was planning to go to England, where my grandfather had some business connections. However, impeded by the dockers' strike in 1925-26 and a general strike which did not appear to be ending, he decided to go to Paris where a school friend from Amsterdam, Bram Gelder, told him that there was a job at the firm where he was working.[4]

So, my father, Frits Mendels, a young Dutchman born in 1905 in the town of Almelo, Holland, arrived in Paris in 1926 at the age of 21 to join *Etablissements Ravilly* (Ravilly firm) in Paris. They were in the meat and food products business and they had an opening. Bram Gelder introduced him to Jack Gerzon. My father moved to 13 *boulevard St. Michel*, into a maid's room. His friend Jack Gerzon lived in the same building with Madeleine whom he married and with whom he had a little girl, Josette. When the owner at *Ravilly Père & Fils* (Ravilly, Father and Son) decided to move the business to Algeria, Bram Gelder relocated there, but my father did not want to go and the business split.

My father remained in Paris and set up shop with Jack Gerzon, who was importing foods from Holland. My father sold products directly to retailers, while Jack Gerzon was selling products wholesale. Louis Lacroix, another Dutchman who imported foods from Holland, joined the new firm, which in 1930 became *"Société Lacroix, Mendels & Moitrier, Import/Export"*, then *"Lacroix, Mendels & Cie"*, and finally, *"Lacroix, Mendels & Cie, SARL"* (LLC). M. Auguste Sautès joined them at a later date in the 1930s.

---

[4] "Paroles de Papa" (1991). My father speaking to me, tape-recorded and transcribed. He was also interviewed and taped by his granddaughter Anne-Emanuelle Birn in 1991.



Frits in a top hat in the doorway of 10 rue des Lions, the shop with Jack Gerzon, 1926.



Lacroix Mendels in 1965, at 2, rue de Sully/ 6, rue Mornay in the 4th arrondissement in Paris.



The sign for Lacroix Mendels was still visible in 1991.

Chapter 2
The Hess Family

My mother told me that the Hess family could be traced back to the seventeenth century in Moisling, near Lübeck, part of the Hanseatic league of merchant cities, in what is now Germany. Moisling and Lübeck were situated in the state of Schleswig-Holstein. At that time, Jews were not allowed to live in the Hanse city-states, but in the nineteenth century, when Moisling was annexed to Lübeck, the Hess family received permission to live in the Hanse. They left Moisling and went to live first in Lübeck,[1] then in Hamburg.

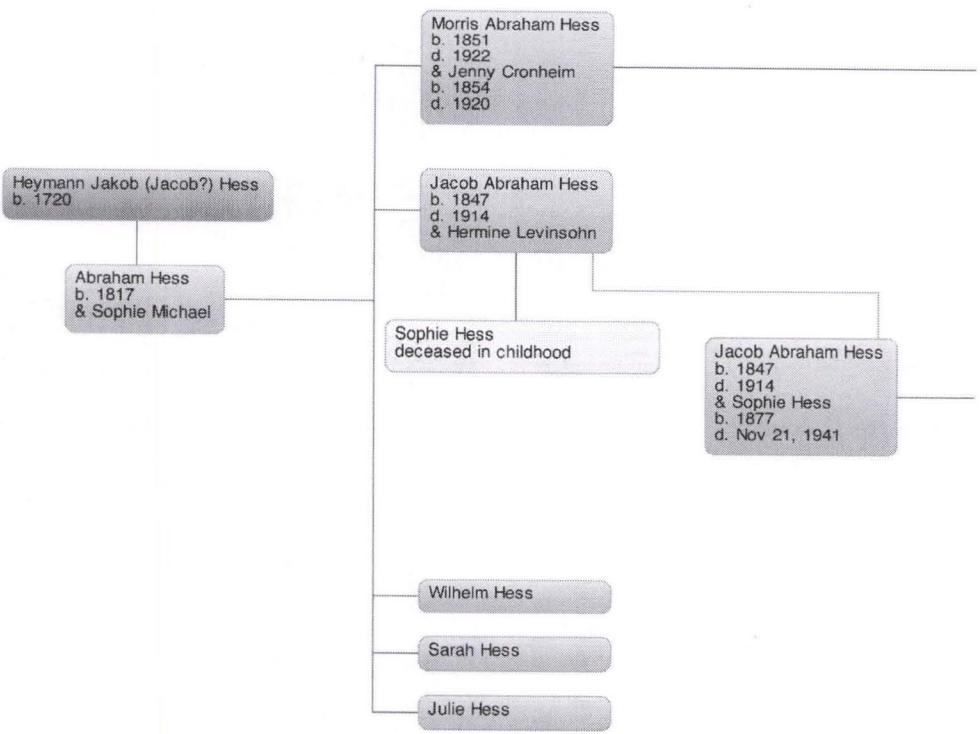
Since the Middle Ages, in most European countries Jews had been required to pay a *Leibzoll,* a special tax or toll paid whenever they moved into another province or country. Since the fourteenth century, Riga, Lübeck, Bremen, Hamburg, and other port cities in the Eastern Atlantic had been part of the Hanseatic league – a group of city-states with their own governments and taxation; the league was one of the earliest free-trade zones. In the nineteenth century, the northern Hanse city-states of Hamburg, Lübeck, and Bremen exempted Jews from that tax.[2] In addition, according to my mother, in the 1850s, the Hess family members, who were extremely well regarded in the community, were declared *Ehrenbürger der Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg,* "honorary citizens" or "privileged members" of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. The Hess heads of household were probably merchants or businessmen who could offer valuable financial help to the city; they may even have lent money to members of the Hanseatic League. The distinction given to my mother's ancestors was very special for Jews in those days. For Jews, living in Hamburg or other Hanse cities was in itself a privilege.

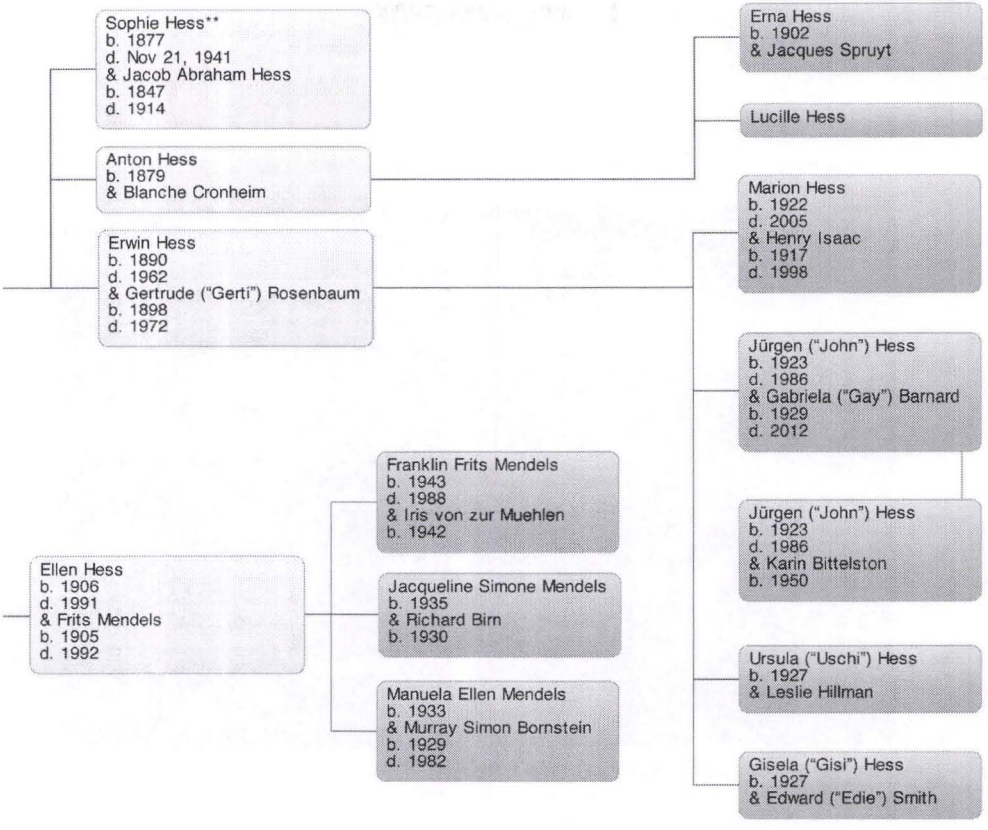
---

[1] Jewish Encyclopedia: The unedited full-text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia. "Lübeck." [Jewish-Encyclopedia.com]

[2] Postel, Rainer. "The Hanseatic League and its Decline." Paper presented at Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, November 20, 1996.

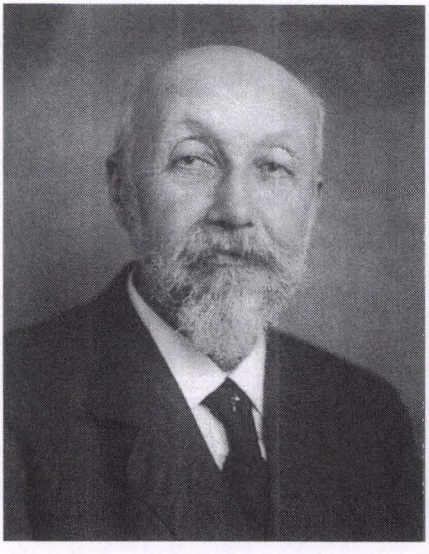
Hess Family Tree




Sophie Hess**
b. 1877
d. Nov 21, 1941
& Jacob Abraham Hess
b. 1847
d. 1914
Anton Hess
b. 1879
& Blanche Cronheim
Erwin Hess
b. 1890
d. 1962
& Gertrude ("Gerti") Rosenbaum
b. 1898
d. 1972
Erna Hess
b. 1902
& Jacques Spruyt
Lucille Hess
Marion Hess
b. 1922
d. 2005
& Henry Isaac
b. 1917
d. 1998
Jürgen ("John") Hess
b. 1923
d. 1986
& Gabriela ("Gay") Barnard
b. 1929
d. 2012
Jürgen ("John") Hess
b. 1923
d. 1986
& Karin Bittelston
b. 1950
Ursula ("Uschi") Hess
b. 1927
& Leslie Hillman
Gisela ("Gisi") Hess
b. 1927
& Edward ("Edie") Smith
Ellen Hess
b. 1906
d. 1991
& Frits Mendels
b. 1905
d. 1992
Franklin Frits Mendels
b. 1943
d. 1988
& Iris von zur Muehlen
b. 1942
Jacqueline Simone Mendels
b. 1935
& Richard Birn
b. 1930
Manuela Ellen Mendels
b. 1933
& Murray Simon Bornstein
b. 1929
d. 1982

After 1848, Jews in Hamburg (and in most German cities) became citizens; ghettoes[3] were opened, allowing Jews to live more freely outside the ghettoes. The Hess family also integrated into the modern world: they dressed the same way as their non-Jewish contemporaries, and they were more educated and wealthier than most Eastern European Jews, whom most German Jews saw as "dirty, poor, and uneducated" and who still wore the traditional black robes, black hats, and long beards.

My great-great-grandfather, Abraham Hess, was very wealthy. He was probably a merchant or a banker, working with the Hanse city-state of Hamburg.



My great-great-grandfather Abraham Hess, born 1817.



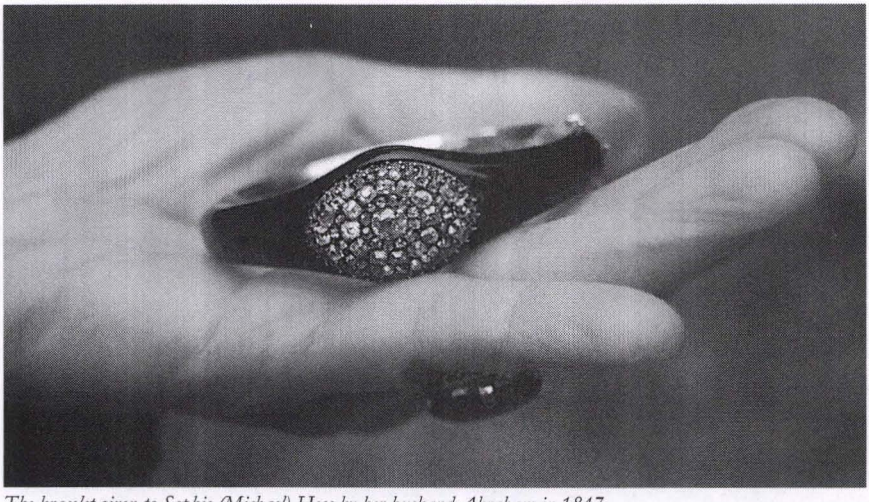
My great-grandmother Jenny (Cronheim) Hess, born 1847.

I have a bracelet given by Abraham Hess to his wife Sophie (Michael) Hess in 1847. It is made of gold, with diamonds in the center, with either lapis lazuli or onyx surrounding the diamonds. That bracelet has a long history of survival, passed from mother to daughter for more than 160 years. My grandmother Sophie Hess ("Omi") inherited it from her mother, Jenny (Cronheim) Hess, the wife of Morris Hess and daughter of Lina (Werner) Cronheim. At some point during the war, a Swedish cousin of Sophie's, Siri Hillelson, who lived on *Flodavägen* 5 in Nockeby Sweden, received the bracelet for safekeeping. I believe that after the war, it was Siri's daughter Lilian Leopolson, living at 3 B *Stiftelsvagen* in Kornas Sweden,[4] who brought the bracelet to my mother in Paris. My mother

[3] Attali, Jacques. Les Juifs, le monde et l'argent. Paris: Librairie Fayard, 2002, p. 360.

[4] Last addresses known, found in the address book of Frits and Ellen Mendels.

Ellen gave it to me when my husband Richard was appointed an officer in the U.S. Foreign Service in 1962; I frequently wore it at formal diplomatic functions, over long white gloves. The bracelet will eventually go to my daughter Anne-Emanuelle (who wore it for the first time at her wedding to Nikolai Krementsov in 2000) and then to my granddaughter Esperanza. I hope that it will continue to be passed down in this way from mother to daughter for generations.



The bracelet given to Sophie (Michael) Hess by her husband Abraham in 1847.



Family members in Hamburg in 1906. From left to right: my great-grandmother Jenny (Cronheim) Hess born 1847; my mother Ellen Hess, born 1906; my grandmother Sophie (Hess) Hess, born 1877; my great-great-grandmother Lina (Werner) Cronheim, born 1817.

After Abraham Hess died, his three sons lost all their inheritance. Two of the sons, Morris and Wilhelm, fought for Prussia in the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. The third son was my grandfather, Jacob Hess who was born in 1847. He married Hermine Levinsohn, and together they had three children, two of whom died during the cholera epidemic of the 1870s. Their daughter Sophie was the only child left; in the late 1880s, however, Hermine, Sophie, and 18 other passengers died in a catastrophic storm-caused boating accident on Hamburg's Elbe river. Jacob Abraham and one other person survived the accident. Hermine and Sophie were buried in the Jewish cemetery of Ohlsdorf,[5] where many other members of the Hess family are buried. My grandfather was devastated.[6]

Jacob had been helping his brother Morris financially for many years; Morris was unsuccessful in his business (coal imports from Nordic countries), while Jacob's business thrived. One of Morris and Jenny's children was also named Sophie (my grandmother, born November 5, 1876), and Jacob became very fond of this niece. When he was 58 and she 27, they married on October 12, 1903, about 15



Sophie Hess, circa 1907.



Jacob Abraham Hess, my grandfather.

[5] Wagner, Anke. "Der Juedische Friedhof in Ohlsdorf; die Geschichte und die Grabmaeler." Hamburg Univ. Mag.-Schr. 1986.

[6] Anne-Emanuelle Birn's interview with my mother, Cannes, France, 1980.

years after his first wife and daughter perished in the Elbe. It was not unusual in those days for a man to marry his cousin, his niece, or the sister of his widow.[7] Their daughter Ellen Hess, my mother, was born on May 17, 1906, in Hamburg, Germany. She was an only child; her father was 60 when she was born.

Jacob Hess became well known in Hamburg. At first he owned a cigar shop. Then he became a certified accountant and, after that, an official receiver in bankruptcy. Two other men in Hamburg had the same profession, though he was the only Jew to do so. My mother said that he was highly appreciated in the community and very proud of his position. The family lived extremely well in a large apartment with many servants and a nanny. On Sundays, they went for rides in a horse-drawn carriage. His telephone number at his office was, according to my mother, *Colonnade* 14-17.

My mother's family was not very religious; her parents went to synagogue only on the High Holidays. My mother always reminded me that she did not go to school on those days, and that she would bring her father a bouquet of violets after services. While my mother did not talk often of her father, whom she knew only for the first eight years of her life, she mentioned her mother Sophie frequently, almost daily; mother and daughter were very close. My grandparents had the means to travel; they went to a health cure in Bad Kissingen in Bavaria, then immediately after to the Baltic Sea for a *NachKur* (aftercure). My mother went to public schools in Hamburg, and though she was the only Jewish girl in her high school, she said that she never felt any antisemitism, which was unusual at that time in Germany.

In 1913, my grandfather became ill. He consulted 11 doctors, but died of heart disease the next year, at age 68. My mother was just eight years old. The night before he died, he played dominoes with her. My sister Manuela recalls that our mother told us that for a year after her father's death, she wore a black-and-white checked dress and a black ribbon in her hair.

Because of her age, it was determined that my mother needed a male guardian.

---

[7] Apparently, uncle-niece marriage was accepted among Jews, and tolerated by at least some of the non-Jewish Europeans among whom they lived. James de Rothschild married his brother's daughter in 1824, in Frankfurt. Another Jewish uncle-niece marriage was the subject of a 1900 British court case described in the Encyclopaedia of International Law (2002): "A Jew and his niece, British subjects domiciled in England... [were] married in Germany according to German law and... Jewish ceremonies. Both German and Jewish law permitted marriage of uncle and niece. The English Court held the marriage void." (p. 25) So uncle-niece marriage was apparently legal in parts of Europe in the nineteenth century, but I don't know if it was for everyone or an exception for Jews. According to the 2005 book The Cultural Defense, such an exception exists or existed in modern America: "There is an exception to the prohibition against uncle-niece marriage in the U.S. In Rhode island, the law exempts Jews from the prohibition." (p. 121)

This was Herr Moeller; I don't know if he or his wife were friends of the family or if they were appointed by the court. Herr and Frau Moeller were Zionists; they later moved to Palestine, and hoped that Ellen would go there as well.

My grandfather had planned everything for his wife and daughter, but he could not have planned for World War I. He had established a trust as a dowry for Ellen, and set aside funds for her studies — he wanted her to study law. My grandmother received the interest on investments my grandfather had made. However, during and after World War I, that interest amounted to very little due to exorbitant inflation. There had been several servants in the bourgeois household of the Hess family prior to the war, but that changed after my grandfather died. Sophie and Ellen had to move to a smaller apartment, though my grandmother



Ellen's war bond. In the spring of 1915, my mother gave 50 marks in gold to help in the Great War.

retained one maid. They were still better off than many families. There was often not enough coal to heat Ellen's classroom, and schools were closed when there was no heat. There was occasionally not enough to eat; the family sometimes ate only parsnips. They also received packages of bread and chocolate from family members in America.

Sophie's mother Jenny had been an opera singer, and a love of music was passed down to her daughter and to all the Hess descendants. To supplement her income, she began giving piano lessons and playing piano to accompany silent movies. My mother took piano lessons from her mother and they played piano four hands; she often fell asleep to the music of Chopin that her mother played.



Erwin Hess in Hamburg, 1920s.

My grandmother had a younger brother, Erwin, who was a prosperous coffee importer. He was an infantry soldier during World War I; in the army, he played military music instead of bearing arms. He also played the organ and piano, and later he composed music for the piano. His granddaughter Carol Isaac has transcribed and recorded some of his music. After the



Marion, Ursula ("Uschi"), Jürgen, and Gisela ("Gisi") Hess playing quartets in 1938.

war ended, he spent every afternoon playing the piano with friends, either four hands on one piano or on two pianos. Erwin's four children, Marion, Ursula ("Uschi"), Gisela ("Gisi"), and Jürgen were also musical; the family often played quartets together.

In addition to Sophie and Erwin, there was another son, Anton, considered the black sheep of the family. After he stole money from the stamp box in a store where he worked, the family sent him to America. In New York, he married Blanche Cronheim (no relation to Jenny Cronheim), who had a daughter, Lucille. Blanche and Anton then had a daughter, Erna, who later married a Dutch man, Jacques Spruyt, in New York. Erna and Jacques had no children. My sister had Erna and Jacques' names and address on the list of family members we would have asked to help us during and after the war if she and I had survived as orphans.

Sophie Hess had two cousins whom we saw mostly after World War II. Margot Schick and her husband Adolph settled in Vincennes, very near where we lived in St Mandé. They had two children, Arnaud and Suzy. Margot was the daughter of Emma Leiser, a sister of Jenny Hess. Emma and Jenny were the daughters of



My mother Ellen Hess at age 14, second from left, with school friends, 1920.



Ellen Hess, June 23, 1922.

Lina Werner Cronheim. The other cousin of my grandmother, Siri Hillelson, settled in Sweden. She was a descendant of the Werner branch of the family.

My grandmother Sophie remarried around 1918, to a Dr. Leopold. My mother always called him Leopold, although it was his last name. She described him as a mean and evil man, who did many cruel things, both large and small. The 1920s were hard years, and Dr. Leopold's patients paid him in kind; he put the food he received from his patients in locked, glass-fronted cabinets. Sophie and Ellen could see what he had received, but he did not share the items. He forbade Ellen to read at night, so she read by a flashlight under the covers. My mother, like many other young people in Hamburg, had a small boat that she kept on the Elbe, secured with a padlock; Leopold confiscated the key. He sent her to pharmacies all over Hamburg to pick up prescriptions for him; we have always wondered whether he was addicted to opium or other painkillers. And he refused to pay for her studies.

At some point, Ellen moved out; she moved in with her uncle Erwin and aunt Gertrude ("Gerti") and the two older children for a few years. But after the twin girls Ursula and Gisela were born, there was no more room for Ellen. In 1927, she moved into a rented room. She also lived with her piano teacher for some time. My grandmother left Dr. Leopold five times, but always went back to him; she said she loved him. She finally divorced him in the late 1920s. He survived World War II.

My mother Ellen met my father Frits in the office of Ben Elzas, a businessman specializing in leather goods in Hamburg; my father had worked there since 1924 or 1925. He was asked to advertise for a secretary/accountant; Ellen was hired. Frits and Ellen became friends, and often shared their lunches. It was a novelty for Frits, who came from a strict kosher home, to taste Ellen's ham sandwiches.

In 1926, my father left Hamburg for Paris,[8] where he rented a maid's room at

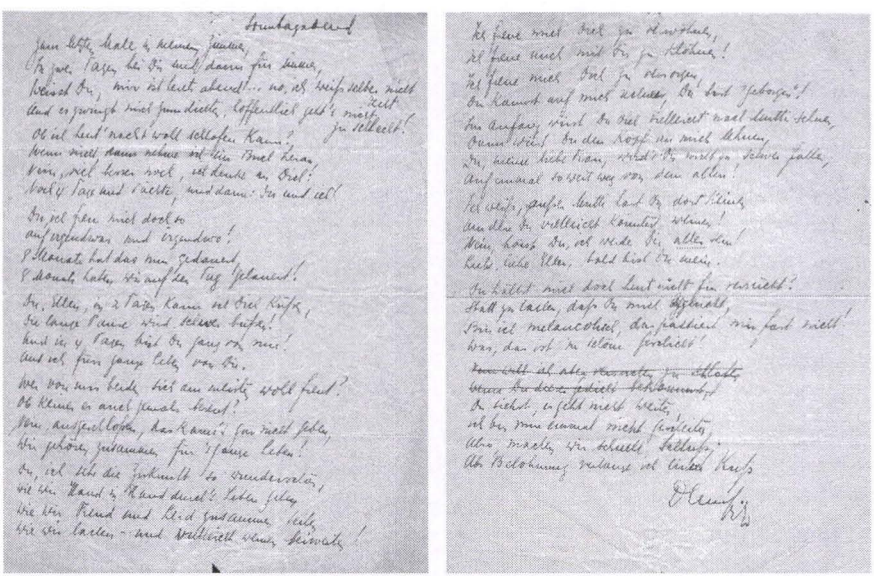
[8] See Chapter 1.



Frits Mendels in Versailles, 1929.

13 *Boulevard St. Michel.* He found a job right away. Frits and Ellen corresponded for four years. They exchanged photos. Little by little, the letters became love letters. Frits proposed to Ellen by mail, and they were married on August 28, 1930, in Hamburg. They had a Jewish wedding; we still have their *ketubah.*

After their wedding, they settled in Paris. It was very difficult for Ellen to leave her mother behind, and for Sophie to let her only child go. Only the great love Ellen felt for Frits made her decide to accept his proposal. Though she feared marriage because of the bad example in her family, she also felt that Frits would bring her the stability and happiness she had never had.



My father's love poem to my mother, in German, written 4 days before their wedding in Hamburg on August 28, 1930. The English translation (by Manuela) follows.

Sunday Night

For the last time in my room,
In two days with you and then forever,
You know, for me it is tonight.....no, I am confused
And I want to write a poem for you, I hope it won't be too bad!
Will I be able to sleep tonight?
If not, I'll take a book.
No - much better - I will think about you!
I have to wait another 4 days, and then:
You and I!

You know, I am so excited
About anything and anywhere!
Eight months the wait has lasted
Eight months we have longed for this day!

You know, Ellen, in 2 days I can kiss you,
This long wait will have ended!
And in 4 days you will be all mine,
And for our entire life I will be yours.

Which one of us two is more excited?
Whether anyone.....?
No, absolutely not, that cannot happen,
We belong together for our entire life!

You know, I see our wonderful future,
As we go through life hand in hand,
As we share joy and pain,
As we laugh...and perhaps cry together!

I am looking forward to spoiling you,
I am looking forward to complaining with you,
I am looking forward to caring for you,
You can count on me, with me you are "safe"!

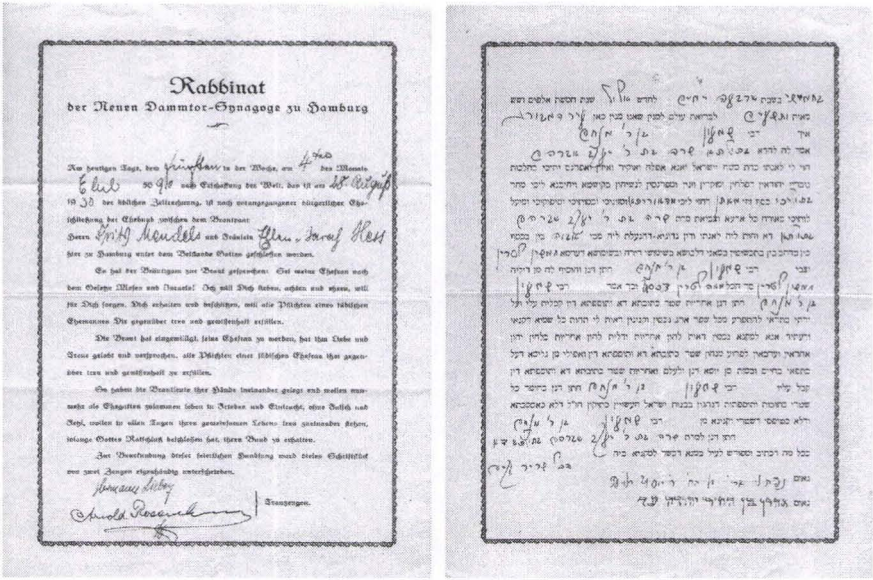
Perhaps at the beginning you will miss Mutti.
Then you will lean your head on me.
You, my beloved wife, will it not be too hard for you,
To be all at once so far from all?

I know, besides Mutti you have no one there
About whom you would perhaps cry.
No, listen to me, I will be your all!
Dear, dear Ellen, soon you will be mine.
You did not .....?
Instead laugh, to bring me luck,
If I am melancholy, and it does not pass quickly!
What, that is too beautiful a tale!

But now I will try to sleep.
When you receive this poem,

You see, I cannot write any more,
Today I am not a poet.
So, let us end quickly,
As a reward I request a kiss.

Your Frits



Rabbinat
der Neuen Dammtor-Synagoge zu Hamburg

Am heutigen Tage, dem Freitag, 4. Tag der Woche, am 4. des Monats Elul 5690 nach Erschaffung der Welt, das ist am 28. August 1930 des christlichen Zeitrechnung, ist nach vorangegangener ehelicher Eheschließung der Eheleute zwischen dem Bräutigam Herrn Fritz Mendels und Jüdin Ellen, Sara Hess hier zu Hamburg unter dem Baldachin Gottes geschlossen worden.

Es hat der Bräutigam zur Braut gesprochen: Gei meine Ehefrau nach dem Gesetze Moses und Israels! Ich will Dich lieben, achten und ehren, will für Dich sorgen. Mich erhalten und beschützen, will alle Pflichten eines jüdischen Ehemannes Dir gegenüber treu und gewissenhaft erfüllen.

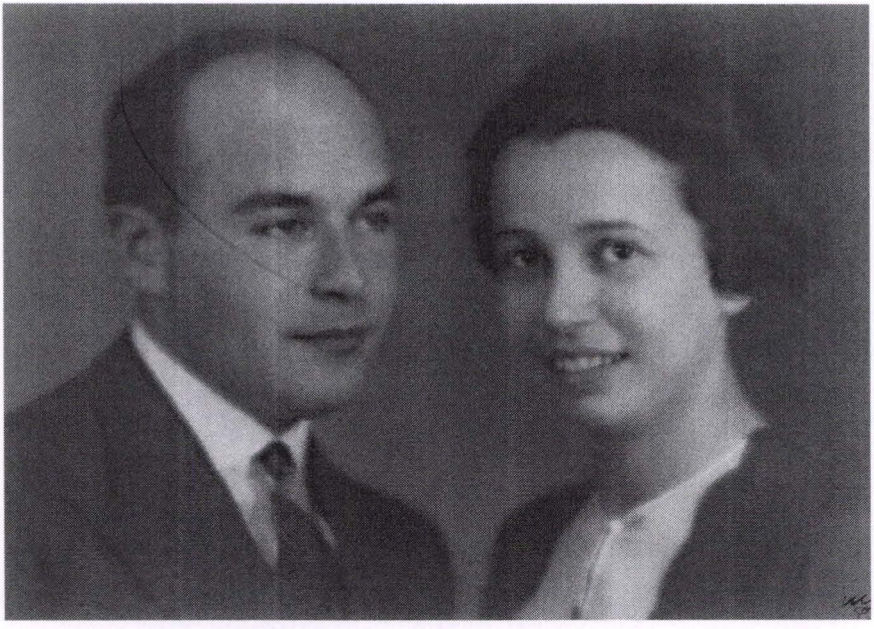
Die Braut hat eingewilligt, seine Ehefrau zu werden, hat ihm Liebe und Treue gelobt und versprochen, alle Pflichten einer jüdischen Ehefrau ihm gegenüber treu und gewissenhaft zu erfüllen.

Sie haben die Brautleute ihre Hände ineinander gelegt und wollen nunmehr alle Tagesläufe zusammen leben in Freuden und Einträchtigkeit, ohne Zwiespalt und Zwist, wollen in allen Tagen ihren gemeinsamen Lebens- treu zusammen stehen, solange Gottes Ratschluß beschließen hat, ihren Bund zu erhalten.

Zur Beurkundung dieser feierlichen Handlung wurd dieses Schriftstück von zwei Zeugen eigenhändig unterschrieben.

Trauzeugen.

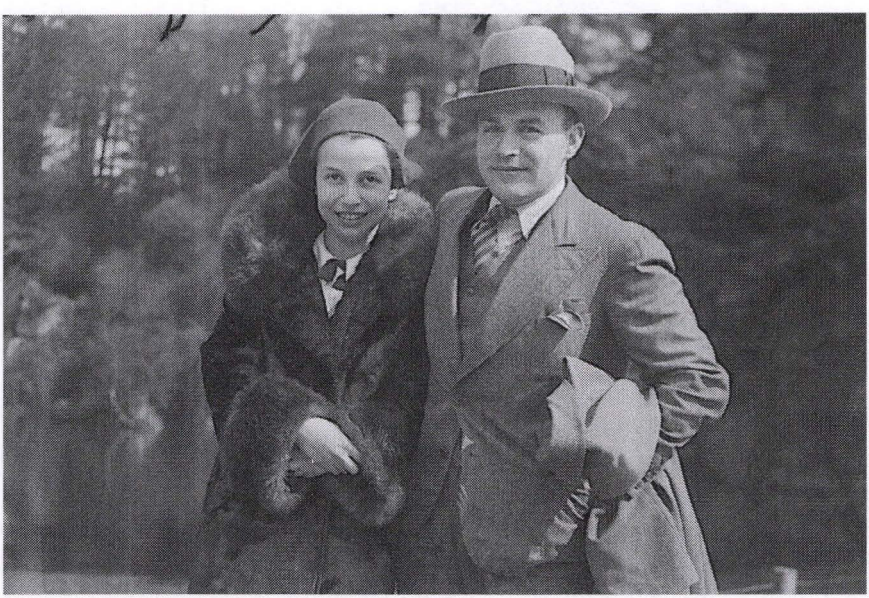
My parents' Ketubah in German and in Hebrew. A Ketubah (Hebrew: a wedding document) is a special type of Jewish prenuptial agreement. It is considered an integral part of a traditional Jewish marriage, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the groom, in relation to the bride.



Frits and Ellen after their marriage in 1930.

Chapter 3
Life in Paris During the 1930s

My parents were very happy for their first few years as a young couple in Paris. My mother became familiar with life as a young wife in a wonderful city.[1] They loved each other very much, and this love endured until they died one year apart from each other in 1991 and 1992.[2] This love helped them immensely to survive the war years.



Frits and Ellen in Paris shortly after they were married, 1930.

[1] My mother had taken French lessons in high school in Hamburg. Her mastery of the French language never became perfect, however it certainly improved while living in Paris. (She often mentioned to us her former French teacher Fräulein Osterloh whom she liked very much).

[2] My mother died in 1991 in Cannes, my father in 1992 in Atlanta where he had moved to be near my sister Manuela.

My father was working very hard trying to establish himself in his profession, importing specialty foods. He had already lived in Paris since 1926; his knowledge of the city and of the French language was excellent. I still have his old *Guide de Paris* (Paris guide) with the 20 *arrondissements*. His friends used to say, *"Il connaît Paris comme sa poche."* ("He knows Paris like the back of his hand.") He traveled a fair amount. I remember a gift he once brought back for us children: a bag of candies that looked like little stones or pebbles such as the ones we found at the beach. What a wonderful surprise for Manuela and me!



Frits Mendels, 1930.

My parents rented an apartment in Saint Mandé, on the métro line no. 1. The métro stop was *Saint-Mandé-Tourelle* and it was not far from my father's office in the 4th *arrondissement* (one of the 20 administrative districts of Paris).[3] Saint-Mandé is situated between the 12th and the 20th *arrondissements*, near the *Bois de Vincennes* and the zoo. It was, and still is, a lovely area just on the southeast border of Paris. The neighborhood was bourgeois, mostly middle-class, mostly French and Catholic. As in other French municipalities there was a Catholic church, a Town Hall, a *rue de la République*, (Republic Street) and many shops on the way to the métro stop. There was a synagogue in Saint-Mandé-Tourelle, with no sign on the outer wall indicating the presence of a Jewish house of worship. There were a few middle-class Jewish families living in Saint-Mandé, and some of them were recent immigrants from Germany, Holland or Eastern Europe, like our friends the Edelsteins who came from Romania, the Bernheims from Germany and the Raines-Lambés from Lithuania. My parents were not practicing Jews, although they had a Jewish wedding and considered themselves Jewish. They were what were known as "assimilated Jews." My parents considered themselves to be integrated into the French community and French life. We never went to religious services.

[3] Paris is composed of *20 arrondissements* or administrative districts created in 1860, starting with the oldest, the 1st *arrondissement* in the center with the *Louvre*, the *Jardin des Tuileries* and *Ile de la Cité*, and circling around in the shape of a snail.



One of my father's suitcases with hotel stickers showing the places where he traveled for his business.

In 1931 from May to November, there was an International Colonial exhibit which took place in the 12th *arrondissement*, along the *Bois de Vincennes*, at the metro stop *Porte Dorée*, on the edge of a small lake, *Lac Daumesnil*. My parents could walk there from home in St. Mandé. It was a huge event, reflecting upon the French and other Western empires. There were complaints from the Left accusing participating governments in the exhibit and denouncing colonial empires.[4] I believe my mother took my grandmother Sophie there when she was visiting from Hamburg. My parents bought a wool rug made in North Africa that I still have, with a brown and beige design and colors.

Hitler came to power in March 1933, less than 3 years after my parents were married and just a few months before my sister Manuela was born. I am not sure when my parents started to worry about Hitler's first laws against the Jews. It was not until *Kristallnacht*[5] in 1938 that the events in Germany worried Jews around the world.

I was born at home, at 19 *rue de l'Alouette* in St. Mandé, unplanned, 20 months af-

[4] Review of book by Michel Pierre & Catherine Hodeir, "L'Exposition Coloniale", Edition Complete. Le Monde. May 21, 1991.

[5] An anti-Jewish pogrom in Nazi Germany and Austria on November 9 and 10, 1938 triggered by the assassination of German diplomat Ernst von Rath by a German-born Polish Jew. Ninety-one Jews were killed and 25,000 to 30,000 were arrested and deported to concentration camps, 110 synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of Jewish homes and businesses were ransacked. My mother's uncle Erwin Hess was sent to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen on the night of *Kristallnacht*. He was released after his wife gave money to the camp commandant and he was allowed to leave Germany shortly thereafter, penniless, with a Brazilian visa through family connections. His children recounted being beaten in the streets and harassed by young Germans.



Sophie Hess, 1930.

ter my sister Manuela. The midwife, Marguerite Bouard, wrote in my baby journal that my father called her on April 22nd at 3 o'clock in the morning, and then at 5 am, but I didn't appear into this world until the next day, April 23rd at 1:30 pm, the day after Easter Monday. I weighed 3.4 kilograms. Manuela had been born in a private hospital on *rue des Martyrs*, near Montmartre. But by the time of my birth, in 1935, and from then onwards, my parents were suffering financially from the worldwide economic crisis. My father's business was not doing well. Being born at home with the help of a midwife was less of a financial burden for my parents. If there had been any complications during labor and delivery, the midwife would have immediately been in touch with our family doctor and my mother would have been transported to the hospital nearby. However, everything went well. I don't know what other hardships there were in our family. My mother wrote in my journal that it was very hard to earn a living. She also wrote that their two little girls brought them much joy and hope for a better future.

The year I was born, 1935, was eventful for political and scientific reasons. The

Germans repudiated the Versailles Treaty that was signed at the end of WWI. Many historians claim that the conditions of the Versailles treaty were too harsh on the Germans and helped the rise of Hitler. The German government introduced compulsory military service and it enacted the Nuremberg laws against the Jews to prevent "racial pollution". Nylon was produced for the first time in the United States by DuPont. Frédéric and Irene Joliot-Curie of France received the Nobel prize in chemistry. There were many innovations in the fields of medicine, chemistry, telephone communications, etc.

Shortly after my birth, we moved from 19 *rue de l'Alouette* to 10 *avenue Ste. Marie*, still in Saint-Mandé. With two children, my parents needed more space.

My paternal grandparents, back in Holland since the early 1930s, were short of funds since their return from Hamburg. It was very sad for my parents not to be able to help them financially. My father's brother Bernard, on the other hand, was more able to help. My mother tried to compensate by knitting clothes for our cousins Thea and Eda Mendels, Bernard and Annie Mendels' daughters. At the same time, Manuela and I, being younger than our two cousins, were wearing hand-me-downs from them.[6] (After the war, we became quite used to wearing hand-me-down clothes, even from people that were unknown to us, such as the clothes that we received from American charities.)



Manuela and Jacqueline, Paris, Spring 1935.

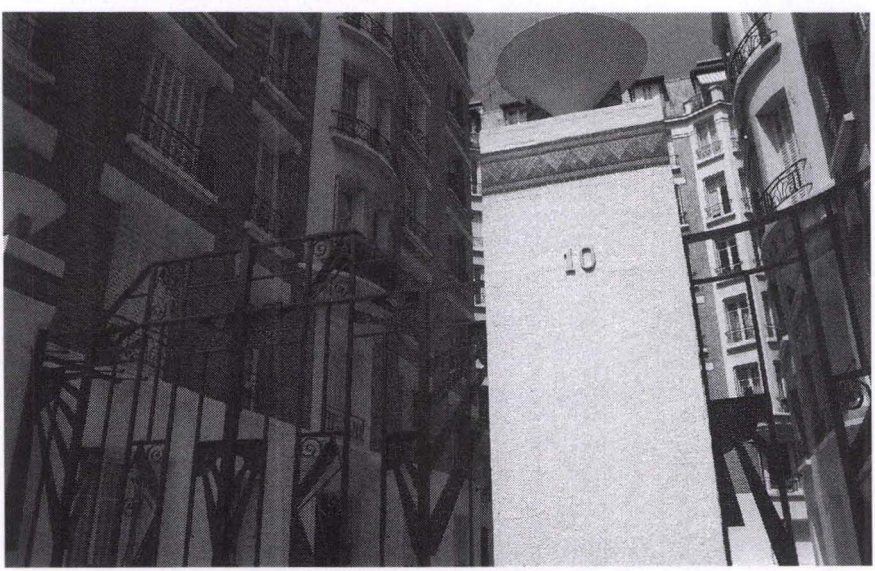
Before my birth, my parents were hoping for a boy since they already had Manuela, my older sister, and they wanted to call me Jacques after my maternal grandfather Jacob Hess. But I was a girl, so Jacques was not to be. After my parents discussed my name for a day (according to my father) or two hours (according to the midwife),[7] I was named Jacqueline. My parents called me "Kikline" or

[6] My sister and I inherited clothes that were too small for Thea and Eda. Thea found this quite strange. It was unusual in the Dutch Mendels family to give second-hand clothes to other members of the family.

[7] Letter written by the midwife, Marguerite Bouaud, in my journal.



The street sign "avenue Sainte Marie". Photographed by Jessica, 1994.



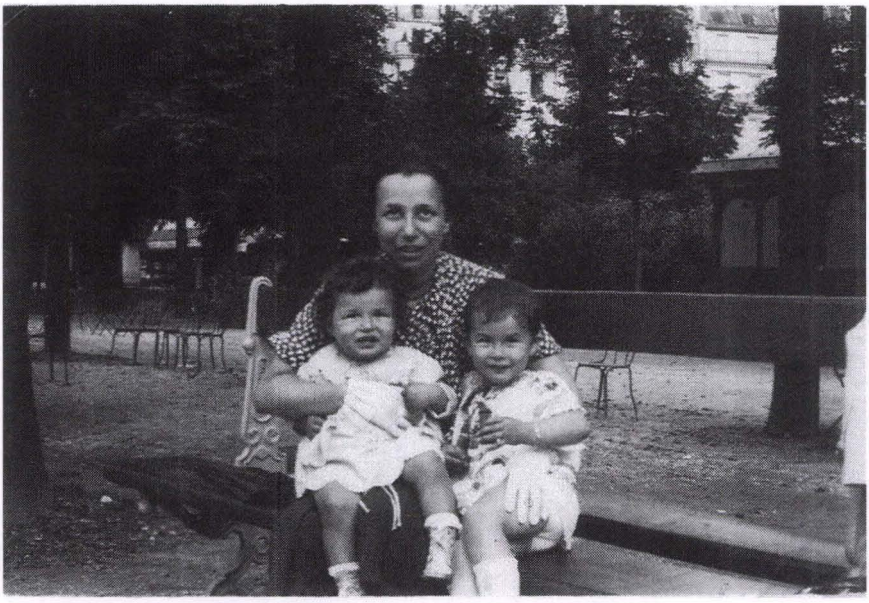
The gate of our apartment complex at 10 avenue Ste. Marie in St. Mandé. It has not changed in over 70 years and is in excellent condition. It has a lovely wrought iron gate in the Art Deco style. I showed it to my granddaughter in the Spring of 2008; the 3 buildings are still there, facing the fountain, the shutters are the same as in the old days, and I could see the windows of our apartment on the 2nd floor on the left side. Photographed by Jessica in 1994.

"Jacqui," until one day I said, "I am not a boy, my name is Jacqueline, not Jacqui." My mother wrote in my journal that, when I was as young as two years old, I was holding and taking everything with my left hand. I was definitely left-handed. However, when I started attending *l'école maternelle* (nursery school), the teacher took my pencil from my left hand and forced me to use my right hand, as was the custom in schools in those days. All children had to learn to write with their right hand. Except for writing, I am left-handed to this day. I should add that although my parents had not planned for a baby so quickly after the birth of my sister, they were nonetheless delighted to have me once I was born, as they wrote in my journal. Manuela and I loved having each other as playmates. I called her *"ma p'tite Mela"*.

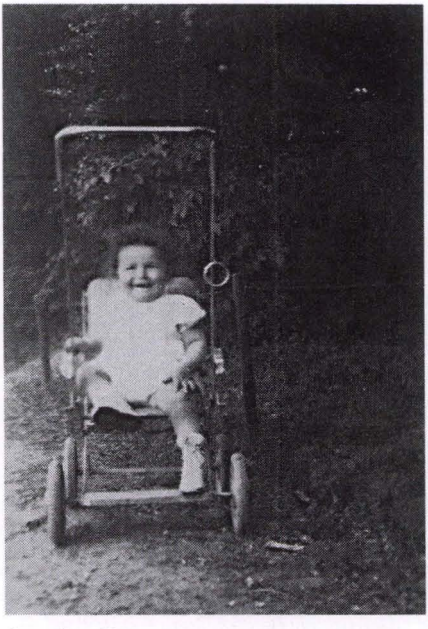
When I think of how Manuela and I had each other's company when we were growing up, during the war when we had no one else to play with, and during our adolescence, it was a blessing for both of us to be so close in age and in relationship. I feel that one important reason that we were not afraid during WWII is because we had each other.[8]

My parents' friends in Paris were, for the most part, other foreign Jews: Dutch (Josefa Mendels), German (Alix Stiel) or other nationalities whom they had met over the years. I often wondered why this was the case, given that they considered themselves assimilated and wanted to blend in with French people (although they never did become French citizens). I don't have an answer to this question. Perhaps it was difficult to be accepted in French circles due to prejudice against foreigners and perhaps due to the fact that my mother's mastery of the French language was not equivalent to that of native-born people that she met. Yet my parents also had some very good French Catholic neighbors and friends. In the mid 1930s, they became very friendly with another young couple, Maurice and Geneviève Paris, who lived in the same apartment house as we did at the time, at 19 *rue de l'Alouette*. My mother used to tell me that Geneviève had admired me in the baby carriage and then she became pregnant and her younger daughter Cécile was born two years after me. In 1934 or 1935, they moved from their apartment to a private house that was accessed through *une porte cochère* (a carriage gate), on *rue Poirier*, nearer to the Town Hall and the métro stop, and

[8] When I left for America after Richard asked me to marry him, it was a hard blow to Manuela and the rest of our family to see me leave for good. It was extremely difficult for my parents who had tried so hard since WWII to keep the five of us together. It was also very difficult for my sister to see me go so far away. We always went out together and we were each other's best friends. Later she came to spend a year in New York where Richard and I were living, and eventually, she married an American as well. To this day, and although we don't live in the same city, we are in touch with each other daily, by telephone, e-mail or Skype, and I feel that the older we become, the closer we are. We used to write long letters to each other when I lived overseas with my family, describing our everyday life. When I became very ill with a rare disease, amyloidosis, Manuela was an incredible support for me. I am sure that I owe my recovery, mental and physical, to her help, together with the help I received from Richard, our daughter Anne-Emanuelle, and my brother's wife, Iris.



Ellen with Jacqueline and Manuela, 1936.



Jacqueline, 1936.



Manuela and Jacqueline, 1936.

we moved to 10 *avenue Ste. Marie*, a larger and nicer apartment than our previous one, also in Saint-Mandé and near the zoo. As the years went by, my mother Ellen and Geneviève Paris became each other's best friends.



Manuela, Jacqueline and Ellen, spring of 1936 in Paris. I am learning to walk holding on to my sister and my mother, and we are having a nice stroll along the Champs Elysées.

According to the older daughter of the Paris family, Marie-Thérèse, the two women discussed religion, and Geneviève was trying to encourage Ellen and Frits to convert to Catholicism. Maurice Paris, on the other hand, said that this was nonsense, and that everyone was entitled to her own religion.

Despite the fact that some thought it could be safer for them to convert to Catholicism at that time in history, my parents never took steps to do so. As we know now, conversion would not have saved them from arrest and deportation during the war. Under German and Vichy laws, even being 1/4 Jewish (having one of four grandparents who was Jewish) made a person legally Jewish and thus, subject to abominable indignities, atrocities, and murder. In those days, Jews were called *Israélites*. In French this was the correct term. The word Jew – *Juif* -- was considered pejorative and insulting. Since the end of WWII, the opposite is true: *Juif* has become the polite word to use. When I meet French people of my generation, i.e. people born before WWII, they still use the word *Israélite* and it makes me angry and sad.

Early in the 1930s, nothing much changed in Paris for Jews, except that the far right political party became a very active and antisemitic movement. There were still remnants of the Dreyfus affair in people's minds and divisions between the Right and the Left in people's thinking. The Right was traditionally composed of high ranking officers in the army, of the *haute bourgeoisie*, and of families of the former nobility, with last names starting with "de" like d'Ormesson, de Ségur, de Sévigné, de Musset, de Vigny. These families espoused views of the Right; some of them were Royalists and they had a tendency to be antisemitic. In general, they were practicing Catholics and they married among their peers. It was a shock when a Jewish son-in-law or daughter-in-law entered their families. The Left, on the other hand, was liberal, socialist, anti-clerical and comprised of factory workers, teachers, merchants, scientists and intellectuals. They were also more open to foreigners and accepted Jews among their friends. In 1936, Léon Blum, a socialist, was elected France's first Jewish Prime minister. The Right didn't appreciate having a Jewish Prime minister, or a Socialist. These were hard times in France, as in most of the world, with high unemployment and an economic depression. Léon Blum was trying to improve working conditions for millions of people.[9] He was reproached by his adversaries on the Right for being more preoccupied with domestic policies than with foreign policy. Blum enacted a number of progressive laws for the working classes. It was the beginning of "*les congés payés*" (paid vacations) for millions of workers who were able to go to the seashore or to the country for the first time in their lives.[10] As usual in hard times, antisemitism increased and Jews were accused of causing the economic depression by the people who suffered from it.

In the summer of 1936, our family spent a week at Merlimont-Plage, on the seashore. This was the first summer for us along the North Sea. I was just over one year old and my sister was three. The next summer, we went to the same resort town. My father wrote in my journal that my sister and I were scared of the water, especially I. Going to the North Sea was easy since it was very close to Paris, and my parents felt that it was good for our health. It was a short trip for my father who would join us at the end of the week.

In late August 1937 my father's sister Therese ("Thea") and her husband *Majoor* Abraham ("Albert") van Weenen came to Paris for a visit, along with their daughter, our cousin Juliette ("Julie") van Weenen. During the war, our uncle Albert was taken as a prisoner of war in Germany. He survived the war while his wife Thea and daughter Julie perished in the Sobibor concentration camp.

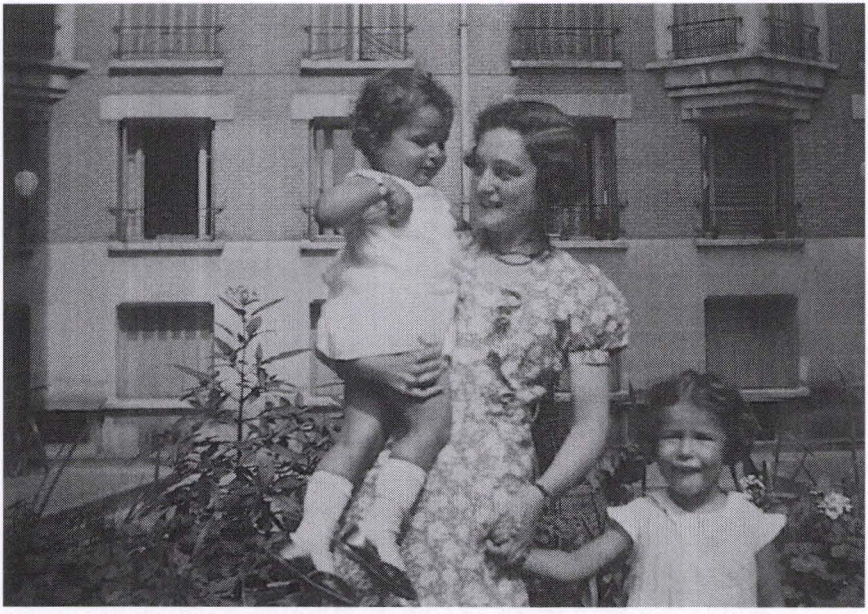
---

[9] Chastenet, Jacques. Histoire de la Troisième République, Volume VI: Déclin de la Troisième, 1931-1938. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1962. pp. 1-272.

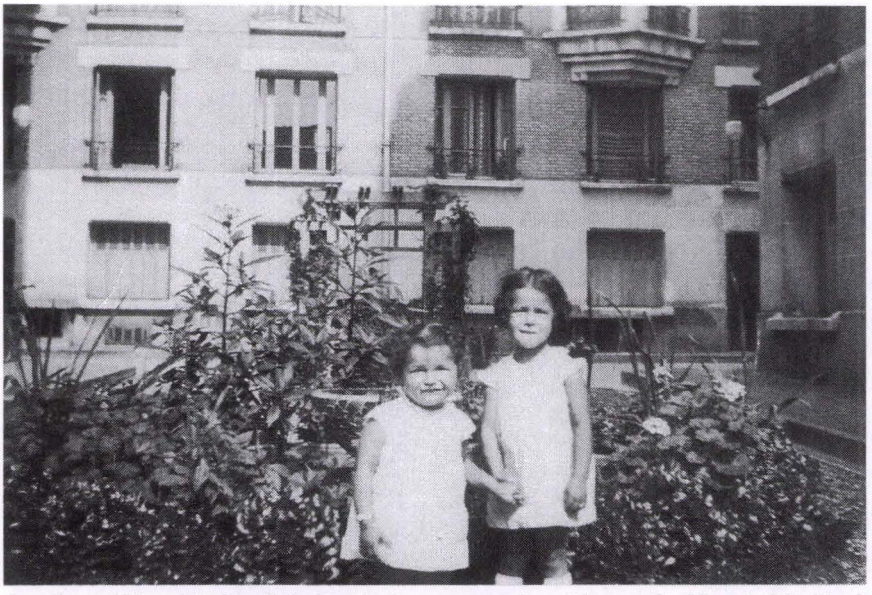
[10] Noguères, Henri. La vie quotidienne en France au Temps du Front Populaire, 1935-1938. Paris: Editions Hachette, 1977.



Our Dutch uncle and aunt, Majoor van Weenen and his wife Therese ("Thea") (my father's sister), along with my father, mother, Manuela and me, 1937.



Juliette van Weenen with Manuela and Jacqueline in the courtyard of our apartment house in Saint-Mandé, in late August 1937.



Jacqueline and Manuela in front of the fountain of our apartment house, 10 avenue Ste. Marie, in Saint-Mandé, in 1937.

After the summer of 1937, my mother, my sister and I went to Hamburg for a visit with our grandmother Sophie Hess. After that, we went to Holland to visit our Dutch relatives. These two trips to visit our German and Dutch families were the last ones that we took before WWII and the last time we saw most of those relatives alive. My cousin Thea said in an interview many years later that she remembered her French cousins who came for a visit, and that we used the French expression "*coucou*," wanting to play "hide and go seek," I suppose.

After the *Anschluss* (union of Germany and Austria) on March 15, 1938 when Hitler invaded and annexed Austria, there were threats of war. France decided to have a partial mobilization of the troops. The allies, Chamberlain of Britain and Daladier of France, accepted Hitler's and Mussolini's further belligerent acts. In the fall, between the Jewish High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Hitler threatened to take over the Sudetenland, which was part of Czechoslovakia. Five hundred thousand more men were called to arms in France. Classes were suspended, street lamps were covered with black. We had to get gas masks. In Munich in late September 1938, France and Great Britain accepted the take-over of Czechoslovakia by Hitler. It was an "appeasement" period and everyone was hoping that there would be no war. This was only 20 years after the end of WWI and no one wanted another war. We left Paris and took refuge at



Ellen, Manuela and Jacqueline in Hamburg, 1937.

a hotel somewhere in a small village near Fontainebleau. My sister and I remember "a dirty little room" with many flies. I also remember sleeping on a table. My parents felt it was safe to return to Paris[11] after a week.

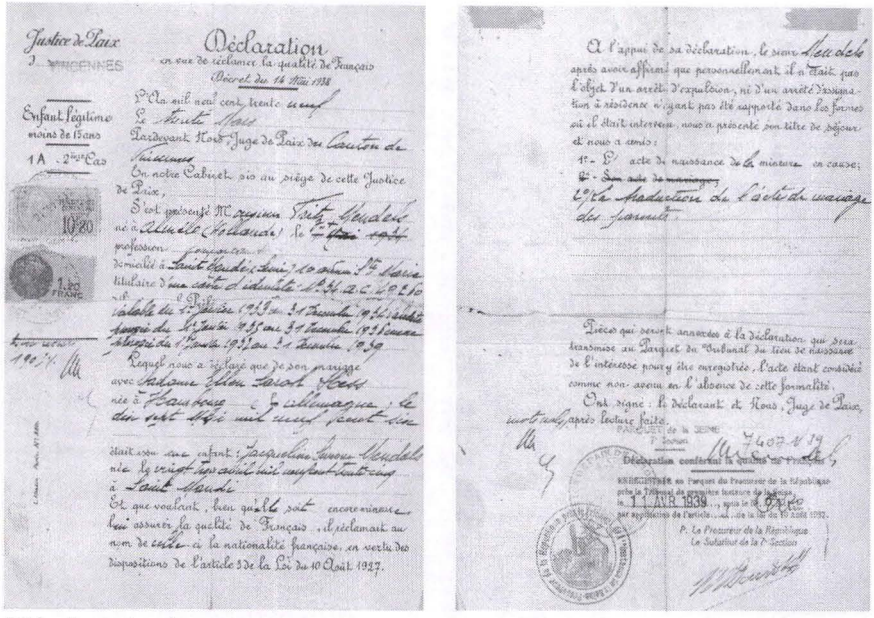
In March 1939, my parents took the step of officially requesting that my sister Manuela and I be declared French citizens according to a law passed in 1927 for children born in France to foreign parents. This was to reinforce the fact that we were born in France. Our parents wanted to protect us during uncertain conditions. I have kept this declaration to this day - it is framed and hanging on a wall in my home. I can see that it had been folded in 4, and my father must have taken it in his pocket with his ID when we crossed the demarcation line in 1942. He thought that it would help to show that Manuela and I were French citizens hoping that his two daughters would not be interned and deported.[12] In fact, we were not declared French citizens until 1947 as I found out in 2010 at the French Embassy in Washington. We were Dutch Jews just like our parents, subject to deportation like all foreign Jews (and later on, French Jews as well).

We remained dual citizens of Holland and France until the age of 21, at which time we had to choose which nationality we wanted to keep. Did my parents foresee something catastrophic happening in the future, and did they feel that it was better for their children to be primarily French citizens rather than Dutch, i.e., "foreign" residents? As for themselves, they remained Dutch. My parents never applied for French citizenship.

Otherwise, the ebbs and flows of life continued. In 1939, our parents took us to see our first movie. It was *"Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains"* ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"). It was a present for my birthday. My mother wrote that our cheeks were red with excitement. We spent the month of June and part of July

[11] Typewritten pages by my father in my journal, January 28, 1940.

[12] Shortly after the war, in early 1945, my parents took the same official steps to request that my brother Franklin be declared a French citizen.



Déclaration, recto and verso.



Jacqueline and Manuela at the seashore in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage in our hand-knitted bathing suits, 1938.

of 1938 and 1939 at the seashore again, in a rented villa called *"Geneviève"* in a lovely resort, Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, along the North Sea. My father would take the train and join us every weekend from Paris. We went there in June, before the summer season, because it was less expensive then. My mother knitted our swimsuits (as seen in the photo to the left), she made all of our clothes until many years after the war.

The ocean was cold along the North Sea and the weather was not always good. Sometimes it was windy and too cool to sit and play in the sand. On those days, we went into the dunes where we were protected from the wind. I remember that it was fun to play in the dunes. Or, if it was raining or drizzling, we went for walks in the forest. My father wrote that the summer of 1939 was the most wonderful time the whole family had at the beach. We girls were not afraid of the water anymore. Papa wrote in my journal that our



Jacqueline, 1938.



Manuela, 1938.



Emanuel Mendels ("Opa"), 1939.

paternal grandfather, Emanuel Mendels died at the end of July 1939.[13] This was a moment of great sorrow for my father because, in addition to the great sadness upon hearing that his father had died suddenly, he went alone to his father's funeral in Holland and there was no family gathering for us with our Dutch family.

[13] Typewritten pages by my father in our journals.

Chapter 4
The War and Measures Against the Jews

War was declared on September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. Our lives were changed forever. France and England were allies with Poland and thus were obliged to support Poland and to declare war on Germany. We left Paris immediately for a second time and took refuge in a small hotel in Seine-Port, Seine-et-Marne, very close to Paris. My father wrote in my journal that he hoped that we would never remember these awful times. Actually, I was too young to notice or understand any of these family or global events. For example, I don't remember that my grandfather had died in the summer of 1939, perhaps because I hardly knew him. Also, I seldom had a chance to visit my family in Holland or to visit my grandmother in Hamburg, and they came to Paris to spend time with us infrequently.

Our parents left us in Seine-Port with a family and came to see us every week, but we went back home to Paris in mid-October 1939 because nothing unusual or dangerous was happening in France.[1] After the declaration of war, there followed the *"drôle de guerre"* ("the phony war") because nothing happened at first. There was no invasion of France and it did not seem that there was a war at all.

On September 2, 1939, approximately 6 million Frenchmen aged 18 to 50 were told to report for military service. It was *la mobilisation générale* (the general mobilization). Men were no longer allowed to leave France. This would have been considered desertion. On August 1, 1939, there were 875,000 men in the French army. Even before the declaration of war, 2,448,000 had been called to serve in the army, 110,000 in the air force and 126,000 in the navy. With the general mo-

[1] Amouroux, Henri. La Grande Histoire des Français sous l'Occupation, Volume I: Le Peuple du Désastre, 1939-1940. Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1976.

bilization on September 2 there were over 6 million men serving, among whom were 24,000 foreigners.[2]

My parents heard on the Dutch shortwave radio station that the Queen of Holland, Queen Wilhelmina, was offering to help Dutch people in distress. For us this would have meant going to Bordeaux or Marseille or some other port in France or Portugal, and then finding a ship to take us to the Dutch colony of Curaçao, where we would take refuge. But my parents decided that we must stay together, and since my father would not have been able to leave France, except by crossing illegally through the Pyrénées into Spain, or through the Alps into Switzerland, the four of us remained in France, even if this meant dying together. Besides, my sister and I were too young to be able to walk across the high mountains and reach Spain on the other side. As far as the Queen of Holland was concerned, some have argued that it was a myth[3] that she was going to help Dutch people in distress. Regardless, Dutch Jewish refugees needed a visa to leave France or to enter Curaçao.

Before the Germans invaded Belgium and Holland on May 10, 1940, we were told to get gas masks at the local City Hall. The French government was afraid that the Germans might start using deadly mustard gases as they had in WWI. Manuela, my sister, had a very small head, and she remembers how difficult it was to find the right size mask for her.

The Germans invaded Luxemburg, Belgium and Holland despite their declared neutrality. Then they continued south towards France, which was totally unprepared for this invasion. The Maginot line, which had been built in the 1920s facing east,[4] was of no use, because the Germans invaded France from the north[5], near Sedan. Thousands of French and British soldiers were caught around the river Meuse and retreated to the coast around Dunkirk.[6,7] British soldiers who survived were repatriated on British ships. Some of the French soldiers went to England with the British and joined the Free French Forces under General Charles de Gaulle. But the majority were taken prisoner by the Germans and remained in POW camps in Germany until the end of the war in 1945. Some

---

[2] Ibid.

[3] Gerstenfeld, Manfred. "Wartime and Postwar Dutch Attitudes toward the Jews: Myth and Truth." Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs/Viewpoints August 15, 1999.

[4] The Maginot Line was a line of concrete fortifications facing the border with Germany and it was supposed to prevent German troops from invading France from the East. But Germany invaded France from the North.

[5] Wahl, Jean-Bernard. Il était une fois la ligne Maginot. United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 1999.

[6] The movie "Atonement", directed by Joe Wright in 2007, gives a very clear description of the plight of British soldiers who were evacuated to England and of the wounded and dead soldiers. Most of the French soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans and sent to Germany.

[7] Lukacs, John. Five Days in London, May 1940. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

prisoners were ordered to work in the fields to replace German farmers that had been drafted in the German army. I remember one of our neighbors who came back from Germany in 1945 and told us that he was well fed and did not suffer on the farm where he had been placed. Approximately one and a half million French soldiers were imprisoned by the Germans.

As the Germans invaded France, the British Royal Air Force bombarded German troops in France. German aircraft responded with air raids, east and west of Paris. After France was invaded on May 10, 1940, there were bombardments by the German Air Force, which was trying to hit the Renault automobile factories in Boulogne-Billancourt, west of Paris.

We had to go down to the cellar every time we heard sirens, until the sirens announced that all was clear and we could go back to our apartment. The German soldiers who had moved into the apartment vacated by a Jewish family upstairs from us came down to the cellar along with everyone who lived in the building. Manuela remembers that our father told us not to be scared and he compared the noise of bombs to that of thunder. Once we even took refuge in the métro because we were out on a walk at the time. Of course we didn't have our masks with us that day. At home we had to close the double drapes at night and everyone had to paste dark blue paper on the windows so that everything appeared dark on the outside, it was *le couvre-feu* (curfew) part of *la défense passive* (passive defense), an order from the German authorities in the hope that the British planes would not recognize and hit German installations in France. We were also ordered to protect windows from shattering by pasting a special sticky paper in the shape of an X on each window. The lampposts were covered with dark blue paper. All of that was very interesting to us children. We continued playing and enjoying our toys, sheltered from the reality of what was happening around us.

On June 2, 1940 – a month after the Germans invaded Luxemburg, Belgium, Holland, and then France – my father wrote to his cousin Siegfried Mendels in Palestine, saying that he was going to join the Free Dutch Forces in England. In that postcard, which my father sent through the Red Cross (and which was censored in Palestine), he wrote that he was very worried about us living without him and he could not imagine what my mother would do alone with two small children. He had heard no news from our family in Holland, but was trying to get information through the Red Cross in Geneva. No one could yet fathom what was in store, what atrocities would be committed by the Germans.



June 2, 1940 postcard from Frits to "Sieg". The English translation is below.

Saint Mandé, June 2, 1940

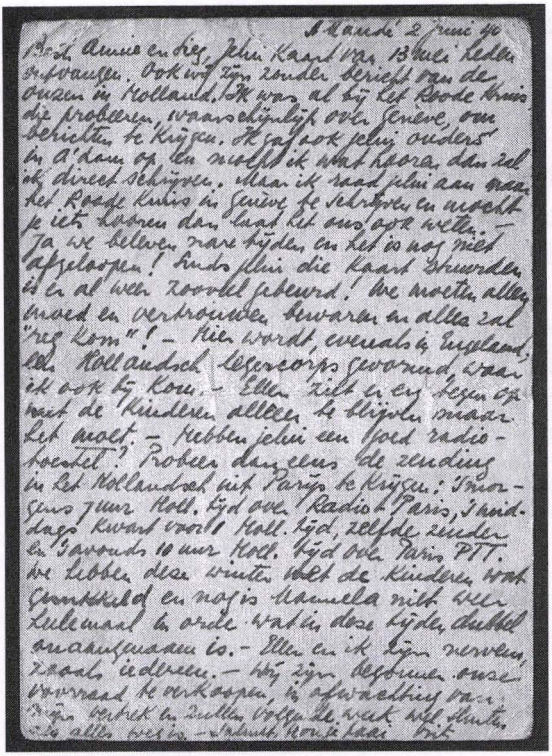
Dear Annie and Sieg,

Received your card of May 13th today.
We too are without news from our family in Holland.

I already went to the Red Cross which is trying (probably by way of Geneva) to get information. I also gave them the name of your parents in Amsterdam and I will write immediately should I hear anything. But, I advise you to write to the Red Cross in Geneva, and please let us know if you hear anything.

Yes, we are experiencing sad times and it isn't over yet. Since you wrote the card, so much has happened. We must not lose courage and faith and all "will be well."
Here as in England, a Dutch Army corps is being formed, which I will join. Ellen dreads remaining alone with the girls, but there is no other way.

Do you have a good radio? Try to listen to the Dutch broadcast from Paris: 7 o'clock Dutch time in the morning; Radio Paris, 12:45 in the afternoon, same station, and 10 o'clock in the evening Dutch time on Paris PTT.



Continuation of June 2, 1940 postcard.

Health wise, the children have had problems this winter and Manuela is still not quite well, which is doubly unpleasant in these times.

Ellen and I are nervous, like everybody else. We have started to sell our stock in the office, in preparation for my departure and I will probably close next week when everything has been sold.

Greetings, hang in there,
Frits

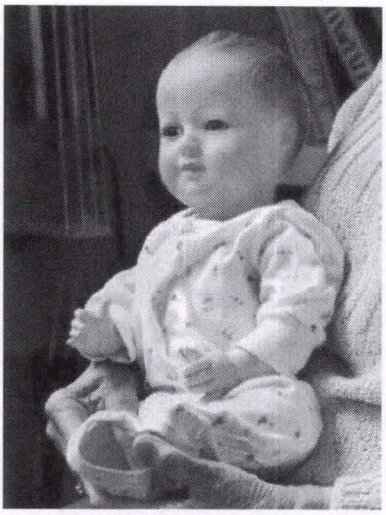
The Germans entered Paris on June 14, 1940, after which things changed from one day to the next. Paris was declared une *ville ouverte* (an open city) and occupied by the Germans, as were many towns in the north of France. This meant that the French did not fight in these towns, but rather let the Germans enter freely. On or around June 10, 1940, we fled south; it was known as *l'exode* (the exodus) or *la débacle* (the collapse). It was the third time that my parents decided to leave Paris. We left first in 1938, after the *Anschluss* and *Kristallnacht*, then again in 1939 with the declaration of war. This time, eight to ten million refugees, French and foreign, found themselves heading south, fleeing the Germans.[8,9]

We were in a privileged position, because we had the use of a vehicle – a little Rosengart van from my father's business. He took his typewriter and my mother took her sewing machine, thinking they could get some work wherever we went. My sister and I took our best dolls, two *Petit-Collin* dolls with eyes that closed. The two of us sat on footstools in the back of the van. My parents left everything in the apartment and locked the door; they thought that they would be returning home soon.

---

[8] Irene Nemirovsky gives a very detailed description of the exodus in her novel Suite Française, Tempête en juin (Editions Denoël, 2004).

[9] Azéma, Jean-Pierre. "1939-1940, L'année terrible. XI La grande Peur: l'exode." Le Monde Périodique August 23, 1989.



The Petit-Collin doll.
© Naturally Photography by Monni

We went as far as Celles-sur-Belle, near Niort, in les Deux-Sèvres, a *département* [10] approximately 150 km (90 miles) south-west of Paris. I assume that my father took small roads out of Paris to avoid the crowds of refugees on foot, in carts, on bicycles, in trains and cars. We drove for about four hours.

My father was afraid to run out of gasoline, or it was just late in the day, when my parents decided to stop in the *département* of les Deux-Sèvres. There a family, Olga and Camille Rivière and their two daughters, Janine and Rolande, who were approximately our ages, took us in. This had not been planned in advance. In 2008, when I reconnected with Janine, she told me that she remembered a black car (the van), and a man knocking at the door and asking if her parents would rent a room to our family.[11] They let us use their dining room and one bedroom. They were very kind to us, and never accepted any money.

A few weeks after Paris was declared an open city, my parents decided it was safe to return. I stayed with the Rivière family for three or four more weeks; we had become friends, and the fresh country air was supposed to be good for my health because I suffered from frequent bronchitis. Rolande, the older Rivière daughter, went to Paris with Manuela and my parents. Then my mother took Rolande back to Celles-sur-Belle by train and I returned to Paris with my mother.

On June 22, 1940, the armistice was signed between Hitler and Pétain, and the

---

[10] France is divided into 100 *départements*, each administered by a *préfet* representing the French State, who is appointed by the prime minister. The role of the *préfet* is both administrative and political. During WWII, many préfets resigned or were removed from their functions by the Germans. Some joined the *Résistance*; others collaborated with the occupying forces.

[11] A few years ago, while doing online research for her studies in economics, Audrey Collin (granddaughter of Janine Rivière, whose parents in Celles-Sur-Belle had housed us during the exodus in 1940) discovered the name Franklin Mendels, my brother (who was a professor of economic history). Audrey remembered my brother's name from discussions with her grandfather, Camille Rivière, who died in 2003. Audrey then tracked down Franklin's daughter, my niece Jessica Mendels. Through this connection, I began a correspondence with Janine, her sister Rolande, and Audrey; they sent us photos from the 1940s. In the spring of 2008, Manuela and I visited Paris and met Isabelle Gregorutti (daughter of Rolande) and her husband Fabrice. Via video, we were able to reminisce with Rolande and Janine about when we were refugees in their parents' house in Celles-sur-Belle. Sadly, Rolande passed away in 2012.



Rolande and Janine Rivière, with Manuela and Jacqueline in Celles-sur-Belle, May 1940.

demarcation line along the river Loire was drawn between German-occupied France and *la zone libre* (the so-called free or non-occupied zone under Vichy).[12] Celles-sur-Belle was in the occupied zone.[13]

My father decided that he must stay with us, and it was too late for him to join the Dutch forces. My parents determined that we would stay together, in life or in death. The borders were closed, no country would give a visa to Jews, and my parents had hardly any savings. My father had to earn a living; there was nowhere else we could go but back home to Paris. Then, on September 27, 1940, came a government ordinance forbidding Jews to go back north of the demarcation line into the occupied zone. (This law saved some Jews, although soon there were roundups and deportations in the unoccupied zone as well. It became even more dangerous for Jews when the Germans occupied all of France, starting in November 1942.) We made it back to Paris just in time.

On the way back, my father heard that there was a reserve of gasoline in Vierzon, originally intended for the British army. But with the defeat and evacuation of more than 300,000 British soldiers at Dunkirk, there was no need for that reserve of gasoline. The French intended to blow up the whole reserve so it would not fall into the hands of the Germans. So, in the middle of the night, my father

[12] For a map of the demarcation line, visit [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ligne_de_démarcation].

[13] The Germans occupied three-fifths of France until November 11, 1942, at which point they occupied all of France except the eastern and southern section, including Nice. This area was occupied by the Italians until September 1943.

and many other refugees and local residents went to fill up their tanks. My father later wrote that kind people in the town gave him three additional jerry cans full of gasoline – which made it possible for our family to drive back home.

In a later interview,[14] my father remembered that on the way back to Paris, he saw German soldiers beat a battalion of black Senegalese soldiers,[15] who were part of the French colonial troops. He got a bad feeling about what was in store for us under the German occupation.

On June 18, 1940, while we were still in Celles-sur-Belle, my mother had heard the message on the radio from General Charles de Gaulle known as *"l'appel du 18 juin"*.[16] He asked all French people to join him and the "Free French" in London.[17] De Gaulle also said that France had lost a battle, but France had not lost the war. Years later, my mother remembered that when she heard the message, she was alone in the house of the Rivière family. She told my father about it and they wanted to join de Gaulle – but how could they do it with no savings and two little girls? I understand now how hard my parents tried to think of a way to leave France. They considered the Dutch colony of Curaçao, going to London with de Gaulle, or to Switzerland, when my parents heard rumors that the Swiss let Jews into their country (they did not; they let in a few Jewish families with children and children were smuggled into Switzerland with the help of Jewish organizations). But finally, my parents had no choice but to stay in France.

Almost immediately after the armistice was signed, anti-Jewish measures were put into place. The Vichy government established *le commissariat général aux questions juives* (the administrative body that implemented Vichy policy vis-à-vis the Jews of France) as part of the ministry for domestic affairs. Jews were forbidden to practice most professions, including owning or managing businesses such as my father's food import-export company. My father carefully read articles on the new laws and ordinances in *Le Monde*, marking those that applied to him; he kept clippings of these articles until his death in 1992.

My father had to give up his shares in the business when it became "aryanized" as part of the ordinances of May 1941. This must have been very painful for him; he was so proud of the company he had founded in 1930 and reorganized

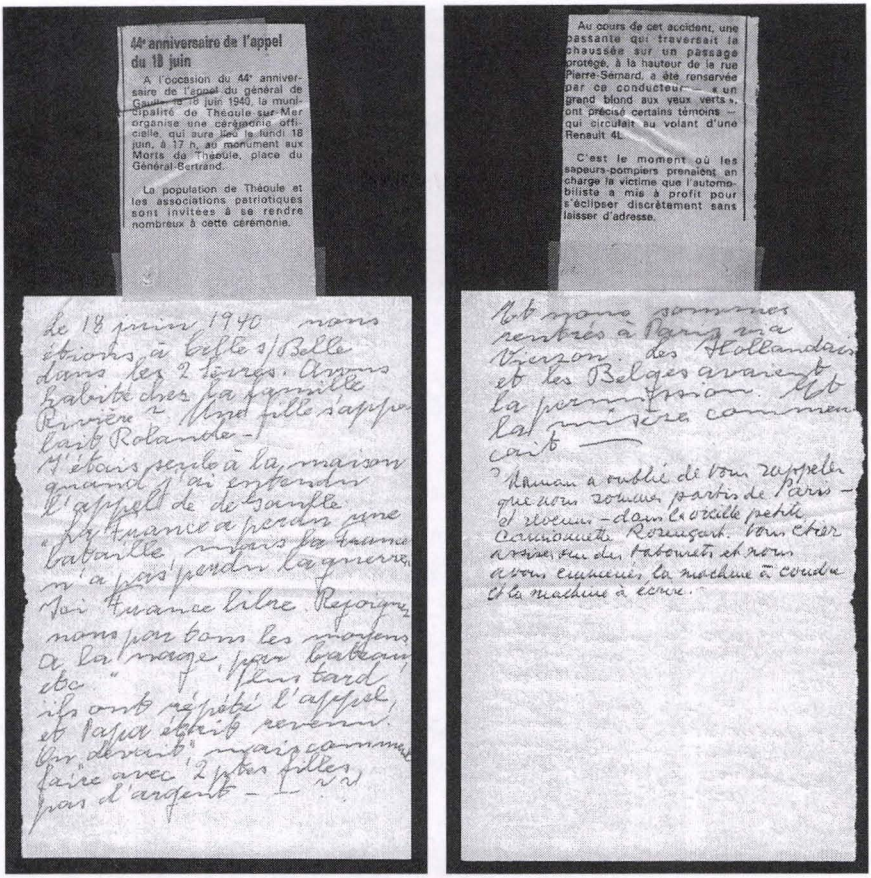
---

[14] "Odyssey of a Jewish Family in France 1940–1944", interview in German of my father, Frits Mendels by Alix Stiel-Preece, an old family friend from Hamburg, Wiener Library, London, June 1957. See introduction for translation in English.

[15] Scheck, Raffael, Une Saison Noire, Les massacres de Tiralleurs Sénégalais, Mai-Juin 1940. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2007.

[16] An image of a poster, signed by General de Gaulle, asking the French to join him in body and spirit to save France, can be seen at [www.charles-de-gaulle.org].

[17] De Gaulle said, "*La France a perdu une bataille, la France n'a pas perdu la guerre.*" ("France has lost a battle; France has not lost the war.")



Letter from my mother to me in 1984, remembering de Gaulle's June 18, 1940 speech.

in 1937. On May 29, 1941, he officially sold his 75 shares in *Lacroix, Mendels & Cie, SARL,* to an associate, Auguste Sautès, for 100 francs per share.[18] The shares were worth much more than he had sold them for; that might explain why, during his later interrogation in Périgueux, he declared that he had 23,000 francs in Lyon with a friend.

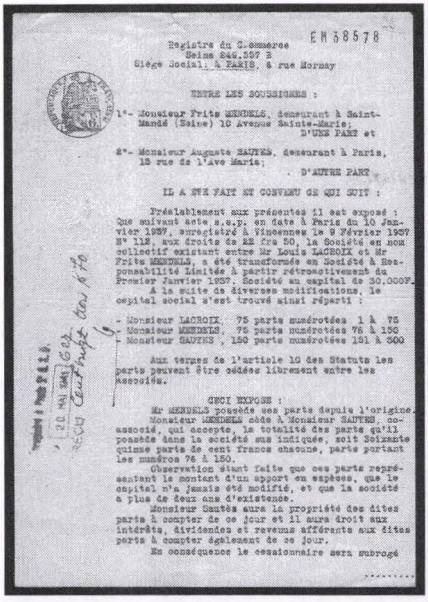
After he sold his shares, my father continued to go to his office. (He went to work by bicycle, because there was no gasoline, and it was less dangerous than taking the métro, where the police could ask for his papers at any moment.) He

[18] Twelve years ago the French government created a "*Commission pour l'indemnisation des victimes de spoliations intervenues du fait des législations antisémites en vigueur pendant l'Occupation.*" I learned in January 2013 that based on the decision of this Commission, we (Manuela, Jacqueline, and Franklin's widow) will receive a monetary indemnification for the occupation and pilfering of our apartment in St. Mandé, and for the money my father paid to the passeurs to lead us across the demarcation line into the free zone in 1942. There was no indemnification granted for the ayranization of my father's firm.


NOUVEAU STATUT DES JUIFS
EN ZONE OCCUPÉE
Il leur est interdit d'exercer certaines professions.
STATUT DES JUIFS
ONE OCCUPÉE
§ 1. — Juifs
§ 2. — Déclaration postérieure
§ 3. — Interdiction d'exercer certaines activités économiques, ainsi que d'employer des juifs
§ 4. — Parts sociales et actions appartenant aux juifs
§ 5. — Subsides indispensables
§ 6. — Dédommagements
§ 7. — Dispositions pénales
§ 8. — Entrée en vigueur

Newspaper clipping kept by Frits explaining the anti-Jewish measures.

gave help and advice to his assistant, Monsieur Cervini, who was officially in charge of the business. He hid in the storeroom whenever someone rang the bell, for fear that he had been denounced and would be rounded up and sent to an internment or concentration camp. Monsieur Cervini and my father had an unwritten agreement that my father would receive half the profits from the



Registre du Commerce
Seine 245.557 B
Siège Social: 6 PARIS, 6 rue Mornay

EM 38578

ENTRE LES SOUSSIGNES :

1°- Monsieur Frits MENDELS, demeurant à Saint-Mandé (Seine) 10 Avenue Sainte-Marie;

D'UNE PART et

2°- Monsieur Auguste SAUTES, demeurant à Paris, 10 rue de l'Ave Maria;

D'AUTRE PART

IL A ETE FAIT ET CONVENU CE QUI SUIT :

Préalablement aux présentes il est exposé : Que suivant acte s.s.p. en date à Paris du 10 Janvier 1937, enregistré à Pontoises le 9 Février 1937 N° 112, aux droits de 22 frs 50, la Société en nom collectif existant entre Mr Louis LACROIX et Mr Frits MENDELS, a été transformée en Société à Responsabilité Limitée à partir rétroactivement du Premier Janvier 1937. Société au capital de 30.000F.

A la suite de diverses modifications, le capital social s'est trouvé ainsi réparti :

- Monsieur LACROIX, 75 parts numérotées 1 à 75
- Monsieur MENDELS, 75 parts numérotées 76 à 150
- Monsieur SAUTES, 150 parts numérotées 151 à 300

Aux termes de l'article 10 des Statuts les parts peuvent être cédées librement entre les associés.

CECI EXPOSE :

Mr MENDELS possède ses parts depuis l'origine.

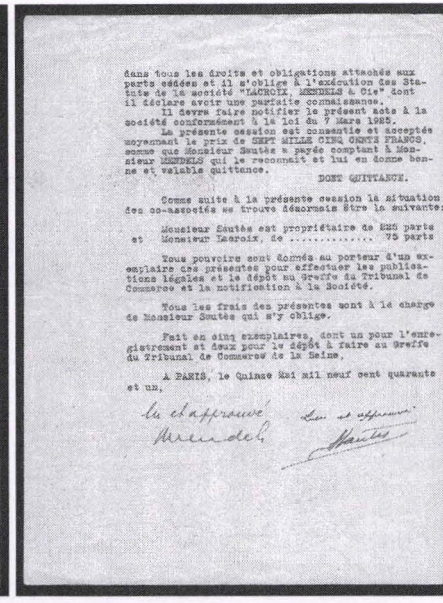
Monsieur MENDELS cède à Monsieur SAUTES, co-associé, qui accepte, la totalité des parts qu'il possède dans la société sus indiquée, soit Soixante quinze parts de cent francs chacune, parts portant les numéros 76 à 150.

Observation étant faite que ces parts représentant le montant d'un apport en espèces, que le capital n'a jamais été modifié, et que la société a plus de deux ans d'existence.

Monsieur Sautès aura la propriété des dites parts à compter de ce jour et il aura droit aux intérêts, dividendes et revenus afférents aux dites parts à compter également de ce jour.

En conséquence le cessionnaire sera subrogé

.....



dans tous les droits et obligations attachés aux parts cédées et il s'oblige à l'exécution des Statuts de la société "LACROIX, MENDELS & Cie" dont il déclare avoir une parfaite connaissance.

Il devra faire notifier le présent acte à la société conformément à la loi du 7 Mars 1925.

La présente cession est consentie et acceptée moyennant le prix de SEPT MILLE CINQ CENTS FRANCS, somme que Monsieur Sautès a payée comptant à Monsieur MENDELS qui le reconnait et lui en donne bonne et valable quittance.

DONT QUITTANCE.

Comme suite à la présente cession la situation des co-associés se trouve désormais être la suivante:

Monsieur Sautès est propriétaire de 225 parts
et Monsieur Lacroix, de ..... 75 parts

Tous pouvoirs sont donnés au porteur d'un exemplaire des présentes pour effectuer les publications légales et le dépôt au Greffe du Tribunal de Commerce et la notification à la Société.

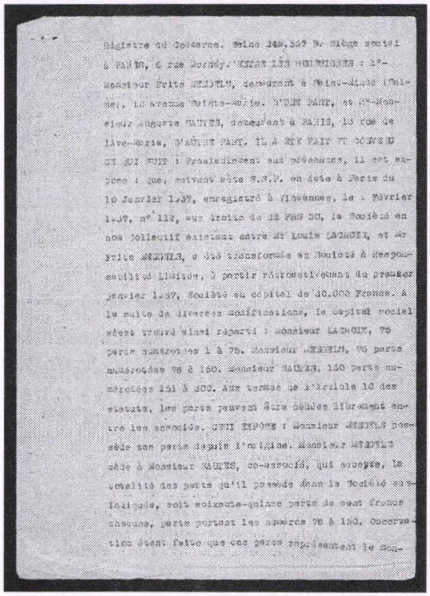
Tous les frais des présentes sont à la charge de Monsieur Sautès qui s'y oblige.

Fait en cinq exemplaires, dont un pour l'enregistrement et deux pour le dépôt à faire au Greffe du Tribunal de Commerce de la Seine,

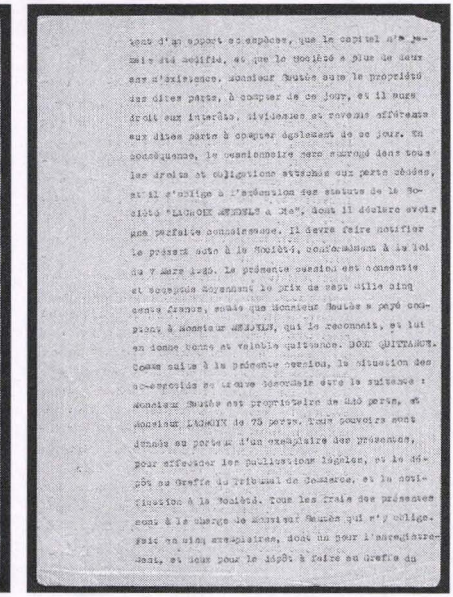
A PARIS, le Quinze Mai mil neuf cent quarante et un,

Lu et approuvé
Mendels

Lu et approuvé
Sautes

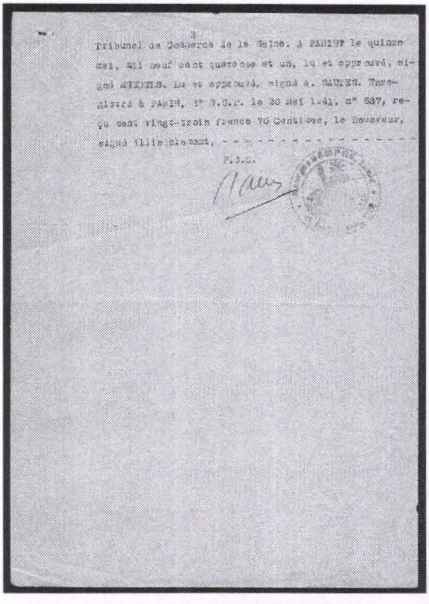


Registre du Commerce. Seine 245.557 B. Siège social à PARIS, 6 rue Mornay. SUIVENT LES SOUSSIGNES : 1°- Monsieur Frits MENDELS, demeurant à Saint-Mandé (Seine), 10 Avenue Sainte-Marie. D'UNE PART, et 2°- Monsieur Auguste SAUTES, demeurant à PARIS, 10 rue de l'Ave-Maria, D'AUTRE PART. IL A ETE FAIT ET CONVENU CE QUI SUIT : Préalablement aux présentes, il est exposé : que, suivant acte S.S.P. en date à Paris du 10 Janvier 1937, enregistré à Pontoises, le 9 Février 1937, n° 112, aux droits de 22 FRS 50, la Société en nom collectif existant entre Mr Louis LACROIX, et Mr Frits MENDELS, a été transformée en Société à Responsabilité Limitée, à partir rétroactivement du premier janvier 1937. Société au capital de 30.000 Francs. A la suite de diverses modifications, le capital social s'est trouvé ainsi réparti : Monsieur LACROIX, 75 parts numérotées 1 à 75. Monsieur MENDELS, 75 parts numérotées 76 à 150. Monsieur SAUTES, 150 parts numérotées 151 à 300. Aux termes de l'article 10 des statuts, les parts peuvent être cédées librement entre les associés. CECI EXPOSE : Monsieur MENDELS possède ses parts depuis l'origine. Monsieur MENDELS cède à Monsieur SAUTES, co-associé, qui accepte, la totalité des parts qu'il possède dans la Société sus-indiquée, soit soixante-quinze parts de cent francs chacune, parts portant les numéros 76 à 150. Observation étant faite que ces parts représentant le mon-



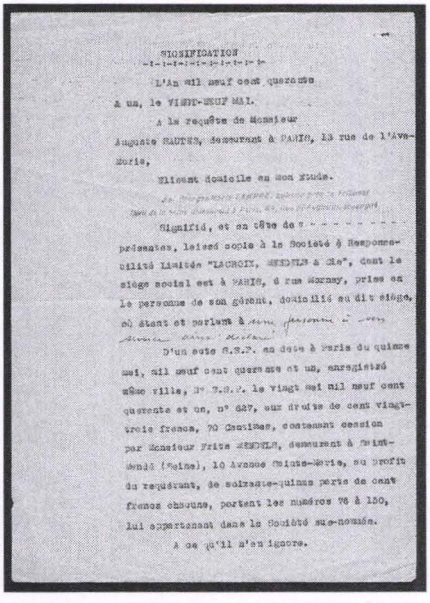
tant d'un apport en espèces, que le capital n'a jamais été modifié, et que la société a plus de deux ans d'existence. Monsieur Sautès aura la propriété des dites parts, à compter de ce jour, et il aura droit aux intérêts, dividendes et revenus afférents aux dites parts à compter également de ce jour. En conséquence, le cessionnaire sera subrogé dans tous les droits et obligations attachés aux parts cédées, et il s'oblige à l'exécution des statuts de la Société "LACROIX MENDELS & Cie", dont il déclare avoir une parfaite connaissance. Il devra faire notifier le présent acte à la Société, conformément à la loi du 7 Mars 1925. La présente cession est consentie et acceptée moyennant le prix de sept mille cinq cents francs, somme que Monsieur Sautès a payé comptant à Monsieur MENDELS, qui le reconnait, et lui en donne bonne et valable quittance. DONT QUITTANCE. Comme suite à la présente cession, la situation des co-associés se trouve désormais être la suivante : Monsieur Sautès est propriétaire de 225 parts, et Monsieur LACROIX de 75 parts. Tous pouvoirs sont donnés au porteur d'un exemplaire des présentes, pour effectuer les publications légales, et le dépôt au Greffe du Tribunal de Commerce, et la notification à la Société. Tous les frais des présentes sont à la charge de Monsieur Sautès qui s'y oblige. Fait en cinq exemplaires, dont un pour l'enregistrement, et deux pour le dépôt à faire au Greffe du

Documents from the Régistre du Commerce, dated May 15, 1941 and May 29, 1941 showing that my father, Frits Mendels, was selling "of his own free will" his 75 shares in Lacroix, Mendels & Cie, SARL to Auguste Sautès, signed by Georges Sampré (an officer of the civil court of Paris), my father, and M. Sautès, notarized May 20, 1941 and confirmed May 29, 1941. These documents were found in my father's desk after his death.



Tribunal de Commerce de la Seine. A PARIS le quinze mai, mil neuf cent quarante et un, lu et approuvé, signé MENDELS. Lu et approuvé, signé A. LAURIN. Enregistré à PARIS, 2e R.C.P. le 20 Mai 1941, n° 627, reçu cent vingt-trois francs 70 Centimes, le Receveur, signé Illisible. [illegible]

P.J.M.



SIGNIFICATION

L'An mil neuf cent quarante

A la, le VINGT-NEUF MAI.

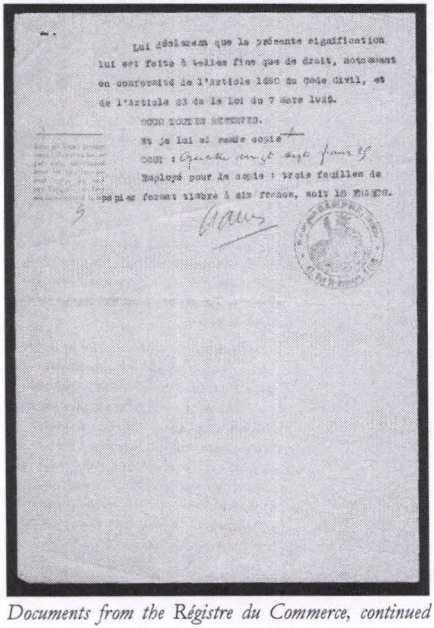
A la requête de Monsieur Auguste LAURIN, demeurant à PARIS, 13 rue de l'Ave-Maria,

Elisant domicile en son Etude.

Signifié, et en tête de [illegible] présentes, laissé copie à la Société à Responsabilité Limitée "LAURIN, MENDELS & Cie", dont le siège social est à PARIS, 6 rue Murray, prise en la personne de son gérant, domicilié au dit siège, où étant et parlant à [illegible]

D'un acte C.R.P. en date à Paris du quinze mai, mil neuf cent quarante et un, enregistré même ville, 2e R.C.P. le vingt mai mil neuf cent quarante et un, n° 627, aux droits de cent vingt-trois francs, 70 Centimes, contenant cession par Monsieur Fritz MENDELS, demeurant à Saint-Mandé (Seine), 10 Avenue Chiune-Maria, au profit du requérant, de soixante-quinze parts de cent francs chacune, portant les numéros 76 à 150, lui appartenant dans la Société sus-nommée.

A ce qu'il n'en ignore.



Lui déclarant que la présente signification lui est faite à telles fins que de droit, notamment en conformité de l'article 1690 du Code Civil, et de l'article 23 de la loi du 7 Mars 1918.

POUR COUTRE MENDELS.

Et je lui ai remis copie [illegible]

COUT : [illegible]

Employé pour la copie : trois feuilles de papier format timbre à six francs, soit 18 Francs.

P.J.M.

Documents from the Régistre du Commerce, continued from previous page.

business – though at that time I doubt there was much to share. Still, this probably helped to sustain our family.

In September 1940, the German authorities had ordered all Jews to register at the local *mairie* (city hall), and to have their *cartes d'identité* (IDs) stamped in red with the word *"JUIF"*. Most Jews obeyed the law and registered.[19] People have asked me why we obeyed those orders. My parents felt that if they did everything they were ordered to do, their lives would be safe. Some Jews never registered; I don't know if it helped them escape deportation. There were many denunciations of Jews by neighbors and so-called friends; they did it for money or because they were antisemitic.

[19] Adler, Jacques. The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp.1-14.

Jewish doctors, lawyers, and all Jews in liberal professions such as teachers and professors, scientists, civil servants and all government employees had to give up practicing and working. Also, Jews were allowed to go shopping only late in the afternoon, when stores were sold out of food. Luckily, the shopkeepers in St. Mandé knew the Mendels family well and always kept food for us. However, food soon became scarce for everyone. Everyone got monthly *tickets d'alimentation* (food tickets or ration coupons) for food, clothes, textiles, yarn, shoes, and sundries. Ours were stamped *"JUIF"*. Though I don't remember ever being hungry during this time, I do remember that we ate a lot of pasta, which my father got from a business contact of his in Marseille. *Le marché noir* (the black market) started around that time. Some store owners thrived on it, selling their goods at higher prices but without tickets, and becoming very rich.[20]

We were restricted in other ways as well. Jews could not go to public gardens or squares, and were not allowed to sit on park benches; signs were posted forbidding "dogs, Blacks, and Jews" to enter the parks. (*"Interdit aux chiens, aux Noirs, et aux Juifs."*) We lived next to the *Bois de Vincennes*, and did continue going there for a while, but eventually we were no longer allowed. We went instead to the *petit bois* (small wooded area at the entrance of *Bois de Vincennes*). Over time, the restrictions increased. Jews could not go to swimming pools, so Manuela had to stop her swimming lessons. Jews were not allowed to travel without a permit. Jews could not go to libraries, could not own bicycles. We stored the bicycles in the cellar.



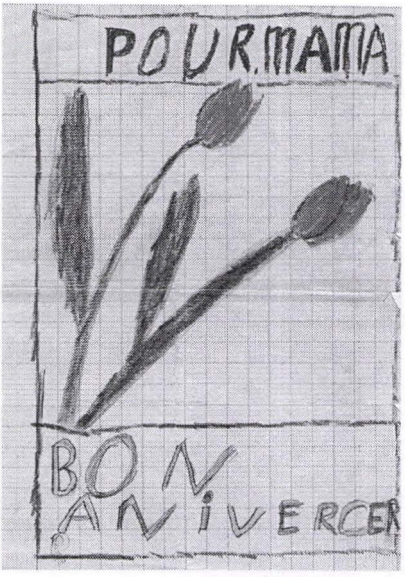
Manuela and Jacqueline on our bicycles, March 1941.

My mother had a piano, a spinet Gaveau she had acquired in December 1940,[21] and she played children's tunes for us, like *"Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains"* ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarves"). She played Mozart and Chopin, and I would fall asleep listening to music. Our favorite piece was what Manuela and I called *"Mozart, page 9."* It was Mozart's sonata in C major, K.545, which I have loved all my life.

---

[20] Dutourd, Jean. Au bon Beurre. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952.

[21] My mother came from a musical family and had played the piano since she was a little girl. Since her marriage, there was not enough money to buy a piano. When she got a piano in December 1940, she could play again. It must have given her much joy and relief during those terrible years in Paris.



Birthday card I made for my mother, May 17, 1941.

My mother, although not religious, read us stories from her copy of *"La Bible Illustrée pour nos petits"* ("Children's Illustrated Bible"), by Rabbi Julien Weil. She also read us fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

After Paris was occupied, we saw the Nazi swastika on many buildings, especially those that had been taken over by the Germans for use as ministries. We also saw Germans in uniforms everywhere. My parents knew that the Germans were dangerous for the Jews, though they didn't know details about the atrocities. Our friends in Paris said that the German occupiers were quite "correct" and polite. That was in the beginning of the occupation.

We children trusted our parents entirely and never questioned their decisions. Not only were we innocent, but also we led what felt like normal lives. We went to school, we played with each other; Manuela started taking violin lessons and got braces for her teeth. We had children's books to read, although Jews were forbidden from borrowing books from the library. We played with our favorite dolls. We went to the nearby zoo in Vincennes; I especially enjoyed the monkeys and elephants. I'm not sure how long Jews were allowed to go to the zoo – probably not after 1941.

At school recess, we were given powdered milk diluted in water. I thought it tasted awful, but I had to drink it like all the other children. I can still recall the memory of its taste. Around that time, I had my tonsils removed; I remember eating ice cream afterwards in my parents' bed. Manuela and I were sick a few times in the winter. My mother would apply mustard plaster to a wet cloth on our chests; we would tell her, *"Ça pique, ça pique!"* ("It stings, it stings!") – crying but trying to be brave. I started to draw at that time, and I made a birthday card for my mother.

The situation for Jews in France became worse throughout 1941. Germany in-



Ellen (Hess) Mendels, March 1941.

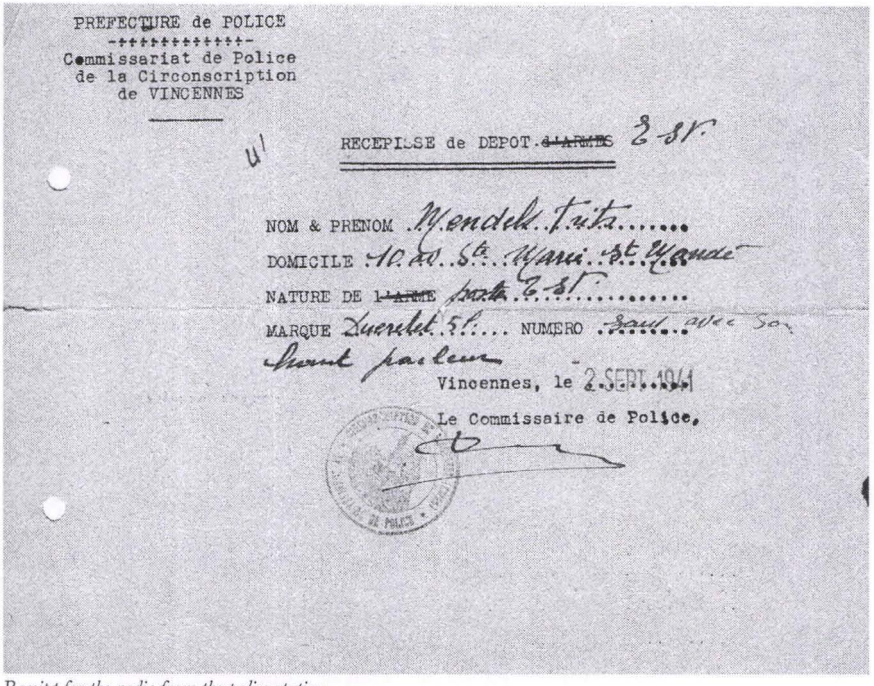


Jacqueline at age 6, March 1941.

vaded the Soviet Union on June 15. On December 17, 1941, the German government in occupied France requisitioned a fine from the Jewish population of France in the amount of one billion francs. On August 13, 1941, a government ordinance forbade Jews from owning radios or listening to the news; the authorities claimed this measure had become necessary because Jews were allegedly spreading false news that they heard on foreign stations. My father bought a cheap radio to bring to the authorities at the *Commissariat de Police* (police station); we kept our good radio.

I remember hearing the radio news in Paris, which had become a propaganda tool under the Germans. In London, with the Free French, there was a popular singer, Pierre Dac, who made a mockery of the radio station. To the melody of the Latin-American song "*La Cucaracha,*" he sang, *"Radio Paris ment, Radio Paris ment, Radio Paris est allemand"* ("Radio Paris lies, Radio Paris lies, Radio Paris is German").

During the fall and winter of 1941, there were *rafles* (roundups) in the métro. Jews were only allowed to ride in the last train car, so it was easy to find and arrest them. Whenever my father came home late, my mother was terrified that he had been arrested. He used his bicycle, thinking it would be less dangerous. My father had a leitmotif he whistled when he arrived in the courtyard of our



PREFECTURE de POLICE
Commissariat de Police
de la Circonscription
de VINCENNES

RECEPISSE de DEPOT. ~~d'ARMES~~ 2-31.

NOM & PRENOM Wendel Fritz
DOMICILE 10 bis St Mandé
NATURE DE ~~l'ARME~~ poste 2-31
MARQUE Zuerlet 51 NUMERO 3 avec 50
Saint parleur

Vincennes, le 2 SEPT 1941

Le Commissaire de Police,

Receipt for the radio from the police station.

building: the first few measures of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony". He did this all through the war and afterwards, until the end of his life, whenever he was nearing home, so we would know he was arriving.

My parents' friends, including the Paris family, urged them to leave Paris. By the spring of 1942, all Jews in France were required to wear a yellow cloth Star of David, the color of "old gold" (*"vieil or"*), on all outer garments. If they removed their coat or jacket, they needed another Jewish star on their dress or shirt. They had to purchase three Jewish stars per person using textile tickets, at three tickets per star. (At the tender age of seven, I thought that the star looked very pretty on my green knitted suit.) The star was the size of the palm of the hand, printed or embroidered with the word *"JUIF"* in big black Gothic lettering. It was very large, very visible, especially on small children.[22]

Jews were instructed to sew the stars solidly to the left side of all outer garments. My mother, practical as she was, instead attached them with safety pins, so we could change clothes every day or when they were dirty like with most children. The police did not arrest us for that act of disobedience, which could have been

[22] Amouroux, Henri. La Grande Histoire des Français sous l'Occupation. Volume 5: Les Passions et les Haines. Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1981, p. 206.



Frits Mendels, 1941.

severely punished – with banishment to a detention camp, or even a death camp.[23]

The first day Manuela wore her star, she was called to the front of her class. The teacher, Madame Bargain, said to the class, "You must be very nice to this little girl because she is living in difficult times." It was a courageous act. Children telling their parents what happened during the day at school could very well have talked about their Jewish schoolmate and the words of the teacher. It would have been easy for any parents who were antisemitic and pro-Hitler to denounce both the teacher and Manuela.

Then came the infamous *"rafle du Vél d'Hiv"*.[24,25] On July 16 and 17, 1942, 12,884 Parisian Jews, including more than 4,000 children, were rounded up and detained in the *Vél d'Hiv*, a former bicycle arena, then after two days under atrocious conditions, sent to a transit camp such as Beaune-La-Rolande, Compiègne, Pithiviers or Drancy. Upon arrival, men were separated from their families. Then women were separated from their children. Most were then shipped in cattle cars to Auschwitz.

The event, under the code name *Vent Printanier* (Spring Wind), was designed to round up 27,391 Jews, with the assistance of 7,000 Parisian police officers. The eventual numbers, though still enormous, were lower largely thanks to some kind French policemen who warned Jewish families to go into hiding. Many of these families were helped by neighbors who took them in or kept their children. Beginning at four in the morning of July 16, neighbors witnessed the French

---

[23] Berr, Hélène. Journal. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2008. Berr wrote that her father was arrested and sent to Drancy for having his yellow Jewish star pinned on his jacket instead of solidly sewn as ordered by the police.

[24] The French police knocked at the door of apartments in the 3rd, 4th, 11th, and other *arrondissements* where they knew many Jews lived. The police would give only a few minutes for families to pack a minimum of belongings, then would order them with their children to climb onto city buses that took them to the *Vélodrome d'Hiver*, a space totally inadequate to house 13,000 people with no water, no sanitary facilites or sleeping arrangements.

[25] Rajsfus, Maurice. Jeudi Noir, 16 juillet 1942, l'honneur perdu de la France profonde. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan,1988.

police in full force – whole families pushed into city buses, screams, people trying to run away, people throwing themselves out of windows.[26] The police told families they had 15 minutes to pack clothes and food for two days. News of the roundups spread by word of mouth and through the press, despite the German Propaganda Staff's order for a total news blackout.

Many non-Jewish Parisians helped friends hide or escape. However, most went on with their lives. Some were worried about their jobs and finding enough food to feed their families, or scared of reprisals from the German occupiers. Others were indifferent to the fate of the Jews. And some were openly antisemitic and even happy to see Jewish families taken away.

I remember that my mother told us never to open the door of our apartment if she was not home. Of course, one day I disobeyed these orders while my mother was out shopping, and saw a pair of tall boots in front of me – the boots of German soldiers. They were probably the soldiers occupying the apartment of the Jewish family upstairs (the family had fled to the unoccupied zone soon after the armistice). The soldiers must have been drunk, or maybe the boots belonged to their visiting friends. I shut the door and we did not hear from them again.[27]

Why my family was not rounded up during those two days remains a mystery, and one of many miracles of our survival. The French police went everywhere, and all Jews, including my family, were registered at the 20 city halls of Paris and all city halls of the city's suburbs.[28] Although we did not live in *le quartier juif*[29] (the Jewish neighborhood), which comprised most of the 3rd, 4th, 10th, 11th, and 19th *arrondissements*, policemen rounded up Jews in Saint-Mandé as well. We learned after the war that the police came to get us one week after we fled.

In 1938, my father had gone to Hamburg to try and convince my maternal grandmother, Sophie Hess, to come live with us in Paris. At that time Sophie did not want to leave Germany. She had a comfortable life in Hamburg. She did not speak French. She had friends, she went out, and she played music on her grand piano and with her musician friends. She was surrounded by all of her belongings, and she could not believe that anything would happen to her. Like many German Jews, she felt that she was a German first and a Jew second. After all, her ancestors had lived in Berlin, Lübeck, and Hamburg for more than two

---

[26] Berr, Hélène. Journal. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2008, pp. 105–108.

[27] As with our neighbors, the apartments of absent Jews were taken over by German occupying forces. This eventually happened to our apartment as well. A week after we fled in late July 1942, our apartment was taken over by the occupying forces; it was occupied by German soldiers until August 25, 1944, when Paris was liberated.

[28] Poznanski, Renée. "René Rémond, le fichier juif." Legacy Vol. 1/No. 2, Summer 1997.

[29] Now restored and fashionably called *Le Marais*.



Sophie Hess playing two piano four hands with her friends, 1932.

hundred years. They were Hanse citizens and German citizens. By the time she understood the danger she was in, it was too late.

My father's stay in Hamburg in 1938 was difficult and scary. There were German soldiers and Nazi swastika flags at the train station and all over the city. When he returned home, he said he would never go back to Germany.[30]

We have despairing letters from our grandmother Sophie, written to her brother Erwin Hess in 1940 and 1941.[31] (The postal service was still working in 1941, though it was censored and very slow.) Erwin had been sent to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen following *Kristallnacht.* Thankfully, his wife Gertude was able to free him by offering a large amount of money. The Germans took over his firm and his savings, but Erwin was able to get a Brazilian visa thanks to Gertrude's brother, who had moved to Sào Paulo. He was ordered out of the country immediately, without a penny to his name. He survived the war, but never again was he able to recreate his successful coffee business. And despite the fact that she had saved his life, he divorced Gertrude during or after the war; they did not get along. Eventually, he remarried. When I saw him in New York in the 1960s, he was an old, broken man. I don't know if he ever played the piano again – he, who once had two grand pianos, who played every day, (four hands on one piano or two pianos with a friend) and composed music after working mornings at his office.

In her letters, Sophie begged Erwin for help and money to leave Germany for anywhere, anywhere at all – Shanghai, Cuba, South America... any far-away place for which one did not need an entry visa. But it was extremely difficult to leave Germany. For example, to reach the U.S., one might have travelled east to Mos-

---

[30] In fact, my father returned to Germany after the war to claim money that was due to my grandmother.

[31] Twenty letters from our grandmother Sophie to her younger brother Erwin Hess (who had escaped to Brazil), typed in German. These letters were recovered by Erwin's daughter Marion after her father's death. They were typed in German on onion skin. Despite being censored, the letters gave clear information on her activities, her attempts to leave Germany and her feelings of despair. These letters are in the The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum in Atlanta with copies in the USHMM in Washington, DC.

cow with an exit visa from Germany, then one would need a Soviet internal permit, then a ticket on the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok, then a Japanese transit visa for the port of Yokohama and finally a ship's passage from Japan to San Francisco.[32] Such a trip was impossible for my grandmother, who had neither the strength nor the stamina required. Moreover, the U.S. government did little to help European Jews in distress, and had a very small quota for entry visas. The American consulate in Hamburg was of no help to my grandmother. On June 16, 1941, German and Italian diplomatic personnel were expelled from the U.S.; the Third Reich and Italy then closed American consular offices.[33] On top of these barriers, Sophie did not have money for the required round-trip ticket. She did finally obtain an exit visa to leave Germany, but its number was 18,000.[34]

On May 9, 1940, Sophie wrote to her brother Erwin that, even with an affidavit from a relative in America, no one could get a visa. The only way was through connections at the American consulate. She needed a deposit of money to guarantee that she would be able to support herself in the U.S. (she told Erwin she could work as his housekeeper), as well as the price of a round-trip ticket, which had to be sent in dollars. (For a time one could transfer one's own money for that purpose, but what she had left after the liquidation of her assets by the German government was not enough.) In early 1941, she wrote that an affidavit was on the way – though she never received one. And with her high exit visa number, there was no hope there. On June 4, 1941, she wrote to Erwin that she had been forced to move from her apartment, which was taken over by the German authorities. She had to part with almost everything that she owned. She wrote that if only she had an exit visa and a ticket, she would not be so depressed. On June 21, 1941, she wrote that a ticket cost $500; the deposit was three times that amount. She also said that she weighed only 47 kilograms (about 100 lbs).

---

[32] Goldberg, Esther. "Our Goldberg Variations" The Hidden Child Vol. XVII, 2009, pp. 1-10

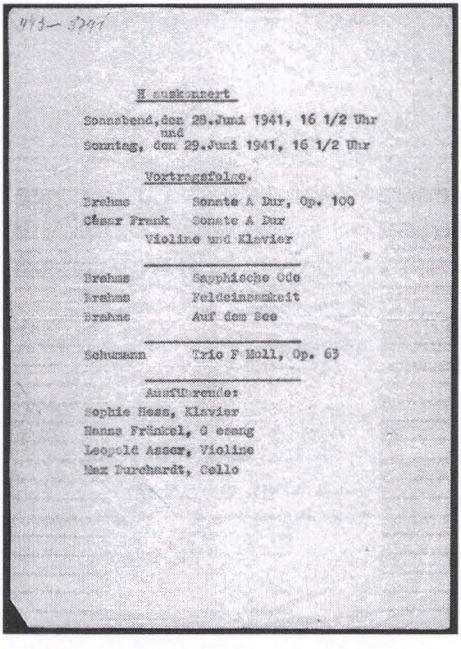
[33] JTA: Jewish News Archives. "Closing of U.S. Consulates Traps Thousands with American Kin." [http://archive.jta.org/article/1941/06/23/2854628/closing-of-us-consulates-traps-thousands-with-american-kin].

[34] According to Peter Black, senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, all German Jews lost their citizenship in 1935. My grandmother had both German and Hanseatic league citizenship, both of which she lost. Dr. Black wrote to me: "The Nuremberg Citizenship Law of September 1935, and the following implementation regulations, deprived Sophie Hess of her status as a German citizen with full rights, effective in 1935. She continued to be a resident of Germany (literally a subject of the state) without citizenship rights and obligations until her tragic death in 1941. Likewise, she would have continued to be a resident of Hamburg, but not a citizen with full rights—including voting rights (not that there was much voting other than in plebiscites in Hamburg…). She would not have been '*heimatlos*' (stateless). Other nations might still have considered her a German citizen; alternately she might have been considered stateless, since the Germans no longer recognized her citizenship. Had she been deported, she would have lost her residency both in Hamburg and in Germany, and would have forfeited all property left behind to Germany the moment she crossed the border into the so-called General Government (German-occupied Poland)."



Sophie Hess with her brother Erwin Hess, 1937.

During this time, my grandmother and my parents were also corresponding. Sophie knew that my father had been forced to give up his business. On July 9, 1941, she wrote that on July 31 she would have to move from *Görnestrasse 4* to *Innocentiastrasse 37*, to a *JudenHaus* (a building where all Jews were lodged together), where Jews were moved prior to deportation. My grandmother described her living conditions there. She was housed in a small, dark, damp room. Her kitchen consisted of a small space in the wall next to a smelly toilet that she had to share with other tenants. She wrote to Erwin as well, telling him how she missed her spacious apartment, how she continued to play chamber music with her friends,



H ausmusiert

Sonnabend, den 28. Juni 1941, 16 1/2 Uhr
und
Sonntag, den 29. Juni 1941, 16 1/2 Uhr

Vortragsfolge.

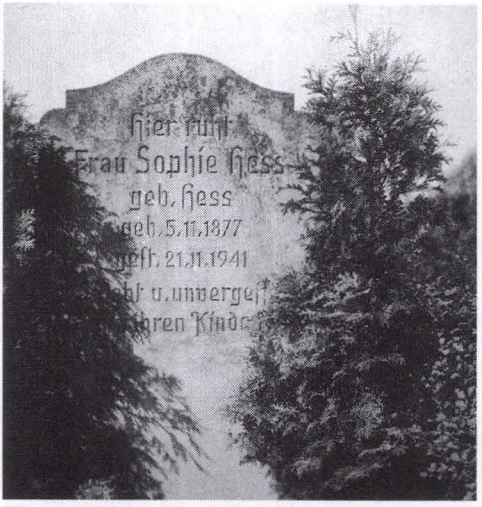
Brahms Sonate A Dur, Op. 100
César Frank Sonate A Dur
Violine und Klavier

Brahms Sapphische Ode
Brahms Feldeinsamkeit
Brahms Auf dem See

Schumann Trio F Moll, Op. 63

Ausführende:
Sophie Hess, Klavier
Hanns Fränkel, 0 esang
Leopold Asser, Violine
Max Burchardt, Cello

Program of chamber music in which Sophie played on June 28 and 29, 1941.



The grave of Sophie Hess in the Jewish section of the Ohlsdorf cemetery in Hamburg.

through the *Judische Kulturbund* [35] (Jewish cultural organization). She mentioned how difficult it had become to communicate without a telephone. Her living quarters were not located in a ghetto: in Germany, for public relations purposes, there were no ghettoes.

Sophie had been living at *Innocentiastrasse 37* for approximately two months when she received a *Kommand* (an order or summons); it ordered her to report the next day to Gestapo headquarters to be "evacuated." She knew what this meant: she was about to be deported to a concentration camp. She wrote to her brother Erwin that many of her friends and acquaintances had either disappeared into the camps or committed suicide. She was 64 years old.

She wrote to Erwin again in early November 1941, to tell him that she was planning to end her life. My mother also received a farewell letter from her, written on November 5, 1941, Sophie's birthday; it said that she could not go on living any longer. She never used the word *suicide.*

November 5, 1941 (original in German)

My Ellen,

Yesterday I wrote to you that I would not yet say farewell.
My beloved child, you must pull yourself together, you have your husband and your sweet little girls. It is the way of the world that children must give up their parents.
I have tried everything I could think of to maintain for you what is yours. You have to contact Dr. Kaufmann, the lawyer. Write to Pelte, perhaps his 79 years will protect him.
Wish me courage. I can no longer bear this life.
You have been the best and most faithful gift that life has given me.

---

[35] Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, 1990. "Cultural Society of German Jews."
The *Jüdische Kulturbund* was organized prior to WWII and lasted until 1941. Jewish artists who had been fired from their jobs in Nazi Germany were allowed to perform for Jewish audiences only until that time. When the *Kulturbund* was disbanded, the artists had to go into hiding for fear of being sent to concentration camps.

My darling, I thank you for everything.
Yesterday I was with our piano teacher. Perhaps he will write to you.
My dear Frits, my Manuela, my Jaqui, I kiss you.
Stay in good health and together; keep me in your hearts.

I cannot do otherwise,
Mutti



Sophie and Ellen together in 1929.



Sophie Hess, 1937.

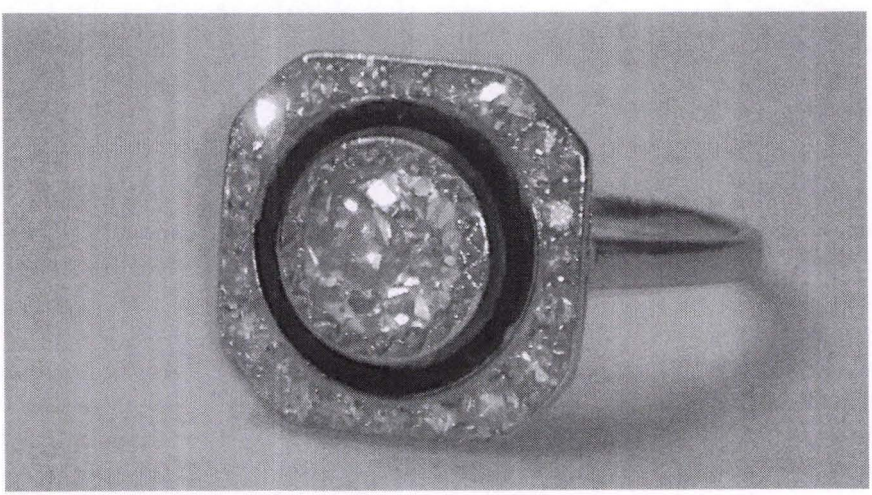
In the *Staatliche Kriminalpolizei* (state criminal police) report that my daughter Anne-Emanuelle Birn and my niece Jessica Mendels found in the Hamburg archives in 1997, it is stated that Sophie Sara Hess died of an overdose of sleeping pills on November 21, 1941. The police found four tubes of Veronal, the fourth tube partially empty. (Sophie had friends who were doctors; it seems likely that one of them gave her the pills.) The police went into the kitchen and turned on the stove, and there was an explosion. Most likely, Sophie had turned on the gas to make sure that she would die by asphyxiation in case the pills were insufficient. The police found her in her nightgown on the floor. Her downstairs neighbor told the police that Sophie had told her that she would not accept being transported east; she knew or guessed what it meant. Sophie was buried in the

Jewish section of the Ohlsdorf cemetery in Hamburg, after being transported to the hospital to verify that she had died by suicide.

The night of my grandmother's suicide, my mother had gone to a concert. She told us later that during the concert she had a profoundly sad feeling that there was something terrible happening. The next day, my mother sat at the piano and played Chopin's Funeral March.[36] Every year after the war, on November 5, which was also my grandmother's birthday, my mother placed an azalea on her piano, next to her mother's photo.

In the Hamburg archives, Anne-Emanuelle and Jessica found the inventory of Sophie's apartment from which she had been evicted (officially, for the convenience of the Germans). The inventory included minute details of her belongings, down to how many pairs of shoes she had (17), each with an estimated value in *Deutschmarks*. Apparently, the Germans gave the evicted Jews money in exchange for the so-called "value" of their belongings.

In November 1941, shortly after my mother had received the farewell letter from Sophie, she received a telephone call from an official at the German Embassy. He said that he wanted to meet her in a certain café in Paris; that he had something from her mother. My mother was scared, of course, but she decided to go. My father said he would follow her and stay near where she sat in the café. In fact, that official was a decent person: he had brought money and a beautiful



Sophie's ring.

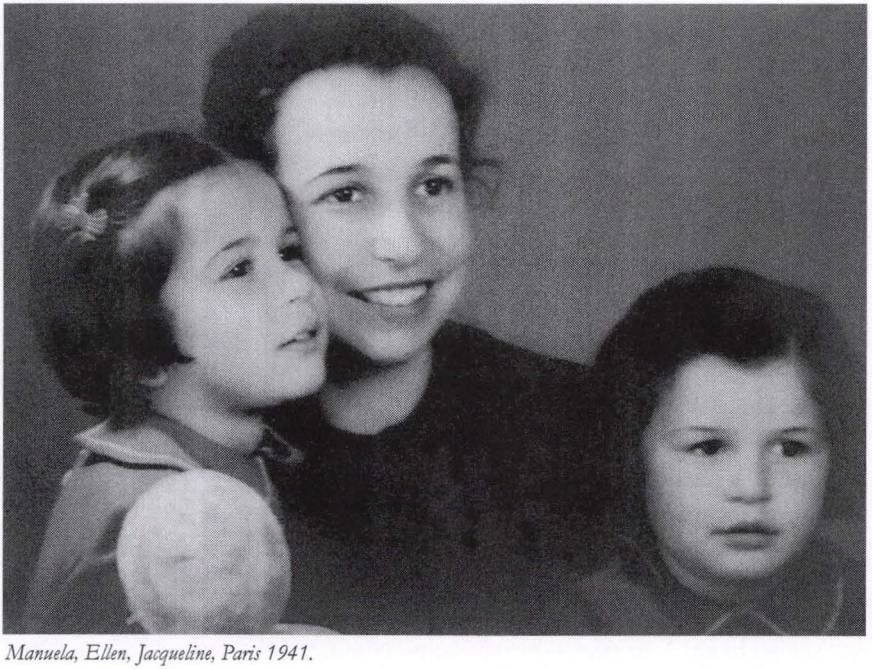
[36] In 1988, after I received the news of my brother Franklin's death, I sat down and also played music. I played a Bach suite on the cello, my instrument.

diamond and onyx ring of Sophie's. Manuela now has that ring; I hope it will one day go to Jessica, Sophie's great-granddaughter.

I believe that the money that my mother received that day helped make it possible for my parents to pay the *passeurs* (smugglers) who later got us out of the occupied zone in August 1942; the rest came from the sale of my father's shares in his business to his associate Auguste Sautès. This money also allowed my father to tell the *gendarmes* who interrogated him that he had a certain sum of money with him, plus money and jewelry in a bank in Lyon. I believe that money sustained us for the rest of the war.

Chapter 5
Fleeing Paris

My parents may have been overly optimistic in the beginning of the war and thought they would be able to stay in Paris and survive, despite the increasing danger for Jews. As the horrible events described in Chapter 4 were unfolding, my parents realized the extreme urgency of our departure. They did not know how to manage our escape, especially with two young children and small savings. Furthermore, it was difficult to find reliable contacts to cross the demarcation line and one needed a lot of money to pay smugglers.



Manuela, Ellen, Jacqueline, Paris 1941.

Some Jews did decide to stay where they lived and managed to survive. According to some estimates, about 30,000 Jews remained in Paris, wore the Jewish star,[1] and obeyed all or most of the regulations such as not going to libraries, public parks, swimming pools, the theater or the cinema, going shopping only at certain allowed hours, and riding only the last train on the metro. Some people decided not to register at all at their local city hall and never wore the Jewish star. Those people went out as little as possible and survived with a "good dose of luck".[2] Some may have found it inconceivable to leave Paris; they wanted to show the Germans that they were not going to give in or give up.[3] Besides, it was forbidden for Jews to travel and they would never have gotten a *laissez-passer frontalier*, an *Ausweis*[4] (border pass). As time went on it became more and more difficult to cross the demarcation line.

Many Jewish families who stayed in Paris ended up denounced and rounded up. Their journey started in the internment camp of Drancy in the North of Paris and ended in Auschwitz and other death camps. A school friend of mine, Nicole Marx, spent the whole war in an attic in Paris and she survived. Some Jews managed to get false papers with names that did not sound Jewish. Claude Lanzmann, the director of the documentary film "Shoah", writes of his young years in Paris in his autobiography and mentions how his mother with her friend changed identity and address numerous times and both survived.[5]

By the time of the roundup at the *Vel' d'Hiv,* my father had secured the help of two young smugglers to help us escape. They were going to guide us across the demarcation line into the unoccupied zone, the so-called "free zone." It is important to note that my mother had had two miscarriages, one in 1940 and another in 1941. The pregnancies were not planned. If there had been a baby in our family, we would never have been able to leave and cross the demarcation line as we did. So it was a strange kind of luck, although sad that we did not have another sibling at that time. (My sister and I were not told that our mother had had miscarriages. It was not considered proper for little girls to be told such things. We were told that she had an appendectomy, the first time that she miscarried. I do not know about the second time. I remember that she spent a whole week in a private hospital, on *chaussée de l'Etang,* near where we lived in Saint-Mandé.) Also, we did not have our grandmother Sophie with us, because she had committed

---

[1] Mémoire juive et Education. Natanson, Dominique. [http://d-d.natanson.pagesperso-orange.fr].

[2] Zuccotti, Susan. The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

[3] Berr, Hélène. Journal. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2008.

[4] Adler, Jacques. The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, chpt. 1.
According to Jacques Adler, figures vary considerably. Between 20,000 and 50,000 Jews were left in Paris when the city was liberated. Most of those were French Jews.

[5] Lanzmann, Claude. Le lièvre de Patagonie. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2009, chpt. 1.

suicide in November 1941, almost one year before we left Paris. As I mentioned before, our grandmother had severe arthritis, she had walked with a cane since the 1930s and she would not have been able to walk quickly across the demarcation line if she had been with us in 1942. On the other hand, my sister and I were old enough to withstand that strange and dangerous voyage. If my grandmother had joined us in Paris as my parents had wanted, we would not have been able to flee, because running at night through the woods, as we did in order to cross the demarcation line, would have been impossible for her. In addition to these difficulties, Sophie did not speak French; German was her language. If these circumstances had been different, we most likely could not have fled Paris when we did.

My parents prepared for our departure quietly. They started to pack their valuable belongings a long time before we fled. They left silverware and other items with our neighbor upstairs, including my *tirelire* (money bank), which was an old silver *repoussé* alms box[6] (a silver round box with cover, a lock and narrow slit on its cover that the Jewish ladies used to collect coins for the poor during their afternoon tea parties in the 19th century). That money bank was a present to me from my grandmother Sophie Hess when I was born. It has her engraved initials "SH" on the inside cover and I cherish it to this day.[7]



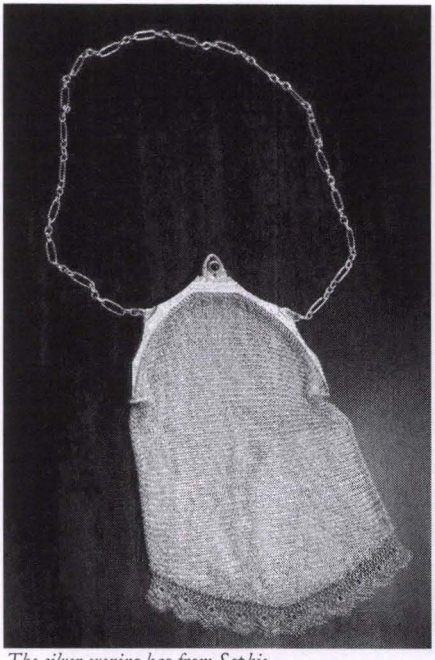
My tirelire (money bank). © Naturally Photography by Monni

Another item stored was a mesh silver evening bag engraved "Ellen H." which survived and was given to me by my mother. It came from my grandmother Sophie also.

There were several silver trays, some silver serving pieces from my grandmother Sophie, and wedding presents that my parents had received – also paintings, prints, photos, and other sentimental belongings. All of these things were left with our wonderful neighbor three flights up in the building, Mme. Deneux. My parents trans-

[6] A technique that produces low relief on silver by hammering the design on the reverse side.

[7] There is an exact replica of this silver repoussé alms box dating from or before 1883 in the Jewish Museum in New York, a gift of the Danzig Jewish Community to the Museum.



The silver evening bag from Sophie.
© Naturally Photography by Monni



The silver cake tongs from Sophie.
© Naturally Photography by Monni

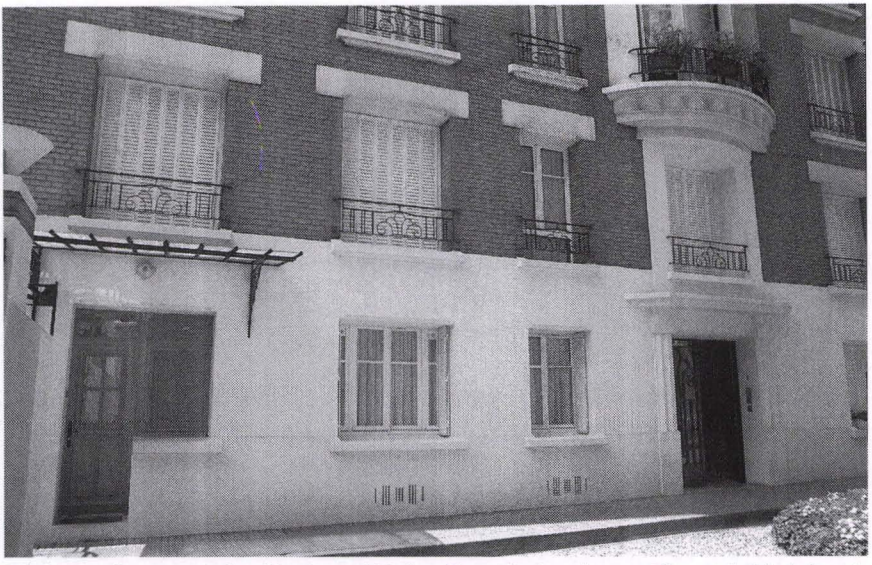
ported everything to her apartment at night. My mother still had her beloved Gaveau, a spinet piano that she had acquired in 1940. She wanted to keep it in a safe place. It was reddish-black, made of highly polished mahogany and had a mirror below the keyboard all the way to the pedals to protect the soundboard and the strings. My father, with the help of a neighbor, M. Langlais, moved the spinet piano at night, down one flight and across the courtyard to M. Langlais' apartment. I really don't know how the two men managed to transport the piano unnoticed. It was sheer luck that no one denounced my father for doing something that was so totally illegal. M. Langlais told his young son never to touch the piano because it did not belong to them and because he was afraid that neighbors would hear the sound of the piano and wonder where it came from.[8]

The concierge, Madame Trocmé, must have known that unusual activities were taking place at the Mendels apartment, and she knew that we were Jewish. She lived with her husband on the ground floor at the entrance of the courtyard of our apartment building and she could see all the comings and goings of the people who lived there. However, she and her husband kept quiet, which in it-

---

[8] Interview: Monsieur Langlais in Saint-Mandé, 1997. (DVD 61-62)
*Note: There are 66 DVDs, and the corresponding original MiniDVs, consisting of interviews and other documentation completed under the direction of Jessica Mendels between 1994-1997. These materials remain in her permanent care, as do a large number of photos and documents relevant to the Mendels history.

self was reprehensible in the eyes of the occupying forces. She could have been severely punished for not denouncing us.[9] Many concierges were not nice like Madame Trocmé and did denounce Jews.



The loge (small apartment) where Monsieur and Madame Trocmé lived, on the ground floor, to the left of the main entrance of 10 avenue Ste. Marie, Saint-Mandé. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

My parents also packed suitcases and trunks in the hope that our friends, in particular our upstairs neighbor Madame Deneux, would be able to forward them to us after (and if) we had an address. Madame Deneux was a war widow from WWI and she hated the Germans, *"les boches"* (short for *"alboches"* meaning the "Krauts") as she called them. Another word for the Germans was *"les haricots verts"*, ("the green beans"). I remember asking my mother later on in the war what it meant, when she received a letter from Madame Deneux saying that there were many green beans in Paris. In his "Odyssey,"[10] my father wrote that the French were not necessarily pro-Jewish, but many of them hated the Germans and Madame Deneux most certainly did.

The belongings that we were hoping to receive later included our bicycles, my best doll and my sister's doll, my mother's sewing machine, my father's typewriter, his office clothes, and my parents' radio. My parents packed many items such as daily clothes that they hoped would be useful and would help them to survive wherever we ended up. There were sheets and pillows and blankets and even

[9] It was official policy, condoned by Pétain and his ministers, to denounce Jews.
[10] Frits Mendels, "Odyssey of a Jewish Family in France, 1940-1944." See Introduction.

some pots and pans. However, one needed a special permit to ship suitcases and packages from the occupied zone to the unoccupied zone, and to this day, I do not know how Madame Deneux and friends who helped her received those permits. Maybe they lied and said that the packages were intended for their relatives on the other side of the line and nobody checked. Or maybe there were some good people at the post office or the train station. In the decree of December 10, 1941, it said that it was forbidden to transport goods belonging to Jews living in Paris, outside of the Seine *département* (outside the Paris region).

Although the police did not come to arrest us in our apartment in Saint-Mandé as part of the infamous July16-17 *Vel' d'Hiv* round-up, Jews were rounded up in Nogent, Joinville, St. Maur, Pavillon-s-Bois, Montreuil, Vincennes, and Fontenay-s-Bois, between July and September 1942. All these neighborhoods adjoin Saint-Mandé in the Seine *département.*

It was two weeks after the large round-up of 13,000 Jews at the *Vel' d'Hiv'*[11] that we fled Paris. My parents had no idea where we would end up. All they knew when we finally left was that there were hopefully two *passeurs* (smugglers) in the village of Pontayraud, Dordogne, waiting for us and ready to help us walk across the demarcation line. It had all been arranged beforehand for a large fee per person. But who knew if the young men would be honest? It was all very risky. Would they even show up at the rendezvous in Pontayraud? Through the Dutch Club and acquaintances with the association of Dutch residents in Paris, my father found the name of two *passeurs* who had helped other Dutch Jews to cross the demarcation line. Those smugglers were usually young farmers or villagers who, for a large fee of between 5,000 and 25,000 francs per person, (the lower figure being approximately one year's salary for a secretary or a chambermaid) accepted to smuggle Jews across the *ligne de démarcation*,[12,13] (the demarcation line) which divided France into *la zone occupée* (occupied France) and *la zone libre* (the free zone). This line divided France until November 11, 1942. These young men knew where and how to smuggle Jews across the line, because they lived in the vicinity and were familiar with all the byways.[14] These two young men my father found, one of them a baker's son, one a farmer's son, had helped other Jewish

---

[11] Jacobson, Louise. Lettres de Louise Jacobson. Lyon: Centre de Documentation sur la Déportation des Enfants Juifs, 1989.
Louise Jacobson was a student at *lycée Hélène Boucher.* Manuela and I attended the same *lycée* in the 1950s. A memorial plaque with the names of students who had attended the *lycée* and were deported during the war was placed on its wall a few years ago.

[12] Marrus, Michael & Paxton, Robert. Vichy et les Juifs. Paris: Editions Calmann-Levy, 1981.
By the end of 1942, it could cost as much as 50,000 francs to cross the Pyrénées into Spain, according to Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton.

[13] Chemins de Mémoire. "La ligne de démarcation." [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr].

[14] As an exemple, Jews paid 5,000 francs per person to cross the demarcation line in the *département* of Allier. Different amounts of money were charged, depending on the smugglers and the degree of danger.



General map of Dordogne showing Pontayraud where we crossed the demarcation line, Riberac, Perigueux, Le Got and Mazeyrolles.

families to cross the demarcation line. It was quite possibly the money that my mother had received from her mother through the German official in the fall of 1941 and some of the money from my father's business after it had been aryanized that made it financially possible for my parents to hire and pay the *passeurs*. It was quite dangerous for anyone to help Jews cross the demarcation line, and the *passeurs* deserved the money that they asked for. They could have been shot, tortured, or sent to a concentration camp themselves. They were risking their own lives as well as ours.

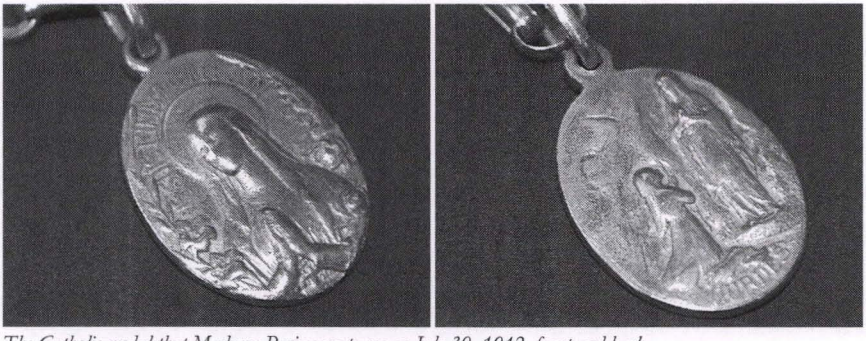
Michel Paris, the son of my parents' friends, the Paris, and his friend Pierre Deneux, the son of our upstairs neighbor, Madame Deneux, (both boys around the age of 15) were especially courageous on our behalf. They were active in the *Résistance* (the French Resistance movement). They put their lives on the line in preparing our departure. They bought backpacks for my parents. They also bought the train tickets for the four of us. They took my parents' backpacks, filled with whatever was considered by my parents to be their most essential items, and they left the backpacks for us with the baggage check at the *gare d'Austerlitz* (the Austerlitz train station). Later that year, the Gestapo came to look for Michel Paris. Fortunately he was not at home that morning and his mother knew nothing of her son's activities in the *Résistance*. She thought that her son was active in a theater group. She told the Gestapo that they were welcome to inspect the house. She had no idea that her son Michel was hiding pamphlets under the floorboards upstairs in his bedroom in order to distribute them throughout Paris. Michel Paris had been denounced by someone in his group or by strangers spying in the café where the group was meeting. After that incident, Michel was sent to his grandparents' house in Heudicourt, a village in Normandy, because his parents were afraid that he would be caught by the French police or by the Gestapo in Paris. He spent the rest of the war in Normandy and he continued working in the *Résistance*. Two of his friends in Paris were caught by the Gestapo; they were interrogated, deported, and never came back.

On July 30, 1942, we left our apartment, walking casually in the late afternoon, pretending that we were invited to an early family dinner at our friends' house, Maurice and Geneviève Paris. My parents did not carry any luggage. We were wearing our Jewish stars. We had dinner at their house and spent our last night in Paris there. Despite the heat, Maurice Paris lit a fire in the furnace in the basement and burnt our Jewish stars.

For my sister and me, it was all part of going on vacation and it was very excit-

ing. It was summertime. We children were having a wonderful time. I remember playing with my little friend Cécile; we threw pillows at each other and she shared her bed with me. My parents were relieved that Manuela and I were not worried and that we took it all in good spirits.

That night, Madame Paris gave my mother, my sister and me each a small Catholic medal, as a good luck token. I still have this medal. On one side it says *"JESUS L'IMMACULEE CONCEPTION"* and on the other side it says *"LOURDES"*. She had chosen it because in the French Catholic tradition, Lourdes is considered a place where miracles occurred since Bernadette Soubirous saw apparitions in the XIXth century in that little village in the Pyrénées. I did not understand the meaning of her gift at the time. She hoped that the medals would bring us protection and good luck. I am sure Maurice and Geneviève Paris were as scared as my parents. No one knew if we would survive.



The Catholic medal that Madame Paris gave to me on July 30, 1942, front and back.

The decision to spend our last night at our friends' house was well calculated. Because they lived near the métro stop of *Saint-Mandé-Tourelle*, we could get to the métro station quickly, leaving inconspicuously. Had we left from our apartment, neighbors might have noticed that we left very early in the morning, without our Jewish stars, and they could have denounced us. People sometimes spied on each other and our neighbors knew that we were Jews. Our friends, the Paris family, risked their lives by helping us, a Jewish family.

I remember leaving very early in the morning with my parents and my big sister, holding hands with one of my parents. It must have been 6am, the time of day when Jews were allowed to take the métro. We took the métro to the *gare d'Austerlitz*. Paris has several train stations and that was the station for all trains heading southwest. (The plan was to meet with our *passeurs* at the border along the demarcation line, on the occupied side of France, approximately in the

center-west of France, between Angoulème and Ribérac.)

My parents hoped that early in the morning there would not be any policemen or Gestapo checking ID cards. I do not know if we took the last car on the métro, the only car allowed for Jews. Taking any of the other cars was forbidden for Jews, but we were not wearing our Jewish stars any longer. Still, it was a gamble to travel with everyone else, because the police inspected all cars whenever it suited them. My parents did not have false ID papers until later in the war. The dreaded *"vos papiers, s'il vous plait"* ("papers, please") would have been the end for us with my parents' IDs stamped with the word *JUIF*. Furthermore, it was forbidden to travel anywhere without a special permission form, an *Ausweis, a laissez-passer*, from the authorities, and without a visa on the ID cards of foreigners stating that they were allowed to travel. My parents did not ask for that visa because Jews were not allowed to get a travel permit. Jews were simply not allowed to travel outside the city, town or village where they lived. My sister and I carried no ID cards, but my father carried our *"Déclaration en vue de réclamer la qualité de Français"* (a declaration requesting French citizenship) for my sister and for me.

But there was no inspection of IDs that morning in the métro that we took, and along the way, no French policemen or Gestapo made the frequent demand, *"Vos papiers, s'il vous plait."* When we arrived at the *gare d'Austerlitz*, my parents retrieved their backpacks, and we boarded the train. We got in our seats, but the train did not leave on time. As we waited impatiently, my father went to the corridor and found out that the police had rounded up Jews from the train on the other side of the platform. This was another miracle for our family because if the police had searched our train, we would have been caught. Finally the train left and we were safe, for the time being.[15]

We had to change trains in Angoulême, in the *département* of Charente. When stepping from the train, Manuela slipped and fell backwards; she hit her head on the hard cement of the platform. Fortunately she was not seriously hurt. If she had gone to a hospital with a serious injury, the hospital staff would have found out that the four of us were Jewish. Manuela tells me that she can still recall today the sound and the ringing in her head.

We continued our trip on the next train and then got off and spent the night in a little hotel in the small village of St. Aulaye in Dordogne, located on the northern edge of the demarcation line in German-occupied

[15] Grimberg, Raymond. "Je me souviens, en train." TGV Magazine. The story of a couple of foreigners arrested on the train in Dax, south of Bordeaux in 1942.

France.[16] We were supposed to meet with the young men, but they sent word that they were busy elsewhere. Perhaps they were helping some other Jews, or it was too dangerous that night.

Two days later, we started walking towards our designated meeting place in Pontayraud on the border with the unoccupied zone. It was about 10 kilometers (six miles) away. We walked a long time in the summer sun; I still remember resting in the middle of the day under a tree with my sister and my parents. We met the *passeurs* at midnight in the cemetery behind the church and headed toward the demarcation line in Pontayraud, a small village in the center of France (*département* of Dordogne). The two *passeurs* each had a bicycle. We walked through the fields and the forest in the middle of the night. At one point, the young men told us to quickly lie down flat on the ground. Manuela cried out and said that she had to go *"pipi"*. Fortunately, the German soldiers, who were very close to us, did not hear anything. Then, one of the *passeurs* put my sister and me on his bicycle, Manuela on the bar and me behind the back seat on the rack. The other *passeur* rode ahead and was supposed to whistle to us to signal that we could proceed when the way was clear. My parents ran behind us. My mother was wearing a navy blue knitted suit and her slip turned violet from perspiration due to exertion and fear. Suddenly, lights from the tips of lit cigarettes could be seen in the air, coming from the German border patrol. We had to lie down on the ground again, but they did not see or hear us, and they must not have had guard dogs. In his account of our odyssey my father wrote that there was also a German soldier on a motorcycle who drove nearby and we had to lie down on the ground once more. Pontayraud was a village along the demarcation line that many refugees tried to go through in order to reach the unoccupied zone. It was pure luck not to be caught. In fact, on a list of children rounded up and deported, there is the name of a child who went to school in Pontayraud and was arrested there and shipped to Auschwitz after first being sent to the *Centre UGIF Numero 64 (Union Générale des Israélites de France*, General Association of Jews in France) in Saint Mandé, just a few blocks from where we lived before fleeing.[17] That child could have been one of us.

My father wrote in his Odyssey[18] that he and my mother were each carrying a hat in a bag. "Who knows what for?" added my father in telling our story of survival. Perhaps to apply for a job somewhere, or to look like a middle-class bourgeois

---

[16] The demarcation line cut across towns and villages. France was divided into the occupied or northern part of France and the so-called free zone, the southern part of France. There were inhabitants of the same town who lived in the occupied zone or the unoccupied zone. Sometimes they lived in the unoccupied zone and worked in the occupied zone or vice-versa.

[17] Laloum, Jean. La maison d'enfants de Saint Mandé Centre UGIF no 64, 1943-1944. Paris: Editions Polyglottes, 1994.

[18] see Introduction.



Jewish girls sheltered at the Centre de Saint-Mande, children's home on rue Granville in Paris, June 1943. Only a few escaped deportation to Auschwitz. Photo: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Serge Klarsfeld (Beate Klarsfeld Foundation).

family to the authorities, were we to be arrested. My parents had bought large and heavy gold rings that they told us they would have given to the Germans or the French police if we had been arrested in the hope that gold would bribe them into giving us our freedom. I still have one of those gold rings. As we know now, some *passeurs* took money from the Jews and then turned around and denounced them to the Germans and got money from them as well.[19] Again, we were lucky. Our *passeurs* were honest.

We have no idea what happened to the two *passeurs* who helped us cross the demarcation line and saved our lives. They must have been scared themselves. Undoubtedly they made a lot of money helping people in distress. If they had been caught for illegal activities they would have been severely punished, and perhaps even shot or sent to camps.

We reached the other side of the demarcation line, the so-called "free zone",[20]

[19] Chemins de Mémoire. "La ligne de démarcation." [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr].

[20] By November 11, 1942, there was no more demarcation line, because the Germans occupied all of France. There was no more need for *passeurs* along the demarcation line. The line was officially abolished on March 1, 1943. The Vichy army was dissolved. There had been 100,000 French soldiers until November 1942. At that time the Italian occupation was extended to the South of France, including Provence and the city of Nice where many Jews had escaped because they felt safe. The Italians were kinder to the Jews than the Germans. In September 1943, after the death of Mussolini and Italy's alliance with the Western powers, Germany invaded the South of France and Nice was no longer safer than the rest of France. The Germans never imposed the wearing of the Jewish star in the Vichy zone but they deported Jews from all of France.

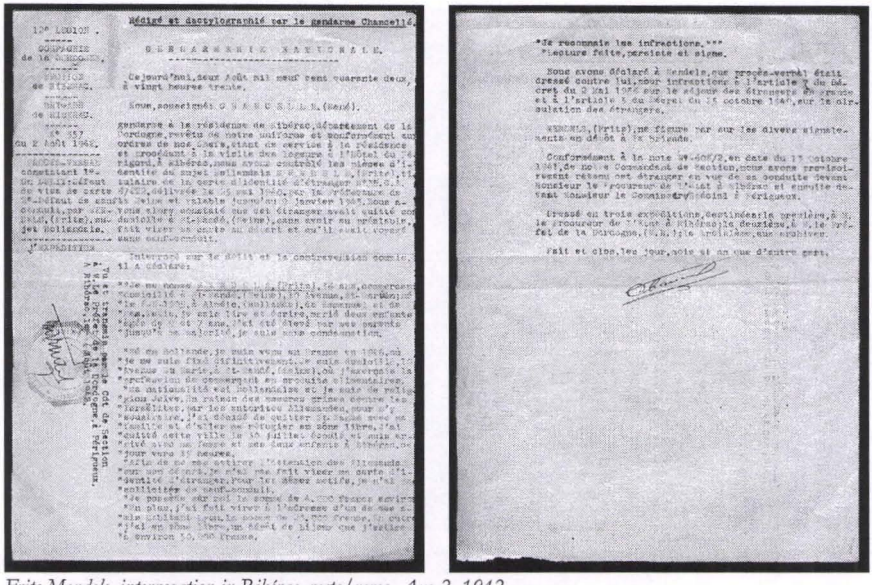


My father's gold ring. © Naturally Photography by Monni

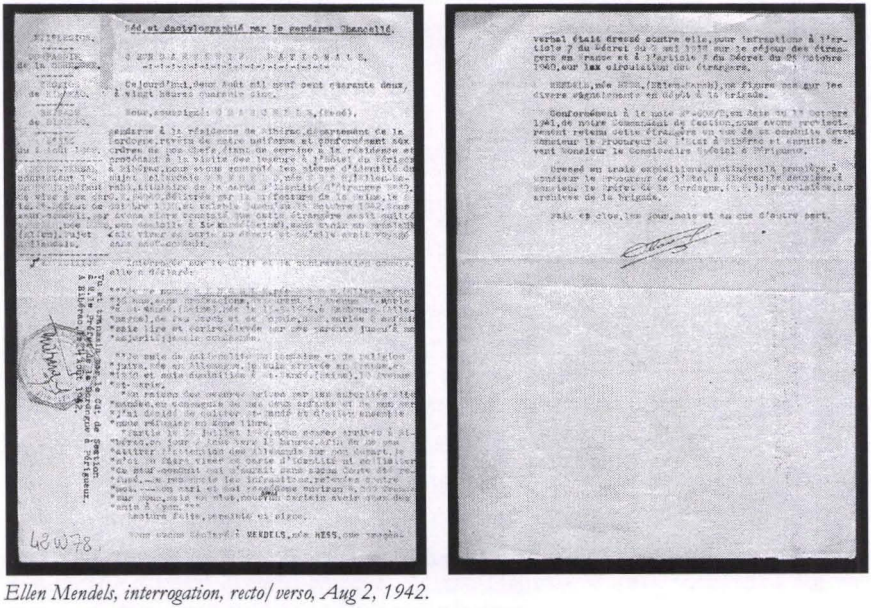
and I remember hearing, *"Qui va là?"* ("Who goes there?"), a military expression, which indicated that the Free French Forces[21] were there and we were safe from the Germans. The soldiers fed us and housed us for the night, and I remember that my father went swimming in the local river, the *Rizanne*, the next morning. The soldiers took us to Ribérac, the *sous-préfecture* (the administrative town under the *préfecture*) of Dordogne, in the morning. It was August 2, 1942. Around 3pm we went to a hotel, *l'hôtel du Périgord.*

My parents didn't know anyone in Ribérac or anywhere else in the area. They had no choice but to check into a hotel even though it was terribly dangerous because it meant showing an ID or a passport, and the Vichy police checked every night to see if there were newcomers. The police checked where visitors came from and if there were any illegal refugees coming from the occupied zone. Early that evening, the police knocked at the door of our room. We were under arrest. My parents were taken to the *gendarmerie nationale* (the police headquarters) of Ribérac. My parents were interrogated separately, one after the other, my father at 8:30 pm, my mother at 8:45 pm by a representative of the *gendarmerie nationale.* My parents showed their ID cards indicating they were foreigners, with the word *JUIF* stamped on the cards. In the official written reports of their *procès verbal* (official interrogation, recorded in writing, in the presence of a public officer, for an offence committed against the law) dated August 2, 1942, my parents were accused of traveling illegally because they had crossed the demarcation line

[21] There were 100,000 French soldiers in the free zone, according to the agreements of the Armistice.



Frits Mendels, interrogation in Ribérac, recto/verso, Aug 2, 1942.
Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne #42 W 78.



Ellen Mendels, interrogation, recto/verso, Aug 2, 1942.
Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne #42 W 78.

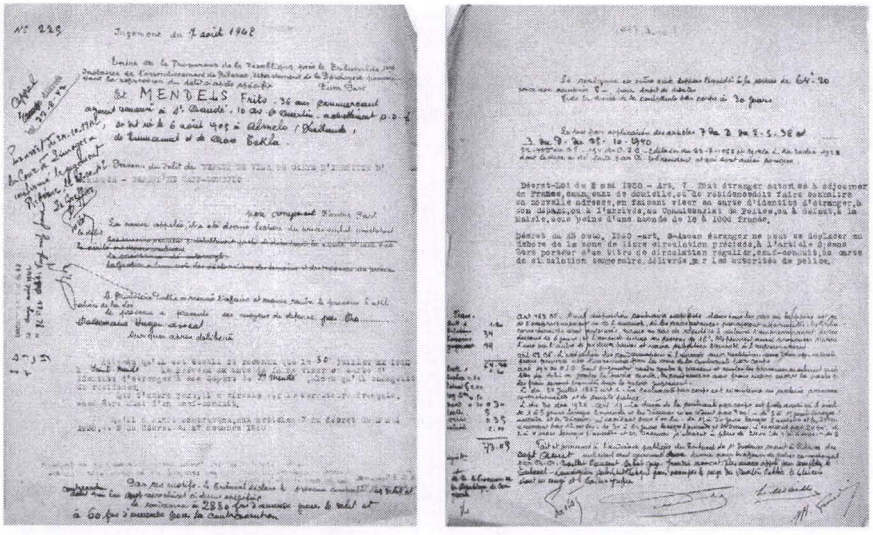
without a *laissez-passer*, with a *"défaut de visa de carte, défaut de sauf-conduit"* (lacking a visa and a permit) to cross into the free zone. Their passage was deemed clandestine and forbidden, since they were not allowed to travel anywhere as Jews, *"de race juive"* ("of Jewish race"), as it was written. My sister and I do not remember where we were while our parents were interrogated. We believe my parents were released and returned to the hotel where we waited until August 7, 1942, when the tribunal of Ribérac fined my parents 2,880 francs each for the offense of not requesting a visa on their foreign IDs when they left Paris on July 30, 1942, and 60 francs each for traveling in France without a permit. They also had to pay 73 francs for the stamp, as it is done to this day on an official document. Then, we were taken to Périgueux under police escort.

In 2009, I received a copy of the judgment from August 7, 1942 *(Dossier du tribunal correctionnel de Ribérac, Jugements 1009 W 29, Dordogne "Dossier juif 42W42", chapitre "Etrangers")* that had been done in the presence of an attorney from the *Archives Départementales de la Dordogne, tribunal correctionnel in Ribérac* (archives of the criminal court of the Department of Dordogne) thanks to Bernard Reviriego in Périgueux, a historian of the Jews in Dordogne during WWII.[22] The judgment stated that both my parents were declared guilty. The judgment was sent to the court in Limoges on August 22, and the decision was confirmed on October 22, 1942. This was done with the help of the attorney that my father retained. The attorney signed his name. How did my parents pay for the attorney and for the fines? They had only 4,000 francs each. Did the attorney help my parents pro bono? Was he working for the *Résistance* and helping Jews in distress? In addition to the fine, my parents were detained for 30 days, *"contrainte par corps"* (physically detained). They had to report daily to the authorities in Périgueux but they could stay with their children in the hotel.

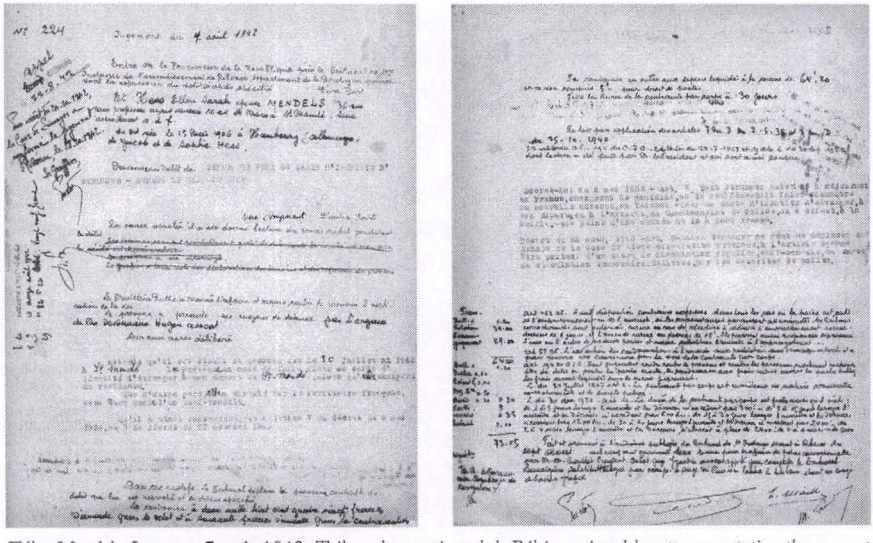
In the departmental archives that my daughter Anne-Emanuelle and I consulted in Périgueux, Dordogne in 1997, we read that by the end of August, my parents were placed on a register of refugees who were *"assignés à résidence"*, or *"en résidence forcée"* (sent to a dwelling acceptable to the authorities and under surveillance), but not under house arrest. The report was sent to Vichy on August 31, 1942. We were not allowed to live further than 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Périgueux. At the same time we were forbidden to stay in any kind of town or city. We had to live in the countryside, in a village. We were not sent to a detention camp. We were officially released under surveillance as of October 28, 1942. But in fact, we were allowed to leave Périgueux in early September 1942. Why these privileges? Bernard Reviriego mentioned in a letter to me that foreign men were

---

[22] Bernard Reviriego wrote the book Les Juifs en Dordogne 1939-1944. (Périgueux: Coédition Archives départementales de la Dordogne & Editions Fanlac, 2003.)



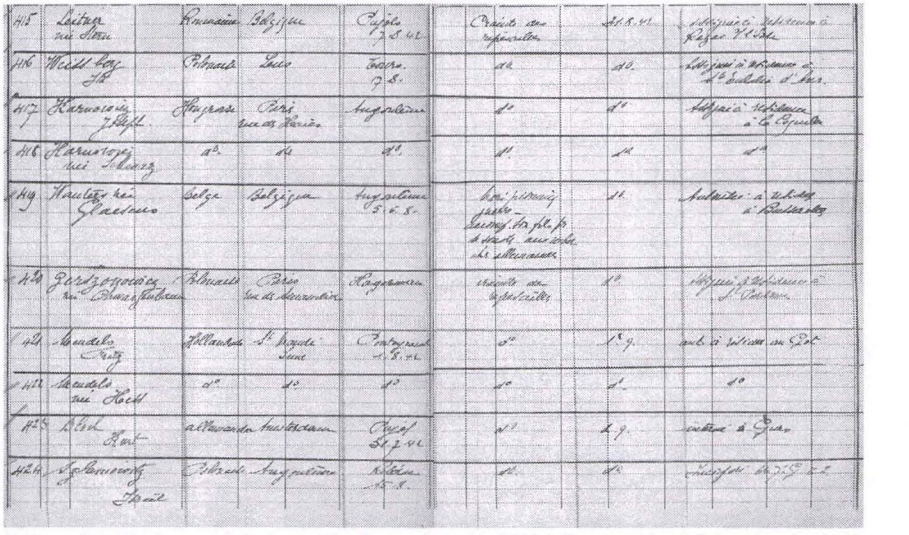
Frits Mendels, Jugement 7 août 1942, Tribunal correctionnel de Ribérac, signed by attorney, stating the amount of the fine.
Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne #1009 W 29.



Ellen Mendels, Jugement 7 août 1942, Tribunal correctionnel de Ribérac, signed by attorney, stating the amount of the fine.
Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne #1009 W 29.

usually either sent to an internment camp, a *GTE (groupe de travailleurs étrangers* - an internment camp for foreign workers), or they were placed in *assignation à résidence* (kept under surveillance) with their family. The law of October 1940[23] said that the internment of Jews of foreign origin depended upon an administrative decision of *préfets* for each *département*.[24] The *préfet* of Dordogne during that period, René Rivière, had the power to determine whether we would live or die.

My father wrote that he had hoped that we would be allowed to go to Lyon, where my mother had cousins of Sophie Hess (Margot and Adolphe Schick), and where my father's associate M. Auguste Sautès had deposited money and jewelry he had entrusted to him. But my parents were not authorized to travel. It was a privilege to be *"en résidence forcée"* or *"résidence surveillée"* ("under surveillance") because, as it is shown on the register for Jewish refugees in Périgueux, people of Polish, Russian and other Eastern European origins were immediately sent to transit or internment camps (each *département* had one or more such transit camps in France). After that, most of them ended up in death camps in East-



Register of people who crossed the demarcation line on August 1, 1942 in Pontayraud and their assignation à résidence. Note lines 421 and 422. Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne, 42 w 79-1.

---

[23] Mémoire juive et education. "Ordonnance du 4 octobre 1940, Loi sur les ressortissants étrangers de race juive, Article 1." [http://d-d.natanson.pagesperso-orange.fr/index.html].

[24] AJPN. [www.ajpn.org/commune-Perigueux-24322.html].

The *préfet* of Dordogne at the time that we were in Périgueux was probably anti-Vichy, perhaps anti-German. He was the only one who had the power to decide if we would be interned or not. His name was René Rivière. Still, on August 26, 1942, he was in charge of the round-up of Jews in the area. On the other hand, there was also a vice-admiral and regional *préfet* from July 1940 until 1944. His name was Louis Bourgain. He was condemned to eight years in prison at the Liberation for his pro-Vichy actions. Regional *préfets* covered several departments and had a higher rank than departmental *préfets*. They were not in charge of day-to-day affairs. In the 1940s they were appointed by the prime minister, now they are elected.

ern Europe. Perhaps they were without means, stateless, or entered France in or around 1936. The column on that same register, entitled *"le devenir des personnes appréhendées"* ("the fate of people arrested") showed that Frits Mendels and Ellen Hess Mendels were forced to reside in a defined and permissible location, stated as "Le Got, Dordogne."

In their interrogation papers, which we discovered in the archives of the *préfecture* in Périgueux in 1997, my father declared that in addition to 4,000 francs he also had 23,000 francs in Lyon with a friend of his, and jewelry worth about 50,000 francs in the free zone.[25] My mother declared that they had 4,000 francs with them and some money in Lyon, without further details. Perhaps these resources signified to the authorities that we would not be *"à la charge de la Nation,"* (financially dependent on the Nation).[26] Perhaps a friend in Paris had told him to inflate the sum of money he said that he possessed. We will never know. Other refugees who were arrested did not possess or claim to possess such sums of money. Refugees typically didn't have papers, as they were illegal immigrants, and *apatrides* (stateless). My parents, on the other hand, were long-time residents in France. They had ID cards that showed that they lived in Paris and my father had a French work permit.

However, we were not rich, and I don't know how many months or years we could have survived without the kindness and generosity of the farmers in the village where we ended up. Bread in those war years cost 2.80 francs per kg, steak was 13 francs per kg, codfish cost 6 francs per kg, milk was 1.65 francs per liter, eggs were 11.70 francs per dozen, and potatoes cost 1.20 francs per kg.[27]

Even though the reason that we were not interned remains, retrospectively, a mystery to us, the four following factors appear to have helped us:

1) My parents were Dutch. My mother had been naturalized a Dutch citizen upon her marriage to my father in 1930. However she was born in Hamburg, Germany and according to the law of Vichy, she normally would have been sent to the internment camp of Gurs or other camps with all the other Jewish Germans who were enemies of the Reich. The authorities might have decided that my mother's naturalization upon her marriage in 1930 exempted her from the infamous treatment of other Jewish German nationals.

---

[25] My father told me in the 1990s that M. Cervini, an employee of my father, was sending him 50% of the income that he made, on a monthly basis although business was very bad during the war years. How and where he sent the money is a mystery. Perhaps he sent it to M. Frédéric in le Got.

[26] Adler, Jacques. The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. Chapter 3, footnote 48: "Schrager, J0, 31 January 1942, 'Foreign Jews who could show sufficient resources were assigned to confined residences.'"

[27] Amouroux, Henri. Le peuple du désastre, Volume 1. Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1976.

It seems that Dutch Jews were treated better than Jews who were refugees from Eastern Europe,[28] although that was not always the case.[29] Furthermore, my parents were declared *"résidents privilégiés"*("privileged residents") because they had lived in France for many years, my father in particular – he came to Paris in 1926, my mother came in 1930.

2) My parents were not refugees, but the four of us were not French, we were Dutch. Foreign Jews who had entered France after 1936 were the first group to be arrested and interned. They were usually stateless. But my father had come to Paris long before 1936; he was an established businessman and he carried with him a *permis de travail* (a work permit) that he renewed regularly. He also had a driver's license that he was always proud to say that he got in 1929. He must have had those papers with him when we were arrested.

3) My father spoke, read and wrote French like a Frenchman. This may have helped him. He also spoke fluent German and English in addition to his native Dutch. However, my mother had a foreign accent when she spoke French, Dutch or English. (My parents mostly spoke French when we grew up, with occasional German phrases when they did not want us to understand what they were saying.)

4) My parents had some money with them. Foreign Jews who could show sufficient monetary assets could be assigned to confined residences. I do not know if there was a fine for children or how much money they had remaining at that point in time.

Notwithstanding these factors, things could have turned out very differently for us. My parents' interrogation papers were sent to the prosecutor of the French State (Vichy), to the special commissioner for Jewish Affairs in Périgueux and Sarlat, and to the *préfet* of Dordogne. It would have been easy for the administrators in charge of Jewish Affairs, first in Périgueux and Sarlat (Dordogne) and then in Vichy, such as Pierre Laval, Maurice Papon, Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, Paul Touvier, René Bousquet and many more vicious French antisemitic officials in the Vichy Government, to find us and order the *gendarmerie*[30] to detain us, put us in one of the numerous detention or transit camps, and send us to an extermination camp.

We spent less than one month in Périgueux (the *préfecture* of Dordogne), where we

---

[28] Poznanski, Renée. Etre Juif en France pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Paris: Editions Hachette, 1994.
Marrus, Michael & Paxton, Robert. Vichy et les Juifs. Paris: Editions Calmann-Lévy, 1981, pp 160-161.

[29] Zuccotti, Susan. The Holocaust, the French and the Jews. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 159.

[30] Cazals, Claude. La Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation. Les Editions la Musse, 1994, chapter 14.

had been driven under police escort from Ribérac. We ate in *soupes populaires* (soup kitchens). I still remember long wooden tables and benches where we would sit. After the first few days we moved to a second hotel, cheaper than the first one. My parents were trying to save money, not knowing how long their savings would last. Manuela celebrated her 9th birthday on August 16, 1942 and she received nine peaches as her birthday present, which I am certain she shared with all of us.

One day, while walking down the street in Périgueux, we encountered Jewish friends from St. Mandé, Monsieur and Madame Raines-Lambé. They started crying, saying that their daughters were not with them; they had crossed the demarcation line with another smuggler and without their parents and they were in hiding in another town. They added that it had been a big mistake on their part not to keep their daughters with them.[31] For my parents it was inconceivable to separate from us. They had decided that we would live or die together. However later on, when it became even more dangerous in the village, they did want to send us to a convent, but it never materialized.

During the month of August my parents started looking for a village and rooms where we would be allowed to stay. They looked in the newspapers, at notices on shop windows, and through an agency. They located a house with rooms available for rent in the small village of Le Got. We went there as soon as Le Got was deemed acceptable by the authorities in Périgueux. Le Got was not even a village; it was a *"lieu-dit"*, *"un hameau"*, *"un trou"* (a minuscule village, a hamlet, a "hole", as my father said in popular French). It could be identified only on a highly detailed map. It had 30 houses, no church, no school, and no town hall. It was part of the administrative *commune* of Mazeyrolles (the smallest administrative division in a *département*) and was located 74 kilometers from Périgueux, and therefore acceptable according to the new rules for Jews arrested in Périgueux. The *préfet* of Dordogne had decided on this rule. It would have been easy for the SS, the Gestapo or the French police to get to Le Got and arrest us.

Surely my parents were aware of the terrible danger we were in: Jews were rounded up in Périgueux and other towns in Dordogne on August 26 of 1942, while we were trying to find a village where we could live.[32] The same *préfet*, René Rivière who saved us from an internment camp, was responsible for the round-up of August 26 and we were still in Périgueux ourselves. Jews were also rounded up in the *département* just north of Dordogne, the Creuse, during that same period.[33]

---

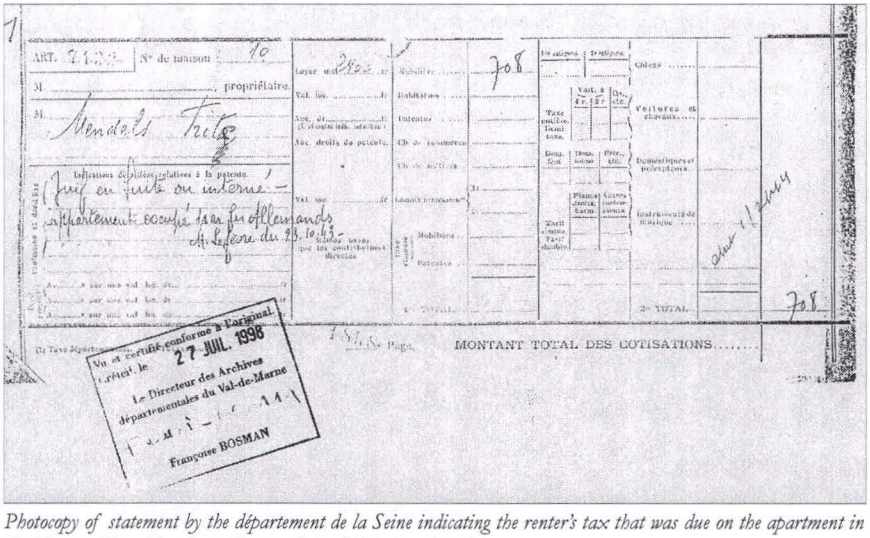
[31] Raines-Langmuir, Nelee. "My Story," unpublished souvenirs about her survival during WWII. Nelee died in August 2010 just after completing the documentary film "Fallen From the Sky" about her family's ordeal and survival.

[32] Reviriego, Bernard. Les Juifs en Dordogne, 1939-1944. Périgueux: Coédition Archives départementales de la Dordogne & Editions Fanlac, 2003.

[33] Six weeks after the *Vel' d'Hiv* round-up in Paris, there was a round-up of foreign Jews in the *département* of the Creuse, north of the Dordogne, called *"la rafle du 26 août 1942 en Creuse."*

They were sent to detention camps such as the infamous camp of Beaune-La-Rolande, or Nexon or any one of many other camps. Jews were under constant watch by each *préfecture*. Each *département*, especially those on the border of the demarcation line, had to supply a certain quota of arrested Jews. Numbers varied, according to the orders of Laval or Darquier de Pellepoix in Vichy. Some of the *préfets* were more lenient towards Jews and were secretly anti-Vichy and pro-de Gaulle. Officially, all *préfets* took orders from Vichy in the unoccupied zone. Some *préfets* resigned rather than obey the orders of Vichy. Others obeyed the new rules faithfully; they were arrested once the war ended, then tried and shot or imprisoned.

My parents found out after the war that, one week after we left, the police came to arrest us at our apartment in Paris. Thankfully, we were long gone. Madame Paris had our keys but she did not dare go to our apartment after we left. We are not sure if the police came for only my mother because she was a German-born Jew or if the police came to get all of us as foreign Jews. My mother would have been sent immediately to one of the detention camps in Beaune-La-Rolande, Gurs,[34] or Rivesaltes, that were created in each French *département* and where all German Jews were interned as enemies of the Reich prior to being sent back to Hitler's Germany. Once in Germany, she would have been sent to a concentration camp in the East. As part of the armistice agreement between Hitler and



Photocopy of statement by the département de la Seine indicating the renter's tax that was due on the apartment in St. Mandé. (Found by Anne-Emanuelle in the Paris archives).

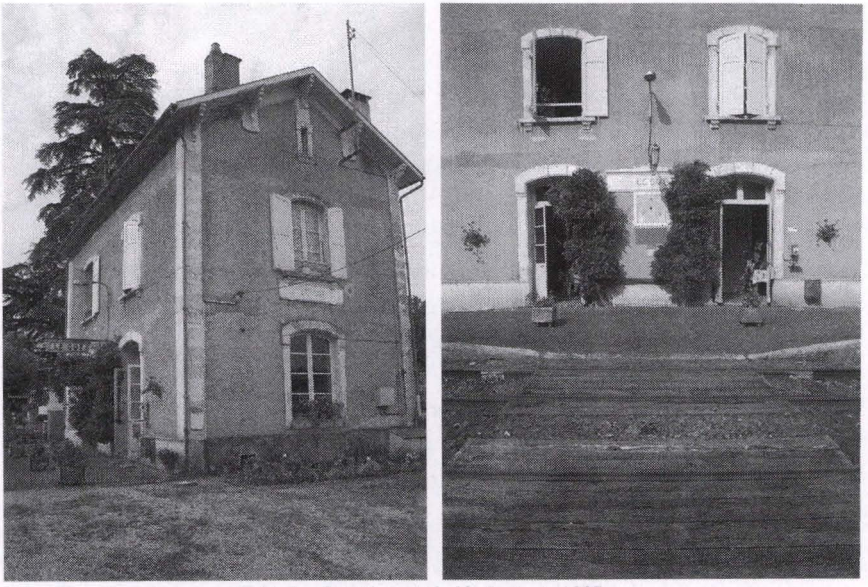
[34] Stiel-Preece, Alix. (a very good friend of my parents who survived her detention in Gurs) "Testament to the Holocaust." Archives of the Wiener Library, London, reel 56.

Pétain, all German enemies of the Reich, such as German Jews, would be sent back to Germany. Or the police might have come for all of us, a Jewish family, either because we had been denounced or because we were registered as Jews at the St. Mandé City Hall. Our apartment was sealed after our departure. Shortly thereafter and for the remainder of the war it was taken over by the German occupiers. My father was declared *"Juif en fuite ou interné"* ("Jew that fled or was interned") by the office of the Treasury of Vincennes in 1942, claiming that he owed 708 francs in renter's tax. That money was claimed again in 1943 and in 1944.

Chapter 6
Living in Le Got, Dordogne

We arrived in the village of Le Got, in the *commune*[1] (district) of Mazeyrolles, in early September of 1942. Trains were still running in that part of France at the time. I still remember getting off the train at the village station.

There was a small plaza in front of the station, covered in little white pebbles; it looked huge to me. The house where we would live was right across from the



The train station where we arrived in Le Got. Photographed by Jessica in 1997.

[1] A French *commune* can be a city of two million (like Paris), a town of ten thousand, or a hundred-person hamlet.

station. The landlord, M. Maurial (who, with his sister Hélène, would rent us two rooms in the house they had inherited from their mother) welcomed us. Paul Delpech, Mazeyrolles' mayor and a friend of Hélène's, accompanied him. When we reached the door, we saw that someone – we never found out who it was – had left us a basket filled with fruits and vegetables.

Shortly after we arrived in Le Got, my parents chose non-Jewish pseudonyms, Monsieur and Madame Frédéric. Mail was censored; one had to be careful what and to whom one wrote. From then on, we received mail for M. Frédéric, and our parents told us to use that name if we had to identify ourselves, though I don't remember ever doing so. I only remember that we were Manuela and Jacqueline.

The village of Le Got had only 30 houses, as well as a train station, a tiny post office in the postmistress' home, a bakery, and one or two small general stores – but no church and no school. The postmistress, Madame Lagrèze, was remarkably busy; she delivered mail on her motorcycle. Mail arrived by train from Périgueux; she delivered outgoing mail to the train station each day. The train station also housed the village's only telephone. Mme. Lagrèze took phone messages for everyone in the village, or went to get the villagers so they could answer the call or make one themselves. On top of all this, she worked to give food to those in need, and mailed packages to the French prisoners in Germany.

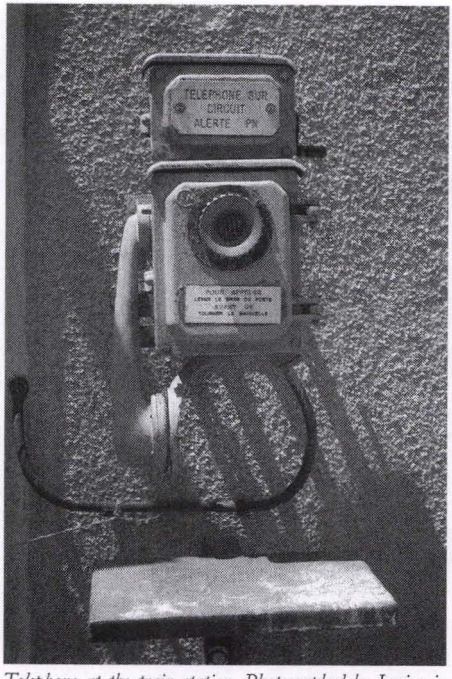
Sometimes the *maquisards* (*Résistance* fighters) left their hiding places in the forest to hold up the postmistress at gunpoint. They had become desperate as the war went on, and tried to get money for weapons, food, and protection in any way they could. They also snuck into the post office and raided the cash register.[2]

There was only one street in the village; it was lined with houses and fields on both sides. Railway tracks crossed it at one point, accompanied by a little house where the man in charge of the crossing gate lived. I remember that he looked scary to me and I thought he was drunk; I was afraid of him.

The mayor's office was just a small room in his home, which was located in Mazeyrolles, as were the school, the church and the cemetery. Mazeyrolles was on a hill and inaccessible by train; thus the station made Le Got somewhat important, even though it was tiny.

So many families had lost men in *la Grande Guerre* (World War I) that across

[2] Interview: Mme. Lagrèze, 1997. (DVD 41)



Telephone at the train station. Photographed by Jessica in 1994.

France there was a deep hatred for *"les boches"* (the Germans); many villages had monuments to commemorate their dead. And now there were many families in which a husband, father, or son was a prisoner of war in Germany. One such prisoner was my school friend (in Le Got) Jeannot (Jean) Martegoutte's father, who was imprisoned for five years, during which time his mother struggled financially. Fortunately, M. Martegoutte came back at the end of the war.

When we first arrived in Le Got, as Manuela remembers, we lived in a very small space downstairs, made up of a kitchen with running water and a single bedroom. We later moved upstairs, where there were two bedrooms but no running water. Manuela and I slept in a double bed in the middle of one room; my parents had the other. I remember that there was a fireplace in our bedroom, which we never used. Maybe it didn't work.

There was no working toilet anywhere in the house – there was one toilet that had probably worked before the war. There was an outhouse, dirty and smelly, with a hole in the ground that Manuela once almost fell into, a frightening episode for her. So instead of the outhouse, we used a pail inside the house, in the small room with the toilet. My father took the pail to the outhouse to empty it every day. Because there was no toilet paper, my father cut old newspapers into little squares. After a while there were no more newspapers, and we used leaves from vines growing on the outside walls of the house.[3] Though our family had never lived in such primitive conditions, they weren't uncommon; many older apartment houses in Paris, mostly in poor neighborhoods, had toilets consisting of a hole in the ground on the landing of each floor. The situation in Le Got was shocking to us at first, but we got used to it.

---

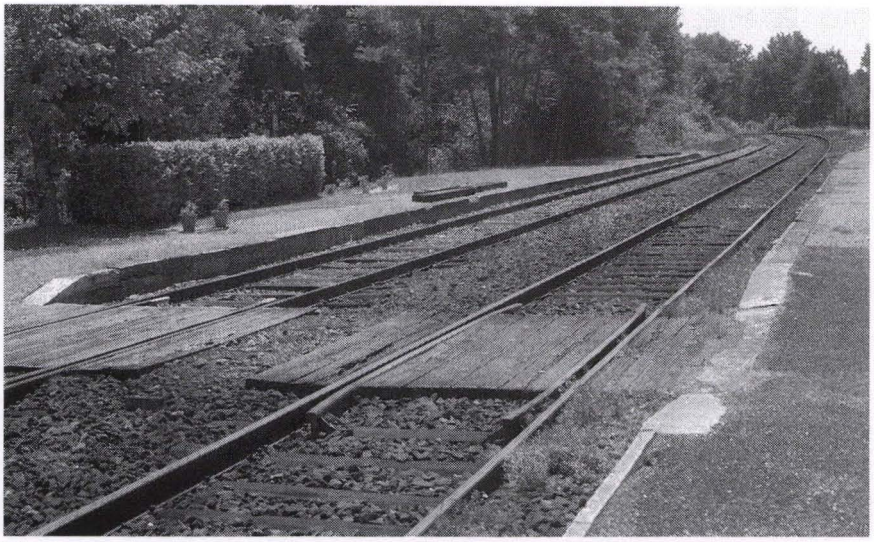
[3] Manuela or I wrote, in my brother's baby journal, about newspaper in the bathroom. After the war, back in Paris, toilet paper was available, but too expensive; we bought it for guests only, especially for our American cousins, Erna and Jacques Spruyt, who visited in 1947. My little brother Franklin, at age four, thought it quite wonderful to see real toilet paper, and he excitedly showed it to our cousins. My parents reprimanded him for showing the paper, and he answered, "*Mais il est propre*!" ("But it is clean!").



The house in Le Got; we lived upstairs in the two rooms on the right. This photo was taken years later, but the house had not changed since we lived there. Photographed by Jessica, 1994.

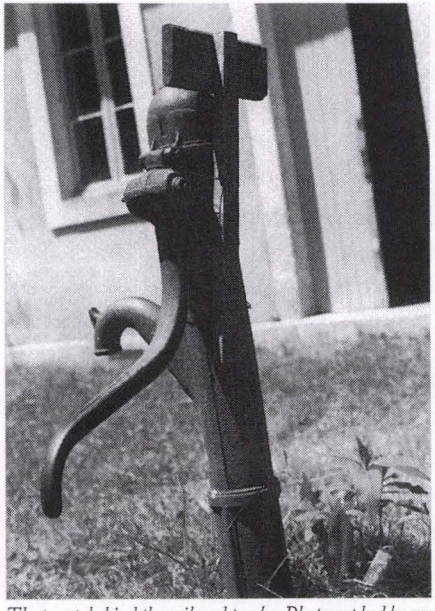
I remember one day when a man got off the train in Le Got and saw my sister and me playing in front of our house. He asked us if the hotel had rooms for rent. We girls thought it so funny to think that the house where we lived was a hotel! I have a vague recollection of the day in the village when we received our suitcases and packages, and the excitement of rediscovering our bicycles, dolls, and clothes. My father received his typewriter and my mother her sewing machine. Mme. Deneux, our upstairs neighbor in Paris, must have sent the packages. Though the mail was still working, it was dangerous to tell people our address because we had fled Paris illegally. In our 1997 interview with Mme. Lamouroux, our neighbor in Le Got, she mentioned that she would receive mail addressed to her, and inside the envelope would be another envelope addressed to us. I suppose that our packages were sent either to the neighbors or to *Poste Restante* (P.O. Box), *Le Got, Dordogne.*

Manuela and I had to fetch water at the pump located across the railroad tracks; I was scared to cross the tracks even though very few trains ran through the village, perhaps two a day. After some time there was only one working track; Mme. Lamouroux, the wife of a local farmer, told us in 1997 that it was used mostly by German convoys. Trains continued to pass through the village until the *résistants* blew up nearby bridges later in the war.



The railroad tracks that we had to cross to get to the water pump. Photographed by Jessica, 1994.

There was a little yard around our house, enclosed by a stone wall and a low metal fence. At the bottom of the yard lived a group of *"romanichels"* or *"gitans"* (gypsies). They kept chickens around their *roulettes* (trailers). I stayed away from the area where they were camped; I found them somewhat scary. We heard rumors – without any proof – that they stole chickens from the local farmers.[4] I never saw gypsy children at school in Mazeyrolles. After a while, the group left town.



The pump behind the railroad tracks. Photographed by my son Daniel, 1976.

My mother was busy most of the day, trying to feed us by cooking what was available – mostly bread made from chestnuts, mashed mixed vegetables, and even a sort of cake, also made from chestnuts. She also did laundry and mended clothes, all under the most miserable conditions. She heated water on top of an ancient stove. My sister and I used a bellows and blew air through a little door in the front of

[4] Gypsies who lived in France were deported and murdered by the Germans. In total, about 500,000 gypsies from German-occupied countries were murdered.

the stove to make the wood burn faster. My mother also cut wood with a hatchet; she told the neighbors she had to be careful of her fingers because she was a pianist and wanted to play the piano again when the war was over.

I remember taking a bath in a tin tub once a week; everyone in the family used the same water, one after the other. My mother learned to make soap from caustic soda and fat, using a recipe that the farmers' wives gave her. She cooked the thick black mixture on the wood stove, then poured it into a square baking tin to cool. When it was cold enough, she sliced the solid mass into squares.

We kept rabbits in cages in the yard on the side of the house – as food, not pets. Manuela and I picked dandelions for them to eat; when there were no more dandelions, we picked acacia leaves. But the leaves did not agree with the rabbits, and their stomachs became swollen. My father killed them one after the other; I am not sure if my mother or my father skinned them. I remember thinking that a rabbit without its fur looked very skinny. We also kept a chicken that produced an egg once in a while. We ate that egg each in turn – what a treat! I believe a farmer up the hill gave us eggs also.

Our kitchen window faced the fields, and I enjoyed the view. One day, when a convoy of German troops was passing, I pushed the curtains open to see better. I was curious. My mother yelled not to open the curtains, and to get down on the floor – the Germans could have shot me through the window. Later, many German convoys passed through our village, and after D-day they came through in retreat.

My parents gave Manuela (who was 20 months older than I) the names and addresses of our relatives in the U.S. for use in the event we were orphaned. These included Erna and Jacques Spruyt, my mother's cousin and her husband in New York, and the Gans family, "Oom Jo", "Tante Clara", and their daughters, Ida and Yetty – my father's relatives in California, who had left Holland on the last boat in 1939. I still remember their address: 518 Nevada Avenue, San Mateo, California. Manuela was told to carry those written names and addresses at all times in a small pouch around her neck. As for me, the little sister, my parents just hoped that we would hold hands and that she would take care of me, although we both also had to learn them by heart. To this day, when I travel I carry a small pouch around my neck, with jewelry, money, and important addresses and phone numbers.

There were walnut trees in the area. In November 1942, early in our stay, a distant cousin from Lyon, Arnaud Schick, came for a visit. He picked up from the ground a walnut whose shell had three sides instead of two. The three-sided shell was supposed to bring good luck; he gave it to my mother. To this day I keep that walnut in a silver bowl in my living room.



The three-sided walnut.

Arnaud, then about 18 years old, had taken a train from Lyon to Angoulême, and then changed trains, continuing to Cahors, where his uncle Adolph Schick was staying (perhaps hiding). Arnaud had his bicycle with him on the train, and finished the journey by bicycle. His mother, Margot Schick, was a cousin of my grandmother Sophie Hess. They were from Berlin. Her husband's name was Jules and his brother was named Adolph. They survived the war and eventually moved to Vincennes, next to Saint-Mandé, where we saw them often. Once during the war "Tante Margot" sent Manuela and me presents: two small linen handkerchiefs. We never dared to use them; they were too precious.

While we still had electricity, my parents listened to the BBC broadcasts in French. The leitmotif was the first few measures of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, just the rhythm but not the music of that beautiful piece. Each broadcast was introduced with the phrase *"Les Français parlent aux Français"* ("The French people speaking to the French people"). Years later, my father recounted listening to radio messages from de Gaulle, being comforted by his voice. I am sure these programs gave them courage. The news broadcasts were jammed, partially

obscured by a sound, like grinding coffee in a hand grinder, that made it difficult to understand what was said. I remember the funny sentences we heard over the airwaves: *"There will be bright sunshine tomorrow." "The carrots are cooked." "There are no more sardines." "The weather will be cloudy tomorrow." "The first cut costs 200 francs."*[5] Of course, this was coded information for the *Résistance* fighters.

My father would tell everyone in the village about reports of battles and other events of the war. Once, classical piano music was broadcast, played by Myra Hess. My mother thought she heard the name "Marion Hess", her cousin who had played the piano since childhood and who, with her siblings, had been evacuated from Hamburg to England on the *Kindertransport* (children's transport) in 1938.[6] Marion was about 20 years old in 1942. However, my mother found out after the war that the pianist was not Marion.

At first my parents felt somewhat secure in the village. But two and a half months after our arrival, American troops landed in French North Africa on November 8, 1942. General Dwight Eisenhower was in charge of "Operation Torch", as it was named. Hitler decided to punish the French and the Americans. On November 11, 1942, the anniversary of the WWI armistice, he ordered that all of France be occupied by the Germans. It was coded "Operation Attila" – no more demarcation line and no more free zone. From then on, German soldiers were everywhere. Starting December 11, 1942, Vichy law stated that anyone *"de race juive"* (of the "Jewish race") had to have the word *JUIF* printed on food stamps and official papers. However, wearing of the Jewish star was never enforced in the formerly free zone.

Suddenly, it became extremely dangerous for Jews throughout what had been the free zone, as well as for those in French colonies occupied by the Germans. Jews in the colonies lost their French citizenship. My mother wrote in our journals that she was constantly afraid that our father would be taken by the militia, the French police, or the Gestapo.

Most of the time, Manuela and I led an ordinary life. The summer fields around Le Got were covered with blue cornflowers, white daisies, and red poppies; I remember saying that it was so pretty: blue, white, and red like the French flag. Wisteria and *boules de neige* (snowball flowers) grew along the paths. In the woods,

---

[5] A very famous code sentence that Elsa Triolet, a Russian Jewish writer and wife of Louis Aragon, used as the title of her book Le Premier Accroc Coûte Deux Cent Francs, which she wrote while in hiding. The book, published after Paris was liberated, won the prestigious *Prix Goncourt* in November 1944, the first prize after liberation. Perhaps the prize jury was moved by the opportunity to honor a Jew who had been saved by anti-Vichy *Résistance* fighters.

[6] Fox, Anne L. & Abraham-Podietz, Eva. Ten Thousand Children. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1999, pp. 67-71.

we picked wild strawberries and blackberries in the spring and summer. We did not have games or toys, but I remember playing with little pieces of cloth and small boxes. I think we had some colored pencils. I also enjoyed visiting our downstairs neighbor, helping her clean up, and I would reorganize her sewing box. Once, we even went to a gathering of children in the village to see a movie starring Charlie Chaplin. There were only bits and pieces of the film, but to us it was fun and new. We had enough to eat, we made friends, and we played with each other.

Manuela and I attended school in Mazeyrolles, district seat for the villages of Fontenilles, Aigueparses, La Trappe,[7] and Le Got. We had to wait a while before we could attend school, as we had outgrown our shoes and it took some time to obtain *sabots* (wooden shoes), the only footwear available, which we wore with felt socks. I don't remember complaining about wearing them. It took my sister and me close to an hour to walk the four kilometers to school. Just before we reached Mazeyrolles there was a big hill, which was very hard for our small legs.

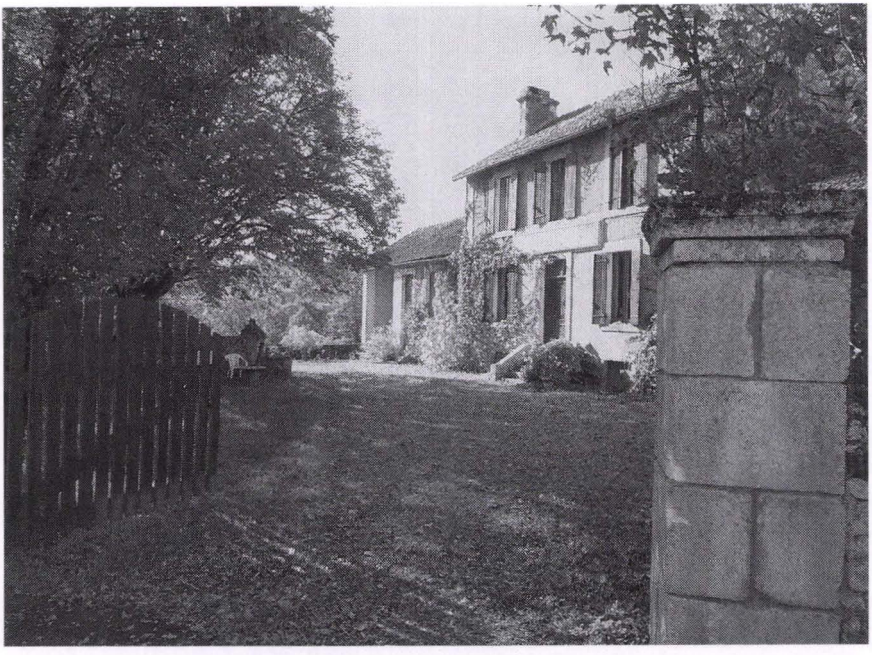
One day, I saw a snake lying across the path on our way to school, and I stopped in my tracks, terribly frightened. Finally, summoning my courage, I went around the snake and joined the other children. In school there was very little paper, so we used a slate and chalk. There were two classrooms; Jeanne Lalbat taught the young children and her husband Henri Lalbat taught the older children.[8] When we first began attending school, the other students commented on our Parisian accents and good education.

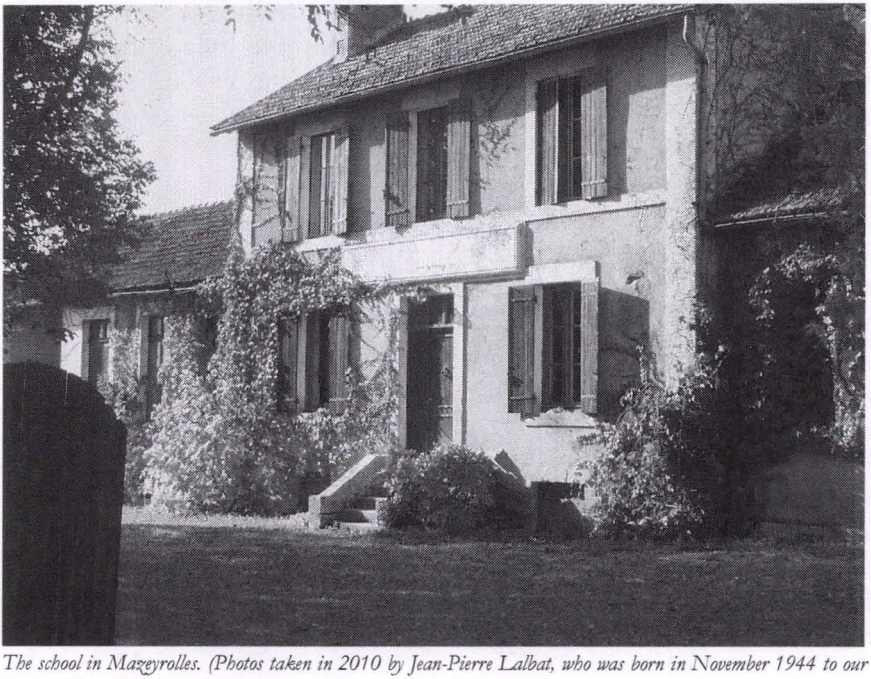
At the beginning of each school day, M. Lalbat raised the French flag. Instead of the *"Marseillaise"*, which was banned, we were required by law to sing the new anthem: *"Maréchal, nous voilà..."* ("Marshal, here we are..."). The country's motto was also changed from *"Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité"* ("Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", dating from the French Revolution of 1789) to *"Travail, Famille, Patrie"* ("Work, Family, Homeland"). This motto was posted on all public buildings. Although the flag retained its blue, white, and red stripes, they had been overlaid with a two-headed hatchet called *"la Francisque gallique,"* an ancient war symbol of the Francs and Germans. This flag with the hatchet symbol was adopted by Field Marshal Pétain, a 94-year-old World War I hero widely considered the only statesman in the Vichy zone who could save France. Hitler accepted Pétain as head of Vichy France; the new flag was said to symbolize sacrifice and courage, to remind an

---

[7] La Trappe is sometimes spelled Latrape.

[8] Manuela's friend Simone Malvy recalled, in 1997, that Manuela was very good at grammar and always knew how to distinguish between past participles and infinitives. According to Simone, Manuela was an excellent student, very advanced. Also, Simone was surprised at Manuela's name; she had never met any one called Manuela. My name, Jacqueline, on the other hand, was typically French.





The school in Mazeyrolles. (Photos taken in 2010 by Jean-Pierre Lalbat, who was born in November 1944 to our teachers M. and Mme. Lalbat.)

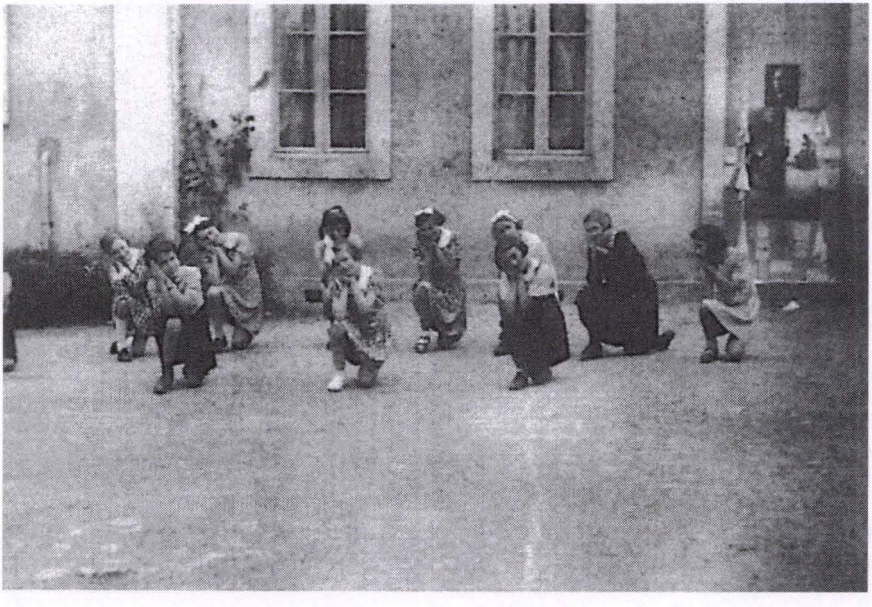


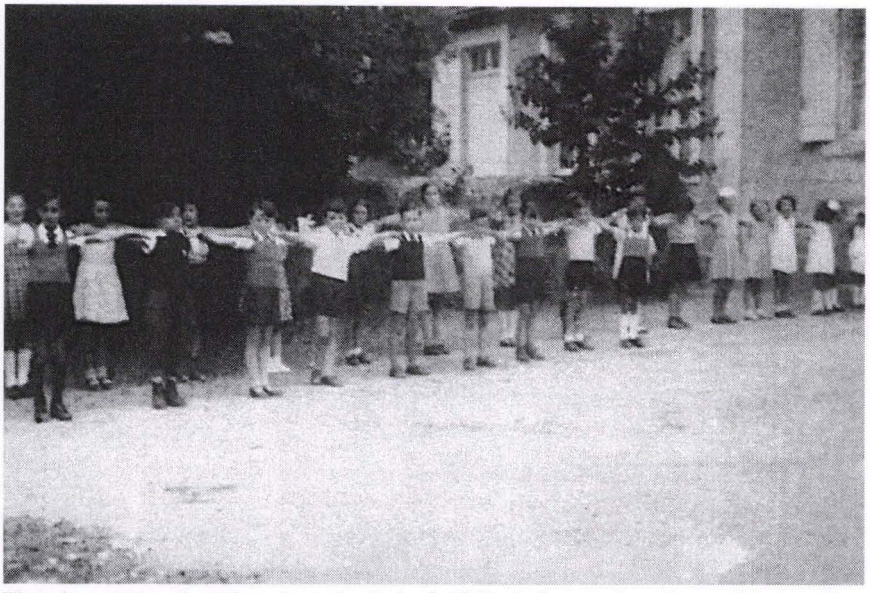
The school in Mazeyrolles, and its outhouse on the left. (Photo taken in 2010 by Jean-Pierre Lalbat.)



The wall outside the schoolyard. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.







Three photos of Manuela and Jacqueline in the schoolyard with friends, doing exercises as instructed by their teachers.

unhappy France that it was being reborn from its ashes. In a famous speech in 1940, Pétain declared that he was giving himself to France.[9] There was a framed photo of him in every classroom, including ours.

During recess, we would go into the yard to play, but first we had to help the teachers clear their potato patch of *doryphores* (potato bugs) – also a pejorative word for Germans. There was an outhouse (containing a long wooden board with several holes) on one side of the schoolyard; there was no running water inside the school.

Like most children in the school, Manuela and I ate lunch at the home of Mme. Conchou, a kind woman who lived behind the school. My parents paid her for the meal. One day, the meal consisted of *rillettes* (pâté of minced pork), which was full of worms. My sister and I refused to eat it; from then on, though we continued to eat at Mme. Conchou's home, my mother prepared our lunch,

---

[9] Speech by Pétain, broadcast June 17, 1940: "*Français! A l'appel de Monsieur le Président de la République, j'assume à partir d'aujourd'hui la direction du gouvernement de la France. Sûr de l'affection de notre admirable armée qui lutte, avec un héroïsme digne de ses longues traditions militaires, contre un ennemi supérieur en nombre et en armes. Sûr que par sa magnifique résistance, elle a rempli nos devoirs vis-à-vis de nos alliés. Sûr de l'appui des Anciens Combattants que j'ai eu la fierté de commander, sûr de la confiance du peuple tout entier,* ***je fais à la France le don de ma personne pour atténuer son malheur.*** *En ces heures douloureuses, je pense aux malheureux réfugiés qui, dans un dénuement extrême, sillonnent nos routes. Je leur exprime ma compassion et ma sollicitude. C'est le coeur serré que je vous dis aujourd'hui qu'il faut cesser le combat. Je me suis adressé cette nuit à l'adversaire pour lui demander s'il est prêt a rechercher avec nous, entre soldats, après la lutte et dans l'Honneur, les moyens de mettre un terme aux hostilités. Que tous les Français se groupent autour du Gouvernement que je préside pendant ces dures épreuves et fassent taire leur angoisse pour n'écouter que leur foi dans le destin de la Patrie.*"

mostly chestnuts and bread that we carried in a gamelle, a tin lunchbox with compartments for a main course and dessert.

We walked to and from school with the other children, though a few times a week they attended *le catéchisme* (religion classes) with the priest in Mazeyrolles. We probably waited for them so as not to walk home alone. In the spring of 1944, Mme. Lalbat, the teacher for the younger children, became pregnant and stopped teaching. All of us went to M. Lalbat's class; I was so proud to be in the same class with my big sister and the older children. But that did not last long – M. Lalbat was a member of the *Résistance*; later that year he joined his comrades in arms. From then on there were no teachers and no more school.[10] (M. Lalbat survived the war, returning to the village after Dordogne and the Southwest were liberated. When we left Le Got in November 1944, he was among the villagers who saw us off at the train station.)

Manuela and I occasionally visited our friend Roberte Marescassier at the farm where she lived. We had to walk through fields to get to the farm and several white geese would run after us, squawking and squealing loudly. We were terribly scared, certain they would bite us. At the farm, I remember the pigs in their sty; they were filthy, noisy, and smelly. The cows stayed in sheds at night, sleeping in their manure; they were also very dirty.

In the fall, we joined the whole village to help with the *vendanges* (grape picking) at the Sadouillette family's vineyard. It was fun; we gathered the grapes in big baskets. Once harvested, we poured the grapes into barrels, and then the farmers took off their boots and jumped into the barrels to crush the grapes. After we finished working, we joined everyone at a long outdoor table and ate a meal with the farmers. My mother was very thirsty, so the farmer poured her a glass of something that looked like water. My mother swallowed it rapidly and started to cough; it burned her throat – it was some sort of homemade brandy or *eau-de-vie*.

Once, when I was not happy with one thing or another, I used a swear word I had heard other children use: *"merde"* ("shit"). My mother was very angry with me; she made me stand in the corner of our room, facing the wall, for the rest of the day. Despite her major worries about our survival, she wanted to give us a proper education. In Paris, we used to curtsy when introduced to grownups, but

[10] In October 2011, I met the son of the Lalbats, Jean-Pierre and his wife Ginette, when they took a trip to New York. He was born in November 1944, approximately one year after my brother. It was an incredible encounter facilitated by the journalist Pierre Fabre, a school friend of Jean-Pierre who remembered that the Lalbats had lived in Mazeyrolles and worked there as teachers. There was a ceremony on June 27, 2010 to honor the village of Mazeyrolles that had saved Jewish families in WWII. I had written to the mayor to tell him that the Mendels family had been saved by the people of the village. Pierre Fabre reported the event in the newspaper *Sud-Ouest*. He gave my email address to Jean-Pierre and we started to correspond.

she told us not to do that in Le Got. The former neighbors, the Garrigues, whom we interviewed in 1997, remembered Manuela and me as proper, polite, and well dressed – *"bien élevées"* ("nice little girls").

As we outgrew our clothes, my mother worked wonders to keep us clothed. She altered some of her own garments to fit us. A traveling salesman came to the village a few times, selling thread and fabric (among other things); my mother must have bought a few items from him. I think he was Jewish. I don't know if he survived.

My parents' frugality enabled us to maintain basic necessities. My mother saved every bit of yellow basting thread, winding it back on the spool to use later. My father saved every paper, every envelope, every piece of string—any item he might reuse. My parents kept this habit all their lives. I seem to have inherited the habit of saving thread, wrapping, and string from packages; my sister and my children are also very thrifty.

My father had been a smoker since he was a young man. Although cigarettes were scarce and costly during the war, tobacco was cultivated in Dordogne. He brought home tobacco leaves to dry, then rolled them tightly in cigarette paper he bought from the general store to smoke. His beautiful hands were black from the tobacco leaves, and from the chestnuts he peeled at the kitchen table.[11]

The farmers in our village were poor, hardworking, and honest. They seemed to like us and, most important, they remained silent about our presence as refugees in their village. When I hear the expression "the goodwill of neighbors," I think of them.[12] I am not sure that they knew what being Jewish meant in the grand scheme, though they knew we were Jewish, although we were nonpracticing. Religious Jews would have attracted more attention for their customs, dietary restrictions, etc.; we ate whatever was available, including pork. The villagers knew how frightened my parents were. Years later they said that, though they were frightened by the events of the war, they realized that my parents' fright was worse; there were collaborators and militia all around. When we spoke with her in 1997, Mme. Vigié (a local farmer's wife who was so kind with us during the war) said that she and her husband could not trust anyone; they never knew who might denounce them for helping us. My friend from school, Jeannot (Jean) Martegoutte, also told me in 1997 that as a child, he knew we were Jewish. Did I tell him or did his mother? I do not know.

---

[11] After the war, my father became very ill from a stomach ulcer. The surgeon had to cut out most of his stomach, though fortunately it was not cancerous – one of many miracles in our family. My father survived, though he was on a dairy diet for a year after that operation, while his stomach healed.

[12] Zuccotti, Susan. The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, pp. 244-246.

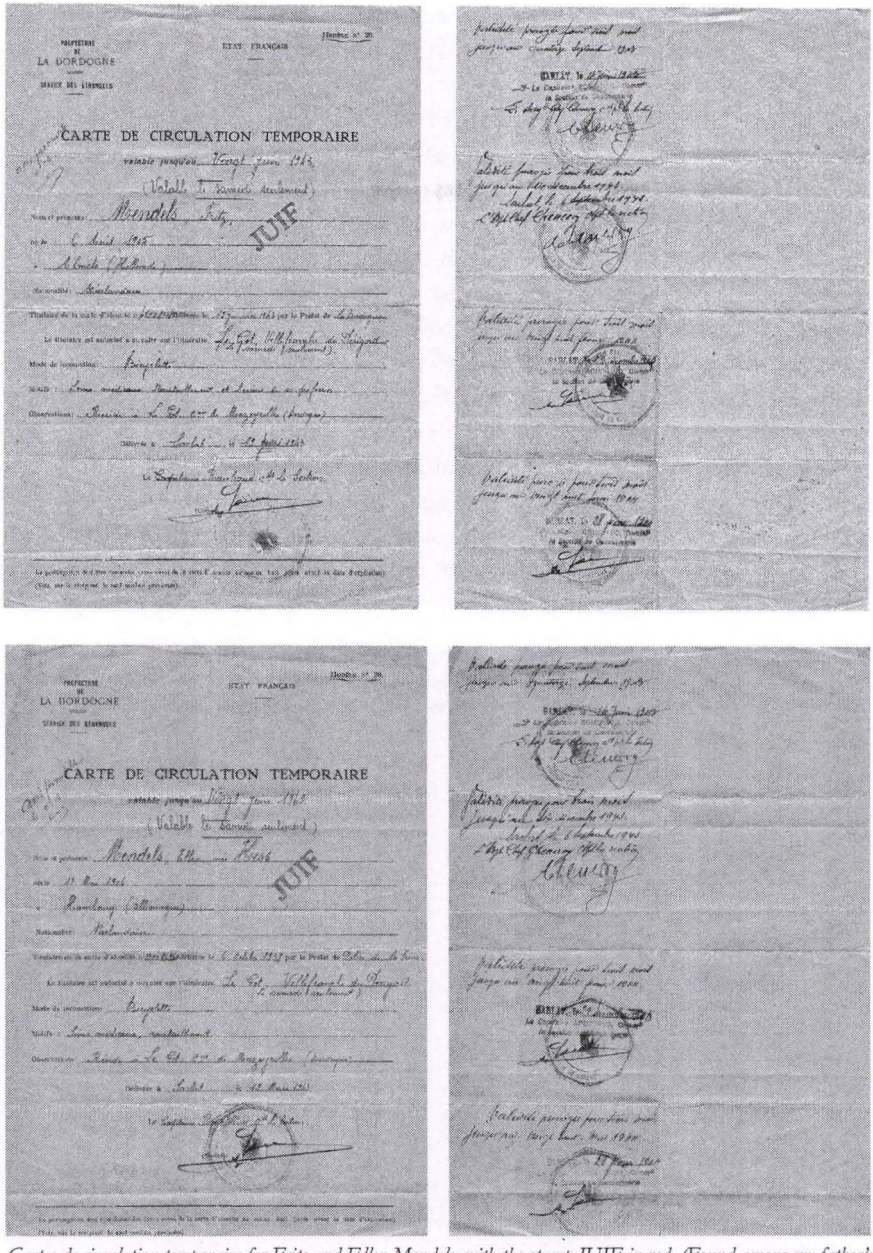
How did my parents manage financially? They had to pay the rent and buy food. They have received money from Lyon, where my father had declared he had money with a friend. Some local farmers would give us eggs and produce from their fields. The farmer for whom my father worked gave him food in exchange for work. And each month my father's associate M. Cervini sent us half of the money earned by his business. All of this sustained us.

Our landlords' friend Paul Delpech, the mayor of Mazeyrolles, supervised Le Got and several other villages in the same district. He had been the mayor since 1936; though he received no salary, his farm gave him a small income and food. In 1940, he was called to serve in the French army. After the armistice, he was released and could go back to his administrative duties. M. Delpech's position as mayor entitled him to have a radio, which probably helped him in his work in the *Résistance*. M. Delpech was a strong *Républicain*, meaning a man of the left, and he supported the *Résistance* in all its forms. This man, a wonderful human being and a very shy and modest person, risked his life many times for us. We don't know if he ever accepted any reward. He died in 1967 at the age of 67.



Photo of Paul Delpech from the 1930s, given to us in 1997 by his son Pierre.

In January 1943, M. Delpech requested *cartes de circulation temporaire* (temporary travel papers) in my parents' names; these allowed Jews to travel locally for three months. The documents were issued March 19, 1943, and then renewed every three months until May 28, 1944. These papers allowed us to go to a doctor or dentist in the next town, Villefranche-du-Périgord. We were only allowed to go on Saturdays, on foot or by bicycle; if we were sick in the middle of the week, we had to wait. The permits also allowed us to buy food, especially meat. Saturday was


PRÉFECTURE DE LA DORDOGNE

SERVICE DES ÉTRANGERS

ÉTAT FRANÇAIS

CARTE DE CIRCULATION TEMPORAIRE

JUIF

PRÉFECTURE DE LA DORDOGNE

SERVICE DES ÉTRANGERS

ÉTAT FRANÇAIS

CARTE DE CIRCULATION TEMPORAIRE

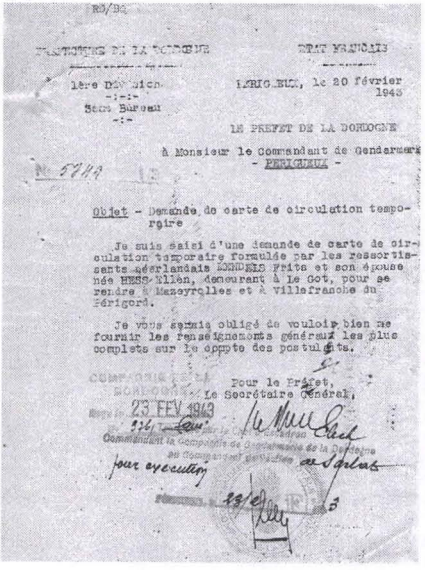
JUIF

Cartes de circulation temporaire for Frits and Ellen Mendels, with the stamp JUIF in red. (Found among my father's belongings after his death in 1992.)

market day in that town. The permits became worn and creased, proof that my parents carried and used them frequently.

We had been in Le Got since September 1942, and M. Delpech wrote the request in January 1943. Getting the permits was certainly an administrative hassle, but perhaps he hesitated to make the request right away because he knew they would carry the stamp *JUIF*. The local historian in Périgueux, Bernard Reviriego, found a letter in the archives of Dordogne in my father's handwriting, signed by the mayor, noting that there was no response to a first request. The correspondence continued through many letters, one from *gendarme* Veyssy, who explained that *"les Juifs étrangers Mendels*, (the foreign Jews) *Frits et sa femme née Hess, Ellen"* were not working and not creating any disturbance. The correspondence went to the *préfet* of Dordogne, the highest authority in the regional département; *préfets* reported to the government in Vichy and followed all its antisemitic laws. Some *préfets* were against these laws and, like good people at that time, tried to quietly help Jews and the *Résistance*. Others denounced Jews, who were then rounded up and sent to internment or concentration camps.

The following 9 images represent correspondence between Paul Delpech and the brigade of Villefranche du Périgord, to the attention of the préfet of Dordogne, requesting cartes de circulation temporaire to be used once a week on Saturdays. Collection des Archives Départementales de la Dordogne #42W42/1.



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Liberté Égalité Fraternité

1ère Division
Bureau

PÉRIGUEUX, le 20 février 1943

LE PREFET DE LA DORDOGNE

à Monsieur le Commandant de Gendarmerie
- PERIGUEUX -

Objet - Demande de carte de circulation temporaire

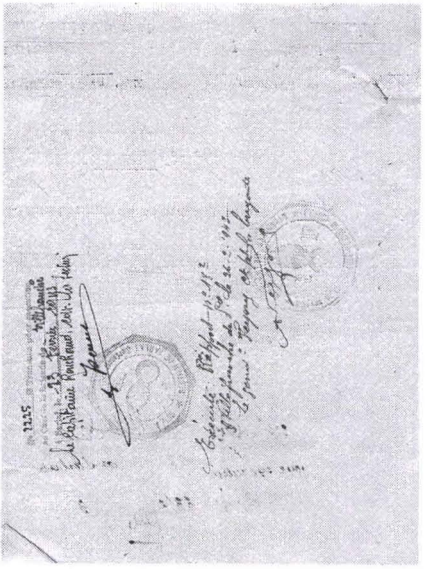
Je suis saisi d'une demande de carte de circulation temporaire formulée par les ressortissants néerlandais MENDELS Frits et son épouse née HESS Ellen, demeurant à Le Got, pour se rendre à Maneyrolles et à Villefranche du Périgord.

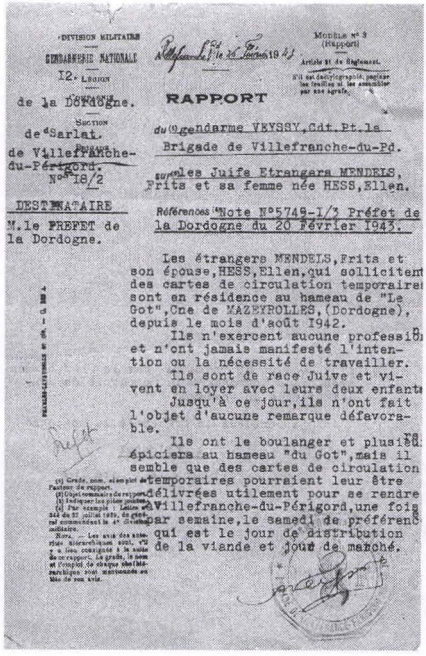
Je vous serais obligé de vouloir bien me fournir les renseignements généraux les plus complets sur le bien-fondé des postulants.

Pour le Préfet,
Le Secrétaire Général,

23 FEV 1943

pour exécution





DIVISION MILITAIRE
GENDARMERIE NATIONALE
12e Légion
de la Dordogne.
Section
de Sarlat.
de Villefranche-du-Périgord.
N° 18/2

Modèle n° 3 (Rapport)
Article 81 du Règlement.

Périgueux le 2 Mars 1943

RAPPORT

du Gendarme VEYSSY, Cdt. Pt. la Brigade de Villefranche-du-Pd.

sur les Juifs Etrangers MENDELS, Frits et sa femme née HESS, Ellen.

DESTINATAIRE
M. le PREFET de la Dordogne.

Références "Note N°5749-1/3 Préfet de la Dordogne du 20 Février 1943.

Les étrangers MENDELS, Frits et son épouse, HESS, Ellen, qui sollicitent des cartes de circulation temporaires sont en résidence au hameau de "Le Got", Cne de MAZEYROLLES, (Dordogne), depuis le mois d'août 1942.

Ils n'exercent aucune profession et n'ont jamais manifesté l'intention ou la nécessité de travailler.

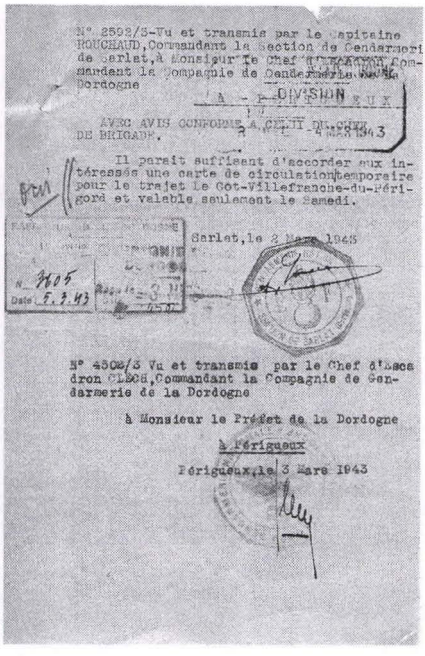
Ils sont de race Juive et vivent en loyer avec leurs deux enfants.

Jusqu'à ce jour, ils n'ont fait l'objet d'aucune remarque défavorable.

Ils ont le boulanger et plusieurs épiciers au hameau "du Got", mais il semble que des cartes de circulation temporaires pourraient leur être délivrées utilement pour se rendre à Villefranche-du-Périgord, une fois par semaine, le samedi de préférence qui est le jour de distribution de la viande et jour de marché.

(1) Grade, nom, et prénoms. Fonction du rapporteur.
(2) Objet sommaire du rapport.
(3) Indiquer les pièces jointes.
(4) Par exemple : Délai de 24 ou 27 jours, etc. Ce délai est accordé à titre de simple indication.

Nota. — Les avis des autorités hiérarchiques sont, s'il y a lieu, consignés à la suite du rapport. Le grade, le nom et l'emploi de chaque autorité hiérarchique sont mentionnés en tête de son avis.



N° 2592/3-Vu et transmis par le Capitaine MONCHAUD, Commandant la Section de Gendarmerie de Sarlat, à Monsieur le Chef d'Escadron Commandant la Compagnie de Gendarmerie de la Dordogne

A - P - DIVISION
AVEC AVIS CONFORME A CELUI DU CHEF DE BRIGADE.
4 MARS 1943

Il paraît suffisant d'accorder aux intéressés une carte de circulation temporaire pour le trajet Le Got-Villefranche-du-Périgord et valable seulement le Samedi.

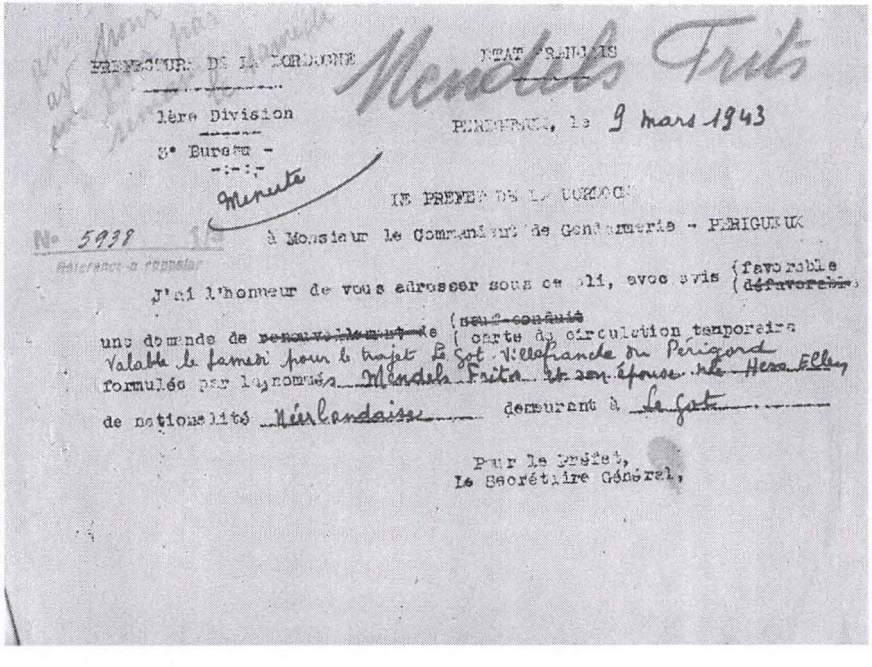
Sarlat, le 3 Mars 1943

N° 4505
Date 5.3.43

N° 4502/3 Vu et transmis par le Chef d'Escadron CLEOD, Commandant la Compagnie de Gendarmerie de la Dordogne

à Monsieur le Préfet de la Dordogne
à Périgueux

Périgueux, le 3 Mars 1943



PREFECTURE DE LA DORDOGNE

1ère Division
3e Bureau
N° 5938

ETAT FRANÇAIS

Mendels Frits

PERIGUEUX, le 9 mars 1943

LE PREFET DE LA DORDOGNE

à Monsieur le Commandant de Gendarmerie - PERIGUEUX

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser sous ce pli, avec avis {favorable / défavorable}

une demande de ~~renouvellement de~~ {~~neuf conduit~~ / carte de circulation temporaire}

Valable le samedi pour le trajet Le Got Villefranche du Périgord

formulée par le nommé Mendels Frits et son épouse née Hess Ellen

de nationalité Néerlandaise demeurant à Le Got

Pour le Préfet,
Le Secrétaire Général,

Mairie de Mazeyrolles (Dordogne)

Le Maire de Mazeyrolles à Monsieur le Préfet de la Dordogne — 17 mars

Le 23 janvier 1943 deux habitants de ma commune, Mr et Mme Mercadel ont fait une demande de sauf-conduit temporaire à Mr le Préfet du dépt. pour se rendre de Mazeyrolles à Villefranche et retour à seule fin de pouvoir se ravitailler chez le boucher et autres détaillants, pharmacien, soins médicaux etc. etc.

Une quinzaine de jours après cette demande vous m'avez adressé 2 feuilles rouges (modèle N-8-D-2) que j'ai fait remplir par les intéressés et que je vous ai adressées accompagnées des photos demandées.-

Depuis je suis sans vos nouvelles et je me permets de vous demander par la présente si ces personnes vont bientôt recevoir les cartes en question.

Ci jointes je vous remets à toutes fins utiles deux nouvelles formules de demande remplies et signées par les intéressés.

Dans l'attente de vos nouvelles, je vous prie, Monsieur, mes salutations distinguées.-

Le Maire

PREFECTURE DE LA DORDOGNE — ETAT FRANÇAIS

1ère Division
3e Bureau

PERIGUEUX, le 24 MARS 1943

Minute — Mendelo

LE PREFET DE LA DORDOGNE

à Monsieur le Commandant de Gendarmerie - PERIGUEUX

N° 6022 1/3

Référence à rappeler

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser sous ce pli, avec avis {favorable / défavorable}

une demande de renouvellement de {~~sauf-conduit~~ / carte de circulation temporaire}

pour un tour par semaine le samedi

formulée par le nommé Mendelo Frida et Mendelo Schlem

de nationalité Néerlandaise demeurant à Le Gat Issac Mazeyrolles

Pour le Préfet,
Le Secrétaire Général,

PREFECTURE DE LA DORDOGNE — ETAT FRANÇAIS

Mendelo

1ère Division
3e Bureau

Référence à rappeler 1/3

Minute N° 6004

PERIGUEUX, le 24 Mars 1943

LE PREFET DE LA DORDOGNE

à Monsieur le Commandant de Gendarmerie - PERIGUEUX -

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser sous ce pli, avec avis {favorable / défavorable}

une demande de renouvellement de {~~sauf-conduit~~ / carte de circulation temporaire}

formulée par le nommé Mendelo Frida

de nationalité : Néerlandaise demeurant à Le Gat issac de Mazeyrolles

Refusé

Pour le Préfet,
Le Secrétaire Général,

My parents were not allowed to travel to the town of Sarlat, the location of Dordogne's headquarters for Jewish affairs. Every three months, the mayor bicycled the 60 kilometers (35 miles) uphill to Sarlat, where the permits were renewed, stamped with the proper seal, and dated and signed by the town's *gendarme* (chief of police), M. Rouchaud. The chief secretary of the assistant to the *préfet* said, *"Pour vous, M. Delpech, n'importe quoi."* ("For you M. Delpech, we will do anything.")

In 1998 my daughter Anne-Emanuelle wrote to *Général* Guy Rouchaud, *Capitaine* Rouchaud's son. She found out that the *Capitaine* was a very courageous man[13] who secretly served in the *Résistance* while working as a civil servant for the Vichy government.[14]

M. Delpech also gave my parents false ID cards, which he signed and issued on June 20, 1943. My parents were given the names Jean and Hélène Pascaud, after two French citizens who had died in the *Résistance*. The dates of birth were my parents' real birth dates and the photos were of my parents. They kept the cards in the secret drawer of a console in the hallway of our small apartment. It is possible that my parents never used them; they look pristine, and my mother did not even sign hers. Manuela and I did not have any ID cards.

M. Delpech's son Pierre remembers many false ID cards on his father's desk – a sign that he was helping other refugees, as well as people in the *Résistance* who needed new identities.[15]

The mayor was also in charge of distributing *cartes de rationnement* (food tickets) to the local population; he was able to give us a few each month. The food tickets for us had to be stamped *JUIF*. They enabled my parents to buy bread, flour, sugar, and other goods in the village general store. Sometimes the *maquisards*[16] came to the mayor's office and took all the food tickets for themselves. Though the authorities in Ribérac and Périgueux knew about this, they supported the movement, and so they looked the other way and simply issued more tickets for

---

[13] Letter from *Général* Rouchaud, October 2, 1997, saying that his father was profoundly patriotic and did not hesitate to take risks. *Capitaine* Rouchaud is quoted in:
Restany, Joseph. Une entreprise clandestine sous l'occupation allemande. Editions Charles Lavanzalle, 1948.
and
Fédération nationale des transports routiers (France). Opération souvenance: des routiers dans la bataille de la résistance. Paris: Société d'éditions et d'équipements du Transport Routier, 1982.

[14] Pontaut, Jean-Marie & Pelletier, Eric. Chronique d'une France Occupée: Les Rapports Confidentiels de la Gendarmerie, 1940–1945. Neuilly-sur-Seine: Editions Michel Lafont, 2008.
This book describes good deeds done by members of the *gendarmerie*.

[15] Interview: Pierre Delpech and Paulette Gascou, children of Mayor Delpech, 1997. (DVD 37)

[16] I have used the word *maquisards* or *résistants*; both words were used in WWII.



False IDs issued to "Jean and Hélène Pascaud". (Found in my father's desk after his death.)

the townspeople.

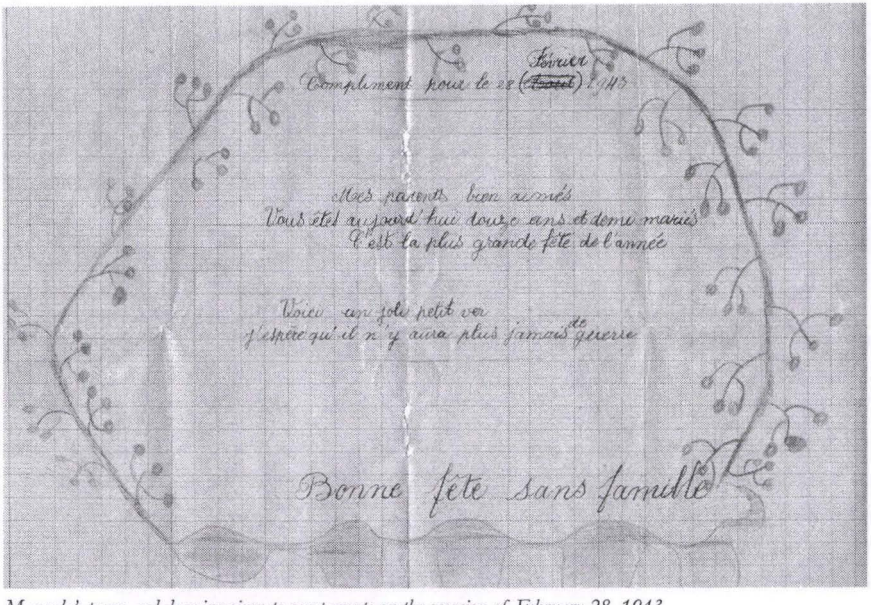
Why did my parents continue to renew their *cartes de circulation temporaire* marked *JUIF*? Were they afraid to use the false IDs? Did the mayor advise them not to use them unless absolutely necessary? Wasn't it dangerous to travel to Villefranche-du-Périgord with papers stamped *JUIF*? The French *gendarmes*, the militia, or the SS could have arrested them at any time.[17] We know that M. Delpech did everything in his power to help us, but he also had to obey the laws of Vichy. The authorities in Périgueux knew where we were, we were "under surveillance," and we could not hide the fact that we were Jewish. Perhaps it was futile to even use the false IDs. The Gestapo could have come any time, any day, to send us to a death camp.

Every Sunday, my parents would lift their glasses and make a toast: *"A dimanche prochain!"* ("Here's to next Sunday!") – an expression of their hope that we would survive one more week. What an ordeal it must have been for my parents to continually think of our possible deaths. I took it all in stride, and thought it very nice of them to lift their glasses and make that wish, not realizing the darker meaning beneath it.

[17] Aloumim. "La législation anti-juive: 1942." [http://www.aloumim.org.il/histoire/legislation-anti-juive.html].

And so it went, for 29 months.

By 1943, with German soldiers all over France, the net was tightening for both Jews and *maquisards*. The Germans gave orders to round up all foreign and French Jews; nobody in our village knew if or when we might be denounced, rounded up, sent to a death camp or shot. Manuela and I could see by now how frightened and worried our parents were. On February 28, 1943, Manuela wrote a poem for our parents to commemorate their 12.5 years of marriage. She wrote that she hoped that there would never be a war again.



Manuela's poem and drawing given to our parents on the occasion of February 28, 1943.

When Italy joined the Allied forces after Mussolini's overthrow, Germany invaded southeast France, which had until then been occupied by Italy. Jews who had felt relatively safe under the benevolent Italians, were no safer than the rest of us.[18]

My father often visited M. Delpech; the two men trusted and confided in each other. The mayor said that my father had a face that inspired confidence. Whenever the Vichy police or the Gestapo arrived, the mayor would warn my father, who would hide in the woods behind our house. (Most of the Jewish men arrested were those registered as receiving a refugee allowance from the Vichy

[18] André Waksman's 2010 documentary "A Pause in the Holocaust" describes how the village of St. Martin Vésubie in the Alps, first occupied by Italian forces, sheltered several thousand Jews until the arrival of German occupation forces in September 1943. Then most of the Jews crossed the Alps into Italy. Those who could not manage the difficult climb stayed in the village and perished.

government. The fact that my father never requested such an allowance may have helped him avoid capture.) On one occasion, the entire village hid in the woods because there was a rumor that the Germans were coming to interrogate everyone.

Once, in the fall of 1943, all five of us had to hide in the woods. We left our house and had dinner at the house of the Lamouroux family, a farm family with many children. They were goodhearted though very poor. I remember before dinner, seeing Mme. Lamouroux make the sign of the cross over a loaf of bread, then turn the bread over and slice it. I remember that she stacked the dirty dishes from floor to ceiling in a corner cupboard until there were no more dishes left, and only then did she and the girls wash them. I had never seen anything like that.

Late that evening we went to hide in the woods, pushing my baby brother in the old Lamouroux baby carriage. We slept in a chicken coop, on fern leaves with jute sacks to cover us.[19] We were not cold.

When my father was hiding, my mother would hang a piece of cloth from the window to signal to my father that it was safe to come home. Once, after staying in the woods for a few days, he came home with a beard, which was all white. My father was only 37 years old; I had never seen him like that. It was strange and scary for me to see my father looking so different, so old. During the nights that my father was not at home with us, my sister and I slept with our mother in her bed. I suppose it was comforting for all of us.

Downstairs from us lived a young family, the Garrigues. M. Garrigue had attended school in Périgueux; he then began working at the railroad station in Le Got. One day, the Gestapo and French militia came for him, having heard that like many railroad workers, he was a member of the *Résistance*. They put a pistol against his chin and took him away. Though in truth he knew nothing special about the *Résistance*, he had been denounced by a militiaman from Lyon, who said that M. Garrigue knew the password for a group of men in the *Résistance*. Apparently the whole village thought that the Gestapo cars surrounding the house had come for us. My parents, meanwhile, were upstairs listening to the BBC noon broadcast in French; they knew nothing of what was going on downstairs. If the Gestapo officers had heard the broadcast coming from upstairs, they would have found my parents and taken them away – Manuela and I were not at home, and we would have been orphaned. Another miracle.

---

[19] Manuela's friend Simone Malvy and her mother reminded us of this in 1997.

Fortunately, M. Garrigue was released after 44 days of interrogation. Incredibly, in that whole time he never mentioned the Jewish family hiding upstairs from his apartment.

Downstairs, next to the Garrigues, lived the Belledents. M. Belledent, who owned a sawmill, was selling wood to the Germans in Bordeaux. At first we were told never to talk to them and to stay away from their apartment, though in reality Mme. Belledent was a very nice lady, herself a young refugee from Alsace-Lorraine who had fled in 1940 with the *exode*. She then had stayed in Le Got, gotten married, and spent the rest of her life there.

We eventually became very friendly with the Garrigues, and sometimes my sister and I went downstairs to play with their baby, Annie. There was a door at the back of their apartment that they kept unlocked, with the idea that if the Germans were to come upstairs for my parents, my sister and I could run down and escape through it. We knew this plan, and we were aware of the danger, though we were never scared.



M. and Mme. Garrigue, our neighbors in Le Got. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

The Garrigues accepted my parents' request to take care of us in the event that my parents were caught and deported. My father told them he had buried money for our education at the bottom of the yard. How naïve of my parents to believe that only they, as adults, would have been deported. Little did they know that whole families, including babies and elderly people, were being murdered in the death camps.

During this time, there was danger on all sides. No one in the village trusted anyone else, despite the efforts of the mayor to protect us all. And there were constant denunciations, though we were never denounced. All this time we were the only Jewish refugees in the village. People clearly saw us as different; Manuela and I were seen as more sophisticated and urban than the local children. Only once, though, was I denigrated openly. A girl approached as a friend and I were walking down the road, and threw a terrible insult at me that I will never forget. She said to my friend, "Aren't you ashamed to play with a Jew who is dirty like a pig in a stable?"[20] I ran home crying and told my mother. The girl must have heard some nasty antisemitic remarks at home.

My mother decided, probably while we were still in Paris, that if we were rounded up it would be better for the four of us to die together by poison pills (most likely cyanide pills, as those could be procured from a doctor). Perhaps the news of her mother's suicide in November 1941 triggered the idea. I don't know how she was able to procure the deadly pills – either from our family doctor, Docteur Maufrais, or from the pharmacist in Saint-Mandé. She definitely acquired them before we left Paris; there was no way she could have obtained them in Périgueux or Le Got. Mme. Belledent later told us that my mother (and perhaps my father also) kept the pills at all times hidden in the backs of their shirt or jacket lapels;[21] the daughter-in-law of M. Vigié confirmed this information, which my father had mentioned to her father-in-law. He also told the mayor, M. Delpech. My parents clearly wanted the village to know that the Mendels family would commit suicide if the Germans came and arrested us.

Although I had forgotten this in the intervening years, in 1997 when we returned to Le Got, I found out that I had told my friend Jeannot (Jean) that if the Germans came, my mother would give me a pill to swallow and I would die immediately and never suffer. I was not scared; I took the situation for granted. I remember leaning forward on the low wall outside of the school during *la recreation* (recess), as I told him about this. I knew that the Germans were bad people who wanted to harm us, and I understood that my mother wanted to protect us.[22] My sister Manuela has an almost identical story: when she met a school friend, Simone Malvy, whom she had not seen for 55 years, Simone told Manuela about the pills.
This story proves that my parents were well aware that atrocities were being

---

[20] I remember her exact words in French: "*Tu n'as pas honte de jouer avec des Juifs qui sont sales comme des cochons dans une étable?*"

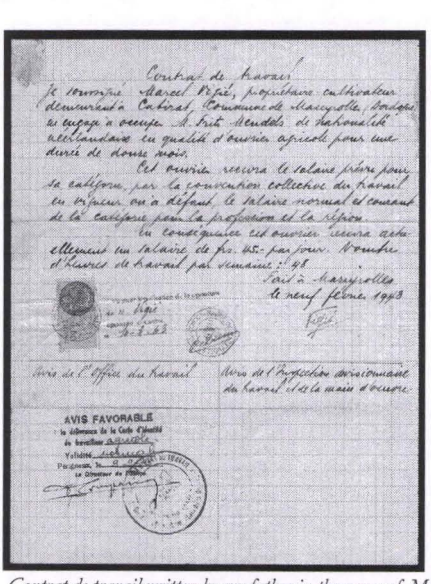
[21] 1997 letter from Mme. Belledent, describing her memories of WWII and of us living upstairs from her.

[22] It was wonderful to see Jeannot (Jean) Martegoutte again after all those years. Now retired, he was for many years the mayor of Villefranche-du-Périgord and *Conseiller Général de Dordogne.*

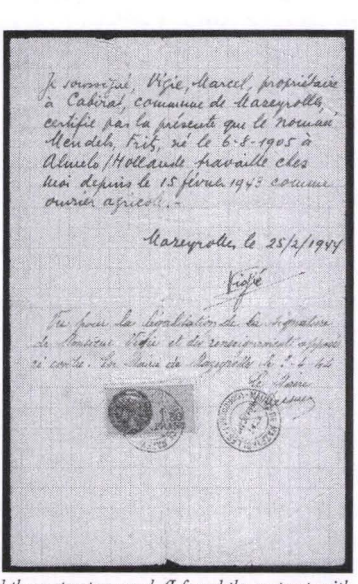
committed against Jews, and they had decided it was better to die by their own hands than to be subjected to that horror. The Garrigues told us that my parents were scared all the time, afraid someone would denounce them. My mother hardly left the house. My parents trusted the Garrigues, but almost no one else.

In early 1943, M. Delpech had introduced my father to Marcel Vigié, a farmer in Cabirat, the village next to Le Got. It was a good idea for my father to be considered a valuable employee, an *ouvrier agricole* (farmhand) who could help with daily tasks. Such a job would, in theory, prevent my father from being forcibly recruited by either the *STO, Service de Travail Obligatoire* (compulsory work service)[23] or the *GTE, Groupe de Travailleurs Étrangers* (an internment camp for foreign workers).

On February 9, 1943, my father wrote a letter on behalf of the farmer, who was illiterate, saying that he needed a farmhand. M. Vigié signed the letter, the signature was notarized, and the letter was sent to Périgueux. The Office of Labor in Périgueux approved the request, authorizing the farmer to hire a farmhand for a period of 12 months. My father was issued an ID card with his new occupation,


Contrat de travail

Avis favorable



Contrat de travail written by my father in the name of M. Vigié, and the contract renewal. (I found the contract, with many other documents, in my father's desk drawer after his death.)

[23] During the German occupation, the *STO* consisted of the deportation of hundreds of thousands of French workers to Nazi Germany for use as forced labor for the German war effort (in industry, farming, railways, etc.). The German government promised that for every three French workers sent over, they would release one French prisoner of war. Those requisitioned under the *STO* were housed in work camps on German soil. This was done with the complicity of the Vichy government – the French forced laborers were the only ones in Europe condemned to this fate by their own country's laws rather than by German order. Nazi Germany set up the *STO* to compensate for its loss of manpower as it enlisted more and more soldiers for the Eastern Front.

"ouvrier agricole." In 1944, the work contract was renewed for another year.

On the ID card, my father wrote his real name, Frits Mendels, rather than the name that appeared on his false ID: Jean Pascaud. I don't know why he risked using his real name and identity as a Jew, which the authorities knew in Périgueux, Sarlat, and Vichy.

My father would officially receive 45 francs per day and worked a 48-hour workweek. In reality, he accepted no money but was paid in kind. He rode his bicycle to work. After a while the tires wore out and he biked on the bare wheels. Finally, his bicycle was taken over by the *maquisards* and he walked, taking back roads to avoid dangerous encounters with collaborators, militia, *gendarmes*, or Germans. My father did not have farmer's clothing, a fact the villagers commented on. He wore his business suit from his days at his office in Paris, covered by a gray cotton smock, and wooden shoes. He left early in the morning and came home after sunset, so he would not be seen.

M. Vigié was a wonderful person, highly trustworthy. My father gave him a tin box containing his gold pocket watch and some of my mother's jewelry. He told my sister and me that the box was buried under the floor of the barn on the side of the farm. My father told M. Vigié that if we were caught, those items would





Mme. Vigié, the wife of the farmer Marcel Vigié, in 1997, holding her wedding photo. Close-up of the wedding photo. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

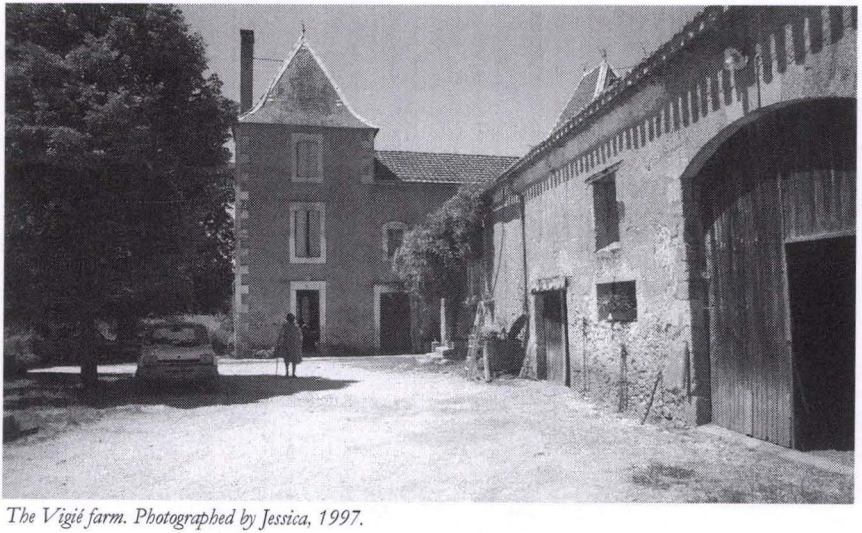
be his to keep.

According to Mme. Vigié, my father spent most of his work hours hiding in the small cellar of a dilapidated house dating from the sixteenth century. The house, in the nearby village of La Trappe, sat in the middle of fields surrounded by woods. His hiding space, concealed by a wooden floorboard, was so small that he could not stand up.

When not hiding, my father helped the farmer – leading horses and cows to the fields, planting potatoes and carrots, picking fruit, cleaning the stables, etc. In exchange for this work, he was able to bring home fruit, vegetables, milk, and eggs. We also ate a lot of chestnuts that we picked up from the ground. I remember my father cutting crosses on the hard skin of the chestnuts with his knife, then peeling away the tough outer skin. My mother would then boil them and my father would remove the thin pink inner skins before we ate them.

My father had no farmhand skills and had to learn everything. Neither he nor my mother knew much about country life. My mother laughed that before coming to Le Got, she knew so little about farming that she thought green beans grew on trees.

I remember that while we were in Le Got, my mother learned to make *clafoutis*, a dessert of milk custard baked with cherries. My father picked the cherries at the Vigié farm. She also learned to make a *mique*, a mixture of flour, oil, and water



The Vigié farm. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

that she boiled to thicken soup. I don't know where she got the oil. My mother boiled milk (which in those days was not pasteurized), then skimmed the cream; by the end of the week, we had enough to make a little ball of butter.

The farmers ate soup regularly. When there was a little soup left, and the plates were still warm, they added wine and drank the mixture, which they called *"faire chabrol"* – a local custom we had never seen before. We also ate rutabagas, *topinambours* (Jerusalem artichokes), and *raves* and *salsifis* (other roots). My mother cooked a wine custard, which years later Mme. Garrigue told us she thought had a strange flavor.

When we fled Paris my mother had taken a bar of chocolate, which she saved for us. But when she finally opened it many months later for some special occasion, the chocolate was full of worms and had to be thrown away. We had so looked forward to eating that chocolate, and we were very sad and disappointed.

We children never went hungry, but my parents... I don't know. Mme. Garrigue said that my parents did not have enough to eat. Eventually, they traded their radio for food and later still, my doll's clothes were traded. I cried when my doll's clothes went to the newborn baby of the farmer.



Old road sign. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.



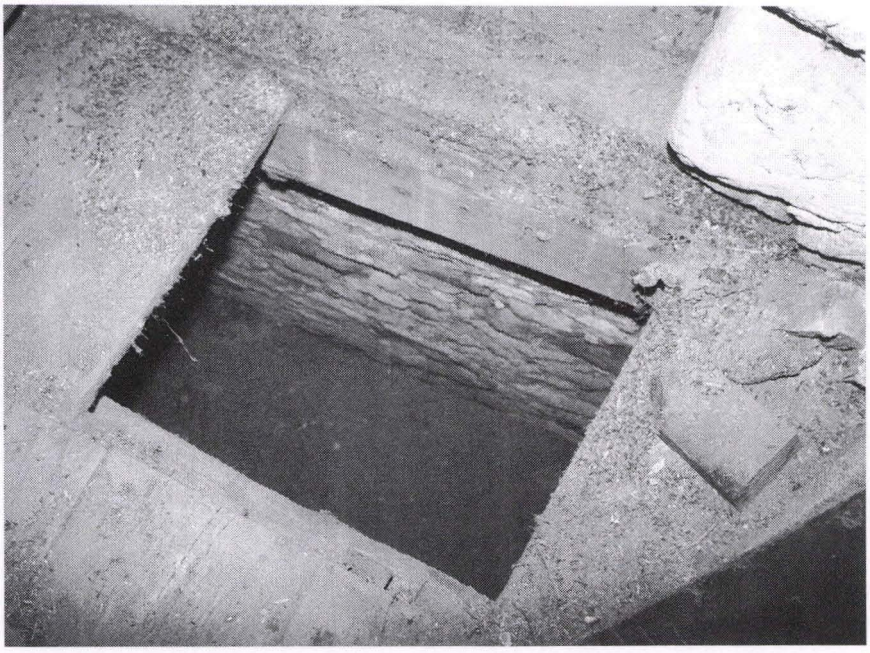
Exterior of the old house in La Trappe where Frits spent time hidden in the cellar. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.



Claude Vigié (son of M. Vigié), inspecting the cellar. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.



The secret entrance to the cellar through the floorboards, and a view inside the cellar. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

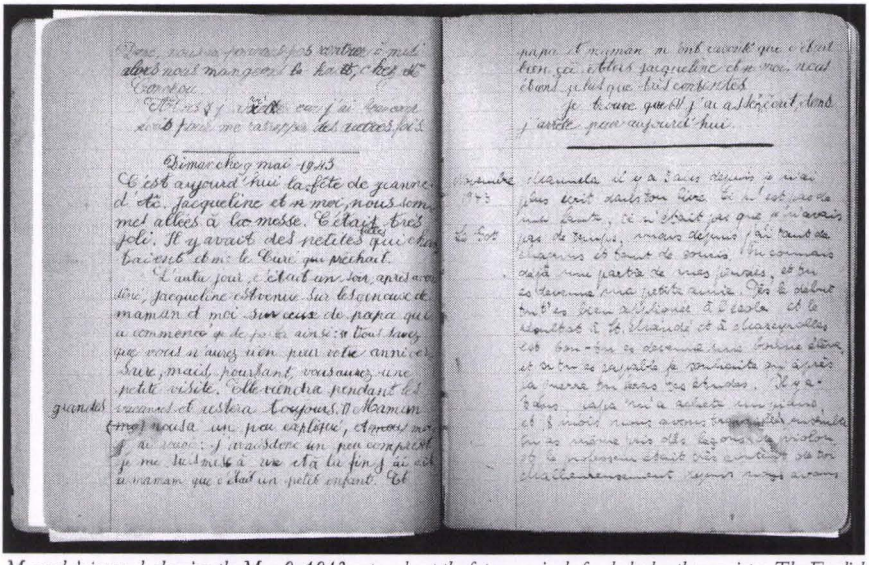


Closeup view of the secret entrance to the cellar through the floorboards. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

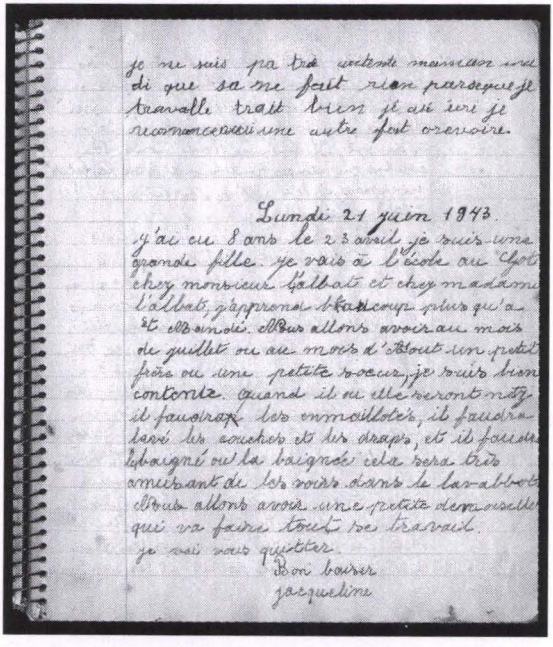
Chapter 7
Franklin's Birth

My sister Manuela wrote in her journal that in May of 1943, as I was sitting on my mother's lap and Manuela on my father's lap, our parents had a story to tell us: "You know that you will receive nothing for your birthday, but you will have a little visit. It will come during summer vacation and will stay forever." Manuela, after a few clarifications from our mother, wrote in her journal that she guessed that it would be a baby, our future brother or sister. We blushed with joy. I wrote in my journal how I would feed and change the baby; I used "he" and "she" with plural verb forms – my grammar could not express exactly how I felt, how I would help my mother, whether we would have a brother or a sister. But I certainly expressed my joy.

> *Sunday May 9, 1943*
> *The other day, in the evening after dinner, Jacqueline sat on Maman's lap and I sat on Papa's lap. He began to say this: "You know that you will receive nothing for your birthday, but you will have a little visit. It will come during summer vacation and will stay forever." Maman explained a little and I blushed: I had understood and I started to laugh and at the end I said to Maman that it was a little baby. And Papa and Maman told me that it was indeed. So Jacqueline and I, we were more than happy.*



Manuela's journal, showing the May 9, 1943 entry about the future arrival of a baby brother or sister. The English translation is on the previous page.

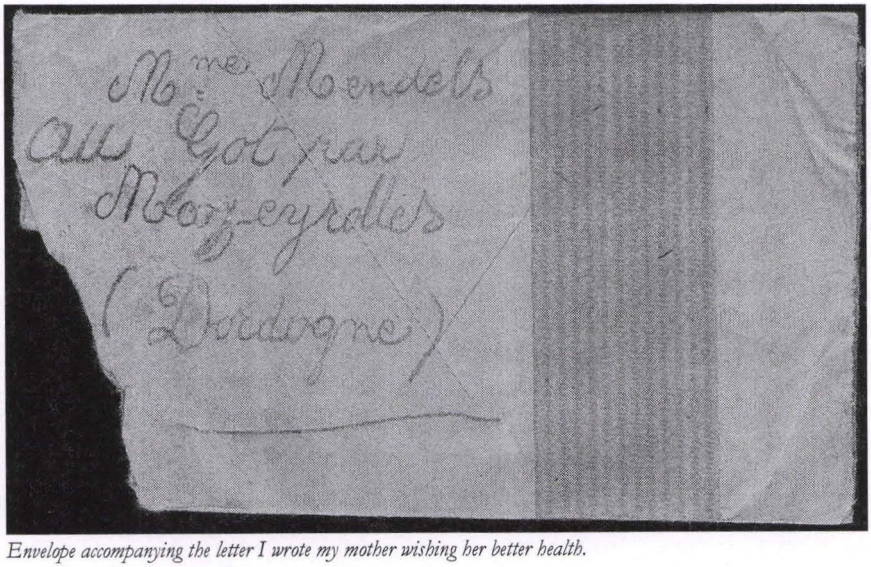


Jacqueline's journal, showing the June 21, 1943 entry announcing the future arrival of a baby. The English translation follows.

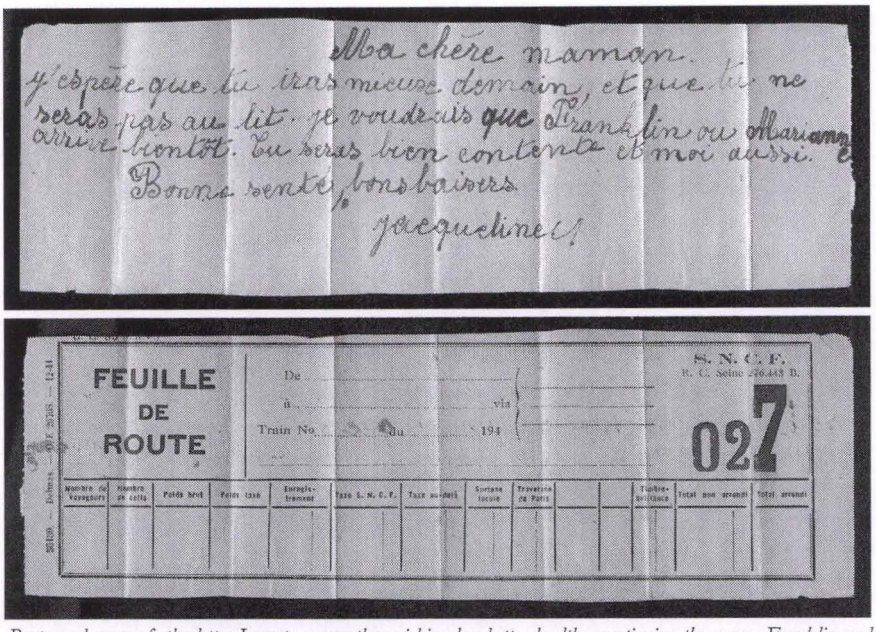
Monday June 21, 1943
I turned 8 years old on April 23. I am a big girl. I go to school in Le Got. My teachers are Monsieur and Madame Lalbat. I learn much more than in St Mandé. We will have in July or in August a young brother or a young sister. I am very happy when he or she is born. When he or she will be born, we will have to dress them, we will have to wash the diapers and the sheets, and we will have to bathe him or her. It will be a lot of fun to see them in the sink. We will have a young woman to do all this work.
I am leaving you now.
Big kisses,
Jacqueline

Although my mother hid her worries from us, she obviously did not want to have another child – not when we did not know if we would survive from one day to the next. In 1997, Mme. Lamouroux told us that after my mother became pregnant she cried a lot, though never in front of us. She was afraid to leave our two rooms upstairs; she spent a lot of time at home. Mme. Lamouroux told her, "It is better to have another child than to lose one."

Manuela and I knew our mother was miserable and scared, and sensed that she was not well. I still have a short letter that I wrote to her during her pregnancy, hoping that she would sleep well and feel better the next day. I wrote that I hoped that the baby, who was to be named Franklin or Marianne, would be born soon. We knew by then the names that our parents had chosen for the future baby. In my journal, too, I wished her better health.



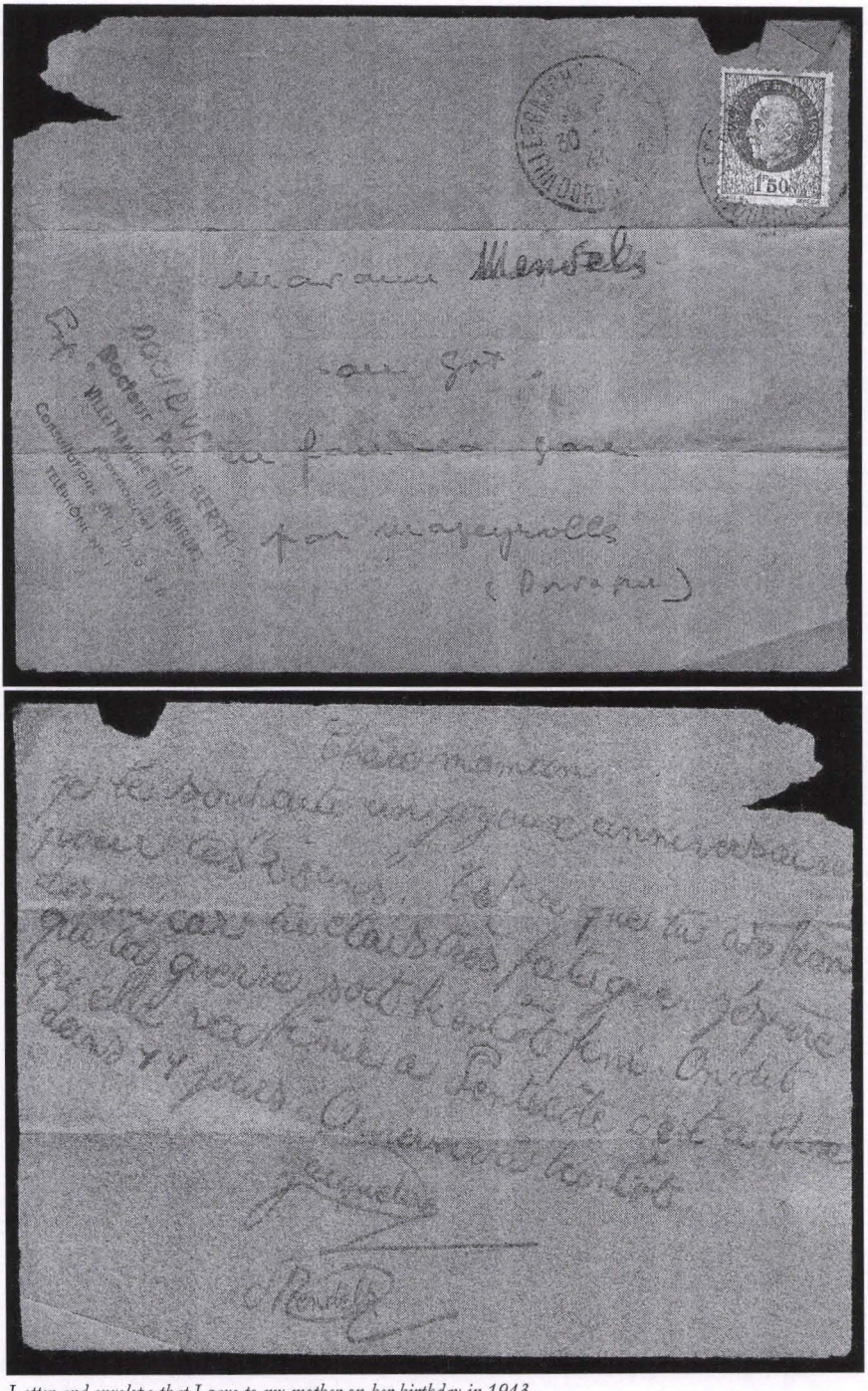
Envelope accompanying the letter I wrote my mother wishing her better health.


Ma chère maman.
j'espère que tu iras mieux demain, et que tu ne seras pas au lit. je voudrais que Franklin ou Marianne arrive bientôt. tu seras bien contente et moi aussi.
Bonne santé, bons baisers.
jacqueline
FEUILLE DE ROUTE
S. N. C. F.
027

Recto and verso of the letter I wrote my mother wishing her better health, mentioning the names Franklin and Marianne.

My mother had a very difficult pregnancy, physically and emotionally. She was very tired and lacked adequate nutrition; she was not well, especially near the end of her pregnancy. On her birthday, May 17, 1943, when she was about 6.5 months pregnant, I gave my mother another note. (We had practically no paper to write on; this note was on the back of a bill from her doctor, Dr. Paul Bertho in Villefranche du Périgord.) I wrote that I knew that she was very tired and was hoping she would feel better. I also offered my hopes for the end of the war. This note shows that I was very well aware of the war and its dangers. In addition to being afraid, I think my mother was very depressed, wondering what would happen with an infant in addition to the four of us. She spent most of her days lying in bed.

She must have written to Geneviève Paris in St. Mandé, because Geneviève managed to send yarn so my mother could knit baby clothes. Toward the end of her pregnancy, my mother had to see a dentist. I don't know how my parents found the money to pay the dentist and to pay the doctor for her prenatal care. I remember my sister and I pushing my mother up a steep hill to get to the dentist's office in Villefranche-du-Périgord, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) away. It was summer, probably the end of July, and we had to walk the whole way. She had no strength left to do it on her own. She was wearing a nightgown, because she



Letter and envelope that I gave to my mother on her birthday in 1943.

had no pregnancy clothes and nothing that would fit over her enormous belly.

My mother was planning to give birth at home, with the help of a midwife from Belvès. However, the baby was in a breech position[1] and the midwife decided my mother needed a Cesarean delivery. I remember waking up late one night to a lot of noise; our downstairs neighbor, Mme. Garrigue, entered our room and said not to worry, she would look after us.

Manuela and I went back to sleep. My father (or the midwife) tried to find a vehicle so my mother could be transported to the closest hospital, which was one hour away in the village of Montayral, in Lot-et-Garonne, the *département* south of Dordogne. Probably our neighbor M. Belledent drove my parents to the hospital in his van.

During the war, there was little ordinary gasoline for nonmilitary use, so many vehicles were fueled with *gazogène* (an ersatz gasoline, a methane-type wood gas, which was produced by heating wood chips, stored in tanks strapped to the roof). My father wrote in his "Odyssey" that the car broke down on the way to the hospital. Somehow, M. Belledent or someone else must have repaired it.

My mother, a Jewish woman, was not allowed to travel, she did not have an *Ausweis*, her temporary travel permit said she could travel to the next village on Saturday only and it had a large stamp in red ink saying *JUIF*. To reach the hospital she had to go to another *département*, Lot-et-Garonne, which was forbidden for Jews.

The hospital to which my mother was transported was located in the *château de Salomon*, which had a large sunroom in the back. Genia Boquet, a nurse and the wife of the doctor, recalled the war years when Anne-Emanuelle and Jessica interviewed her in 1997:

> "The *château de Salomon* was a factory converted into a hospital and used for surgery because the sunroom had good daylight. It was supposed to be a temporary arrangement, but it lasted from 1939 until 1948. The front of the *château* was used for dormitories and rooms for patients. This hospital is where Dr. Robert Boquet helped the *Résistance* fighters who were sick or wounded, and also took care of the German occupying forces who needed medical attention. There were many *résistants* in that part of France, and they brought the wounded to the *château de Salomon*. There

[1] A breech position in late pregnancy is not unusual. Today, there are many ways to manipulate a baby, encouraging it to move into a head-down position before birth. If this is not successful, there is the option for either a safe breech birth (with emergency Cesarean section if necessary) or a planned Cesarean.

were from 10 to 29 wounded at a time. They had to be hidden, especially after D-Day when the Germans came with guns looking for *résistants*. On one occasion the wounded were hidden in bales of hay in a farm nearby. After that, the *résistants* set up an emergency hospital in the woods, like an army field hospital. By 1941, German soldiers were also coming to the hospital. *Colonel* Robinet from the *Résistance* had come with ten trucks of supplies – weapons and medical gear. Dr. Boquet and I agreed to hide the medical supplies but not the weapons."[2]

The Gestapo came on a Sunday morning, Genia Boquet recalled:

"We were taking care of the wounded on the second floor and we saw a Citroën car; we said, 'Those are the Germans.' My husband fled and hid in the fields. I greeted the Germans and played dumb. We had not been denounced for being *résistants*, but for the medications we had received. They knew exactly where to look and came back with French trucks to retrieve all the medical supplies."

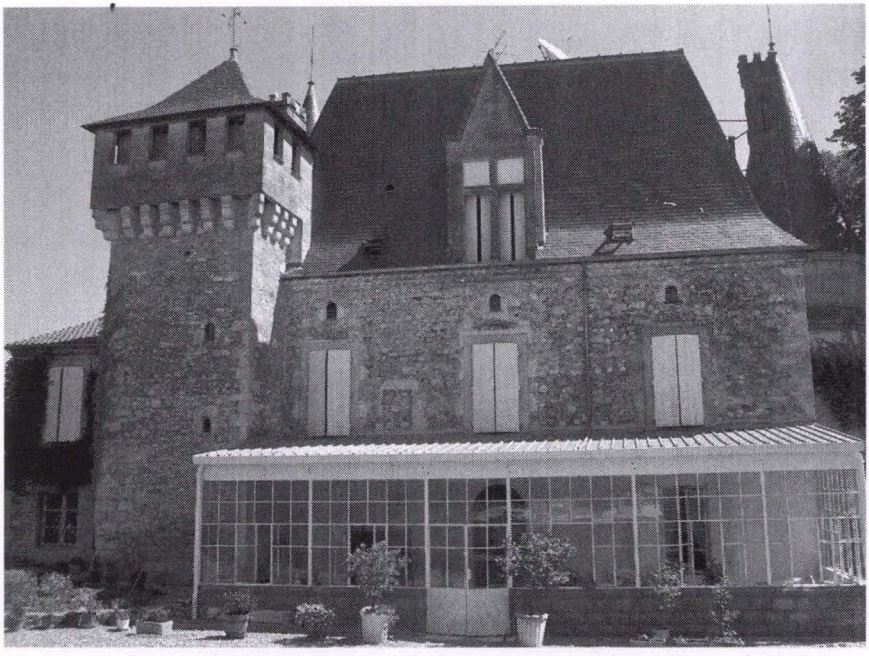
Mme. Boquet continued:

"Dr. Boquet was allowed to continue his practice. German soldiers needed medical care too, and perhaps there were no German field hospitals in that area of the country. Dr. Boquet was able to get medical supplies all throughout the war; there was never a lack of supplies, even in 1943 when there were German troops all over France. There was electricity for the duration of the war. Anyone from the *départements* of Lot-et-Garonne and Dordogne were treated. It was difficult to travel in those days. There were some ambulances that still worked, or someone in the family would telephone and a doctor would pick up and bring the patient to the hospital. There were several Jewish families who came. It never made any difference to us who came. Sometimes Jews came with false IDs. We treated everyone systematically whether Jewish, black, white, etc. We performed circumcisions – not at birth, but on demand."

"There was a Jewish man named Levi. He was not hiding; he was the regional chief of the *Résistance* in Sauveterre-la-Lémance. He changed his name to LeRoi. After the war he became the director of the department store *Le Printemps* in Paris. Between Villeneuve and Fumel, one had to go through St. Sylvestre. Once there was a confrontation between *résistants* and Germans; a few *résistants* were killed, and three Germans were wound-

[2] Transcript of interview conducted by Jessica and Anne-Emanuelle with Madame Boquet, 1994.





The château de Salomon, with the sunroom in the back where surgeries were performed. Photographed by Jessica in 1994.



Dr. Boquet at the center of the picture, with his wife Genia, his nursing staff, and hospital patients. (This photo was taken in front of a different location, château du Boscla, after D-Day, and given to Anne-Emanuelle and Jessica by Dr. Boquet in 1994.)



A 1937 photo of Dr. Boquet, Genia his wife, who was a nurse, and hospital staff. (Photo given to Anne-Emanuelle and Jessica by Dr. Boquet in 1994.)

ed. They brought them to the *château de Salomon.* One had died in the car. One had a bullet in the stomach; he needed a transfusion. In those days you needed a donor right there, because there was no blood bank. The German refused French blood, so the doctor wouldn't operate, and he died a few minutes later. A third man named Kurt, a young man, just had an ankle fracture. We treated him and he stayed with us for six months. He did the cleaning, washed the cars, and he was helpful. Later he fled. He was a brave young man. Many people faked illness to avoid going to the *STO (Service de Travaille Obligatoire)* in Germany. The *résistants* never paid us. Others paid, but not well – they were not rich; they paid in kind with food: meat or grains. The staff consisted of 10 support workers and four or five nurses. There was a kitchen to prepare food. A woman who gave birth normally stayed 10-15 days. There were many babies born at that time. Not many died. Prenatal care didn't exist. There were consultations, but not frequently. The hospital was really for emergencies. There were other types of treatments, a bit of everything, even trepanation (brain surgery), which a surgeon wouldn't do anymore these days."

My mother nearly died in childbirth. She lost a lot of blood and needed a transfusion. No one had her blood type – AB+ – at first. My father gave some of his blood, but it was not compatible with my mother's. I do not know when and where they found a person with her blood type. (I have the same blood type, but nobody checked me, and I was probably too young to give blood).

My brother was born on August 7, 1943, and was named Franklin because my parents' only hope of survival at that time was Franklin Roosevelt. (Of course, de Gaulle was their hero as well.) If the baby had been a girl, she would have been named Marianne, the allegorical figure that had represented France since the French Revolution – the embodiment of the motto *"Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."*

My parents asked the doctor to circumcise my brother, a dangerous action because it marked male Jews. I don't know why my parents, who were not practicing Jews, requested it; my father probably thought of his mother and of the Jewish tradition. However, it was the most dangerous thing to do when we did not know from one day to the next if we would be alive.

My sister and I were totally oblivious to what was happening. The Garrigues hired a Spanish woman, a refugee from Franco's Spain, to cook for us and take care of us for the entire three weeks while my mother recovered in the hospital. The woman brought along her son, Raphaël, who was about our age; he taught

us to play marbles. It was August, so there was no school.

My father wrote that not only was he terribly worried about the condition of his wife, who had nearly died, but he was also concerned about the survival of his young son, who continued to lose weight, and who rejected the cow's milk that was given to him. The nurses in the hospital did not understand that cow's milk did not agree with my brother, and my mother was too sick and too weak to be able to breastfeed my brother. The nurses called him a bad baby because he cried a lot.

My father also worried about Manuela and me. Luckily, the woman who was hired to stay with us and cook for us was very kind. I have a vague recollection that my sister and I went with an adult to see our new brother and our mother. But I am not sure that we did; we were not allowed to travel and I am not sure how we could have reached Montayral.

My mother slowly recovered. My brother, who had had a very difficult beginning, also survived. Franklin still cried a lot when he came home with my mother. By some miracle, my parents were able to find Nestlé sweetened condensed milk that they bought with food tickets. How did the cans of Nestlé condensed milk reach our little village of le Got? Perhaps from American troops that had landed in North Africa in November 1942 with food supplies and C-rations. It agreed with my brother and he started to gain weight. The milk came in cans and was thick and sweet; my mother diluted it with water that she had boiled. I would lick the contents of the can after my mother had emptied it; I loved it. My mother also found baby bottles in the general store.

I loved playing with my baby brother. He was my best toy, better than my doll. Once, I had him on my lap and I dropped him on the floor. For a few months after that, my mother did not let me hold him. It felt like a terrible punishment.

My father wrote in Franklin's journal, on September 8, 1943, that he was so happy to have a son, and that he only wished that he could tell his mother, sister, and brother that there was now a boy in the Mendels family. (Until then, my grandmother Thekla had had six granddaughters.) My father added that he hoped that we would all get together when the war ended, and that we would celebrate Franklin's birth together. Little did he know that, by then, most of his family had been rounded up and imprisoned in Westerbork in Holland, and were about to be shipped or had already been shipped to Sobibor and Auschwitz, where they would be murdered. He did not yet know that his mother Thekla had been murdered on March 5, 1943.







8 Septembre 1943. Le Fort d'Ondaye.

Tu sais, mon petit Fredy, tu es né à un drôle de moment et d'une drôle de façon! Nous ne nous attendions pas du tout à avoir un 3ème enfant. Tu as plus de 8 ans de différence avec Jacqueline qui était jusqu'alors notre cadette. Et nous te sommes par "chez nous" depuis un an: nous nous sommes réfugiés ici, dans la zone non-occupée par les Allemands (et qui l'est quand même depuis). Tu sais que ta maman a porté surtout les derniers mois elle a bien souffert et quand le moment était venu où tu allais naître nous avons dû la transporter d'urgence dans une clinique en Lot et Garonne et c'est là, à Mondayral que tu as vu le jour! La maman a été bien fatiguée après; plus tard elle te raconteras cela.

Nous t'avons donné le nom de Franklin Fritz. Tu te demanderas pourquoi ce nom qui n'est pas du tout européen? Parce que le président des Etats Unis, Franklin Roosevelt est l'homme qui nous a donné l'espoir qu'après la guerre nous pourrions à nouveau vivre librement sans être opprimés par les Allemands! — Et le nom de Fritz, c'est la maman qui a absolument voulu que tu aies également mon prénom.

Si nous pouvions correspondre avec ma mère, mon père et ma sœur, tous seraient très contents qu'ici il y a un garçon dans la famille: jusqu'à maintenant il n'y avait que des filles. J'espère qu'après la guerre nous pourrons tous nous réunir et fêter ta naissance.

J'espère que tu grandiras bien, que tu sois fort, que tu apprennes bien quand tu iras à l'école; bref que ta mère et moi nous puissions être fiers de notre fils!

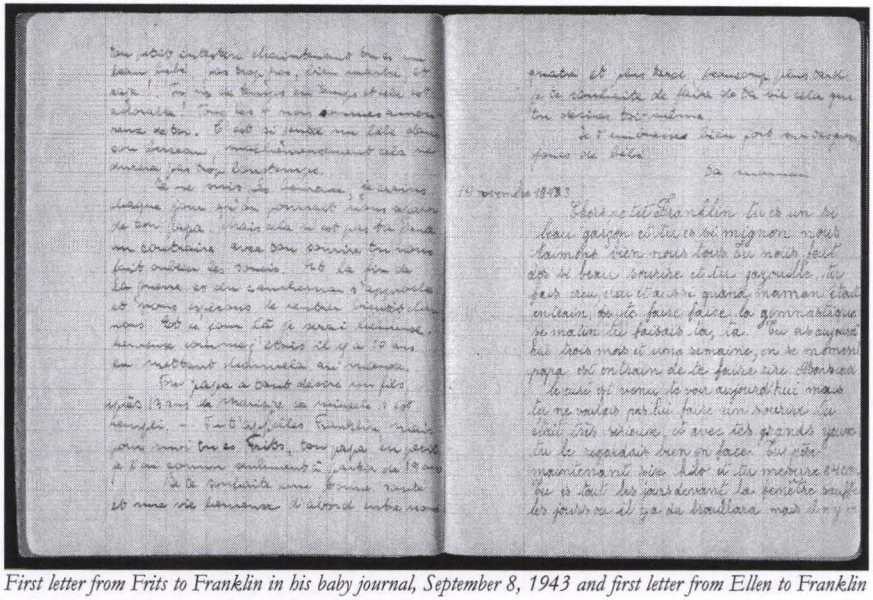
Et maintenant c'est ta maman qui t'écrira et tes sœurs qui attendent avec impatience que leur tour soit venu.

Ton père.

2 Novembre 1943

Mon petit Franklin, tu as presque 3 mois et tout ce temps avait été écrit par papa. Comme tout jeune papa n'était pas heureux quand ça a été mon tour d'être vraiment bien malade. Malgré tout je me suis vaincue et j'ai repris mes forces et l'usage de tout mon corps. Actuellement je commence à me promener et je n'ai plus de faiblesses entre nous trois.

Tu étais un petit nouveau-né en arrivant au monde, mais à ton troisième mois tu n'as pas changé et tu es comme tout petit garçon devrait être, et une chose que tu ne mentionnes pas et que je n'avais pas vu encore, tu n'avais pas le droit aux compliments à



First letter from Frits to Franklin in his baby journal, September 8, 1943 and first letter from Ellen to Franklin in his baby journal, November 2, 1943. The English translations are below.

September 8, 1943, Le Got, Dordogne

You know, my little one, you were born at a strange time in a strange way! We were not at all expecting to have a third child: there are more than eight years between you and Jacqueline, who was until now our youngest. And for the past year, we have not been "at home": we took refuge here, in the zone that is non-occupied by the Germans (but which has become occupied since our arrival). While your maman was pregnant with you, especially the last few months, she suffered a lot and when the moment arrived for her to give birth to you, we had to urgently transport her to a clinic in Lot-et-Garonne and it is there, in Montayral, that you saw the light of day! Your mother was exhausted afterwards, later she will tell you about that.

We have given you the name Franklin Frits. You will wonder why such an uncommon name? Because the president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, is the man who has given us hope that after the war we will once again be able to live in freedom, without being oppressed by the Germans! And the name Frits, it is your maman who absolutely wanted you to also have my first name.

If we could correspond with my mother, my brother and my sister, all of them would be very happy that finally, there is a boy in the family: until now, there were only girls. Let us hope that after the war, we will all be able to get together and celebrate your birth.

I hope that you will grow in good health, that you will be strong, that you will learn well when you go to school… in brief, that your mother and I will be proud of our son!

And now, it will be your maman who will write to you, and your sisters also because they are impatiently waiting their turn to write to you.

Your father

November 2, 1943

My little Franklin, you are almost 3 months old and it is time that I write a short note to you. As your father explained it to you, I was not happy when I was expecting you and you made me very sick. But since you were born and since I regained my strength, I love you with all my heart, as much as your two big sisters. I have no preference among the three of you.

You were a magnificent baby when you came into this world, but in the hospital no one took care of you as they should have. You cried a lot, and they said to me that you were a bad baby. And it was not true, you did not have the milk that agreed with your little stomach. Now you are a beautiful baby, not too fat, with clear skin, and well behaved. You laugh once in a while and it is adorable. All four of us are in love with you. It is so nice to have a baby in his cradle, unfortunately it won't last too long.

I am not happy. I fear every day that we might be separated from your papa. But it is not your fault. On the contrary, with your smile you make us forget our worries. And the end of the war and of the nightmares are approaching and we hope to go back home soon. And on that day, I will be happy – happy as I was 10 years ago when Manuela was born.

Your papa wished so much for a son after 13 years of marriage. This miracle happened. Your name is Franklin, but for me, you are Frits, your papa when he was small. I met him only when he was 19 years old.

I wish you good health and a happy life, first spent among the four of us and later on, much later, I wish you that make what you wish for yourself out of your life.

I am kissing you strongly on both your baby cheeks,

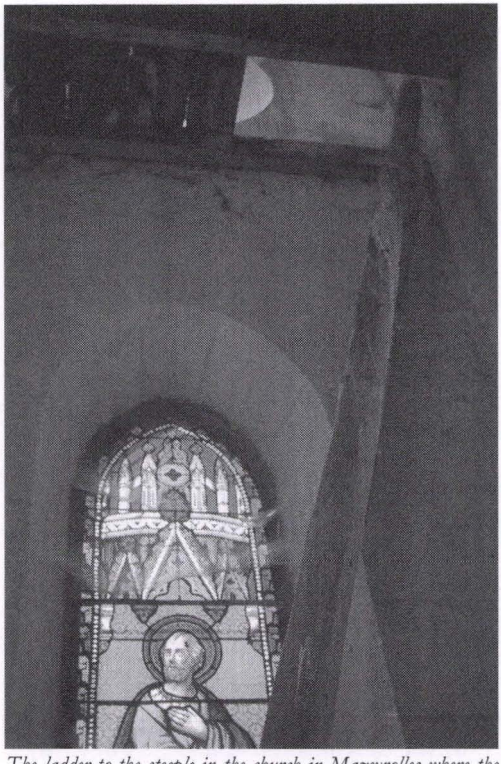
Your maman



Manuela, Jacqueline, Ellen, and Franklin, September 1943. Franklin is one month old.

My mother went to the outdoor public washhouse to wash Franklin's diapers. The water was ice cold, especially in the winter. The other women told my mother that she didn't have to wash the diapers if they were just wet from urine, that she should just hang them to dry and use them again. I don't know if my mother followed their advice. I also don't know where she found diapers; I think she made them out of cotton cloth she found at the general store or bought from the traveling salesman who came through the village occasionally. She also took apart some of our garments, and unraveled our knitted clothes to knit clothes for Franklin.

I watched my mother wash Franklin, give him his milk bottle, and exercise his body by moving his legs and arms. Mme. Lamouroux lent us an ancient baby carriage, which served as both crib and carriage for Franklin. Having a baby with us was an adventure, and we admired every bit of progress that Franklin made. Both Manuela and I wrote in his journal about his first smiles, how he raised his head when he was on his stomach, how his hair was growing, and later on how he was teething. To use fewer diapers, when he was being washed or doing his gymnastics, my mother put a bottle over his penis and he urinated into it. We measured the amount of urine, and it was a big excitement. Whatever he did, Franklin was a source of joy, admiration and wonderment for us.



The ladder to the steeple in the church in Mazeyrolles where the priest promised to hide us if necessary. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

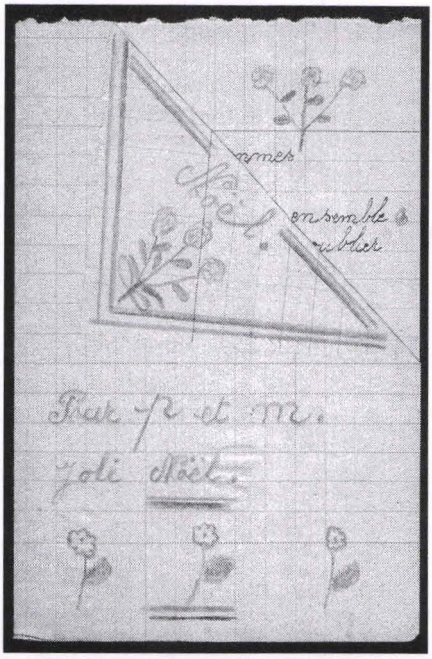
When Franklin was four months old, the Catholic priest from Mazeyrolles, *Monsieur le Curé* Lareigne,[3] came to see us. He rode up on his bicycle wearing a black cassock. Manuela wrote in Franklin's journal that he was afraid of the priest. I remember that my mother made *crêpes farcies* (stuffed pancakes) in honor of the priest's visit. He said he would hide us in the church tower if there were ever a threat that "they," meaning the Gestapo or the French militia, were about to come for us.[4] He was the kindest person, and always kissed the children who came to him. He also said, *"Il faut pardonner,"* ("One must forgive.") meaning that the Gestapo or the French militia had to be forgiven in some cases. I remember also that he wore a handkerchief on his head and he sang a popular song: *"viens poupoule, viens poupoule, viens..."* ("Come, little chicken, come.")

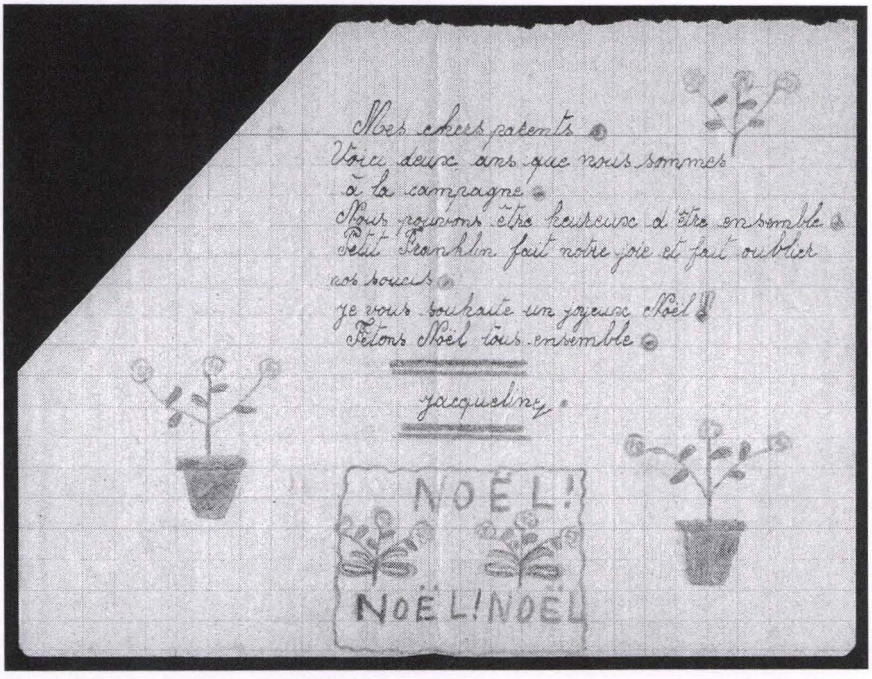
The last months of 1943 were full of increasing dangers. Manuela and I continued going to school; my father spent most of his time in hiding. My mother took care of Franklin and tried to make life as normal as possible for the five of us. Everyone at school was thinking of Christmas, and we heard the word *"Noël"* repeatedly. I wrote a letter to my parents saying that we had been in Le Got for two years, adding that we must be happy to be together. I also said that Franklin was a joy to all of us and allowed us to forget our worries. I believe that it was a very mature letter for a girl of eight.

---

[3] The priest Antoine Lareigne, was a brave person. After serving his parish from 1909 to 1949, he died and was buried in the cemetery behind his church. He was born in Ste. Alvère on December 16, 1874 and died in Périgueux on December 30, 1949.

[4] I remember his words : "*Je vais vous cacher dans mon clocher.*" ("I will hide you in the steeple of my church.")





Letter that I wrote to my parents before Christmas 1943.

Chapter 8
The Last Year in Le Got and Our Return to Paris

During our last year in Le Got, my father had to hide in the woods several times, as German troops or French militia marched through the village and rounded up all men for forced labor in Germany. Thanks to warnings from the mayor or the postmistress, most men in the village were able to leave and hide in the woods for a while.

In 1944, my parents felt that it was becoming too dangerous all around; they decided to send my sister and me to hide in a convent in nearby Monpazier. Manuela and I each prepared a small suitcase. At the last moment, we were warned (I think by the mayor) that it was a bad idea to walk along the road (our only means of travel) because there were German cars, convoys, and trucks on it on that day. Furthermore, the Mother Superior was afraid to take us in; it was too dangerous for her and the convent's 39 nuns and staff. We know now that there was a later raid by the French police and the Gestapo, and had we been there, we would likely have been caught and deported.

The situation became more and more dangerous for Jews. Some Jewish families hid in a psychiatric hospital in Ste. Foix, not too far from us. I do not know if they survived.

We were the only Jewish refugees in the village of Le Got; perhaps this fact also saved us. The farmers in the area were very poor; they had a hard life and very little education. They could have been rewarded for reporting a Jewish family to the militia or the collaborators. But they were all good people, proud and honest.

No one denounced us; everyone was kind to us.

In March and April 1944, the German Brehmer division came to Dordogne. This was unsurprising: we were only two hours by car from Bordeaux, where the infamous Maurice Papon was the high civil servant in charge of filling the death trains with their monthly quota of Jews. The soldiers took animals, eggs, and other foodstuffs from area farms, terrorized the population, and systematically searched villages including La Bachellerie, Azerat, Ste. Orse, Tourtoirac, Excideuil, Brantôme, and St. Prancace, shooting or deporting any Jews they found.

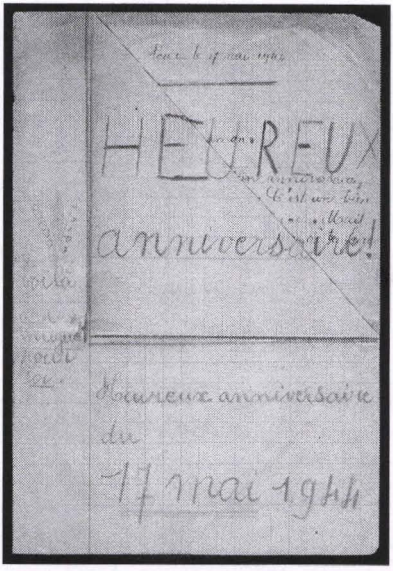
On May 21, 1944, the Gestapo arrived in Le Got – two or three cars with four or five SS soldiers in each car. They searched Le Got, then the nearby villages of Belvès and Fontenilles; in Fontenilles they lined up young men against the wall of the church and shot two or three of them. They were apparently looking for weapons the *résistants* had hidden in the cemetery, but found nothing. The Gestapo caught and arrested 11 *résistants*, all men, hiding in a château nearby, lined them up against the wall of a church, then put them on a truck to the *Kommandantur* (headquarters of the Gestapo) in Périgueux, and from there to the central prison of Limoges. One man asked to go get his toilet kit and towels, and was shot to death.[1] The Gestapo also searched the mayor's office; fortunately, M. Delpech had destroyed all incriminating papers, including the false IDs. Soon thereafter, he went into hiding, fearing that he would be caught by the Gestapo or the militia and tortured for information.

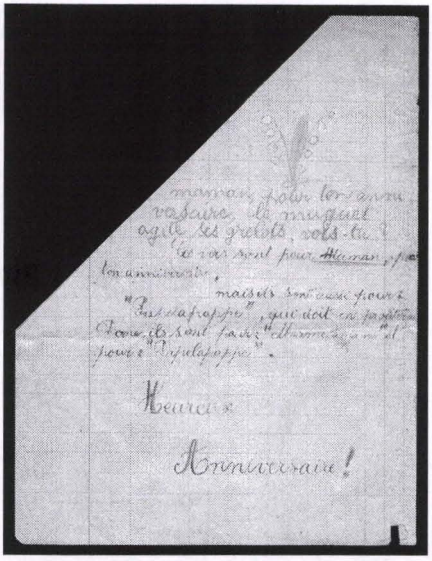
In Dordogne, there were roundups of children and adults from north to south – in Bergerac, Périgueux, St. Paul de Lizonne, St. Privat-des-Prés, St. Michel de Rivière, Ponteyraud, Sarlat, La Bachellerie, Tourtoirac, Cherveix, Condat-sur-Vézère, and other towns in the region.

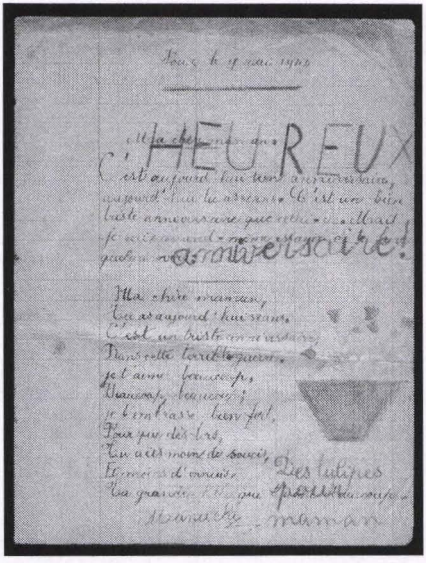
There were many assassinations of Jews by the SS or the French militia. Two young Jewish men in the nearby village of Fontenilles worked in the *Résistance*. They were denounced; the SS came, lined them up against the wall of the church, and shot them. Then the SS rounded up other *résistants* from the town; I don't know if they ever came back from the camps, or if they were shot or perished there. And in Tourtoirac, near Périgueux, five Jewish men were assassinated by the Germans on April 1, 1944. One of them was 78 years old.

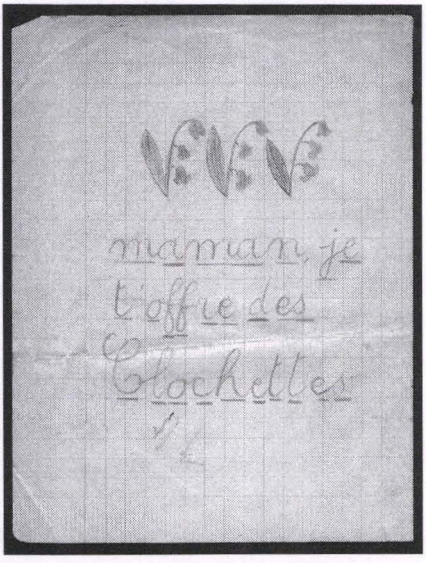
Every Sunday the young *résistants* came to mass in Mazeyrolles; they listened to the sermon from the back of the church.[2] I suppose the sermon would give

[1] Interview: Monsieur Garrigue, 1997. (DVD 42-46)
[2] Interview: Mayor Delpech's son, Pierre Delpech, 1997. (DVD 36-39)

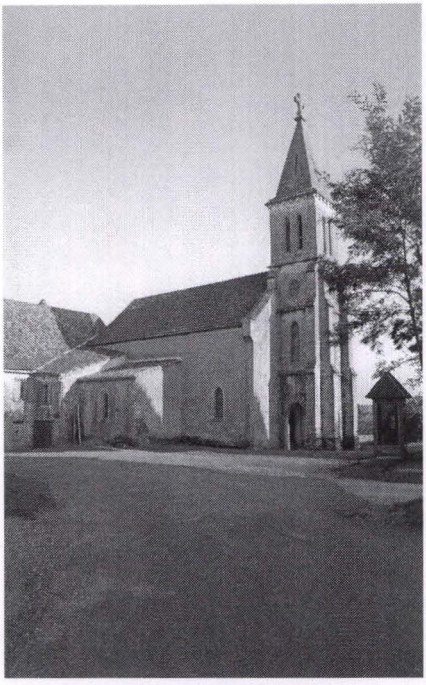








Manuela's poem of congratulations for our mother's birthday, on May 17, 1944. In it she said that our mother's birthday was very sad because of the terrible war and she wished her fewer worries in the future.



The church in Mazeyrolles. Photographed by Jessica, 1997.

them courage; the priest was a good man and a great supporter of the *Résistance*. Occasionally, Manuela and I went to that church with the other children of our village, as we did on the celebration of Jeanne d'Arc's birthday. I found it interesting to watch Sunday services but I never learned any of the Catholic prayers and I did not know how to do the sign of the cross.

On June 6, 1944, my father heard about the *débarquement* (D-Day). He was picking cherries in M. Vigié's orchard at the time; he was so surprised and filled with joy that he fell out of the cherry tree. We had heard that there were plans for the Americans to land, and I wrote about the *débarquement* several times in my journal. I was unable to spell that word correctly at that age. It was the most wonderful event for us, and the news that everyone was anxiously hoping for after all the hard and dangerous years.

However, after D-Day it became even more dangerous in the area where we lived. Everyone was afraid of the Germans. The German armies were ordered to move north and join other occupying forces, slowing the advance of the Allied armies. On their way, they killed and destroyed everything and everyone they encountered. My father wrote in his "Odyssey" that we knew when there would be German patrols going through the villages on their way north:

> "Whenever German patrols were sighted the whole district worked together. All the train stations were called (that was the only way to communicate as they were the only ones to have a telephone) and warned which village was in danger. We then would hide in the forest until the danger had passed".

There were more fierce fights between the *résistants* and the collaborators and



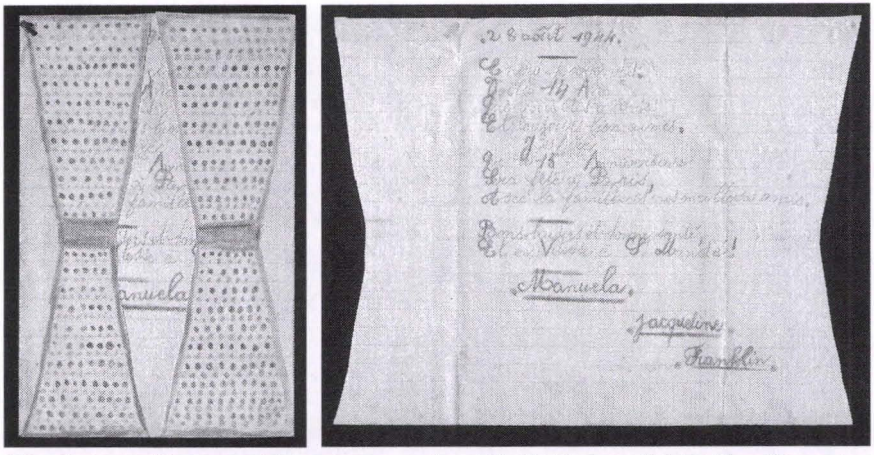


Monument in Tourtoirac, Dordogne, with names of the five Jewish men assassinated there.
Close-up of monument honoring the five Jewish men assassinated in Tourtoirac.
Photographs by my friends Ross and Colette Cowey, 2010.

French militia. By that time, most men from the village were in the *Résistance*, except the older ones. During the fighting, all the women and children hid in the woods or stayed in shelters, like we did. The *résistants* hid their weapons in the cemetery in Mazeyrolles, and became more daring in their attacks on the collaborators and the Germans. There was fierce retribution on both sides. The massacre of the inhabitants of Oradour-sur-Glane occurred on June 10, 1944, four days after the *débarquement*.[3] The village (near Limoges, in the *département* of Haute-Vienne, just north of Dordogne and not far from Périgueux) was a typical country village alongside the Glane river; there were no *résistants* in the immediate area. SS soldiers arrived in the town, forced all the women and children into the church, and burned it down. They then rounded up and shot all the men. The village was completely destroyed. It has never been rebuilt, and in its destruction remains a memorial to the victims of German atrocities. It has been said that the SS mistook Oradour-sur-Glane for Oradour-sur-Vayres, which *did* house *résistants*, and the atrocities were conducted as retribution against them.

Although my father had long before traded his radio for food, he quickly heard about the August 25, 1944 liberation of Paris. He made plans to go back to Paris as soon as possible to see what was left of our apartment and of his business.

[3] Oradour-sur-Glane 10th June 1944. [www.oradour.info]



Manuela's poem written to congratulate our parents on August 28, 1944 in honor of their 14th wedding anniversary. She expressed the hope that we would celebrate their 15th anniversary in Paris with all the family and friends.

My father was courageous and optimistic, resourceful and smart. Despite the frightening years of deprivation and despair, he had enough strength, willpower, and stamina to undertake the trip without knowing how he would travel through France. My mother, on the other hand, was rather pessimistic, and her suffering had left a mark on her.

My father left Le Got for Paris in September 1944. Most trains were not running; many tracks and bridges had been bombed and trains damaged, making the trip long and exhausting. However, he made it to Paris after many days of travel, changing trains multiple times.

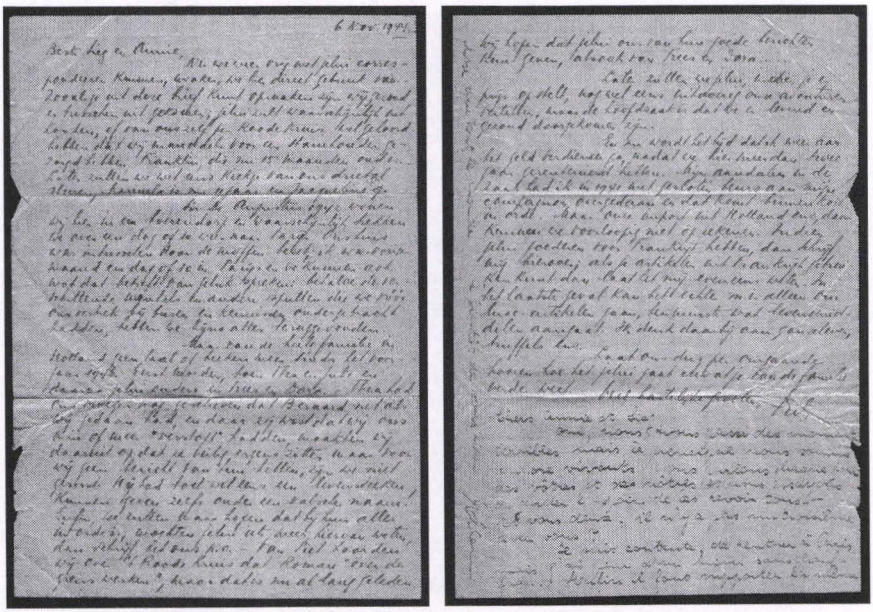
France was not entirely liberated; it was still dangerous to travel north toward Paris. But my father was very anxious to resume a normal life for our family. He found our apartment vacant, and was able to reclaim it for us before other refugees moved in, which could have happened if they had nowhere else to go. Because there was a great shortage of housing in Paris, the rule was that if an apartment was vacant, it could be given to whoever was in need of housing.

Some possessions belonging to Jewish families had been collected at the Saint-Mandé city hall after the departure of the German occupying forces. My father managed to recover some items that he recognized as ours: the dining room furniture, my parents' bedroom furniture, and bookshelves, all in bad shape. I remember seeing that my parents' mattress was slit in the middle; I suppose

the German soldiers who occupied our apartment were looking for money or jewelry. I also remember a sheet of leather left on a bookshelf in the apartment that my parents recovered. It came in very handy because we desperately needed shoes, and the shoemaker had no leather for soles. (I especially needed good shoes made to order, because my flat feet had not been looked after during the war). Other Jewish families never came back to collect their furniture because they had perished in the death camps. We were the lucky ones.

In October, my father returned to Le Got. He was planning to bring our family back to Paris. Manuela and I had started school again with M. Lalbat. M. Lalbat did not teach students over 11, and Manuela was 11, about to go to a higher grade – meaning that she would have had to go to boarding school in another town, coming home only on weekends. So we left in time for her sake.

On November 6, 1944, my father wrote to his cousin Siegfried ("Sieg") Mendels, in Palestine, to tell him that we were alive, we had survived the war, and that my brother Franklin had been born in 1943. He added that he had no news from his family in Holland and he was hoping that his mother, brother, sister, cousins, and their families were also still alive.



My father's letter to his cousin "Sieg" in Palestine, written in 1944 in Dutch. The English translation follows.

November 6, 1944

Dear Sieg and Annie,

Now we can correspond again freely with you and we are taking this opportunity immediately.

As you can gather from the letter, we pulled through and we are in good health. You must have heard from London or from ourselves by way of the Red Cross, that we have a son and heir, Franklin, who is now 15 months old. Later, we will send a photo of our three children: Manuela is now 11 and Jacqueline 9.

Since August 1942, we have been living here in a farming village and we will probably move back to Paris in 10 days or so. In the meantime, our apartment in Paris was occupied by the Germans. Last month, I was in Paris for about 10 days and in that respect we have also been lucky: in addition to the furniture and other items which we had stored with neighbors and acquaintances before our departure, we have found almost all our things.

But no news whatsoever of the whole family in Holland since spring of 1943. First Mother, then Thea and Julie, and then your parents and Trees and Dora. Thea had written to us earlier that Bernard had done what we did and, as she knew that we were more or less "in hiding" somewhere, we concluded that they are safe somewhere, but we will not have peace of mind until we hear from them. He could have sent a message, even under a false name, by way of the Red Cross.

Enfin, we just hope everything is fine with them. If you know anything, please write immediately. We heard from Piet by way of the Red Cross saying that RoMau[4] "are working abroad", but that news is from a long time ago.

We hope you can give us good news about them, also about Trees and Dora…

Later we will tell you about our "adventures", if you so wish, but the main thing is that we came through alive and in good health.

And now it is time for me to start earning money again, after living off our savings for more than 2 years. I handed my share in the business over to my partner in 1941 on mutual terms and that will be sorted out soon. But it will be a while before we can count on importing from Holland, etc, again. If you have goods for France, let me know. If

[4] "RoMau" is a nickname referring to Rosa and Maurits Mendels, using the first syllable of each name.

you can use commodities from France, let me know also. In my opinion it can only be a question of luxury goods, at least as far as foodstuffs are concerned. I am thinking of foie gras, truffles, etc.

Let us know by return mail how you are and what you know about the family. Many kindest regards,

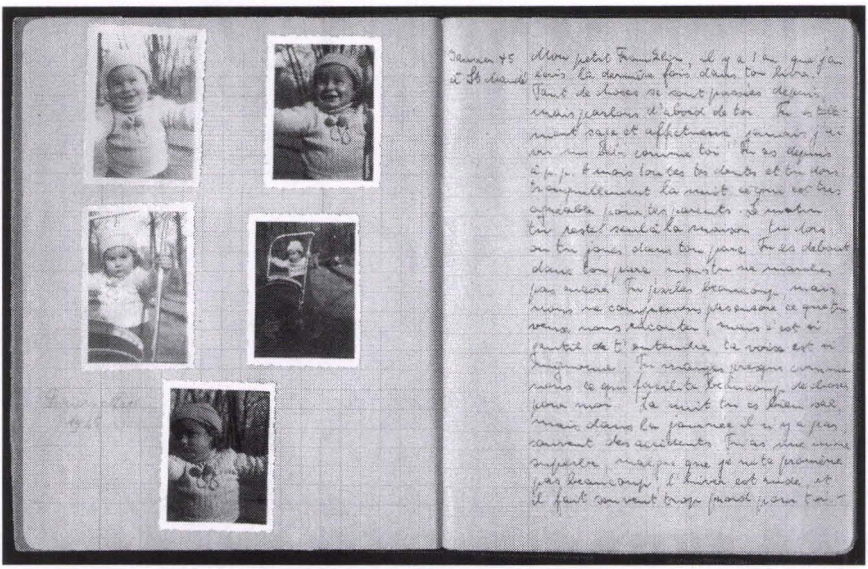
Frits

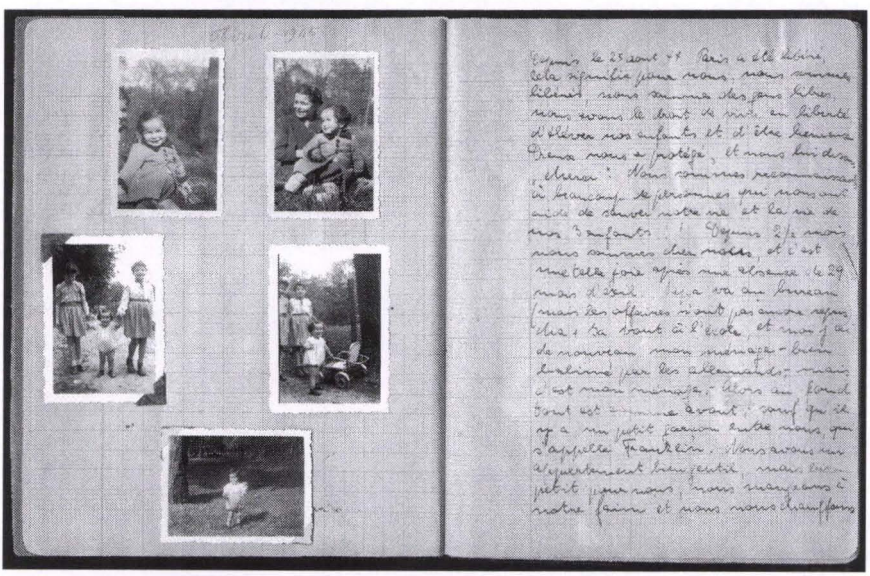
We left Le Got on November 16, 1944; the whole village came to the train station to say goodbye and wish us good luck. In his "Odyssey", my father noted that we had to stop at the *préfecture* in Périgueux to get new identity cards, without the stamp *JUIF*. This time we were very well received by the officials in charge.

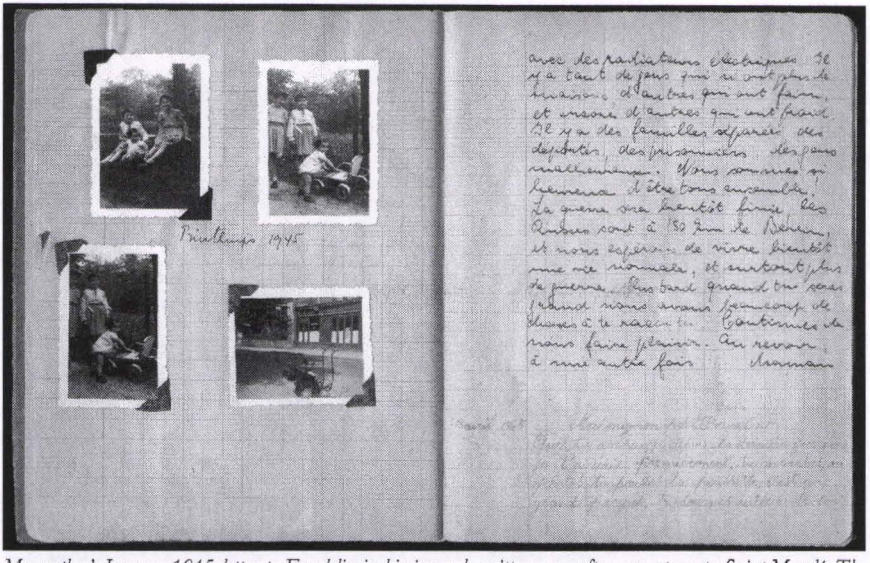
We had to change trains several times – this time, with no threat of capture by the Gestapo or the police. The train stopped in Limoges. It was cold and we had to wait until midnight for the next train. Franklin, then 15 months old, was crying. My parents had written to our friends from Saint-Mandé, the Raines-Lambé family, whom we had met by chance in August 1942, and who had also survived. They came to the train station and brought milk for Franklin. By this time, their daughters had been reunited with them. There were many tears of joy.

It was a long trip back. We were considered a *famille nombreuse* (a large family), and thus given priority to climb aboard one of the trains full of refugees heading home. In Limoges, we were offered seats in a first-class compartment. People were angry, screaming at us because we had priority. We changed trains again in Orleans. It took three days to reach the *gare d'Austerlitz* in Paris, where we arrived at night, exhausted. We had been invited to stay with the Paris family, who had been so good to us before we left in 1942.

Eventually, we were able to move back into our old apartment. Our toys had disappeared, but my mother consoled us by saying that we were now too big to play with toys from before the war, and that we would have new and exciting activities from then on. My mother later wrote that the Germans who occupied our apartment had damaged the furniture, and some of it was missing, but we were all so happy to be alive and back home. We had been liberated and we were now allowed to live freely. My mother, who was not a religious person, wrote in Franklin's journal that she thanked God for protecting us and for letting us live in freedom.







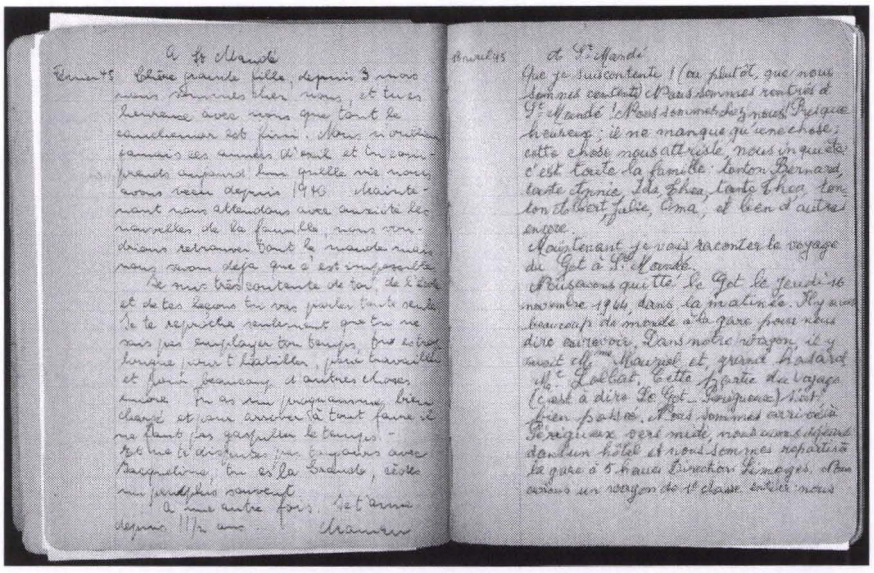
My mother's January 1945 letter to Franklin in his journal, written soon after our return to Saint-Mandé. The English translation is below.

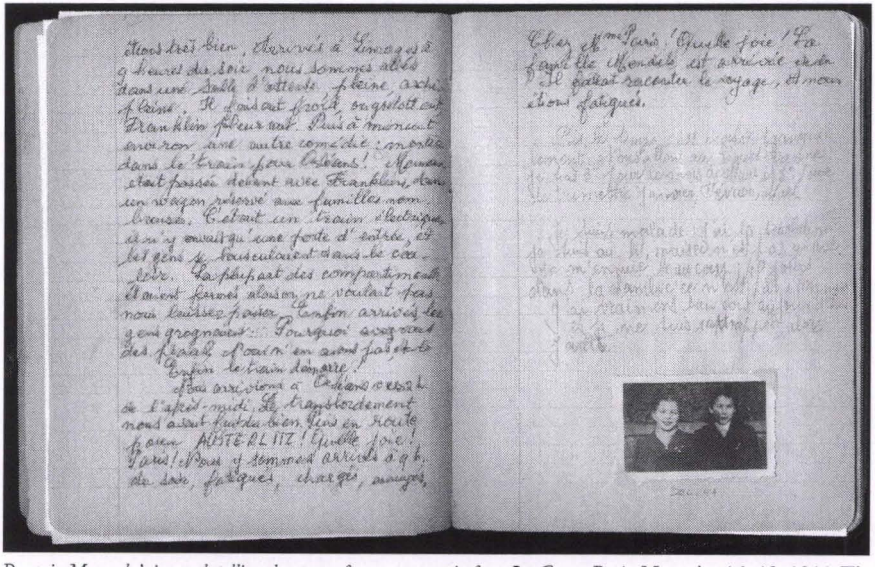
January 1945 in St Mandé

My little Franklin,

One year ago I wrote in your book for the first time. So many things have happened since then, but let's speak about you first. You are such a good baby, so loving. I have never seen a baby like you! You have all your teeth since about 4 months ago and you sleep quietly during the night which is very good for your parents. In the morning, you stay alone in the apartment. You sleep or you play in your playpen. You stand up in your playpen but you are not walking yet. You speak a lot but we don't understand yet what you are trying to tell us but it is so nice to hear you, your voice is so cute. You eat almost everything that we eat, which makes my life much easier. During the night you dirty your diapers, but during the day, you rarely have accidents. You look very healthy even though I don't take you out much, this winter is harsh and it is often too cold for you.

Since August 25, 1944 Paris has been liberated. This signifies for us that we are free, we are free people, we have the right to live in freedom, to raise our children, and to be happy. God protected us, and we tell him "thank you". We are grateful to many





Pages in Manuela's journal, telling the story of our return trip from Le Got to Paris, November 16–18, 1944. The English translation follows.

people who helped to save our lives and the lives of our three children! We have been at home for 2.5 months and it is such a joy after an absence of 2.5 years in exile. Papa goes to the office (but business has not picked up yet). Manuela and Jacqueline go to school, and I have my home, damaged by the Germans, but it is my home! So, in the end, things are as they were before, except that there is a little boy among us named Franklin. We have a nice apartment, but too small for us, we eat our fill and we have heat from electric radiators. There are so many people without homes, others who are hungry, and yet others who are cold. There are families who are separated, deportees, prisoners, miserable people. We are so happy to be together! The war will soon be over, the Russians are 150 km from Berlin, and we hope that soon we will have a normal life, and most of all, no more war. When you are older, we will have many stories to tell you. Continue to make us happy. Goodbye. Maman

April 18, 1945

In St. Mandé

I am so happy! (or rather, we are so happy!). We are back in St. Mandé! We are in our home! Almost happy, only one thing is missing; this thing makes us sad, it worries us. It's our entire family: Uncle Bernard, Aunt Annie, Ida, Thea, Aunt Thea, Uncle Albert, Julie, Oma, and so many more.

Now I will tell our trip from Le Got to St. Mandé. We left Le Got Thursday November 16 1944, in the morning. There were many people at the train station who came to say goodbye to us. In our compartment, there was Mrs. Maurial, and, quite by happenstance, Mr. Lalbat. This part of the trip (I mean Le Got-Périgueux) went well. We arrived in Périgueux around noon, we had lunch in a hotel and we went back to the station at 5PM. Destination: Limoges. We had a whole 1st class compartment: we were very comfortable. Arriving in Limoges at 9PM, we went to a waiting room, which was crowded – overcrowded. It was cold; we were shivering. Franklin was crying. Then around midnight, another drama: take the train to Orléans! Maman had gone ahead with Franklin, in a compartment reserved for large families. It was an electric train, there was only one entry door, and the people were pushing each other in the corridor. Most of the compartments were closed, so they would not let us pass. When we finally arrived the people were complaining: why do you have seats? We don't have any, etc etc. At last the train starts. We arrived in Orléans around 2PM. Changing trains made us feel good. Then on our way for AUSTERLITZ! What joy! Paris! Then we arrived at 9PM, tired, loaded with baggage, bored. At the house of Mme. Paris! What

joy! The Mendels family has arrived. We had to tell about our trip, and we were tired.

Since then time has gone by quietly. We attend Cours Racine. I am 3rd for the month of March and 3rd for the trimester of January, February, March.

I am sick with scarlet fever. I am in bed, but it doesn't matter. I am very bored: 40 days in my room, so that is no wonder.

I wrote well today and am all caught up, so I will stop here.

As soon as we moved back into our apartment, our neighbor M. Langlais returned my mother's piano, in perfect condition. When we interviewed M. Langlais in 1997, he recalled how much he liked my parents. He said that he remembered how the Germans were looking for Jews everywhere, chasing and arresting them: "It was tragic, atrocious, unbearable," he recalled, with tears in his eyes.[5]

Shortly after settling back in Paris, my father wrote a letter of thanks to the mayor of Le Got, Paul Delpech. M. Delpech answered warmly in February 1945, offering his hopes for a better world where people would live in harmony. Shortly after the war, my father made a formal request of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland to have M. Delpech honored for his courageous actions as one of the non-Jews who risked his life to save us during the Holocaust. We never found out if this honor came to pass.

We began receiving packages of food and clothing from our relatives in the U.S. We also received clothes from the Red Cross and other organizations, and from a center for refugees in a downtown hotel in Paris. I remember saying that I looked like an American girl, because most of the hand-me-down clothes came from the United States.

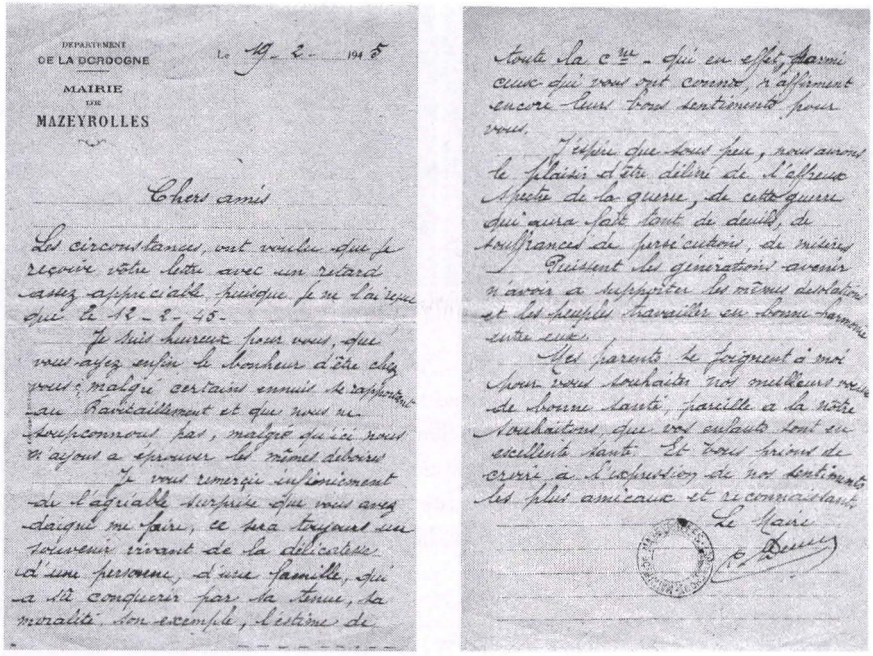
Soon after our return, my sister and I were offered scholarships to *le Cours Racine*, an excellent private school in St. Mandé that we would attend for the next four years. The headmistress, Madame Irène Chastel, had been a leader in the *Résistance*. We had to catch up with the other children because we had not had sufficient education in the village. We would then attend the *lycée Hélène Boucher* in Vincennes. Manuela was also offered free violin lessons by her teacher, M. Chédel, with whom she had begun studying before our departure in 1942.[6]

I remember that my mother paid a Polish woman, Justine, to help with the laun-

---

[5] Interview: Monsieur Langlais in Saint-Mandé, 1997. (DVD 61-62)

[6] I recently took Manuela's violin to Potter, the luthier that I use as well. He mentioned that it was a Vuillaume instrument from the 1840s and he appraised her violin at about $16,000.



DEPARTEMENT
DE LA DORDOGNE

MAIRIE
DE
MAZEYROLLES

Le 19 - 2 - 1945

Chers amis

Les circonstances, ont voulu que je reçoive votre lettre avec un retard assez appréciable, puisque je ne l'ai reçue que le 12 - 2 - 45 -

Je suis heureux pour vous, que vous ayez enfin le bonheur d'être chez vous ; malgré certains ennuis de rapprochement au Ravitaillement et que nous ne nous reconnaissons pas, malgré qu'ici nous n'ayons à éprouver les mêmes déboires

Je vous remercie infiniment de l'agréable surprise que vous avez daigné me faire, ce sera toujours une douceur rivaut de la délicatesse d'une personne, d'une famille, qui a su conquérir par sa ténue, sa moralité, son exemple, l'estime de

Toute la Cie - qui en effet, partage ceux qui vous ont connus, réaffirment encore leurs bons sentiments pour vous.

J'espère que dans peu, nous aurons le plaisir d'être débarrassés de l'affreux spectre de la guerre, de cette guerre qui aura fait tant de deuils, de souffrances de part et d'autre, de misères

Puissent les générations avenir n'avoir à déplorer les mêmes désolations et les peuples travailler en bonne harmonie entre eux.

Mes parents se joignent à moi pour vous souhaiter nos meilleurs vœux de bonne santé, pareille à la nôtre

Nous souhaitons que vos enfants sont en excellente santé. Et vous prions de croire à l'expression de nos sentiments les plus amicaux et reconnaissants

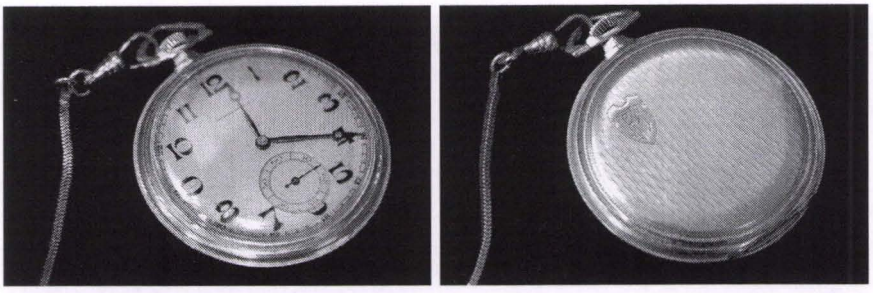
Le Maire
P. Delpech

M. Delpech's January 1945 letter containing his wishes for a better future.

dry, which in those days just after the war, had to be boiled on top of the stove in a *lessiveuse* (a laundry pot), then hung to dry in the hallway. Justine was a simple countrywoman, perhaps a refugee. She worked for the U.S. forces based in Paris; they gave her American food. She brought us white bread, which we hadn't seen during the war years, and we thought it tasted wonderful. I had forgotten what white bread tasted like. We also received peanut butter, either from Justine or in packages directly from the U.S. At first we didn't know what it was (the brand was "Skippy"). I remember that my father and I loved it but the rest of the family did not like it. The care packages also contained some sort of margarine in a plastic container with a yellow ball in the middle. Mixing the yellow ball with the white ingredients turned the margarine yellow so it looked like butter. Several years later, my mother was able to buy bananas and oranges, which we had not seen since the war.

Before we left Le Got, M. Vigié returned my father's tin box that had been hidden under the floor of his barn. There was nothing missing, and his gold watch was still working despite spending 29 months in a box in the ground.[7] After we returned to Paris, my parents pawned their valuable items, including my father's

[7] M. Vigié died in July 1988 and Mme. Vigié died in June 2003.



My father's gold pocket watch.

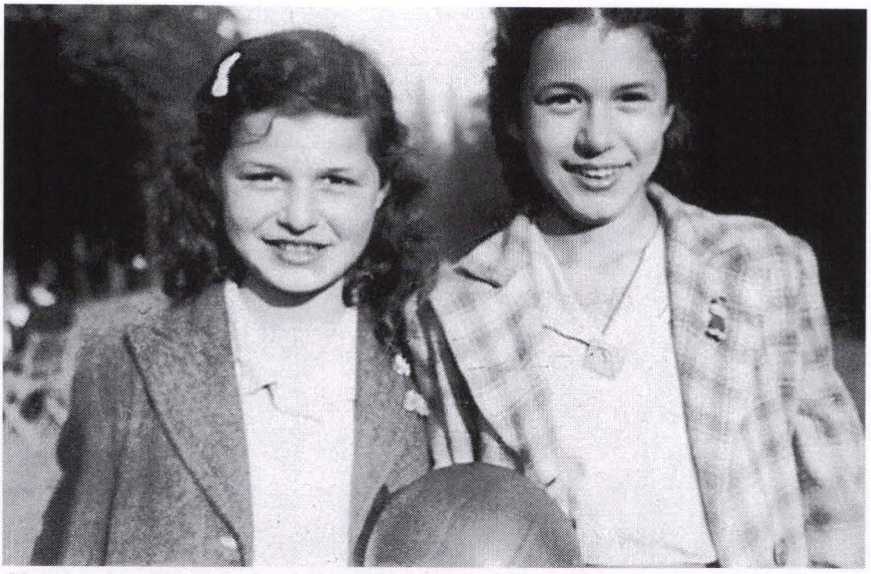
gold watch, at the national pawn shop (*"le Mont de Piété"*).[8] My father's business was in shambles and my parents needed money badly. The office was still there but it was empty – no purveyors, no clients. My father started to make money by selling jams door to door on his bicycle. My mother baked cakes that he sold as well. He told us that there were so few items for sale that he had no trouble selling anything he offered. Meanwhile, he worked to rebuild his import-export business.

My mother made clothes for us whenever she could find fabric and yarn, including from a store on the Champs Elysées called *"A La Toile d'Avion"* that sold fabric from the parachutes of the Americans. I envied my friends who wore store-bought clothes such as jersey wool twin sets, while I wore either hand-me-downs from America or homemade clothes. My mother continued making our clothes throughout our adolescence.

Manuela and I had acquired the local accent from Dordogne, pronouncing words the way they did in *le Midi*, the southwest; our friends thought it was funny.

During the summer, and on Thursdays, when there was no school, our friends would go to lunch and play at their grandmothers' or their cousins' homes; those days were always sad for me, because I had no grandmothers or cousins to visit. On Thursdays, my sister and I would go to the synagogue in Saint-Mandé-Tourelle to learn about Judaism, while our friends went to Catechism lessons at church. The rabbi who taught us was very strict. One time, he told us that Jews were not allowed to eat certain foods such as pork. I raised my hand and told him that during the war, there was not much to eat, and that a farmer had caught a wild boar in the forest. He cut it up and gave us a piece and my mother cooked it and we ate it. The rabbi said that we should never have eaten it. I answered that we were hungry. I ran home crying with Manuela, and told my mother. She

[8] I still have my father's watch (which was an engagement present from my mother to him in 1930) in my bedroom hanging above my dresser and I look at it every night. When I wind it, it still works.



Manuela and Jacqueline in October of 1946, wearing secondhand American coats.

pulled us out of the religion class.

One block from our apartment there was a camp for German prisoners of war. It was set up outdoors on an empty lot. I remember walking past it when I would go towards the zoo. There were German prisoners in khaki uniforms sitting on the ground cross-legged, surrounded by barbed wire. It was shocking to see, but I was not scared; I felt safe because they were imprisoned.

When I was nine and a half years old, I started taking piano lessons. I disliked the lessons, the teacher, and her old, dark house where the furniture was covered with white sheets. I learned to read notes, both right hand (the treble clef) and left hand (the bass clef). A year later I started taking cello lessons. It was my mother's idea. She remembered that in Hamburg, her uncle Erwin Hess' four children were all musicians who played the piano, violin, viola, and cello. I fell in love with the cello. Not only did it bring me consolation, it became my best friend and the love of my life. It was the best relief for what I did not have in my adolescent years: close relatives to visit and grandparents to spoil me and cuddle me.

At first, I played a three-quarter-size cello loaned to me by my cello teacher, M. Victor Clerget, a friend of my sister's violin teacher. Soon thereafter, he found



"MaJaFra", as our parents called us, on my father's 40th birthday, August 6, 1945. My brother was two years old. I was 10 and Manuela 12. My mother had made our clothes.

me a full-size cello in an attic, a very good instrument made in Mirecourt in the 1850s; my parents sold my bicycle (which was too small by then anyway) to pay for it. To get the cello back in playing condition, he took it to the luthier Gabriel Houfflack, on the *rue de Leningrad* in the 17th *arrondissement.* I still play that cello, which has a beautiful sound and is very valuable. I remember going home after my first cello lesson and showing off to my parents how I could hold the bow and play open strings: *la, ré, sol, do* (A, D, G, C). I thought it sounded beautiful; it brought me tremendous joy from the very first day.

Across the courtyard from our apartment building there had been a Jewish family, the Edelsteins, who had three children. We found out that they had been rounded up by the police and deported to concentration camps shortly after we left Paris. Two of the three children, Rita and Albert, came back. Rita was in her early twenties. Her head had been shaved, and she was very thin. My mother made clothes for her and gave her food. Later she became very heavy and bloated. After a while her size was normal again and her hair regrew. My mother made her wedding dress when she got married. She had two children. Albert was also very skinny and sad-looking. His twin sister, Sophie, never came back, and nei-

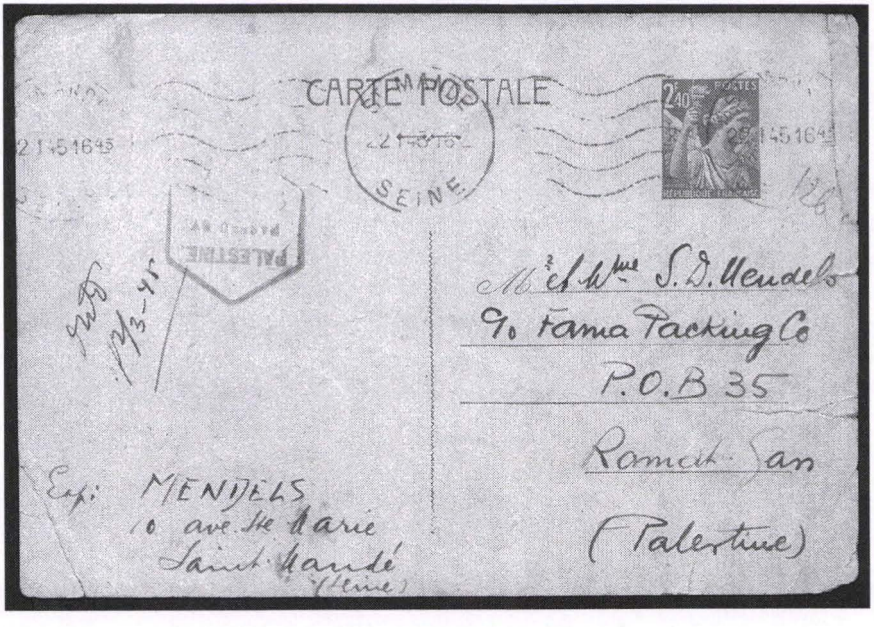
ther did their parents. Albert told us that in Auschwitz, his twin sister had been selected to work when she got off the train, but she ran after her mother who was already on a truck, crying "Mama, Mama." She ended up in the group that was murdered immediately. Eventually Albert rebuilt his life, got married and had children. He kept a room in his house with souvenirs of his parents and his twin sister, and he stayed very active in survivor groups.

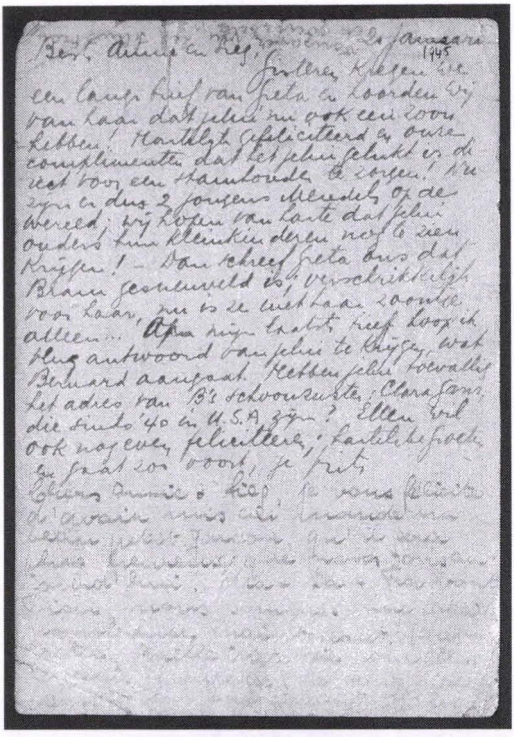
Rita and Albert's uncle and aunt, Maurice and Lotti Schaechter, who originally came from Romania, had hidden in the south of France and came back alive. They had no place to live and moved in with the Edelsteins. We all became good friends; we had a lot of sadness to share as well as the joy of being alive. Maurice Schaechter used to come and chat with my parents around the table after dinner almost every night. Though he had been a pharmacist in Romania, he was not allowed to practice in France unless he went back to school and took all the necessary exams. He became a businessman and opened a clothing store from which he made a good living.

The Schaechters had a child who died after a few months, and later had another child, Jean-Claude, who became a good friend of Franklin's. Manuela and I were invited to celebrate a Passover dinner at their home so we would learn some Jewish customs that my parents did not follow. The Schaechters eventually moved to Montreal, Canada, because they were afraid of the "Red Peril" – the Soviets.

Chapter 9
The Mendels: Deportation or Survival

My father wrote in Franklin's journal that he wanted to celebrate his birth after the war with all the Dutch relatives. Every time I read those lines, it breaks my heart. The following three letters show how my father was still hopeful that his relatives were alive.



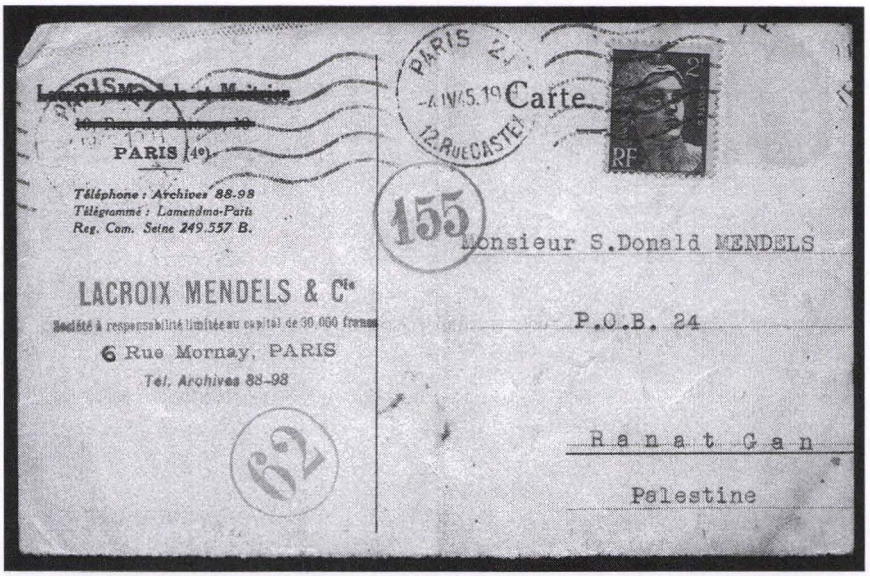


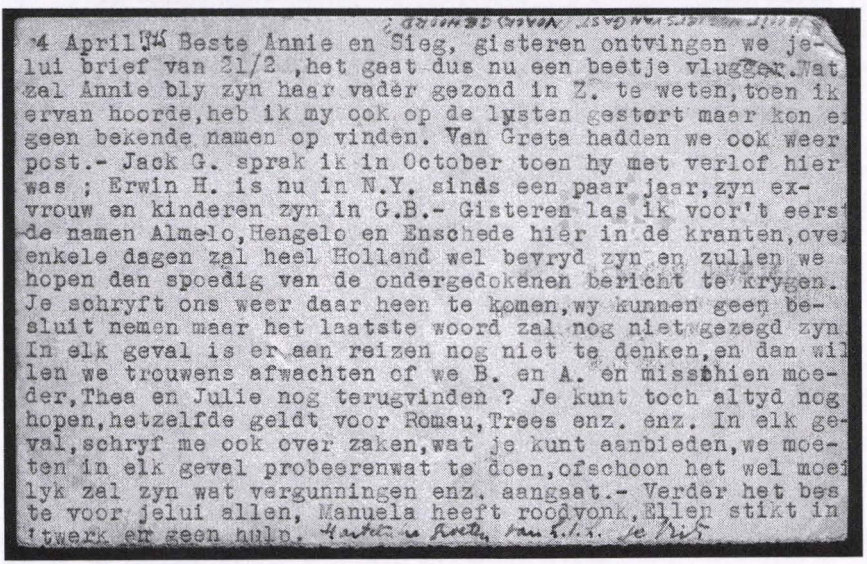
January 20, 1945

Dear Annie and Sieg,

Yesterday, we received a long letter from Greta and we heard from her that you now also have a son! Congratulations and our compliments that you succeeded in providing a son and heir. Now there are 2 Mendels boys in the world; we certainly hope that your parents still get to see their grandchildren! Greta wrote us that Bram was killed in action; terrible for her, now alone with her son. After my last letter I hope to receive quick response from you regarding Bernard. Do you by chance have the address of B.'s sister-in-law Clara Gans, who is in the USA since 1940? Ellen also wants to congratulate you.

Best regards, and continue as you are. Yours, Frits





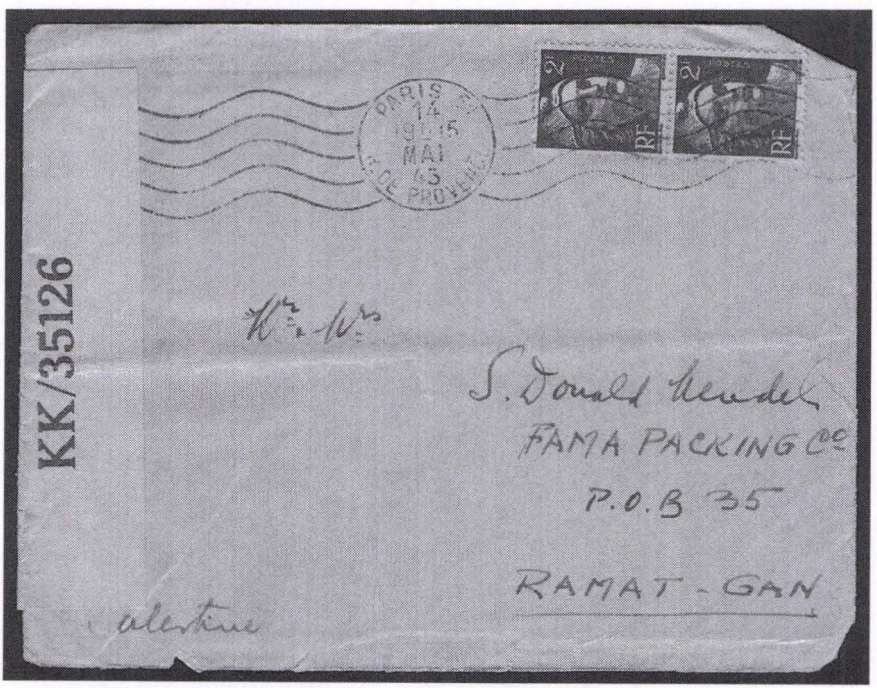
4 April Beste Annie en Sieg, gisteren ontvingen we je-
lui brief van 21/2 ,het gaat dus nu een beetje vlugger.Wat
zal Annie bly zyn haar vader gezond in Z. te weten,toen ik
ervan hoorde,heb ik my ook op de lysten gestort maar kon e
geen bekende namen op vinden. Van Greta hadden we ook weer
post.- Jack G. sprak ik in October toen hy met verlof hier
was ; Erwin H. is nu in N.Y. sinds een paar jaar,zyn ex-
vrouw en kinderen zyn in G.B.- Gisteren las ik voor't eerst
de namen Almelo,Hengelo en Enschede hier in de kranten,ove
enkele dagen zal heel Holland wel bevryd zyn en zullen we
hopen dan spoedig van de ondergedokenen bericht te krygen.
Je schryft ons weer daar heen te komen,wy kunnen geen be-
sluit nemen maar het laatste woord zal nog niet gezegd zyn.
In elk geval is er aan reizen nog niet te denken,en dan wil
len we trouwens afwachten of we B. en A. en misschien moe-
der,Thea en Julie nog terugvinden ? Je kunt toch altyd nog
hopen,hetzelfde geldt voor Romau,Trees enz. enz. In elk ge-
val,schryf me ook over zaken,wat je kunt aanbieden,we moe-
ten in elk geval probeerenwat te doen,ofschoon het wel moei
lyk zal zyn wat vergunningen enz. aangaat.- Verder het bes
te voor jelui allen, Manuela heeft roodvonk,Ellen stikt in
'twerk en geen hulp.

April 4, 1945

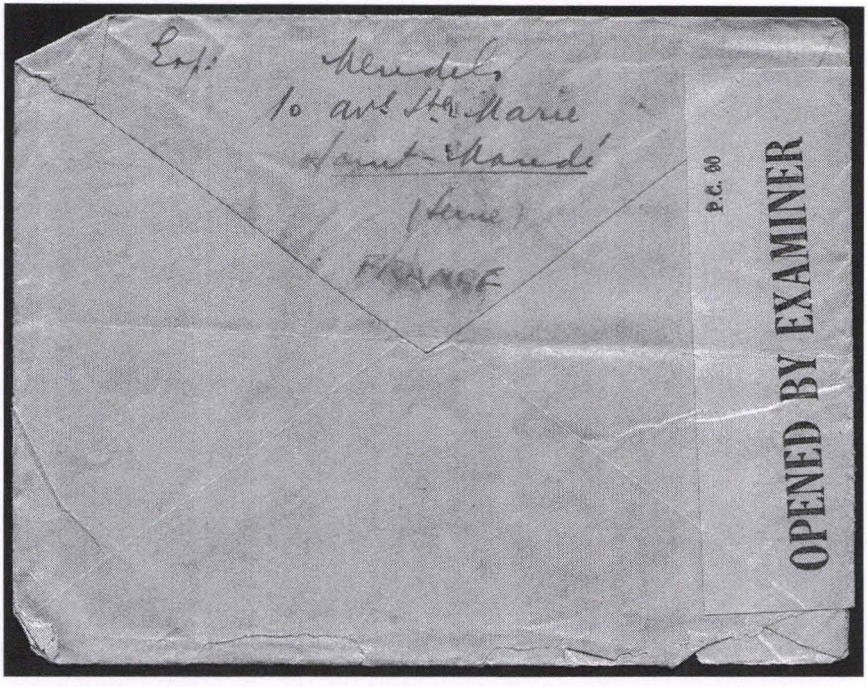
Dear Annie and Sieg,

Yesterday, we received your letter of 2-21. So it's going a little faster. How happy An-

nie must be to know her father is healthy in Z; when I heard about it I threw myself on the lists but couldn't find familiar names. We also again had mail from Greta. I spoke with Jack G. when he was here on leave; Erwin H. has been in New York for a few years; his former wife and children are in G.B. Yesterday for the first time I read the names Almelo, Hengelo, and Enschede in the newspaper here. In a few days all of Holland will be free; we hope then to get news of the hidden people. You write us to come there;[1] *we can't decide, but the final word has not been said. In any case, there is no thought of traveling as yet, and then for that matter, wait to see whether we will find Bernard and Annie, and maybe mother, Thea and Julie. One can always hope. The same goes for Rosa and Mau, Trees, etc. In any case, write me also about business, what you can offer; we must in any case try to do something, although it will be difficult with permits, etc. The best to you all. Manuela has scarlet fever, Ellen in up to her neck in work and no help. Greetings from your Frits.*



[1] He was referring to moving to Palestine.



1945 13 Mei

Beste Lily, Annie,

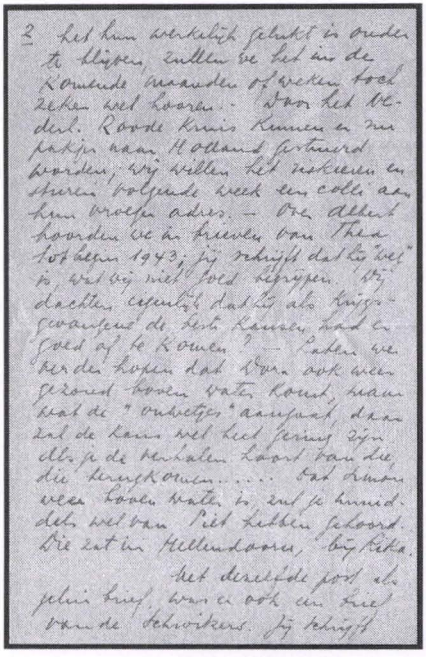
Gisteren ontving we jullie brief v. 13 Maart; het is toch nog een lange tijd en daarom ook wil ik thuis antwoorden. Maar misschien doet deze brief er niet meer zoo lang over, nu we weer kennismaken in Europa, in vredestijd leven! Vanzelfsprekend hebben we niet "gezeurd" we wilden nog een kijkje nemen in de stad waar toen we deze wandeling op het metrostation zagen, zijn we heen naar huis gegaan. –

Van jullie Vorm groeit en zeker, we kunnen jullie letzelde vertellen van onze Franklin, die nu 10 maand is. Binnenkort zullen we wel een kiekje sturen, dat zal nu wel vergoelijk zijn.

Hartelijk dank voor jullie aanbod ons wat te sturen; geld hebben we gelukkig niet hoodig; Kinderkleertjes zouden wel van pas komen evenals lekkernijtjes voor de Kinderen. Ik had er hoewaarden aan. Niet over geschreven maar dat mocht nog niet. Greta stuurden ons al een kratje van Frankrijk

wat hij zeker volgende winter zal drapeeren. Maar voor de meisjes is het probleem veel kariger, die groeien zoo. Erna (zuster / Ellen's nicht in U.S.A.) zal ons kleeren sturen waarmit Ellen waarschijnlijk voor 1 a 2 jaar gereed kunnen kan. Kleeding en schoeisel is een groot probleem hier en zal voorlopig wel zoo blijven. De eters gerust, wanneer ook mocht dan komen we wel mee klaar. Nu is het wel de vleeschschaarste, boter en vetten en olie krijgen we nu zoo'n per maand en dan is Franklin nog wat klein, maakt het daar niet aan – Enfin, dat is allemaal niet erg, trouwens als je onze kiekjes krijgt zul je zien dat Franklin is niet als een oorlogskind uitziet, verlumen als de?

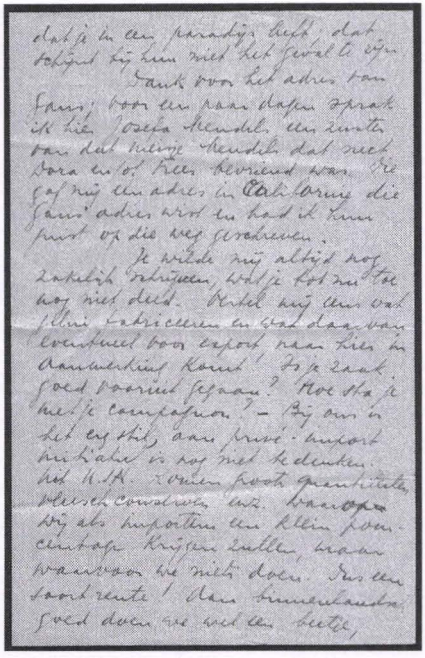
Zoodra wij jullie pakje kunnen sturen zullen we spullen van Franklin zenden, maar voorlopig is dat niet interessant omdat hij kleeren draagt, hoofdzakelijk gemaakt uit dingen die al aan de meisjes komen – Wat Bernard aangaat zijn wij vol goede hoop. En vannen



2

Het hun werkelijk gelukt is overleden te blijven, zullen we het nu de Komende maanden of weken toch zeker wel hooren. - Van het Bedrijf Roode Kruis Kunnen en nu pakjes naar Holland gestuurd worden, wij willen het nakijken en sturen volgende week een colli aan hun Utrechts adres. - Over Albert hoorden we in brieven van Thea tot begin 1943; jij schrijft dat hij "weg" is, wat wij niet goed begrepen. Wij dachten eigenlijk dat hij als krijgsgevangene de Vierde Kamers had en goed af te komen? - Laten we verder hopen dat Vera ook weer gezond boven water komt, maar wat de "onderlijgers" aangaat, daar zal de kans wel heel gering zijn als je de verhalen hoort van die die terugkomen..... Dat Simon weer boven water is, zal je inmiddels wel van Piet Lebbink gehoord hebben. Die zat in Hellendoorn, bij Rika.

Het derde post als gelukkig brief, was er ook een heel van de schrijvers. Jij schrijft



dat je in een paradijs leeft, dat schijnt bij hun niet het geval te zijn.

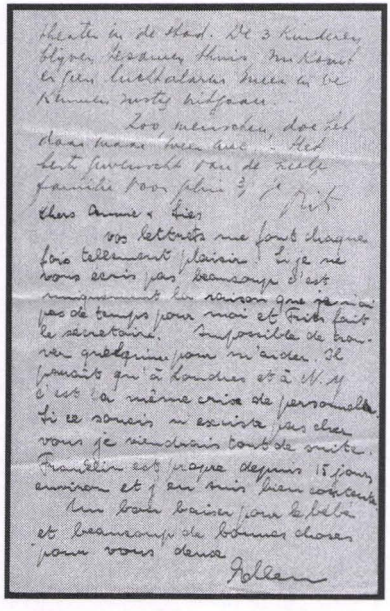
Dank voor het adres van Jans; voor een paar dagen sprak ik Lies Josefa Mendels. een zuster van dat nichje Mendels dat met Vera en of Rees getrouwd was. Ze zal mij een adres in Californië die Jans' adres wist en had ik hun juist op die weg gestuurd.

Je wilde mij altijd nog zakelijk schrijven, wat je tot nu toe nog niet deed. Vertel mij eens van Simons fabrieken en wat daar van overtuigd voor export naar hier in aanmerking komt. Is je zaak goed doorgekomen? Hoe staat het je compagnon? - Bij ons is het erg stil, aan privé-verkeer niet te denken. Het N.K. vormen proefquantiteiten vleesch conserven enz. waarvan wij als importeurs een klein percentage krijgen zullen, waarvan waarvoor we niets doen. Is een saai zeute! Maar binnenlands goed doen we wel een beetje,

3

maar dat ijsje geen omzetten. Enfin ik verdien de kost, waar het toch naar opgaat komt en voor de rest zullen we het zien wat de toekomst brengt. - Rijn avonden is zondag 1939 in de provincie en zondag 1940 het ik hem niet gezien. Een tijd lang waren we "een provi" nu is alles weer goed maar in de loop van de zomer zal hij wel eens komen en zullen dan wel een definitieve uitmaken (Kibbe / of niet)

Er verder heb ik niet veel nieuws te vertellen. - Daniela heeft roodvonk gehad, is nu beter. Ik schreef al dat Leida meisjes goed leeren te zijn altijd 1e 1 of tenminste 2 of 3. Beide hebben ze Fluide pianolen en 1 ook viool. Ze hadden woordenlijsten, deftigen daar hun ook weer niet. - Sedert enige Daniela's Dichte zullen Ellen en ik natuurlijk vaak, maar hondsdolen fungeren we een paar maal uit en ook vanavond jammer we daar



theater in de stad. De 3 kinderen blijven samen thuis. Nu komt er een luchtalarm meer in de Kranten nooit uitgaan.

Zoo menschen, doe het daar maar een beetje. Het beste gewenschte van de hele familie voor jou 3 je

Thers Annie + Lies

Vos lettres me font toujours faire le tellement plaisir. Si je ne vous écris pas beaucoup c'est uniquement par raison que je n'ai pas de temps pour moi et Ruth fait la secrétaire. Impossible de vous parler quelques mots l'un à l'autre. Il faudrait que j'aille à Londres et à N.Y. c'est la même crise de personnel. Si je pouvais m'excuser pas chez vous je viendrais tout de suite. Franklin est papa depuis 15 jours environ et j'ai mis beaucoup de temps à vous donner des nouvelles. Mon bon baiser pour Isabelle et beaucoup de bonnes choses pour vous deux

Hélène

May 13, 1945
Dear Sieg and Annie,

Yesterday we received your letter of March 13; it is still a long journey and therefore I want to answer promptly. But maybe this letter won't take so long anymore, now that we, at least in Europe, are at peace! Personally, we haven't "celebrated"; we wanted to take a look in the city, but when we saw the crowds at the Métro station we went back home.

So your Doron grows and thrives; we can tell you the same of our Franklin, who is 21 months old now. Before long, we will send a snapshot, that should now be permitted.

Thanks a lot for your offer to send us something. Fortunately, we don't need money. Children's clothing would be appreciated, as well as sweets for the children. I had written Piet about that, but it was not yet permitted. Greta already sent us a pair of pants for Franklin, which he certainly will wear next winter. But for the girls, the problem is more difficult, they grow so fast! Erna Spruyt, Ellen's cousin in the USA, will send us clothes, from which Ellen can probably manage to make something for M and J. Clothing and shoes are a big problem here and probably will remain so for a while. Foodstuffs, though difficult at times, we can manage. Now again, there is the scarcity of meat. Butter and fats and oil, we get 500 gr per month, and since moreover, we still have some, we don't lack that. Enfin, all that isn't bad. Furthermore, if you get our snapshots you'll see that Franklin doesn't look like a war child, nor do M and J. As soon as we can send packages, we'll send things of Franklin's, but for the time being, that is not worth while because he wears clothes made from things of the girls.

As for Bernard, we are full of hope. And if indeed they succeeded in remaining hidden, we'll certainly hear about it in the coming weeks or months. Through the Dutch Red Cross packages can now be sent; we want to risk it, and will send a package to their former address.

We heard about Albert in letters from Thea until the beginning of 1943; you write that he is "away", which we don't really understand. We really thought as a prisoner of war, he had the best chance to come through.

Let us further hope that Dora also comes out of hiding in good health, but as for the older generation, the chances are very slim. When you hear the stories of those who return....

By now you've probably heard from Piet that Simon is back. He stayed in Hellendoorn, with Rika.

With the same mail as your letter there was also a letter from the Schwitzend(s). You wrote that you live in a paradise; that seems not to be the case for him. Thanks for the address of Gans; a few days ago I spoke here with Josefa Mendels, a sister of the Mendels girl who was a friend of Dora's and of Fien's. She gave me an address in California and I had just written them.

You always wanted to write me about business, which to date you haven't done. Tell me what you produce and what eventually would qualify for export here! Has your business grown well? How is your relationship with your partner? Here it is very quiet. No chance yet of private import initiative. From the U.S. come large quantities of canned meats, etc., of which we, as importers, will get a small percentage, but for which we don't do anything. Thus a kind of interest! We do a bit of business internally, but the transactions are minimal. Enfin, I earn a living, which is the main thing, and for the rest we'll see what the future brings. Since 1939 my associate is in the provinces, and I haven't seen him since 1940. For some time we were "en froid," now everything is in order, but sometime in the summer he'll come and we'll have a definitive explanation (or not).

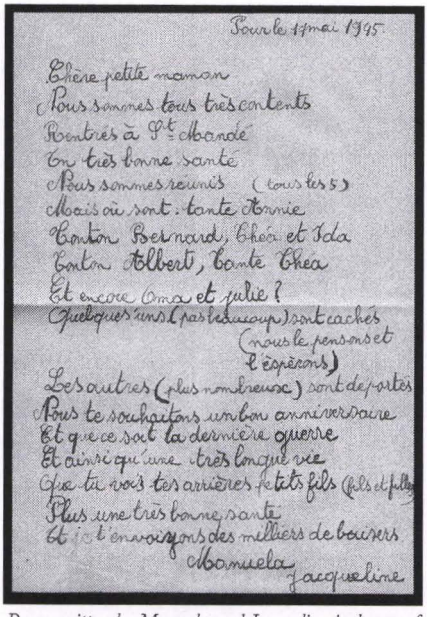
Further, I have little news to tell. Manuela had scarlet fever; is now well again. I wrote already that both girls learn well, they're always #1, or at least #2 or #3. Furthermore, both take piano lessons, and Manuela, also violin. They had Jewish lessons, and will resume those.

During Manuela's illness, Ellen and I were at home, but since then we've gone out a few times, and also tonight we'll go to the theater in the city. The three children stay home together; now there are no more air raids, and we can go out without worry.
So people, be well. Best wishes from the whole family for you 3. Frits.

Dear Annie and Sieg,

Your letters always make me so happy. If I don't write much, it is only because I don't have free time and Frits has the role of secretary. Impossible to find someone to help me. It seems that in London and New York there is the same personnel crisis. If this worry doesn't exist where you live, I would come right away. Franklin is toilet trained since 15 days and I'm very happy.

A big kiss for the baby and best wishes for you too. Ellen.



Pour le 17 mai 1945

Chère petite maman
Nous sommes tous très contents
Rentrés à St. Amande
En très bonne santé
Nous sommes réunis (tous les 5)
Mais où sont: tante Annie
Tonton Bernard, Thea et Ida
Tonton Albert, Tante Thea
Et encore Oma et Julie?
Quelques uns (pas beaucoup) sont cachés
(nous le pensons et
l'espérons)
Les autres (plus nombreux) sont déportés
Nous te souhaitons un bon anniversaire
Et que ce soit la dernière guerre
Et ainsi qu'une très longue vie
Que tu vois tes arrières petits fils (fils et fille)
Plus une très bonne santé
Et je t'envoie ons des meilleurs de baisers
Manuela
Jacqueline

Poem written by Manuela and Jacqueline in honor of my mother's birthday, May 17, 1945. The poem shows that at that time we still did not know the fates of most of the Mendels members of the family.

Little by little, my father found out that most of the closest members of our Dutch family had been rounded up, moved to Holland's Westerbork transit camp, then to Sobibor, Auschwitz, Monowitz, or other death camps, where they were murdered by gas or starvation or bullets. They included my 69-year-old paternal grandmother Thekla, my father's brother Bernard and his wife Annie, and my father's sister Therese ("Thea") and her daughter Juliette ("Julie").[2]

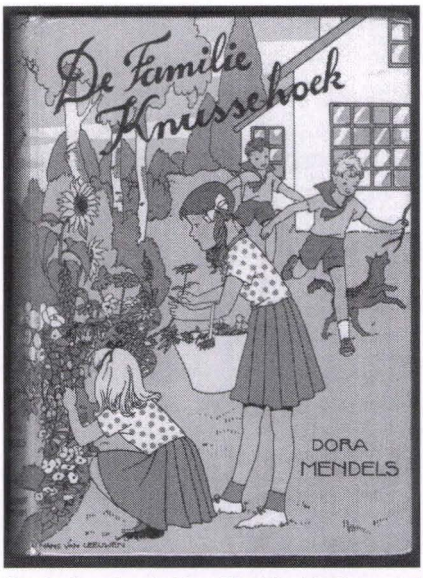
Through the Red Cross, my father tried to find out about the rest of his family. I remember coming home from school one day for lunch; my sister and I were arguing about something silly and my mother told us to be quiet. There was a telegram from the Red Cross on the silver tray on the buffet in the dining room, telling us that Bernard and Annie had been murdered in Auschwitz. Manuela and I stopped arguing. It was a terrible day for all of us.

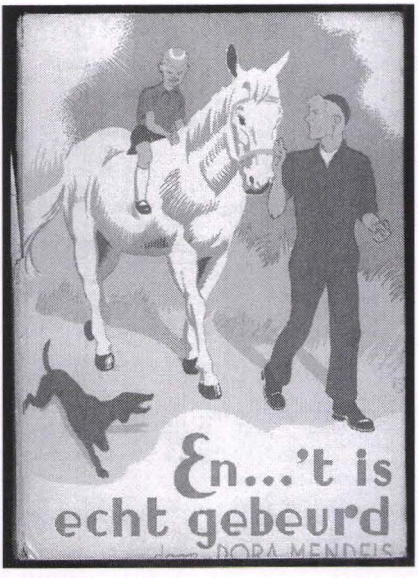
I don't know exactly when my father found out that his mother Thekla had perished in Sobibor. In some ways, it was fortunate that his father Emanuel Mendels had died of a heart attack in 1939. Emanuel did not have to suffer like his wife, our grandmother Thekla, and so many other members of the Mendels family.

My father's cousin Dora Mendels hid in an attic in Holland for a year and a half. She wrote in her memoirs that she couldn't wash her hair for all that time, and that she suffered greatly from the heat in the summer and the cold in the winter. She kept herself busy by writing children's stories, which she published after the war, among them the book *De familie Knussehoek*. The stories featured young girls named "Ma" and "Ja"– the nicknames for us, Manuela and Jacqueline, that my parents used in letters to family in Holland. When Franklin was born, we became "MaJaFra". To this day, Manuela and I still sign our letters "Ma" and "Ja".

---

[2] Through the International Tracing Service (ITS) at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, I found out that more members of our family perished than I was previously aware of. I also found out that my father's aunt Olga (Marx) Goldberg survived Terezin and settled in New York.





Two books written by Dora Mendels while she was in hiding.

Dora's sister Greta and Greta's husband, Bram Levi, were able to acquire a row-boat that the Germans had confiscated from some Dutch individuals. They rowed for 60 hours all the way to England, where they changed their name from Levi to Rodriguez. Their son Ronald ("Ronnie") was born in England. Bram joined the Free Dutch Forces in England and was part of the Allied forces that landed in Brabant, Belgium. He was killed there on October 31, 1944, and buried in Belgium. Greta and Ronald survived in England, then returned to Holland after the war. All three were decorated by the queen of Holland after the war, including a posthumous decoration for Bram.



"Ronnie" Levi and Franklin, December 30, 1954.

Dora and Greta both lived to be near 100 years old. Toward the end of their lives, they lived in the same retirement home; both died in 2007.

Dora's parents, Maurits and Rosa, and



Dora Mendels, December 1948.



Greta (Mendels) Levi, October 10, 1947.

Dora's sister Therese Matilde ("Trees") were rounded up and sent to the detention (transit) camp of Westerbork on March 27, 1943. Therese, who was a nurse, tried to help the detainees there. According to a 1951 document from the Dutch Ministry of Justice, and archives in The Hague, they were shipped to Sobibor on July 20, 1943 and murdered on July 23, 1943. (The Dutch document simply says that they "died.") Between March and July 1943, 23,000 Jews from Holland were gassed in Sobibor.

Below is the last letter from Rosa, Maurits, and Therese ("Trees") to family members, written from Westerbork prior to their deportation to the death camp of Sobibor, written originally in Dutch and translated by my cousins Thea and Eda.

June 28, 1943

Dear Trio, After 2 hours wandering around on sand and paved streets, we have (it is now 10:30) arrived at our "home". It has of course been planned that way, because the different homes are then cleaned, which is necessary, but one does not have cover. Luckily it is not raining, but very cold, and I walked around with a heavy winter cap, which isn't too warm at all for me. It hasn't been a beautiful June, one could count the

warm days.

Hopefully, July will be better. Pietje, we have noticed that you have sent our letters on. Luckily, Do-- was a bit better, because he wrote us a few words. Let him be careful not to go outside too soon in this weather. I could give him examples of pneumonias that became worse. With this illness, one can't be too careful, otherwise one can suffer with it for a long time. We live a monotonous life here, except that this week quite a few acquaintances have joined us – the uncle and aunt of Hans also. Also Gretl Handje (she is in the hospital) was very overwrought by the death of her parents, and I could name many others. Tomorrow will be a difficult day again, another transport will leave. Seert-- works hard, but is accepting of her position because she has seen so many friends and colleagues. We hope that before long our laundry will be done again by the community wash, that would be a big help to her, but the realization of such things can take a long time. Until now, Trees also does our washing. If you could see our laundry, yo would think that we don't keep ourselves clean. Black as soot! Handkerchiefs not fit to look at or touch, and yet we blow our noses in them again – and so it is with everything. Hands, nails, everything black from dust.

The food is usually well prepared, but if we didn't have good friends who send packages, we would be hungry. A. wrote that she would send, but nothing has yet arrived. Yesterday, we had a package from Flora, but be sure to tell her that she should not send sliced or buttered bread, the ends are usually spoiled or moldy. It sometimes takes too long en route. I already wrote her that earlier, and she still does it. Who will tell her? And whoever sends something, at the same time can they send a card with notice of the send-off? Then we can check on whether it arrives. We do write immediately a card of receipt. Rosey, thank you again, those drops are excellent, and I feel well with them. Too bad that half the pot of jam has run out. I don't write this from lack of appreciation, on the contrary, but so that one will be very careful when packing. These packages have to withstand many bumps before they reach us. Also Seert is not forgotten by her friends and colleagues. Everyone, especially Renée, thank you for all the troubles you've taken. Klaas, that is Mr. --- wrote so kindly about everything. Tell him thank you. I hope so passionately that I can soon do it in person.

Our life here is so segregated, no news permeates to us, thus we make small talk with each other, and one must not pay much attention to it. Re is still in "2", but is slowly losing her memory, really sad. Jaap's little child is adorable, and they are both very hospitable. We three are healthy, but have colds. One has that here all the time because of the climate and drafts, because if all the doors aren't thrown open when so many people are together, it is intolerable. So Leida studies now too, a very pleasant idea for

us, and also what Klaas wrote about them all. Good health is everything. It seems that I have become even skinnier, but it doesn't bother me. Now I must leave some space for Seert and the man. All who I didn't name, like Sparbos, who read this also, and Erna, and family M. and Robbie and Rose, to all "so long", thanks and warmest greetings from R.
Pietje, does your friend still visit you? And has Vera gone on to the next grade?

Dear all, I also want to write you some greetings. We are working hard. I have met a tremendous number of old colleagues during the last days, and I hope to see them for a long time. Also --- and parents and further family. I spoke with them today. She didn't want to use the W.C., it was too dirty for her, but one can't avoid it. I am asking for toilet paper, also brown sugar, or white cubes, what you can. Maybe E. would be so kind as to make another bottle of extract, if possible. Also ---, tea and cacao. We can get boiling water here and will make something drinkable. Twice I received a package without sender's name. One time sent and packed by J.R. From whom? Many thanks. If we don't get extra bread we will certainly be short. Will you send it weekly? There are three of us. Also, please coffee, ---, salt, rice, and all the rest. I sometimes have the time to cook something. It is nice to be able to cook some rice ourselves, when we have diarrhea, which happens a lot. Also, please, we miss it a lot, elders do get it, vitamins like cucumbers, carrots and tomatoes, we don't get anything like that here, only the ill and the children. Also, please, a canteen or something to get water in and eventually make tea in.

R. could probably not send anymore of what we asked for before. Too bad. That I ask for so much is not that I want so much, but because I can't get anything here. Please, also shoe laces. Also, please bread coupons. You probably still have ration coupons? One can get some items with those here. We could get cigarettes here, but when it was my turn again, everything was sold. Many friends are back, among others, my former J.J. v.d. Laren. He will want to send you his greetings. If you have the opportunity to send me a woolen vest or sweater, do it. I have a dark vest and a heavy dark reddish sweater. I still wear red. And --- had striped trousers of father's who would like to have them. He has only 1 pair. How much work you have for us now. -Trees

Since we wrote yesterday, already much has changed. M. received 2 packages with a pail, bowls and a very small coffee pot and bread and a washboard with contents, and today Trees received a package from Renee M. We have already confirmed its arrival. We also received a letter from Til, our thanks for that, as well as for the package. Today my friends have left us again. It is said that Greet M. is also among them. In the meantime, others have arrived so that we don't have to complain about emptiness, it is full.

After one good day, it has become cold again. It is an unpleasant climate here, unstable and raw. We are luckily in good health and hope you all are too. It is good that Dora thinks about the saying on the bookcase and will act thereon – and hope that the other sayings will come true. Greetings for all, named and not named. When you have a chance, would one of you send us the house number of Ata? You all stay healthy and hopeful of seeing each other again soon, Mau

My father had two other cousins who survived, Simon and Louis-Philip ("Piet"). Simon, "Piet", and Jacob (who did not survive) were the sons of David Simon Mendels and his wife Mietje Rebekka (we knew her as "Tante Re"). David Simon was the brother of Maurits and Emanuel Mendels. David Simon Mendels died in 1941, in Holland, of a natural death – and so did not suffer the fate of his wife Mietje Rebekka (Prins) Mendels, who was deported and murdered in Auschwitz.

Below are translations of three postcards that Mietje Rebekka "Re" Prins Mendels, Leentje "Leny" de Jonge Mendels, Jacob "Jaap" Mendels and Mirjam Mendels were able to send from Westerbork to Louis-Philip Polak in Amsterdam, who apparently is the nephew of Mietje Rebekka.

CARD #1
from R. Prins Mendels – from Barak 82, Hospital, Westerbork
To L. Phil. Polak
Watteau Straat 5-1 Amsterdam
7-30-1943

Dear Louis, Alice, Lea, Bram, Miep and all who ask about us,
The twice monthly writing day has begun, and I can let you hear something from me. Luckily, we are still healthy and we hope to also receive good news from you. Mother has been moved from Barak 81 to 82, an internal move, and she lies there next to a Mrs. Roos, I believe a niece of Lea, with whom she then has some conversation. Her memory is regressing frightfully quickly, but otherwise she is doing well and adapts herself to the circumstances. This evening, Mr. and Mrs. de Metz came to visit her, they arrived here on Saturday. We go every evening with the baby for half an hour and bring her something from the packages. And so, I arrive at thanking you for what you sent us with so much care. It is now 2:30 at night. Leny and I are both on night duty – but it isn't easy to sleep during the day in this heat. In addition, we have the problem with flies, so that a few flyswatters would make a very useful present. Can you help us with those?

I already wrote you about Mau, Rosa and Trees, we really miss them – but can't do anything about it. Several mixed-married people are returning from here to Amsterdam. John van Loen Hertog is not here anymore, he is better. Mr. P. is still here, as is Maurice Legrand. Is it also so warm at Watteau Street? It makes you wish for a bath in the sea! There isn't much to tell from here. The little one is growing nicely under the circumstances. She tries to stand and will probably start walking soon, but we don't push it. I'll keep this card for now, maybe there will be something new to share – until tomorrow. This week I had to appear at the Joodse Raad, section Confina, to give information. I am curious if it will lead to anything.

Friday evening – in the meantime, Mr. Philip has also been released from the hospital. All my clients are walking away, but there are always others coming. Otherwise, no news to add, only, that it is still very warm. Mrs. Hausdorf-Bondi lies also next to Mother, so she is not without conversation. This card has to go. Greetings to all, and thanks again for everything. If you know Ali's address in Noordwyk, please send her this card. The photograph is still not finished. The potatoes are gone.
Re, Leny, Jaap, Mirjam

CARD #2
from R. Prins Mendels – from Barak 82, Hospital, Westerbork
To L. Phil. Polak
Watteau Straat 5-1 Amsterdam
8-14-1943

Dear all, It is good that it is writing day today in the hospital, so that I can confirm the safe arrival of both packages. The last one with the toys for Mirjam arrived last evening. To all who helped with it, our heartiest thanks, but we missed Jaap and Max's names and hope they are alright. From here, I can luckily tell you good news. We four are all healthy, and Mother came this week really to visit again. That is another tablecloth for her and for us, also cozy. We also had a card from Erich. He still lives in Leiden. We both go on night duty again on Tuesday. Last time, we liked it rather well, only during the day, the flies are so annoying. Louis, could you send us some money? One has to wait so long through the Confina. See what you can do! It seems that I'm lacking for news, so I'll close. Next Wednesday is Jaap's writing day and we'll write again. For all, our heartiest greetings and much love from
Re, Leny, Jaap and Mirjam.

CARD #3,
To Mr. and Mrs. L. Phil. Polak
Watteau Straat, 5-1, Amsterdam –Z
From J. Mendels, Barak 42-b, Westerbork, Post Haaghalen Oost.

Have to tell you that yesterday Mother was released from the hospital. We tried to keep her there, but through a concurrence of circumstances it was not possible. She is now in Barak 70, not far from here. Besides, everything here is in walking distance. Have read the card from Lea, glad that all is well. Leny asks if one can still buy safety pins and whether you still have 2 pillowcases for us. You must have received the postcard from Mother from last Saturday. We haven't heard anything from Ali for a long time, but we'll probably receive a package from her this week. Mother can now come to us regularly, and we have her eat with us every evening – she doesn't have anything else. Leny asks also for a package of bleach, and maybe Lea has a piece of soap left for our little Mirjam. She is starting to walk and gets very dirty. Louis, would you be able to locate some second-hand books on the subject of graphology? Would you try to do that? Bye, dear ones, be well.

Until we write again, and much love,
Re, Leny, Jaap and Mirjam

Simon Mendels had married a Belgian woman, Elvire Janssens, who was not Jewish. In hopes of preventing her arrest, they divorced so she would not be at risk for being married to a Jew. Elvire continued to run *De Aardbol*, the hotel they owned in Amsterdam, while Simon stayed hidden, first in the cellar, then in Ellendoorn with someone named Rika. Simon and Elvire survived and remarried after the war. They were a wonderful couple and lived many years. They never had children. Simon was funny, always full of jokes and very kind to us children.

In 1946, "Sieg" and Annie Mendels traveled from Palestine to Paris, to embrace all of us who had survived. They then took Manuela and me to Holland for a reunion with the remaining Mendels family there. We stayed in Simon and Elvire's hotel in Amsterdam.

Of my father's many cousins, the five who survived had either left Holland or – like Dora and Simon – were extremely lucky. Like my father, "Piet" Mendels and "Sieg" Mendels had left Holland long before the war. "Piet" had moved to England in the 1930s and married an English woman, Phyllis, whose father owned a plant on the west coast of Cornwall. The plant manufactured kaolin clay, a base



Simon and Elvire Mendels in Holland, December 29, 1940.



Simon and Elvire in the kitchen of their hotel, 1946.

ingredient of china, paper, and other products that became very useful for the war effort. They lived in Castle Fields, Fowey, Cornwall.

In April 1943, while "Piet" and his wife Phyllis were leading a normal life in the west of England, "Piet"'s brother Jacob ("Jaap"), with his wife Leentje DeJonge and 19-month-old daughter Mirjam, were arrested, interned in Westerbork, and, in September 1943, deported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. Jacob Mendels worked with children in the Jewish psychiatric institution *Apeldoornse Bos*. On January 21, 1943, in one of the most infamous crimes against Dutch Jews during the war, all the mentally retarded children and adults in this facility were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz. According to my father, Jacob said "Not without me." His efforts to protect the children were in vain, and he was deported in September 1943.

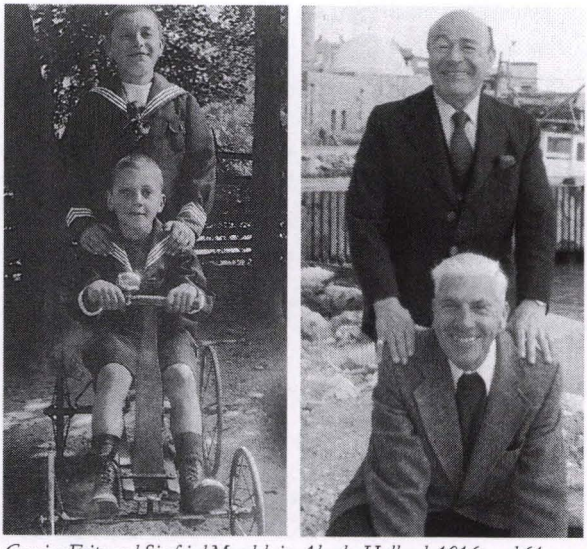
"Piet" Mendels had written to the Dutch Red Cross in 1942 to inquire about the family. The response was that everyone was in Almelo or Amsterdam, and there were no problems. On October 20, 1943, "Piet" wrote to London's Jewish Agency for Palestine to request immigration certificates to Palestine for his mother Mietje Rebekka, his brother Simon, and Jacob's family; he did not know that some of them had been murdered one month earlier. The reply stated that no immigration certificates could be issued for people living in enemy-occupied countries. Jacob survived until March 31, 1944, when he perished in Auschwitz after 14 months as a slave laborer.[3]

"Sieg", the brother of Therese, Dora, and Greta, had studied agronomy at the University of California at Berkeley, before settling in Palestine in 1933. He met and married Annie, born Anna Helena De Haas, also Dutch, who had settled on a kibbutz there. On his way to Palestine in late 1933, "Sieg" stopped in Paris; my father went to the train station with Manuela as a baby in his arms. "Sieg" and Annie were strong Zionists. They had two sons, Doron and Yair Mendels, both born in Tel Aviv, who continue to work and live in Jerusalem with their families. Doron is a professor of ancient history at the University of Jerusalem. Yair is a businessman. Doron and Yair and all their children have served in the Israeli army. "Sieg" died in 2007; Annie is almost 100 years old and living in a Dutch retirement home in Israel.

Two cousins of mine, Thea and Eda[4] Mendels, were saved by a wonderful fam-

[3] Bloemendal, Hans. In Memoriam. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1995, pp. 491-494, 768-769.

[4] Her real name was Ida, but after she came to the U.S. to live with the Gans family (her uncle and aunt) who had a daughter named Ida, it was decided that Ida Mendels would become Eda Mendels, pronounced the same way as in Holland.



Cousins Frits and Siegfried Mendels in Almelo, Holland, 1916, and 64 years later in Ramat-Gan, Israel, during Frits and Ellen's 1980 visit.

ily of farmers, the van de Streeks, in the Dutch village of Oldebroek in Gelderland province. (Mr. van de Streek was a veterinarian.) Their parents, Bernard and Annie, were hiding in another house outside the same village, but were denounced and perished in Auschwitz. At the beginning of the war, Bernard and Annie were thinking of going to Cuba; they even started to learn Spanish, and got the necessary inoculations. But then it was too late: Holland was invaded and they could not get visas. Through an underground organization, they found out about Oldebroek and the wonderful people (a very religious family, with hearts of gold) who would risk their lives to take in the girls, despite the fact that they already had 10 children of their own. As we know today, anyone in Germany or any German-occupied country who helped Jews could be shot or deported if denounced by neighbors or other malevolent people.

Thea Mendels has described that while sitting at dinner one night, she heard one of the van de Streeks' guests say that the two people hiding in a certain nearby house had been caught by the Gestapo. She understood this to mean her parents. Her sister Eda returned the next day from spending nine weeks in a hospital in Zwolle while ill (under the identity of one of the van de Streek's daughters because she had no papers). Thea was so happy that Eda was finally home that she could not tell her the bad news until months later. The two girls hoped for a long time that their parents were alive and would come back. They did not find out until many years later that their parents had died in Auschwitz, in January 1944. On a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington in the 1990s, Thea read in a book about Dutch Jews that her parents had perished in Auschwitz, and only then did she really finally accept that fact. (The book, which I also consulted, was Hans Bloemendal's *In Memoriam*, published in 1995.)

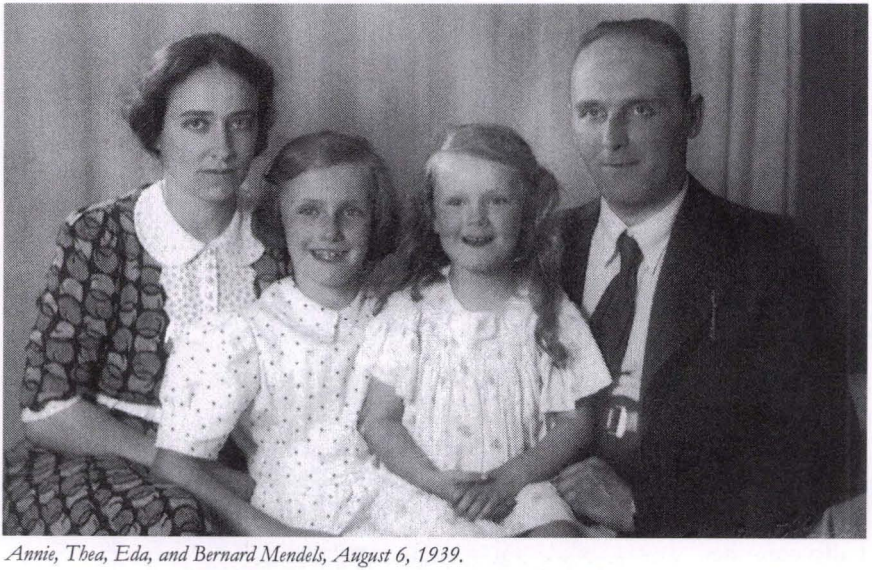
The following letter was written by Thea to Simon and Elvire in 1945, describing the round-up of Bernard and Annie Mendels.

Dear Uncle Simon and Aunt Elvire,

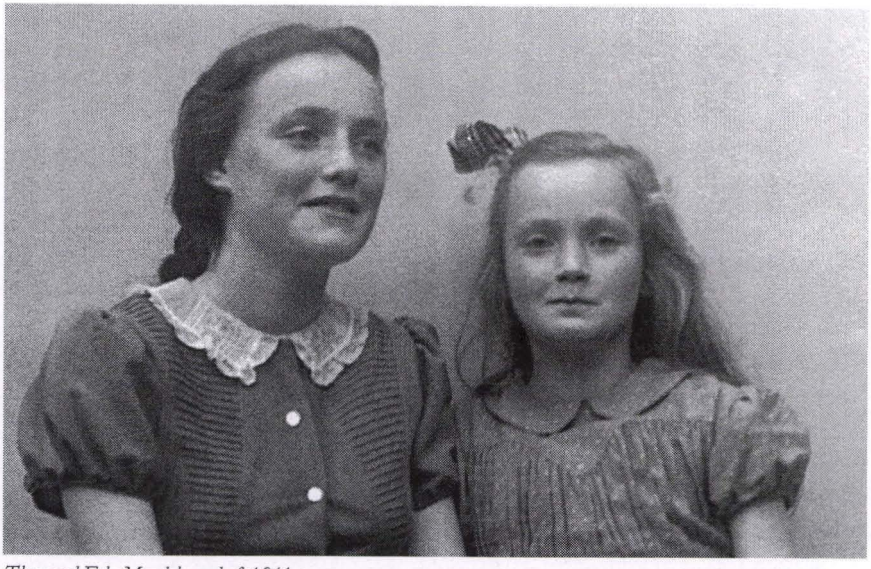
Happy with letter and glad you are still here. Got a letter from uncle Ab, and telegram from Aunt Clara, thru a doctor in Deventer. The Mayor of our town brought us a letter from her. We will write her – until today that had been done by the Mayor and Mr. Evink, the brother of the lady where we are staying. We are only in Zwolle for one week, where a cousin of our mother's used to live.

They were in Westerbork (the cousins) for about 6 months and liberated by the Canadians. I do not know anything about the Ules family.

Starting August 31, 1942 we went to Oldebroek, stayed with the van de Streek family (small farmers). The van de Streeks are very good to us, make no difference between us and their own 10 children, 4 already married. Mother and Father also stayed with a farmer family. We were able to walk outside; Mommy and Daddy could only go outside a few times. In the beginning they were able to visit us every 3 weeks. When the razzias (round ups) started that became less frequent, and after that we went to visit them every Monday. When Ida was in the hospital, I went alone. Ida had scarlet fever in 1942. After she was better she had problems with her digestive system. On December 10,



Annie, Thea, Eda, and Bernard Mendels, August 6, 1939.



Thea and Eda Mendels, end of 1941.





Thea and Eda Mendels in Oldebroek, Holland in 1945, before they left for California.

1942, we had a phone call: round up at the van de Kerk family, where Mommy and Dad were. I spent all day at the hiding place and at the end of the day heard from the hospital that Ida was still there. I was so happy. My parents and another Jewish boy were sent to the police prison in Amsterdam, for 2 weeks and then sent on to Westerbork. Beginning 1944? they were put on a transport.

Mommy and Daddy always said: if we are taken away, Aunt Clara will take care of you – we will probably go to America.

Ever since the war, Thea and Eda have stayed in contact with the van de Streeks, whom they visited whenever they were back in Holland. Their parents had prepared written instructions, left with Annie's sister, Clara Gans, indicating where the girls should be sent if they survived without their parents: to their family in California. The Gans family had been able to leave on the last ship before the Germans invaded Holland. Jo and Clara Gans and their two daughters, Ida and Yetty, settled in San Mateo, a suburb of San Francisco. He was an attorney and she was a pediatrician; they were allowed to resume their professions after taking the necessary courses and exams.[5]

My parents were not aware of Bernard and Annie's instructions; after the war we were all prepared to add Thea and Eda to our family. I remember being very excited about the idea of being the large family that we would have become. I was young, and it did not occur to me that we lived in a very small apartment; Manuela and I slept in the dining room, she on a couch and me on a rollaway bed. Nor did I think about the financial hardship for my parents; my father's business had to be completely rebuilt after the war. In 1945, my father went to Holland, where he found out, through the Red Cross, where Thea and Eda spent their years in hiding. He visited Thea and Eda in Oldebroek and learned of their parents' plans for them. Manuela and I were very disappointed that our cousins were not coming to live with us. Thea and Eda learned about our brother Franklin's birth; they later told us that for years afterwards, they hoped that their parents would come back and that they would have another child in their family, like we had.

Thea and Eda came to Paris to visit us from the U.S. in 1952. They looked like typical American girls to us, with their American clothes and American gadgets. I remember that Thea taught us how to dance the Charleston; it was very exotic to us. I don't think I was very good at it – I was too clumsy. We also sang in the kitchen while cleaning up after dinner, frequently singing the melody from "The Trout," the piano quintet by Schubert.

---

[5] Interview: Thea and Eda, 1997. (DVD 15-17)
Thea's and Eda's conversations with Manuela and me, and their written souvenirs.

Abraham ("Albert") van Weenen, the husband of my aunt Therese ("Thea") (Mendels) van Weenen, was a *Majoor* (Dutch title) in the Dutch army. He was taken prisoner by the Germans and survived the war. He told us the story of a dentist in the camp who treated his bad teeth by pulling them all out and giving him all false teeth. When he came home, he found out that his wife Thea and daughter Juliette had been deported; they never came back. Uncle Albert was devastated. In 1946, we stayed with him in Hilversum, Holland. I remember that he grew beautiful flowers in his garden, mostly dahlias. He kept staring at me because he thought I looked like his daughter, Juliette. It was very uncomfortable and painful for me. I was 11 years old at that time.



Therese ("Thea") and cousin Juliette ("Julie"), 1939.

My grandmother Thekla (Marx) Mendels, whom we called "Oma", was deported to the concentration camp of Sobibor on March 2, 1943, when she was 70 years old. Thekla was murdered three days later, on March 5, 1943.

Thekla had three sisters: Olga, Bertha, and Frieda. Through German WWII documents,[6] I found out that Olga was deported to Terezin and survived. After the war, she was sent to Deggendorf, a displaced persons camp in Bremen, Germany. From there she sailed to New York on the S.S. Perch. She settled in Manhattan, at 542 112th Street, Apt. 86, with one of her sons, Werner, who had moved to New York in 1941. Werner, a naturalized American citizen, died in 1985. Olga's husband, Dr. Bertold Goldberg, was murdered in Auschwitz. I searched for any descendants of Olga in New York: I placed an ad in the online listings of allgenerations.com and inquired with both the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and DHS.gov/immigration websites, I hired a professional genealogist who searched as far as Riverside Cemetery in Saddlebrook, New Jersey where Werner Goldberg was buried, but I have found no one.

Thekla's sister Bertha – "Tante Bertha", as my father called her – also married a Dutchman. His name was Salomon ("Soli") Vles, and they lived in Leiden with

[6] Documents obtained at U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, International Tracing Service.



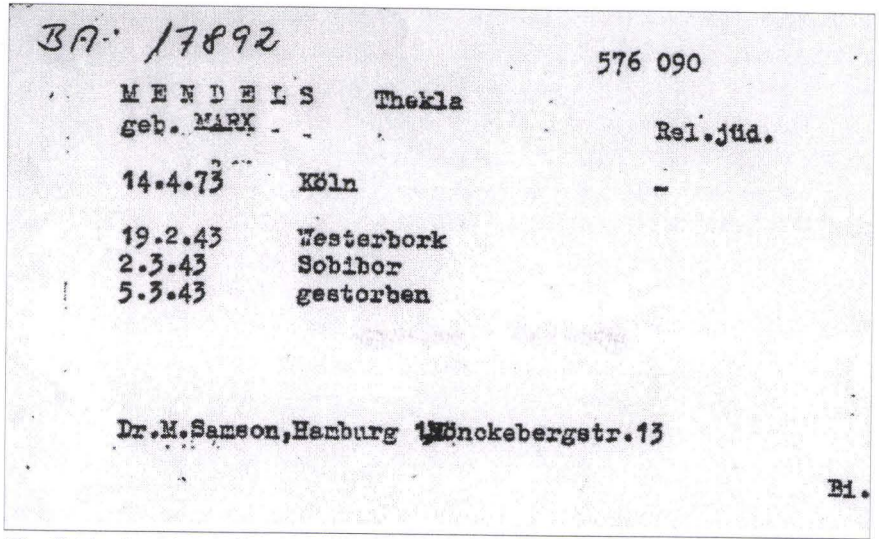
Manuela and Jacqueline in the garden of our uncle Abraham ("Albert") van Weenen, 1946.

their sons Alfred and Simon Erich. Salomon was murdered in Bergen-Belsen on April 11, 1944; Bertha was murdered in Sobibor on March 24, 1943. Simon Erich perished in Monowitz.[7] I have been unable to find any information about Thekla's other sister, Frieda, and her family.

My father never told us what happened to Bertha, Salomon, and their children. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, most Dutch citizens had never heard of Sobibor until the mid-1980s. Now there is an international agreement that a "Memory Lane" will be built there to commemorate those who were murdered. Recently, I learned that still more extended family members from Holland and Germany had perished. After he found out about his mother, his brother and his sister, and other close members of his family, I think it was too heartbreaking for my father to search further. He assumed that every other member of his family had been murdered, but never learned the details.

---

[7] U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, International Tracing Service.



BA. 17892

576 090

MENDELS Thekla

geb. MARX Rel.jüd.

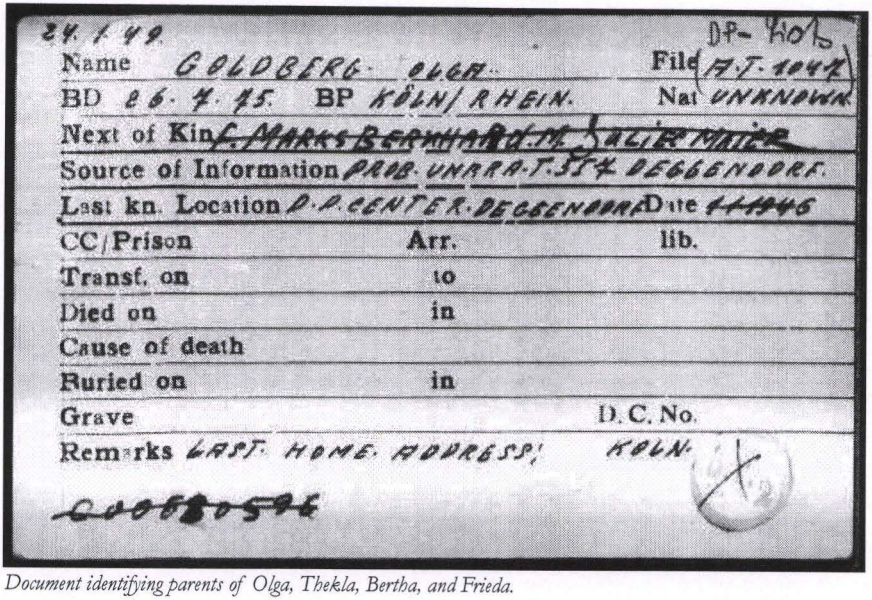
14.4.73 Köln -

19.2.43 Westerbork
2.3.43 Sobibor
5.3.43 gestorben

Dr.M.Samson,Hamburg 1,Mönckebergstr.13

Bi.

The official notice, written in German, of my grandmother Thekla's religion, date of birth in Köln, internment in Westerbork, and murder in Sobibor.



24.1.49 DP- Hol

Name GOLDBERG OLGA File A.T. 1047

BD 26.7.75 BP KÖLN/RHEIN. Nat UNKNOWN

Next of Kin L. MARKS BERNHARD M. SALIE MAIER

Source of Information PROB. UNRRA-T.354 DEGGENDORF.

Last kn. Location D.P.CENTER.DEGGENDORF Date 4.1946

CC/Prison	Arr.	lib.
Transf. on	to	
Died on	in	
Cause of death		
Buried on	in	
Grave		D.C. No.

Remarks LAST HOME ADDRESS: KÖLN

G0068059

Document identifying parents of Olga, Thekla, Bertha, and Frieda.

Here is the most complete list I have of my immediate family members who were murdered in the camps, with their places and dates of death:

- My father's mother Thekla (Marx) Mendels, Sobibor, 3/5/1943
- My father's brother Bernard Mendels, Auschwitz, 1/28/1944
- My father's sister-in-law Annie (Hompes) Mendels, Auschwitz, 1/28/1944
- My father's sister Therese ("Thea") (Mendels) van Weenen, Sobibor, 7/23/1943
- My father's niece Juliette ("Julie") van Weenen, Sobibor, 7/23/1943
- My father's aunt Bertha (Marx) Vles, Sobibor, 3/26/1943
- My father's uncle Salomon ("Soli") Vles, Bergen-Belsen, 4/11/1944
- My father's cousin Simon Erich Vles, Monowitz, 2/7/1944
- My father's aunt Mietje Rebekka (Prins) Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/10/1943
- My father's uncle Maurits ("Mau") Mendels, Sobibor, 7/23/1943
- My father's aunt Rosa (Meibergen) Mendels, Sobibor, 7/23/1943
- My father's cousin Therese ("Trees") Mendels, Auschwitz, 7/23/1943
- My father's cousin Jacob ("Jaap") Mendels, Auschwitz, 3/31/1944
- My father's cousin's wife Leentje (deJonge) Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/10/1943
- Jacob and Leentje's 19 month old daughter Mirjam Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/10/1943

Records have been found for 27 distant cousins of mine who were also murdered:

- Emanuel Mendels, Auschwitz, 4/9/1943
- Martha van Engel Mendels, Sobibor, 3/21/1943
- Keetje Mendels, Sobibor, 3/30/1943
- Catharina Mendels, Sobibor, 5/14/1943
- Donald Emanuel Mendels, Sobibor, 5/14/1943
- Samuel Mendels, Sobibor, 7/23/1943
- Henriette Louise Jacobson Mendels, Sobibor, 6/4/1943
- Jetjen Wertheim Jacobson, Sobibor, 4/23/1943
- Abraham David Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/30/1942
- David Arthur Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/30/1942
- Arthur Mendels, Auschwitz, 9/30/1942
- Rozalie Mendels, Sobibor, 6/4/1943
- Israel Mendels, Auschwitz, 5/22/1944
- Aleida Hamburger Mendels, Auschwitz, 5/22/1944
- Geertruida Mendels, Auschwitz, 1/14/1943
- Sobella Mendels, Auschwitz, 1/14/1943

- Sara Mendels, Sobibor, 4/23/1943
- Rosa Helena Mendels van der Hak, Auschwitz, 12/11/1942
- Julia Mendels, Sobibor, 3/20/1943
- Abraham Mendels, Hengelo, 10/28/1942
- Grietje Wolf Mendels, Auschwitz, 12/11/1942
- Irwin Serphos, Auschwitz, 12/31/1942
- Henriette Menko Serphos, Auschwitz, 1/26/1943
- Alexander Meijer, Sobibor, 5/14/1943
- Amanda Vijth Meijer, Sobibor, 5/14/1943
- Bernard Martin Cohen, Bergen-Belsen, 7/23/1944
- Godert Hugo Cohen, Trobitz, 4/28/1945

On the Meibergen side, so far records have been found for 72 blood relatives of Rosa Meibergen who were murdered in concentration camps, including her brother and sister.[8]

I am still searching for other members of our extended family.

On my mother's side – the Hess family in Hamburg, Germany – the four children of my grandmother's brother Erwin Hess and his wife Gertrude ("Gerti") were able to leave Hamburg as part of the *Kindertransport*[9] in 1938. They survived the war with difficulty, but made a new life in England. Three of the four children were placed in foster homes. Marion, the oldest, was put to work as a maid. Later, Gertrude was also able to leave Germany with a visa saying she would work as a maid. She worked very hard, despite her arthritis. Later, she worked in London in a factory for the war effort.

The rest of her family did not fare as well. Gertrude's mother Hedwig was deported and perished in Terezin. Gertrude's brother Walter and his wife Ruth, who had moved to Holland hoping it would be safer than Germany, were also deported and perished in concentration camps (as Marion (Hess) Isaac recalled). The Hess family had been quite well off before the war, and it was a shock for them to be penniless. But the children and their mother were alive. The children were able to pursue their musical studies, and three of the four became professional musicians. Many of the Hess descendants have also become professional musicians (or luthiers) in England, where they have formed quartets or played in major British orchestras.

---

[8] Bloemendal, Hans. In Memoriam. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1995, pp. 491-494, 768-769.

[9] Fox, Anne L. & Abraham-Podietz, Eva. Ten Thousand Children. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1999, pp. 13-17.

Altogether, almost 200 people on the Mendels family tree that I know of were murdered by the Germans, virtually an entire generation.[10] On the Hess side I have very little information, but know of 3 murders in addition to the tragic suicide of my grandmother Sophie Hess.

[10] Forty years later in 1983, my father still remembered those terrible times and he wrote on an article clipping that he sent to me, "*Quelle chance nous avons eue!*" ("How lucky we were!") The article was: Amouroux, Henri. "Sur un livre de Serge Klarsfeld, Vichy et la question juive." Le Figaro July 8, 1983, p. 2F.

Epilogue

After the war, it was just the five of us in Paris. We were a close-knit family who spent every Sunday together, going on picnics, visiting parks and *châteaux* outside of the city, and once my father earned enough money to buy a car, going on vacations and taking the five of us to the Alps. Upon our return to Paris, on Sundays my father took Manuela and me to visit monuments in the city like *la Sainte Chapelle* or museums like *le Louvre*, while my mother stayed at home with Franklin who was too young for these outings. I remember my mother waking me up early on Sundays for our excursions; I wanted to sleep in, but I had to go. It was important to my parents that we do things together as much as possible. They felt the loss of their relatives and a sense of being alone in the world.

My parents never spoke of the war and the relatives that were murdered. My mother never mentioned her mother's suicide. My father never mentioned his mother either. In my journal in Le Got, I used the words *la guerre*, (the war) and later on *le débarquement* (D-Day) several times; I was aware of those events from a child's perspective. When we returned to Paris, my parents wanted our lives to return to normal and for us to be integrated among the French. I focused on my schoolwork and my music and my little brother Franklin, who I loved dearly and took to the park in his stroller every afternoon after school. Many children had relatives with a house *à la campagne* (in the country) for summer vacations or a grandmother to go to for *le déjeuner* on Thursdays when there was no school. We did not. At school, Manuela and I never spoke of the 29 months of our life in hiding. We wanted to fit in. We were different and isolated, and we knew it.

As we got older, my parents were terribly afraid that as we grew up we might leave Paris and settle far away. As teenagers Manuela and I went to meetings and dances arranged by a local Zionist organization. Our parents were afraid we might go to Israel, and asked us not to go to those meetings. We obeyed them and stopped going although we enjoyed the company of other young Jewish people. All this sometimes made me feel stifled, particularly as an adolescent. I wanted to escape the tight circle we lived in; I wanted freedom from parental supervision.



March 5, 1957, in my Hawaiian costume.

My Dutch cousin Eda came to Paris for one year in 1956–1957, while she was a graduate student at Middlebury College in Vermont, in order to improve her French. She stayed with us at first, then moved to *"la Cité Universitaire,"* (International House) on *boulevard Jourdan* in the south of Paris. There was a large party there for Mardi Gras on March 5, 1957, and Eda suggested that Manuela and I go with her. I was dressed as a Hawaiian girl; I had made the costume – which I still have – out of straw threads. Manuela was dressed as a Japanese girl and Eda as a Dutch girl.

That night I met Richard, an American student. We were both sitting at a long table with Eda and other students. He told me later that he had noticed me going down the stairs to the big hall where we sat, and said to himself, "What a nice French Jewish girl!" Richard was a student in international relations at Columbia University; he had a yearlong fellowship from the French government with a Fulbright travel grant to study French foreign policy and colonial history. He told me his costume was that of an American student: a white t-shirt, black pants and a tweed blazer. He asked me to show him Paris, though the truth was he had already been in Paris for at least five months and knew the city quite well; it was his excuse to go out with me and get to know me better.

I fell in love with Richard and when he returned to New York, he sent me a telegram asking me to marry him. I responded that I could not make up my mind until I saw him again in person. I traveled to New York in December 1957 and we were engaged 3 days later and married 3 months after that. It was an escape for me from the tight circle we lived in and it gave me freedom from parental supervision, but it was devastating for my parents, and very sad for Manuela and Franklin. Richard was my first love and my only love. I was 21 years old. We have now been married for 55 years.

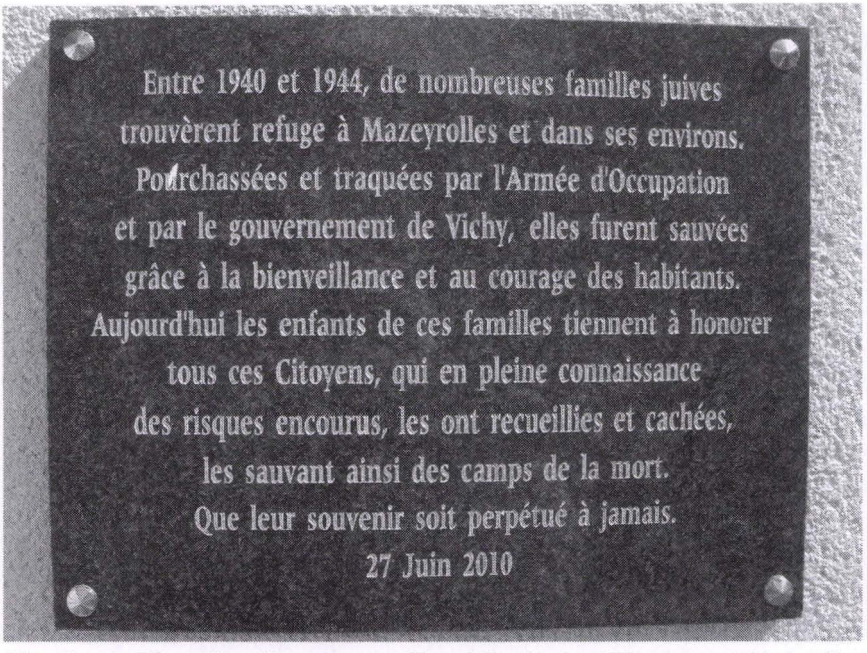
In moving to another continent, I became conscious of a big difference between my native country and the United States: most of the Americans I met were not aware of the suffering that Europeans – and especially European Jews – had endured during World War II. Of course, many American families had lost a husband, son, or nephew fighting in the war. Both European and American Jews learned that members of their families had died under atrocious conditions because they could not get exit visas from their country of origin, and entry visas into the U.S. Little by little over the years, books, conferences, news articles and movies explained the atrocities. Still, most people wanted to think of the future and erase the past, which was too painful to contemplate.

****

At the beginning of World War II, there were approximately 330,000 Jews in France, half of whom were foreigners who had arrived in the 1930s, mostly from Eastern Europe. Of all the Jews who lived in France in 1939, 75% survived World War II; 25% – including 11,000 children – were deported and murdered by the Nazis. (In contrast, in Holland, close to 90% of Dutch Jews were deported and murdered.) Of those Jews living in France who were deported, only 2,500 survived and returned to France.

As our experience illustrates, there were ordinary Frenchmen and Frenchwomen who risked their own lives to help Jews. Our good friends in Paris, Paul Delpech, the mayor of Mazeyrolles, and Marcel Vigié, the farmer and his family who did so much for us at the risk of their own lives, were extraordinary people who helped save us. Everyone in the village of Le Got/Mazeyrolles – our downstairs neighbors, the baker, the postmistress, the priest, and others – offered us a blanket of protection on a daily basis, through their help, and through their silence about our identities.

On June 27, 2010, the grandchildren of Paul Delpech organized a commemoration in Mazeyrolles to honor local residents who worked to protect Jewish families despite the risks, from 1940 to 1944. There is now a plaque in front of the mayor's office to this effect.

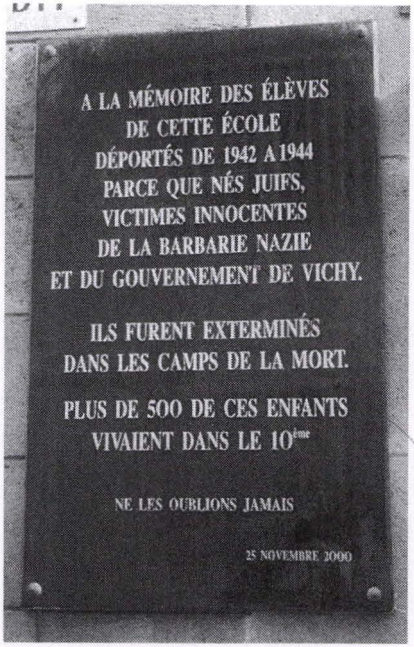


Plaque honoring Mazeyrolles residents who protected Jews, dedicated in June 2010, photographed by Jean-Pierre Lalbat.

The English translation:

Between 1940 and 1944, many Jewish families found refuge in Mazeyrolles and its surroundings. Hounded and hemmed in by the army of Occupation and by the Vichy government, they were saved thanks to the goodwill and the courage of the inhabitants. Today, the children of these families want to honor all these citizens, who, totally aware of the risks they were taking, welcomed them and hid them, thereby saving them from the death camps. May they be remembered forever. June 27, 2010

On a governmental level, it took decades for France to acknowledge the crimes it committed against its Jewish citizens, in collaboration with the Germans. In 1945, *Général* de Gaulle wanted to turn the page, move forward and unite the French, while erasing the past. Indeed, he founded a party called the RPF *(le Rassemblement du Peuple Français)* – literally, "Uniting the French People."



Plaque in front of an elementary school in the 10th arrondissement in Paris. Photograph by Jacqueline, 2008.

During the 1980s, President François Mitterrand never accepted the idea that France was guilty of crimes against the Jews; he said that Vichy was not France, and did not represent the French people.[1] Then, in 1995, Jacques Chirac became the first president of France to officially accept responsibility for the French state, the French police, and the French population's role in rounding up Jews. Chirac visited Paris' *Vél' d'Hiv*, where over 13,000 Jews had been rounded up by the French police on July 16 and 17, 1942 during "*la grande rafle*," and dedicated a plaque honoring their memory. Chirac also made sure that each school around Paris where children had been rounded up and deported had a plaque saying that the French government, together with the German occupying forces, were responsible for the deportation of Jewish children. From those schools, children as young as two or three were deported to concentration camps, never to return.[2]

****

I am at the end of the story of my survival during WWII. It has been a long voyage across 5 years of WWII and across 5 years of research in books and documents from the French archives. It has also been a long voyage across my memory of those days when I was a little girl. In many ways the past is still alive, and every year more information comes to light via documents, books, articles, programs, plays, and films. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and Holocaust museums in many cities and countries, offer regular programs on World War II. Survivors talk about their experiences and historians give presentations to younger generations. The history of the Jews during World War II is told again and again. Jews continue to write their memoirs, and manuscripts continue to be printed.

---

[1] Mitterrand was a prisoner of war in Germany; he escaped after two failed attempts, then walked back to France and offered his services to the Vichy government, where he worked on returning POWs. He had an ambivalent role in Vichy. In early 1943, he joined the *Résistance* – some say after he met his future wife, Danielle, who was from a family of active *résistants*.

[2] Serafini, Tonino. "En mémoire des sourires de la maternelle des Couronnes." Libération April 5, 1999.

Even though I have told my story many times to large and small audiences, I feel that as long as I live, it is my obligation to speak to younger generations. My wish is to help to educate them about the events of WWII, with the hope that speaking the truth will be a blow against hate and genocide, and my intention is to convey in a concrete and personal way, the message: "Don't stand by, stand up."

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my son-in-law, Nikolai Krementsov, who in 2007, encouraged me to write as a way to battle depression while I recovered from treatment for the potentially deadly disease amyloidosis. (I am now in partial remission.) At first, Nikolai encouraged me to write just a few sentences a day, focusing on my life at age seven – the age at the time of my granddaughter Esperanza. How different my life was in 1942 from hers in 2007!

I owe immense gratitude to my daughter Anne-Emanuelle Birn who, despite her many responsibilities as professor and Canada Research Chair in International Health at the University of Toronto, patiently read and reread the first three drafts of my manuscript, made comments and corrections, gave wise advice, prompted me for details, showed me how to organize my information, and encouraged me from start to finish.

I will never be able to adequately thank my niece Jessica Mendels; the elder daughter of my beloved brother Franklin wanted to know more about Franklin's birth and early life, and took me on this long journey of rediscovery of our ancestors and our survival in WWII. Jessica and Anne-Emanuelle first went to Le Got together in 1994, then went to Holland and Germany in 1997 to research the details of the family history, and finally brought Manuela and me back to Le Got in 1997 to document and remember the 29 months that we spent under surveillance in the village.

More recently, Jessica has edited my manuscript page by page, asking me innu-

merable questions to verify the accuracy of my memoir, separating the story of the Mendels family from the history of WWII in France. She has pointed out paragraphs that were repetitive or misplaced, and she has helped me to verify the exact names and dates of our dead relatives and the spelling of French words. She worked with me in person, side by side, at her home during my last visit to San Francisco, and then on the telephone and the computer day and night, to edit the details of my story and to reproduce and appropriately place documents from French archives and photos into the text. Thanks to Jessica, my manuscript will become a book and a family heirloom.

I cannot end my story without thanking two people who have been with and supported me all along. My husband Richard has patiently helped me to understand the details of international politics in the second half of the 20th century. He has also helped me with English grammar and the flow of my story. My sister Manuela, whom I call or email daily, has given me invaluable help in remembering details that I had forgotten. I could not have written this story of our survival without her.

Selected Bibliography

Adler, Jacques. The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Amouroux, Henri. La Grande Histoire des Français sous l'Occupation, Volumes 1-10. Paris: Editions R. Laffont, 1976.

Berr, Hélène. Journal. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2008.

Boussinot, Roger. Les guichets du Louvre. Paris: Editions Denoël, 1960.

Callil, Carmen. Bad Faith. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.

Conan, Eric & Rousso, Henry. Vichy, Un Passé qui ne Passe Pas. Paris: Editions Fayard, 1994.

Crémieux-Brillac, Jean-Louis. La France Libre, de l'Appel du 18 juin à la Libération. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996.

Delbo, Charlotte. Aucun de Nous ne Reviendra. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1970.

Dutourd, Jean. Au Bon Beurre. Paris: Editions Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1952.

Grinspan, Ida & Poirot-Delpech, Bertrand, de l'Académie Française. J'ai pas pleuré. Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002

Gross, Fred. One Step Ahead of Hitler. Macon, Indiana: Mercer University Press, 2010.

Guéno, Jean-Pierre, ed. Paroles d'Etoiles. Paris: Radio France en Co-édition avec Librio, 2002.

Joffo, Joseph. Un sac de billes. Paris: J-C Lattès, 1973.

Klarsfeld, Serge. French Children of the Holocaust: a Memorial. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Kofman, Sarah. Rue Ordener, Rue labat. Paris: Galilée, 1994.

Kupferman, Fred. Les Premiers Beaux Jours 1944-1946. Paris: Editions Calmann-Lévy, 1985.

Laloum, Jean. La Maison d'Enfants de Saint-Mandé, Centre UGIF, No 64. Paris: Les Editions Poliglottes, 1994.

Marrus, Michael & Paxton, Robert. Vichy et les Juifs. Paris: Editions Calmann-Levy, 1981.

Missika, Dominique. Le Chagrin des Innocents. Paris: Grasset, 1998.

Némirovsky, Irène. Suite française. Paris: Denoël, 2004.

Survival in WWII, 1933–1944. 2000. Moritz, Alfred. [http://www.survivalinwwii.com].

Poznanski, Renée. Etre juif en France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. Paris: Editions Hachette, 1994.

Raisky, A & Wellers, G. "Les Rafles des 16-17 juillet 1942." Supplément au n. 12 de la Revue du CDJC: "Le Monde Juif". 1967, pp. 1-20.

Rajsfus, Maurice. Jeudi Noir, 16 juillet 1942. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1988.

Zuccotti, Susan. The Holocaust, The French and The Jews. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Selected Filmography

Au Revoir les Enfants. Dir. Louis Malle. 1988.
Black Book. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. 2006.
Blessed is the Match: Hannah Senesh. Dir. Roberta Grossman. 2008.
Bon Voyage. Dir. Jean-Paul Rappenau. 2003.
Charlotte Gray. Dir. Gillian Armstrong. 2001.
Dresden. Dir. Roland Suso Richter. 2006.
Europa, Europa. Dir. Agnieska Holland. 1990.
Good Night Mr. Tom. Dir. Jack Gold. 1998.
L'Armée des Ombres. Dir. Jean-Pierre Melville. 1969.
L'œil de Vichy. Dir. Claude Chabrol. 1993.
La Ligne de Démarcation. Dir. Claude Chabrol. 1966.
La Traversée de Paris. Dir. Claude Autant-Lara. 1956.
Lacombe, Lucien. Dir. Louis Malle. 1975.
Le Chagrin et la Pitié. Dir. Marcel Ophuls. 1969.
Le Dernier Métro. Dir. François Truffaut. 1980.
Le Silence de la Mer. Dir. Jean-Pierre Melville. 1947.
Le Vieil Homme et l'Enfant. Dir. Claude Berri. 1967.
Le Vieux Fusil. Dir. Robert Enrico. 1975.
Miracle at St. Anna. Dir. Spike Lee. 2008.
Monsieur Batignole. Dir. Gérard Jugnot. 2002.
Mother of Mine. Dir. Klaus Härö. 2005.
Nuit et Brouillard. Dir. Alain Resnais. 1955.
Rosenstrasse. Dir. Margarethe von Trotta. 2003.
Shoah. Dir. Claude Lanzmann. 1985.

Sophie Scholl: The Last Days. Dir. Ralf Rothemund. 2005.
Steal a Pencil for Me. Dir. Michèle Ohayon. 2007.
The Boat is Full. Dir. Markus Imhof. 1981.
The Last Days. Dir. James Moll. 1998.
Twin Sisters. Dir. Ben Sombogaart. 2002.
Un Monde Presque Paisible. Dir. Michel Deville. 2002.
Un Secret. Dir. Claude Miller. 2007.
Uranus. Dir. Claude Berri. 1990.

About the Author



Photo © Arnold Kramer, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Jacqueline Mendels Birn was born in Paris in 1935. She trained at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris, pursuing the cello, and then obtained a degree in organic chemistry. In 1958, after a whirlwind transatlantic romance, she married Richard Birn and moved to New York. Her husband was accepted into the U.S. Foreign Service, and Jacqueline began 2 decades as a diplomatic spouse in Helsinki, Hong Kong, Washington, Toronto, Malta, and Mexico, in addition to raising 2 children, and playing the cello semiprofessionally all over the world.

When her family returned to Washington D.C. in 1978, Jacqueline embarked upon a new career as a French language and culture instructor at the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State. At the same time, she was principal cello of the McLean Symphony Orchestra and she continues playing in chamber groups to this day.

Since her retirement in 2007, Jacqueline devotes much of her time to Holocaust education. As a Survivor Volunteer with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, she speaks about her experiences to students and adults in private and public schools, universities, and government agencies. Jacqueline and her husband divide their time between Bethesda and Cape Cod, frequently visiting their children and grandchild in New York and Toronto.



Made in the USA
Lexington, KY
25 July 2013

Praise For

A Dimanche Prochain

A Memoir of Survival in World War II France

"Jacqueline Mendels Birn has written an impressive, moving story of her family's remarkable survival in France during the Nazi occupation. It reads like a fast-paced novel, but there is nothing fictional about it. Indeed, her book should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand the dark history of France from its invasion in 1940 to its liberation at the end of 1944. Through her eyes and deft accounting we see history unfold. This remarkable story has all the best elements of our human existence – heroism, courage, and humanity."

- Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat
Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State on Holocaust-Era Issues in the Clinton Administration

"Jacqueline Birn admirably presents a picture of everyday life as well as the broader perspective on what happened to Jews under German occupation and French collaboration....This is a precious memoir, and deserves to be widely read."

- Michael R. Marrus
Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies, University of Toronto and Author, with Robert O. Paxton, of Vichy France and the Jews

"...a rare recounting of the survival of a Jewish family in Vichy France through a 'conspiracy of goodness'...this thoughtful and loving memoir is a significant contribution to the history of Jewish survival in France during the Holocaust."

- Liliane Kshensky Baxter
Director, Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum

"Jacqueline Mendels Birn's personal history of her survival as a Jewish child in Vichy France is as moving as it is engaging.... *A Dimanche Prochain* is a story that readers will not soon forget."

- Michael S. Koppisch
Professor of French, Emeritus, Michigan State University

"Her memoir bridges the gap between past and present, becoming the symbolic sepulcher that her deceased family members were denied."

- Audrey Brunetaux
Assistant Professor of French, Colby College

www.jacquelinemendelsbirn.com
ISBN: 978-0-9896367-0-4

