INTERVIEW BEGINS

Ruth: Hello. We are here today with Manuela Bornstein. It’s January 3, 2001. This interview is for the Legacy Project for the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. If you would just begin by telling me some of your background—a little about your parents, where they were from, their background as well, and a little about life in Europe before the war.

Manuela: I was born in Paris [France] but my parents were not French. My father was Dutch. He was born in 1905 in a small town in the east of Holland, near the German border. His name was Frits Mendels, F-R-I-T-S Mendels. He was very adamant about the “S.” He was Dutch. He was part of a large family. He had an older sister and brother, many uncles and aunts, and many cousins. It was a very happy Jewish family. They were in the grain business. My grandfather and my granduncle worked together. As far as I know, they kept kosher. My grandparents’ home was kosher. My mother told me they had four sets of dishes. That says it all. They were comfortable. [It was] a happy family, a large family.

My mother, on the other hand, was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1906. She was an only child. Her mother had married her uncle. My grandmother was born Sophie Hess and married her uncle, Jakob Hess, so my mother’s father was also her great-uncle. She was an only child. My grandfather died when my mother was about eight years old. My grandmother raised

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1 Kosher/Kashrut is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to halakhah (Jewish law) is termed ‘kosher’ in English. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. In a kosher kitchen and home, meat and dairy are kept separate, so a separate sets of dishes, cookware, and serving ware are needed.

2 Hamburg is a major port city in northern Germany, connected to the North Sea by the Elbe River. It is the second-largest city in Germany and the second-largest port in Europe.
my mother by herself. She was comfortable until the German depression. Then she had to . . . She was a musician. She played the piano in movie theatres to make a little money. As I said, she played the piano. She was quite a musician and so was my mother. She raised some money by embroidering various things. Then, four years later, she married a man, Dr. Leopold, who turned out to be a sadistic doctor. He made my grandmother and my mother very unhappy. My grandmother left him several times and finally divorced him many years later. He really soured my mother’s youth. He was very bad.

My father—when he was about fourteen or fifteen, which would have been in 1920 or the early 1920’s—left Holland with his family and went to Hamburg for business reasons. He went to a commercial school. My father was multilingual like all Dutch people. He spoke Dutch; he spoke German; he spoke English and French. They settled in Hamburg. In the mid-1920’s—1926 maybe—my father started working in an office, which was owned by a Dutch man. There was always unemployment in Holland and many workingmen looked for work outside of Holland. That’s how this man, Ben Esras, was working in Hamburg. My father worked there. He had gone to a commercial school. He was a young boy. He was a go-getter. He had a little job.

Around 1926, the bookkeeper of that firm ran away. He did something not kosher. He ran away with money or something. They were looking for another bookkeeper. My father placed an ad. My father hired my mother. That’s how they met around 1926 or maybe a little before. My mother worked there as a bookkeeper. My mother had a totally non-kosher sandwich for lunch. My father had a kosher sandwich. They traded sandwiches. My father never

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3 The cost of paying for World War I and the resultant reparations severely damaged the German economy. A period of hyperinflation plagued Germany between 1921 and 1924. To combat the inflation, the government began printing exaggerated amounts of money. The result was that German bills became essentially worthless—paying for even small items could require huge stacks of money. The severe hyperinflation is widely believed to have contributed to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party’s success in taking over the German government in the 1930’s.

4 From the late 19th century through about 1930, movie theatres often had silent movies (no recorded synchronized sound or dialogue) accompanied by live piano or organ music.

5 The word ‘kosher’ has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning proper, legitimate, genuine, fair, or acceptable. Kosher can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.
ate treif [non-kosher] things, so that was an exciting thing for him. My mother had a boat on the Elbe River, so they went on excursions together.  

A few years later, the owner of the firm—it was a leather business firm—Mr. Esras told my father, “You know, Frits, you are a good worker. You are a nice man. But I have three sons. There’s no future for you in my company. I advise you to find work elsewhere.” My father wrote to one of his friends in London [England] and he was all set to go work in London. However, at that time—I don’t know the year—there was a Dockers strike, so he couldn’t go to London. My father wrote to his friend in Paris, Jack Gerson, who said, “Yes. Come to Paris. There’s work for you here.” My father went to Paris.

While he was in Paris, he corresponded with my mother. As the years went by, they became engaged. In August 1930, they got married in the synagogue in Hamburg and immediately settled in Paris. That’s how I became French. That’s why I was born in Paris. It was very difficult for my mother, who was very close to her mother, but love prevailed.

My father was quite successful in his business in Paris. First, he worked with his friend, Jack Gerson. Then he opened his own import-export business and he was doing fine. My parents were both very sociable people. They made many French Catholic friends. I don’t know that they had many . . . They had a few Jewish friends, too. They also had a lot of visitors. The family came to visit. They all wrote little notes in my baby book. There were a lot of pictures taken. These were—at that time—happy times. I was born in 1933, which at that time was good

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6 The Elbe River [Czech: Labe] is one of the major waterways of central Europe. It runs from the Czech Republic through Germany to the North Sea at Hamburg.
for us in France. Of course, in 1933 [Adolf] Hitler was elected Chancellor, so in Germany, gradually things started to deteriorate.⁷

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Manuela:** In 1933, I was born. Two years later, in 1935, my sister was born. At that time, my parents were already worried. My mother was worried about her mother because the situation in Germany was rapidly deteriorating. My father was traveling for business. He imported and exported fancy foods. He went to Yugoslavia; he went to Milan [Italy]; he went to various European countries. In 1938, he went to Hamburg to encourage my grandmother to leave Hamburg and come live with us, but she wouldn’t. She didn’t want to leave her home, and her friends, and her life. She stayed. My father, when he came back, said, “I will never set foot in Germany again.” He already saw what was going on there.

Until then, we lived in a near suburb of Paris called Saint Mande in a small apartment, but it was big enough for the four of us.⁸ It was very nice. We didn’t have a telephone. There was a telephone downstairs. When there was a phone call, the concierge would call, “Madame Mendel’s, telephone!” I remember that. We were one flight up. When my father came home, he would whistle . . . Mendelssohn’s unfinished symphony, the first verse, so we knew he was coming home.⁹

<interview pauses, then resumes>

⁷ Amid an economic depression and increasing political instability in Germany, Adolf Hitler and his party, the National Socialist German Workers’ Party [German: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei; also known as the NSDAP or Nazi Party] rapidly rose to power. In 1932, the Nazi party was elected to fill more seats in the Reichstag (parliament) than any other party. In 1933, democratically elected President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany, a position responsible for leading the Reichstag. As Chancellor, he began transforming his position into a dictatorial one. When the President died in 1934, Hitler declared himself head of state and effectively became absolute dictator of Germany under the title of Fuhrer (German: Führer). Nazi leaders began to make good on their pledge to persecute German Jews soon after their assumption of power. During the first six years of Hitler’s dictatorship, form 1933 until the outbreak of war in 1939, Jews felt the effects of more than 400 decrees and regulations that restricted all aspects of their public and private lives. Especially following Kristallnacht, Nazi leaders enforced measures that successfully isolated and segregated Jews from their fellow Germans. Jews were barred from all public schools and universities, as well as from cinemas, theaters, and sports facilities.

⁸ Saint Mande [French: Saint-Mandé] is an eastern suburb of Paris, France. It is located 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the center of Paris.

⁹ Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847), known as Felix Mendelssohn, was a German composer, pianist, organist and conductor. When Mendelssohn died in 1847, he left a large number of unfinished compositions and works.
Manuela: When I was about five or six years old, I learned how to ride a bicycle. It was fun, but I didn’t know how to get off, so my father ran after me to help me get off the bicycle. These are childhood memories, which are fun. I didn’t go to school when I was five. My sister and I were very good friends and my mother did not want to separate us. I had a tutor for a year or two. When my sister was five, I was seven and we started school at the same time. I remember the first day of school. My mother gave me piano lessons. Two years later, I started the violin. For many years, I played both piano and violin.

In 1939, the war started. My life, my sister’s life . . . In 1939, I was six years old. Our life didn’t change. For my parents, at first there was the worry about their family—my grandmother in Hamburg and my grandparents, who were at the time back in Holland. My father hoped that Holland would stay neutral like it had in World War I. Unfortunately, Holland and Belgium were invaded by the German army. In 1939, the war started.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Manuela: Then Paris was occupied. We started feeling restrictions and the Occupation. The first thing I remember is we were fitted with gas masks because in World War I, there were terrible gas attacks. All the French people were fitted with gas masks. I was a little girl. I had a very small face and it was difficult to find a gas mask that would fit me. I remember going in a room with this horrible thing on my face. I could feel the stinging of the gas. Whatever it was it was very unpleasant. Fortunately, I never had to wear the mask, but I remember that experience. We had to cover the windows with blue paper. It was called “passive defense,” so that our lights wouldn’t shine through the windows at night.

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10 World War II officially began in Europe when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany on September 3. Within a month, Poland was defeated by a combination of German and Soviet forces and was partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

11 When World War II erupted in September 1939, most in the Netherlands believed that the country could remain neutral, as it had in World War I. Although the Netherlands had declared neutrality, in the early morning of May 10, 1940, the Germans still invaded the country.

12 Germany attacked France, Belgium, and the Netherlands on May 10, 1940. The campaign lasted less than six weeks.

13 Paris, the French capital, fell to the Germans on June 14, 1940. Germany occupied northern France and France’s entire Atlantic coastline down to the border with Spain.
There were more and more restrictions imposed upon the [French] citizens and the [Jewish] residents.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, the first thing that happened was my father was not allowed to own his business anymore. He turned it over to his employee. He has this delivery boy. This employee who knew a little about what was going on was sitting in the front of the store—it was a small warehouse—and my father was in the back. He still went there, but he couldn’t be visible. He was in the back. My father had a car. He had to give up his car and he went to work on his bicycle. Eventually, he had to give up the bicycle and he went by Metro [train] to work.

We were not allowed . . . This was in 1941 or 1942 . . . We could go in the parks, but we were not allowed to sit on the benches. The French go to parks a lot and enjoy the outdoors. Especially with two little girls, my mother would go in the park in the afternoons, and knit, and meet her friends, and sit on the bench. The benches had a sign [that said], “Forbidden to blacks, dogs, and Jews,” in that order. We were not allowed to go into swimming pools. My parents wanted us to learn to swim. We were not allowed to go swimming anymore. We could not go grocery shopping in the daytime. [We could only go] after six [o’clock in the evening] when the stores were empty. However, my parents had good relations with the merchants. The merchant would save some food for us, so we never really went hungry. My sister and I never went hungry. I don’t know about my parents. I’m sure they deprived themselves so we, the children, would not go hungry.

\textless interview pauses, then resumes\textgreater

\textsuperscript{14} Authorities commenced issuing anti-Jewish decrees immediately after the German occupation. The first anti-Jewish measure came September 1940 when definitions of who was a Jew were outlined and a census of Jews was taken. Then in October, authorities began proscribing various business activities for Jews. On August 31, 1941 German forces confiscated all radios belonging to Jews, followed by their telephones and bicycles. Jews were forbidden to use public telephones or change their address, and next were forbidden to leave their homes between 8 pm and 5 am. All public places, parks, theatres and certain shops were soon closed to Jews. German forces issued new restrictions, prohibitions and decrees by the week. Jews were barred from public swimming pools, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, concerts, music halls, etc. On the Metro, they were allowed to ride only in the last carriage. Antisemitic articles had frequently been published in newspapers since the Occupation. The Germans organized antisemitic exhibitions to spread their propaganda. The music of Jewish composers was banned, as were works of art by Jewish artists. During 1941, antisemitic legislation, applicable in both zones, was tightened. On October 2, 1941, seven synagogues in Paris were bombed. In March 1942, all Jews were required to register their children with police. By July 1942, Jews were barred from entering businesses and public institutions and roundups had begun.
Manuela: We were going to school. In the spring of 1942, the latest law was that all Jews were to wear a yellow star. My parents went to wherever the yellow stars were distributed. I know they had to give up coupons, [ration] tickets. There were restrictions and we had tickets for yardage or clothes. We had to give up so many coupons to buy the stars. My mother was very neat. [She] cut out the star and hemmed it. I was wearing it. The first day I went to school wearing it, I think she had attached it with a safety pin to my jacket. I was wearing a dark brown suit that my mother had knitted—a skirt and a little jacket. I was wearing the yellow star on my dark brown jacket, so it was very visible. The teacher . . . When I got to school, I hung my little [jacket up]. It was spring. The weather was nice. I hung my jacket in the hallway. My teacher, Madame Baquer—Mrs. Bargain was her name—a very nice lady . . . The teacher saw my jacket. She asked me to go get my jacket and put it on. She made me step on the podium, on the platform, and she said some very nice words to the class. I think I was the only Jewish child in that class probably because I don’t remember any other child [wearing the star]. She said, “Some people want harm [to come] to this little girl because she’s Jewish, but you have to be very nice to her.” She was very nice. From spring of 1942 until the end of school, which was early July, I went to school and there was nothing special. I took violin lessons from Monsieur Chedelle. He didn’t charge because he too was sympathetic to the Jews and against the Nazis.

Then in mid-July—July 17 and 18, 1942, I think—there was an enormous razzia [Dutch: round up] of Jews in Paris and the suburbs. We lived in a suburb, Saint Mande. We were home. I believe it was a Thursday. I know that it was the French police [who] knocked on

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15 On May 29, 1942, German authorities issued a decree—to take effect on June 7—that all Jews in occupied France must wear the yellow star. The German government’s policy of forcing Jews to wear identifying badges was but one of many psychological tactics aimed at isolating and dehumanizing the Jews of Europe, directly marking them as being different (i.e., inferior) to everyone else. It allowed for the easier facilitation of their separation from society and subsequent ghettoization, which ultimately led to their deportation and murder. Those who failed or refused to wear the badge risked severe punishment, including death. In France, Jews wore a yellow Star of David outlined in black with Juif [French: Jewish] written in Hebraic style.

16 The Vélodrome d’Hiver [French: winter cycling track] round up, also known as the Vél d’Hiv roundup, was the largest French deportation of Jews during the Holocaust. Following agreements with the Germans, French police rounded up 13,000 men, women, and children from throughout Paris on July 16-17, 1942. Most were foreign or stateless Jews. Approximately 6,000 were immediately taken to the Drancy transit camp, while some 7,000 Jews (among whom almost 4,000 were children) were detained in the Vélodrome d’Hiver, an indoor sporting arena. After five days, the Jews incarcerated at the Vél d’Hiv were transferred to other transit camps outside Paris, including Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande, until they could be sent to concentration camps and killing centers in the east. At the end of July, the remaining adults were separated from their children and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Over 3,000 children remained interned without their parents until they were deported, among adult strangers, to Auschwitz-Birkenau as well. The Vél d’Hiv roundup was only one of several in Paris between the spring and summer of 1942.
doors, broke down doors, and rounded up thousands of Jewish families, including children.\textsuperscript{17} Nobody came for us. That’s a miracle. It’s real. We were there. We were home. Nobody came for us. I suppose my parents found out about it the next morning and they decided, “We have to go.” I know that they had been thinking about leaving Paris. At that time, under the Petain\textsuperscript{18} [and] Vichy government, France was divided into two zones—the northern zone, which was occupied and the southern zone, which was unoccupied.\textsuperscript{19} There was a border between north and south. At the beginning, the south was relatively safe.

In July 1942, after the razzia, my parents decided, “We can’t stay. It’s too dangerous. We have to go south.” At that time or a little before that, there was an offer by the Queen of Holland.\textsuperscript{20} My parents were Dutch. My mother was Dutch by marriage, but both my parents were Dutch. The Queen of Holland, Wilhelmina, offered hospitality to all Dutch citizens in the Dutch Guiana.\textsuperscript{21} Our first thought was to go to the Dutch Guiana, to take a train to Bordeaux [France] and then take a ship across the Atlantic [Ocean]. However, there was a new law in France. All men between the ages of 19 and 40, or something like that, had to stay in France. [They] were not allowed to leave France. My mother, and sister, and I were not about to leave my father [in France], so we couldn’t go to Guiana. That was out, so we had to make other plans.

\textsuperscript{17} Many people in German-occupied areas collaborated with German authorities. In some cases, antisemitism, greed, or resentment of alleged cooperation with the Russians motivated the behavior. In others, coercion was the motivating factor. In territories they occupied (particularly in the east), the Germans depended on indigenous auxiliary units (civilian, military, and police) to carry out the annihilation of the Jewish population. Many French authorities and police played an active role in the deportations of Jews.

\textsuperscript{18} Philippe Pétain rose to prominence as a general during World War I and later became Marshal of France and then Chief of State of Vichy, France.

\textsuperscript{19} France was conquered by Nazi Germany in June 1940 and was divided into two parts: the northern region, which was under direct German rule, and the southern one, where a so-called Free French regime was headed by Marshal Pétain with Vichy as its capital. In November 1942, German troops occupied Vichy's formerly “free zone.” As German allies, Italian forces had occupied the southeastern corner of France in 1940. When Italy surrendered to Allied forces in September 1943, German forces took over the area, making all of France occupied.

\textsuperscript{20} At the time of World War II, Queen Wilhelmina was the reigning queen. When the Germans invaded Holland/The Netherlands the royal family fled first to England and then to Canada where she ruled in exile until the end of the war. She was revered for her support of the Dutch resistance and Churchill called her “the only real man” among the government’s-in-exile in London.

\textsuperscript{21} Dutch Guiana refers to a group of plantation colonies in the coastal region between the Orinoco and Amazon rivers in South America. Hundreds of Holocaust refugees settled in the colony known as Suriname (also spelled Surinam) during the 1930’s and early 1940’s. After the Germans occupied the Netherlands in 1940, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba remain the only free Dutch territories. The bauxite mines in Suriname and the oil refineries on Curacao and Aruba become very important to the war effort. In 1940, British troops arrive on the Antilles and Aruba to protect the oil refineries. A year later, under an agreement with the Netherlands government-in-exile, the United States occupied Suriname to protect the bauxite mines. After the war, Suriname became a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and, in 1975, gained full independence.
It took some time, some planning. How do you leave your home, your friends, your business such as it was, with two little children, just like that? It’s not so easy. That’s why they waited so long. That’s why they waited until the big razzia to make a final decision, but even before the razzia, my parents had been in contact with the Dutch community in Paris. Through the Dutch community, they were able to get in touch with a system that would help us walk across that demarcation line. Of course, it cost money, but my parents had some. Just at that time, my mother received some money from her mother. I never will know how we actually received the money, but I know there was some money available. Finally, the decision and arrangements were made that we were going to leave, cross the demarcation line, and go south.\footnote{By October 1940, about 150,000 Jews had crossed what was known as the Demarcation Line to seek protection from Vichy in the south - only to find they were subjected to fierce discrimination along lines practiced by the Germans in the north. Jews were eventually banned from the professions, show business, teaching, the civil service and journalism. After an intense propaganda campaign, Jewish businesses were 'aryanised' by Vichy's Commission for Jewish Affairs and their property was confiscated. More than 40,000 refugee Jews were held in concentration camps under French control, and 3,000 died of poor treatment during the winters of 1940 and 1941. French Jews reacted to major deportations in 1942 by ceasing to cooperate with the German and French authorities. Many Jews went into hiding in some 6,000 villages and small towns across France. The German and French authorities responded by organizing raids in rural areas, including the territories of the Vichy regime.}

A few days before the departure date, the sons of two family friends came to our apartment and brought two backpacks for my parents to fill up with necessities—whatever you take when you decide you are going to go, whatever it is. Those two young men took the two filled backpacks to the railway station. They bought four train tickets for us. They placed the backpacks in the holding area. You have to have a ticket to put the backpacks in the holding area. They put the backpacks in the holding area of that station and they went home.

On the night of our departure, which was at the end of July [1942], my father, my mother, and my sister, and I either took the bus or walked to our friends’ house. We had dinner there. This was July. It was hot. We took off the yellow stars. The father lit the furnace and burned the four yellow stars, which was a forbidden and very dangerous thing to do. We had dinner, we slept there, and the next morning we took the Metro to the railway station.
At the railway station, we met those two young men—the son of our hosts and another young man. [They were] two young teenagers who were active in the Resistance.\textsuperscript{23} They handed my parents the backpacks. I’m sure my sister and I had a little carry-on type bag. Maybe we had a doll. We probably had a doll. They gave my parents the train tickets. Our destination was Angouleme, which was a medium-large city in the southwest of France.\textsuperscript{24} We got on the train. I think we had reserved seats. We were sitting there, waiting to leave. It was maybe eight o’clock in the morning. It was early in the morning. The train doesn’t budge. My sister and I were busy. We [felt like] we were going on vacation [and it was] great, wonderful. My father very nervously goes into the corridor to see what’s going on, what’s the delay, what’s holding us up. He comes back and he found out that there was a roundup of Jews on the train on the adjoining track. They didn’t come to our train. Our train left with us in it. [That was the] second miracle. My story is a story of miracles.

That was that. We got to the agreed upon place where we would meet two other young men who made it their business to walk refugees across the demarcation line. They met us. They had two bicycles. My sister and I were sitting on one of the bicycles with the young man. The other young man was sitting on the other bicycle and my parents ran behind in the middle of the night. My mother said afterwards that she was sweating so much that her pink slip turned blue because she was wearing a blue suit.

We made it across. For my sister and I, it was an adventure, nothing to be afraid of. For my parents, it was a horrible experience. We made it across the demarcation zone. We were

\textsuperscript{23} The French Resistance movement is an umbrella term, which covered numerous anti-German resistance movements that were based within France. On June 18, 1940, Charles de Gaulle addressed the people of France from London and called on them to continue the fight against the Germans. By June 1941, the resistance movement had become well organized and its work against the Germans increased accordingly. By 1944, it is estimated that there were 100,000 members of the various resistance movements that existed in France. The resistance movement provided the Allies with intelligence, attacked the Germans when possible and assisted the escape of Allied airmen. Public outcry over the brutality of roundups and the reluctance of French officials to comply with German demands for the deportation of French citizens saved the lives of many Jews. Nevertheless, nearly 77,000 Jews (two-thirds of whom were foreign refugees) were deported from French territories.

\textsuperscript{24} Angouleme [French: Angoulême] is a town in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region of southwestern France.
received on the other side by the French Free Army, who received us well and offered us a meal and to spend the night.\textsuperscript{25} Of course, it was a border zone. We couldn’t stay there.

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\textit{Manuela:} The next day, we were taken to another town and then another town. Finally, we ended up in Perigueux, which is the capital of the Dordongne, which is a province in the southwest of France, where the headquarters of the French police was.\textsuperscript{26} My parents were told that they were totally illegal, that they had crossed the demarcation zone totally illegally. They were told they had to report to the police and declare that they were guilty of an infraction of the law. They had to declare everything they had in their possession, whatever money or jewelry they had. It was a very humiliating experience. My parents were very law abiding citizens. This was awful.

We found a room in a hotel. We were told we couldn’t stay in the city of Perigueux. We had to live in the countryside, but no further than 50 kilometers [31 miles] or so away from the capital. By that time, it was August 1942. I had my ninth birthday. For my birthday, I got nine peaches. That was a treat—nine peaches. [It was a] nice birthday. I remember it wasn’t easy to find food. I remember standing in line at the soup kitchen. But we were together.

Walking the streets, we ran across Jewish friends of my parents who had lived in the same suburb of Paris and also had two daughters about the same age as my sister and I. The two daughters were friends, not with the parents. When we ran across this couple, they started crying, “If only we had our daughters with us!” I have seen these people . . . of course, they have now passed away, but about five or ten years ago, I saw the father. [He] had moved to California many years ago. He remembered that incident. This happened in 1943—a long time ago.

By chance—I think through a real estate agency maybe—my parents found a house that was available for rent. It had belonged to an older woman who had died. Her children—a son and daughter—didn’t know what to do with it. It was available for rent. There were two small apartments downstairs and one apartment upstairs. At that time—mid-August 1942—only the

\textsuperscript{25} The French Free Forces were the military forces of the French government-in-exile led by Charles de Gaulle during the Second World War. More than 100,000 Free French troops fought in the Anglo-American campaign in Italy in 1943, and, by the time of the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944, the Free French forces had swelled to more than 300,000 regular troops. They were almost wholly American-equipped and supplied. Under General Jacques-Philippe Leclerc, the French Free Forces marched into Paris after its liberation in August 1944. The French Free Forces continued to fight against the Axis powers as one of the Allies after the fall of France.

\textsuperscript{26} Perigueux [French: Périgueux] is a town in the Dordogne department in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region of southwestern France.
downstairs apartment was available. It was very small. There was a kitchen and a bedroom, but there was running water. We decided to do it. There was no choice.

We took the train and arrived there. The name of the little town was Le Got, L-E G-O-T [France]. It was a tiny village. My parents always said it had 30 houses and 100 inhabitants. This may have been exaggerated, but it was a very small village. It had a station. That was maybe the only source of income that it had. It did have a railway station, but no church, no city hall, and no school. We were the only refugees—or at least the only Jewish refugees—there. I believe there were some Spanish refugees, but we were the only Jewish family.

We settled as well as we could in that little tiny apartment. It had running water. A few weeks later, the upstairs apartment became available. It was a little more spacious, so we moved upstairs. However, it had no running water. There was a well in the garden, but water in the well was rusty, so we could not use it. That was my sister and my job. We went with pail . . . We walked across . . . The house was located directly across from the railway station. With pail, we walked across the railroad yard. We walked through the railway station, across the tracks. On the other side of the tracks, there was a pump. We would pump the water and carry the water back. That was our job during those years.

My father had to show that he had a job. He was a businessman. This was farming country. He was not a farmer. He didn’t know anything about farming. The people of the village and the surrounding [area] were quite friendly. The mayor of the adjoining town introduced my father to a farmer, Monsieur Vejay, who gave my father some kind of a job. My father said that they raised horses, so he was leading horses. It was some kind of a job. Vejay, the owner of the farm, did not know how to write, but he had to produce a work certificate so my father wrote [it]. My father was a businessman. He knew all those things. He wrote a work certificate, which the man signed. Then the mayor of the adjoining town approved it, made it legal, so my father was legal.

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27 Le Got is a small village in is a town in the Dordogne department in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region of southwestern France. Le Got’s railway station was opened in 1863, but closed in the late 20th century.
28 The Spanish Civil War (1936—1939) was the bloodiest conflict Western Europe had experienced since the end of World War I. It began in 1936 and was fought between those loyal to the democratically elected Spanish Republic (Republicans) and a rebel group led by General Francisco Franco (Nationalists). The Nationalists were supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while the Republicans were supported by the Soviet Union and Mexico. The violent fighting displaced millions of Spaniards. When the war ended in 1939 with Franco’s victory, some 500,000 refugees fled to France.
Then, a few months later, in the winter of 1943, my mother became pregnant. My brother was born in August 1943. I was ten years old. My sister was eight. Remember, we had no running water. To wash the diapers, my mother had to go to the public washer area in the open air, break the ice, and wash the diapers. It was a very poor village, very simple. The women said, “Why do you have to wash the diapers when it’s just wet? You just hang them up to dry.” That’s what it was.

My sister and I went to school. We walked to school. There was no school in the little village. The nearest school was about ten kilometers [six miles] away. That’s where the school was, the church, and the city hall. The city hall had the mayor that was very sympathetic. The school had two buildings. On the one side was the classroom for the little children. On the other side was the classroom for the big children. My sister went with the little ones. I was with the big children. The teacher and his wife lived in a house in the middle. There was a schoolyard and there was also a little garden. During the recess, the children would go and pick off the potato bugs, the doryphore [French: Colorado potato beetle], which was also the nickname for the Nazis- Les Boche [French: pejorative term used to refer to a German soldier in World War I or II] du doryphore. The teachers, Monsieur Leiban and his wife, were quite sympathetic.

The Catholic priest—of course it was a Catholic country. France is mostly Catholic—was also very sympathetic. I remember he came to visit us with his black robe. He came on his bicycle to visit us. I think he had a towel around his head. He was a character. He said, “If Les Boche come here, I will hide you in my clock tower.” [He was] a very nice man.

At one point, the mayor, who was involved in the Resistance, fabricated false [identification] papers for my parents. As far as I know, they never had to use them. They look intact. I don’t think they’ve ever been used. When we got to the village, our parents told us that when somebody asks our name, we should not use our names of Manuela Mendels or Jacqueline Mendels. No, we should use the name Frederique, an assumed name. I don’t remember ever having to use that name, but it was a way of protecting ourselves.

Everybody in the village knew that we were Jewish and that we were refugees. We were different than the others. At first, when we got there, my sister and I were nicely dressed. We had handmade clothes that my mother made. As time passed and then we grew, we outgrew those clothes, so we were not that well dressed anymore. At first, we were clean and we were
nicely dressed. We were different from the other children, but we made friends, my sister and I. We actually confided in them. I will explain that also.

Le Got and the whole area was a center of French Resistance. The railway workers were involved in the Resistance. I guess they had a way of carrying messages from town to town. I explained that we lived in a house that had a main floor and an upstairs. We were upstairs. Downstairs, there was one couple, who owned a wood cutting factory. On the other side, there was a young couple with a young child. The man was a railroad worker. One day, the Germans—the Nazis—came and surrounded the house. My sister and I were in school. They came and surrounded the house. They came and they picked up the young man downstairs because they suspected him of working for the Resistance. Thank G-d he was released a few days later. My parents were upstairs. My father was home. They had a radio. They were listening to the illegal BBC.29 <knocks on table> That was the theme—Beethoven’s fifth symphony.30 <knocks on table> They didn’t hear it. My parents were upstairs. Another miracle. The villagers all thought the Gestapo had come for my parents, but they had come for the young man downstairs, who was released.31

On several occasions, there had been notifications through the Resistance that there were going to be Nazi patrols. On several occasions, my father went and spent the night in the woods. It was a wooded area. He spent the night in the woods with other refugees or Resistance workers. I don’t know. He spent the night and came back. When the road was clear, my mother

29 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is the world’s oldest and largest broadcasting organization with radio, TV, and online services. It is headquartered in London, United Kingdom. Listening to BBC broadcasts (or any other banned broadcasts) in occupied countries was often punishable by death. In Poland, it was illegal to even possess a radio. The BBC broadcast news bulletins in multiple different languages, often featuring refugees and exiled politicians of German occupied countries in its programs. As resistance fighters in Europe tried to strike back against their occupiers, the BBC’s European Services would broadcast secret messages to them. The BBC’s policy of honesty in its reporting and openly admitting defeats was in marked contrast to the propaganda of Germany’s radio stations. As the war began to turn in favor of the Allies, many Germans even tuned in to the BBC, in spite of harsh penalties and jamming of the frequencies.

30 During World War II, the letter “V” for “victory” [French: victoire] became a popular symbol of resistance and the war effort after Winston Churchill made it famous by forming a “V” with the first and second fingers of his raised right hand. The opening of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 likewise became a powerful symbol. The opening of the symphony has a short-short-short-long rhythmic pattern that corresponds with the letter “V” in Morse code, which is three dots and a dash, or da-da-da-DAAAA. During the war, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) began prefacing their broadcasts to Europe with the first four notes of the symphony played on drums.

31 Gestapo is an abbreviation of Geheime Staatspolizei, which means “Secret State Police.” It was established in 1934 and placed under Heinrich Himmler. With virtually unlimited powers, it was highly feared. The Gestapo acted to oppress and persecute Jews and other opponents of the Nazis, including rounding up Jews throughout Europe for deportation to extermination camps.
would hang a cloth or a shirt in a window to signal to my father it was safe to come home. On one occasion, later on after my brother was born—it must have been at the end of 1943—the whole family had to hide in the woods for a night. How do you keep a six-month-old baby from crying in the middle of the night? But he didn’t cry and we were able to come home.

The villagers were sympathetic and helpful. There wasn’t much food, but the baker always set aside some bread for my parents. There was milk. [It] was unpasteurized, of course, but it was milk. I remember my mother would keep the cream—the cream rose to the top—and make butter, so we had a little butter. I think she made some cakes or some bread with it. I don’t know. My father worked on that farm. He was surprised to see the carrots grow in the ground. I don’t know if it’s a true story, but he didn’t know that carrots grow in the ground. He was a city boy.

Some days, instead of going to the farm . . . He went to the farm, but he went to another property that belonged to these farmers a few kilometers away. He spent days and nights there. I found out much more recently that in that other property . . . It was an abandoned house or farm, which had an underground hiding place. When there had been a warning there would be a roundup, he spent his time in hiding, in that underground passage, smoking cigarettes. Of course he ended up with an ulcer, as can be expected.

At one point, my parents wanted my sister and I to go to another town to a convent or an orphanage, because they were afraid that we would all be picked up. They packed a little suitcase for us. As we were getting ready to leave—my sister and I—we received notification that the road between Le Got and that other little town was dangerous, was not passable. We stayed home. We were together the whole time.

My parents were very aware of the danger. There were roundups all the time. Every Sunday, we had a toast. My parents had a little wine and my sister and I had a drop of wine in our water. [We toasted,] “Until next Sunday,” hoping to be alive another week. That’s when my brother was born—August 1943.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Manuela: As far as I know, my mother had a normal pregnancy. I’m sure she was crying a lot. I know she was very big. She did go to a doctor and I remember there was a hill. We had to push her up the hill. It was probably to go to the doctor. I think the pregnancy was normal. However, the delivery was not. In the middle of the night, my father had to call an ambulance. I
don’t know to this day how he found an ambulance. There was an ambulance that took my mother to a clinic in the next department, Lot-Et-Garonne. That’s where my brother was born. My mother almost died. She had to have a Caesarean section.

**Ruth:** Did she keep her identity a secret in the hospital?

**Manuela:** I don’t know.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Manuela:** The doctor was sympathetic. I think there were some refugees in that clinic. My brother was circumcised. He didn’t have a brit milah, but he was circumcised, which, in those days in France, was practically unheard of. It made you a Jew right away. Nowadays it’s probably different. My brother was called Franklin after [President] Franklin Roosevelt. In those days, Roosevelt was my parents’ hope. Of course, we know better now unfortunately, but in those days, Franklin was my parents’ hope. He was called Franklin Frits—Frits after my father, F-R-I-T-S. If it had been a girl, she would have been called Marianne, which is a symbol

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32 In the administrative divisions of France, a department is one of the three levels of government below the national level, between the administrative regions and the commune. Lot-et-Garonne is a department in the southwest of France named after the Lot and Garonne rivers and located next to the Dordogne department.

33 Caesarean section, also known as C-section, or caesarean delivery, is the use of surgery to deliver babies.

34 A brit milah [Hebrew: Covenant of Circumcision] is a ceremonial circumcision, which involves surgically removing the foreskin of the penis. Circumcision is performed only on males on the eighth day of the child's life.

35 Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the United States through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war. Popularly known as ‘FDR,’ he collapsed and died in his home in Warm Springs, Georgia just a few months before the end of the war. He was a Democrat.

36 President Roosevelt’s (FDR) legacy regarding the Holocaust remains controversial. Throughout the 1930’s, political leaders with ties to the Jewish community advised FDR of the growing refugee crisis in Europe and asked Roosevelt to increase the visa quotas for German Jews. While quotas were not increased, Roosevelt did instruct the State Department that German Jews applying for visas were to be given “the most generous and favorable treatment possible under the laws of this country.” By 1942, information regarding the mass murders of Jews had begun to reach the Allies. In November 1942, the State Department confirmed that the Germans planned to annihilate Europe’s Jews. Eleven Allied governments, including the United States, issued a declaration condemning the atrocities and vowing postwar punishment of the perpetrators. In December 1942, FDR met with prominent figures in the Jewish community, who expressed their horror at the news and provided him with a report on mass murder in specific countries, but the president did not promise any new rescue action. In July 1943, FDR met with a Polish resistance member, who described what he had witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto. A seminal moment in the Roosevelt Administration’s response to the Holocaust was a January 16, 1944 meeting at the White House involving the President and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. At the meeting, Morgenthau presented a lengthy and blunt report to FDR on what he and other Treasury officials believed to be the State Department’s obstruction of efforts to rescue European Jews. As a result, FDR established the War Refugee Board (WRB) to coordinate governmental and private rescue efforts. The Board is credited with saving at least 200,000 Jews, but critics argue that if FDR had acted earlier, and more boldly, even more lives could have been saved.
of French freedom. My parents were not French. They never became French, but still, they were *des férts* for France very much.

Manuela: My sister and I went to school with the other children. It was a fun time for us. We walked. It was a long walk for our little legs and it ended with a hill. I learned how to cross or ‘ford’ a river. I had never done that. I saw a snake. I’d never seen a snake in my life. We had friends. We confided in those friends, my sister and I.

Many years later in 1997, we went back to the village. We had gone before, but in 1997 we went for a special project. My niece, my brother’s daughter, was working on the documentary about this time of our life. We were able to meet with some of the people who knew us at that time, some of the older people—my parents’ contemporaries—and some of the younger people—our friends. One day, we came to the village, Mazeyrolles, where the school was.

There came this man, my contemporary, and he came to me, “Oh, Manuela, I remember you. You used to wear a retainer and every day or every week, you would give it a turn.” I forgot about that but it really made an impression on him. That’s one little incident. I didn’t even remember this man.

Another incident . . . I had a girlfriend, Simone Verzee, I was able to talk to and visit three years ago in 1997. She told me that she remembered that I told her that my mother had told us that if the Nazis came for us, she would give us all a poison pill, and we would all die together, and not be taken away. I had forgotten that. Certainly, I had forgotten that I told her and I had forgotten that completely. Then the next day, we went to another village and we met with a boy friend of my sister, her contemporary, who told her the same story. Both of us had completely forgotten that. When I think about it now, I remember that. I don’t remember telling my friend, but I remember that my mother told us that.

I know also that well before we left our apartment in Saint Mande, my mother made me memorize the names and addresses of our relatives in the United States. My mother had a first cousin, Anna Hess Freud, who lived in Brooklyn and I had memorized her address. There was

37 Marianne is a national symbol of France, symbolizing liberty and the ideals of the French Republic. There are various theories about the origins of the name, but it is widely believed to have come from the combinations of Marie and Anne, names popular with the working classes after the French Revolution. The portrait of Marianne is seen frequently in France, including numerous statues, coins, stamps and banknotes. She is typically depicted in heroic roles, wearing a ‘phrygian cap’ (a soft felt conical hat).

38 Mazeyrolles is a commune in the Dordogne department in Nouvelle-Aquitaine in southwestern France, approximately 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) south of the village of Le Got.
also family in California—cousins of cousins. I had memorized their address. I was the older one of the two, so I was the one who had memorized that. I believe also that she put those names and addresses in a little pouch that I wore under my clothes. I think so.

Anyway, the war went on. As I said, my sister and I enjoyed school. We enjoyed our little brother. For us, it was wonderful to have a little brother. I don’t know how my parents could sleep at night, but I guess they did. Then we heard . . . My father was in a tree, picking cherries, and heard that the Allies had debarked. He fell from the tree. D-Day had happened. That was wonderful news. That was June 1944.

Then, in August 1944, Paris was liberated. Very soon—a month later—as soon as the roads were passable and the bridges were passable, my father took a train and went to Saint Mande to get hold of our apartment, not knowing what he would find. He found the apartment in relatively good condition. The apartment was empty. Everything had been dispersed in the neighborhood. The apartment had been occupied by the German army.

My father was able to get most of our furniture. Before we had left, many of our friends had taken for safeguarding many of our belongings. For instance, the radio . . . We had to give up our radio, so the radio was in the hands of neighbors. I think the silverware was in the hands of some other neighbors. But the most important thing was my mother’s piano. My mother played the piano. She had a lovely French Spinette. It was an unusual piano. It was shiny mahogany, I believe. The soundboard was a mirror instead of wood. It was a mirror. She really liked that piano. Before we left in the spring of 1942, my father, with the help of a neighbor—I don’t know how they did it—carried the piano downstairs. We were one flight up, so [they carried it] downstairs. They rolled it across the yard to this neighbor’s apartment, who kept it for us during our absence. It was covered. They had a little boy, five years old, Jackie Longle, [who] was not allowed to touch the piano. They didn’t play the piano and the neighbors would have heard. Nobody was to know that the piano was there.

When my father went to get our apartment back, he got the piano back. This was in the early fall of 1944. In October or November of 1944, we made our way back to our apartment.

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39 The Normandy landings (codenamed ‘Operation Neptune’) were the landing operations on June 6, 1944 (termed ‘D-Day’) of the Allied invasion of Normandy (known in its entirety as ‘Operation Overlord’) during World War II. The Normandy landings have been called the beginning of the end of war in Europe. By late August 1944, all of northern France had been liberated, and by the following spring the Allies had defeated the Germans.
Ruth: I have a couple of questions. What is your recollection of the response of the neighbors? Were they surprised to see you and that you had made it? Were they happy to see you? Were they welcoming you with open arms or were they resentful at all that some of the things that they thought may have been theirs had to come back to you?

Manuela: As far as I know, we were welcomed back. My parents were very sociable people. They had many French Catholic friends. As far as I know, they welcomed us back. I know my mother had a crystal vase that she gave as a thank you to one couple. No, the neighbors welcomed us back. They were happy to have us back.

There had been some correspondence at the beginning. I vaguely remember that correspondence was very limited. There were postcards and they were open to censure, so you could only write in code pretty much. There was some exchange of correspondence, some contact. Also, after we got to the village, we received a few packages. Probably they were addressed to Monsieur Madame Frederique, to that assumed name. For instance, when the baby was born, there was nothing [in the village], so some clothes were sent, some toys, some books. I remember from one of my birthdays, one particular book I received [called] Catastrophique Papillon [French: Catastrophic butterfly]. I think I still have it. Up to a point, there was some contact with friends.

Where we lived in Saint Mande, it was an apartment complex. There were, I believe, five buildings. There were other Jews in the building—not too many—but they did not come back. Across the yard from us there was a family [called] Edelstein. There was a man and his wife. There was an older daughter and twin brother and sister. Only the older daughter and the twin brother came back from camps.

Ruth: One of the boys?

Manuela: They were boy and girl twins. The boy and the older daughter, Rita, [came back]. The boy was Albert. His sister was Sophie Edelstein. Rita and Albert came back, but the parents and twin sister did not come back from camps. They were taken in by an uncle and aunt from Romania. I remember that my mother helped Rita. She was a teenager at the time. She helped her. My mother made her wedding dress and whatever she needed.
We came back. We had to change trains, I believe in Limoges [France].

There were five of us with the baby. We came back. The baby was . . . born in 1943. The baby was fourteen or fifteen months [old]. We stopped in Limoges. I mentioned this couple that we had run across in Pereioux before we had found the little house. They met us at the station. At that time, they were reunited with their daughters. They met us with milk for my brother. We came back. [It was the] five us in the tiny apartment. Business was very poor, but there were five of us.

We then found out . . . My father through the Red Cross found out that thirteen members of his family had perished, plus my grandmother in Germany. That was hard.

Ruth: You stayed in Paris until the war ended?

Manuela: We stayed in Paris. My sister and I went to school. We went to school in November 1945. We went to a private school. Even though we went to school during the war, we were a little behind. In 1945, I was twelve. I was to start middle school or something like that. I was to start foreign languages. Maybe not quite yet . . . The first two years, we went to that private school. The owner of the school gave us free tuition. They knew that we couldn’t afford private school, so for about two or three years, we got free tuition. I resumed my violin lessons and piano lessons. Then, later on, I went to a regular high school. [It was] girls only and we wore a uniform—a smock with our name embroidered on it.

Ruth: Your family decided to stay in Paris?

Manuela: Yes. Then a few years later, we were able to rent a house in another suburb because it was terribly cramped. It was a tiny apartment. We slept in folding beds and my brother had to be carried from the dining room to a bedroom. There was no space. We were able to rent a house in a suburb where we had space and it was very comfortable. We stayed there until . . . My sister got married in 1958 and she . . . That’s another story.

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40 Limoges is a city in southwest-central France, approximately 375 kilometers (230 miles) from Paris.
41 The International Committee of the Red Cross (“Red Cross”) is a humanitarian institution based in Geneva, Switzerland. During World War II, the Red Cross—although limited by the Germans—had access to and was a crucial source of information about civilians, prisoners of war, and concentration camp prisoners. In 1943, the British Red Cross set up a registration and tracing service for missing persons that was formalized in 1944 as the Central Tracing Bureau. By 1948, the bureau was in Bad Arolsen, Germany and the name was changed to its current International Tracing Service. At the end of World War II, the Red Cross worked with national Red Cross societies to organize relief assistance to those countries most severely affected by the war.
42 Victory in Europe Day, generally known as ‘V-E’ Day, is May 8, 1945 marked the formal acceptance of the German surrender to the Allies. It marked the end of the war in Europe.
Ruth: What about you?

Manuela: My sister . . . It’s an interesting story. My two cousins . . . My father’s brother and wife, who lived in Holland—Mendels, the same name—were hiding.\(^{43}\) My father’s brother, his wife, and their two daughters who were about my age and my sister’s age were hiding in a village in Holland. The sisters were in a family who had already tension when the parents were with the family. The parents were denounced. They died in concentration camps. The two girls were not. Those two girls were blonde and they mixed with the other Dutch family. They survived. They were not taken away.

After the war, papers were found whereby their mother, my aunt, my father’s sister-in-law, had left instructions that if they should perish, the two girls should go to California to her sister, to their uncle and aunt. They went to San Mateo, California, where they went to school.\(^{44}\) They were maybe about twelve and fourteen at the time. They went to school.

The younger one of the two, Eda, was a linguist. She of course spoke Dutch; she spoke English; and studied French and Spanish. She went to Middlebury College.\(^{45}\) As part of her education, she had to spend a year in France. She came to spend a year with us in 1957, I think. On the boat coming over from California or wherever she embarked—I guess she embarked in New York—she met a young man. She stayed friendly with him. She went to the \textit{Cité Universitaire}.\(^{46}\) There was a ball of some kind. My cousin asked us to come with her. It was a masked ball. She asked us to join her for the masked ball. We made costumes. My sister was a Tahitian dancing girl. I was a Geisha or something like that. We went with her to the ball. There,

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\(^{43}\) Deportations of Jews from the Netherlands began in the summer of 1942. By September 1944, the Germans and their Dutch collaborators had deported 107,000 Jews, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibor, where they were murdered. Only 5,200 survived. In addition, 25,000-30,000 Jews went into hiding, assisted by the Dutch underground. Two-thirds of Dutch Jews in hiding managed to survive. In all, less than 25 percent of Dutch Jewry survived the Holocaust.

\(^{44}\) San Mateo is a city in San Mateo County, California, approximately 20 miles south of San Francisco, and 31 miles northwest of San Jose.

\(^{45}\) Middlebury College is a private liberal arts college in Middlebury, Vermont that was founded in 1800.

\(^{46}\) \textit{Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris} is a private park and foundation located in Paris, France. Since 1925, it has provided general and public services, including the maintenance of several dozen residences for students and visiting academics. It is located in Paris, France and is closely related to the universities of Paris.
my cousin introduced my sister to this young man she had met on the ship, who was a Fulbright student.\textsuperscript{47} Lo and behold, my sister and the young man fell in love.

He had to go back home to New York. He was from New York—Richard Birn. At the end of the year, in December 1957, my sister went to New York. In March of 1958, they got married. My mother and I went to the wedding in New York. Suddenly, I was without my sister, which was a big shock for me. We were best friends. We had many mutual friends. Our social life was together. Suddenly I was alone and I was the older one of the two.

In 1960, I decided it was time to leave home. I still lived at home. My sister’s in-laws got an affidavit for me so I could get a green card.\textsuperscript{48} Instead of just moving out of the house, I moved out of France and I went to New York. I spent one month with my sister and brother-in-law and then I found a room in New York. I worked one year in New York.

Then, the plan was that I would save my money and visit my two cousins in California, Thea and Eda, one of whom was already married. Before I left New York, I had an American friend who had lived in Paris many years. [She] had recently gotten married. [She] said, “Oh, you are going to San Francisco. We have a good friend in San Francisco, Murray Bornstein. We’ll write to him and he can show you San Francisco.” When I got there, I called Murray Bornstein and he showed me San Francisco. Before I knew it, I was engaged. That same year . . . This was 1961. I left New York in August 1961. I met Murray in September 1961. I got engaged in October 1961. I got married the first time in San Francisco in my cousin’s house in November 1961 and got married in the synagogue in Paris in December 1961.

\textbf{Ruth:} That’s wonderful. You got married back in Paris?

\textsuperscript{47} The Fulbright Program is an international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government. It is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. It is one of the most prestigious and competitive fellowship programs in the world.

\textsuperscript{48} The first “green card” emerged soon after World War II. Congress enacted the Alien Registration Act of 1940, which required foreign-born persons 14 years of age and older to register their presence in the United States. Immigrants with no legal basis to remain in the United States were required to leave or were removed. Those with a valid claim to permanent residency received documentation to prove their status. Applicants for visas had to have sponsors who would file an affidavit of support, which essentially promised that the immigrant would not become a public charge while in the United States. INS began to issue different documents based on the alien’s admission status. The pale green colored Form I-151 became coveted proof that the holder was entitled to live and work in the United States. Because of the card’s cumbersome official name – Alien Registration Receipt Card – immigrants, attorneys, and INS workers came to refer to it by its color, calling it the “green card.”
Manuela: Right. Then, a few months later, my parents and my brother came to California to live. They lived there . . . ten years.

Ruth: Going back to France after the war, if you’ve ever had these discussions with your parents . . . I know you were a child and obviously it didn’t have the same effect as it did on your parents, but did they discuss with you why they thought they survived?

Manuela: I don’t know that we discussed it, but I know that my parents and myself are very grateful to the French for their help. Without those French people that we came in contact with, we would have survived. Anyone could have denounced us. Not so much in Paris, but especially in the little village, anyone could have denounced us.

There was only one incident. It happened to my sister. Somebody called her a ‘Dirty Jew.’ A little girl called her a ‘Dirty Jew.’ This little girl heard it somewhere. I have no idea where. It’s really the only time that we had a feeling that our situation was dangerous. Otherwise, the French . . . the priest, the mayor, the post office lady who delivered the mail, the teachers . . . they were all sympathetic and helpful. So were their families.

Ruth: You mentioned luck or miracles a few times, but do you credit your family for their ingenuity and perseverance in making sure you all survived?

Manuela: Absolutely. Particularly my mother. My father was raised in a very happy family. It was his temperament to be very easygoing. His saying was also, “Un reve.” [French: a dream] We will see. He was much more easygoing. He had an easy upbringing. My mother had a very rough upbringing. She really suffered. She was harder and more suspicious. She’s the one who insisted, “We have to go. We have to go.” I really credit my mother for pushing. Otherwise, we would not have made it.

Ruth: Have some of the ways your mother raised you and your experience during the war had an effect on how you raised your family?

Manuela: Probably. I’m very different from my mother. I’m more like my father. I look like my mother and my grandmother, I’m told, but I have a much more easygoing temperament. I’m
sure that whatever my mother taught me, I have taught my children. Whether it took is another story. We shall see. Now that my older son is a father, we’ll see. Certainly there are many things that I do and ways I feel that I have passed on to my children.

**Ruth:** Earlier you spoke of your grandmother, your mother’s mother. I would love for you to recount the story of what happened to your grandmother and the last letter your mother received from her, if it’s not too painful for you to do so.

**Manuela:** Yes. My grandmother, my mother’s mother, had a much younger brother, Erwin, who was married. He had four children—an older daughter, Marianne; and a son, Jergen; and twin daughters. He was interned in a camp for a while. Somehow—and I don’t know how. Maybe he bought his way out . . . Erwin and his wife, Gertie, divorced—maybe for the protection of the children. I don’t really know. He went to Brazil. His wife was left in Hamburg. The four children were sent on the *Kindertransport* to England.⁴⁹ Their mother joined them later on. My grandmother’s brother, my mother’s uncle, was in Brazil, probably in Rio or San Paulo. I don’t know. He got involved in the coffee business.

My grandmother liked her younger brother very much. They entertained an extensive correspondence. Erwin’s older daughter, Marianne, had found those letters, all written in German. Most of them were typed actually in German on very thin onion paper. She read them. She asked me if I would be interested in having them because her children don’t read German and weren’t interested. I said, “Yes.” I have in my possession these letters.

These letters were written between 1940 and 1941. They describe in detail my grandmother’s deteriorating life in Hamburg. She had a nice apartment. She had two grand pianos. She had beautiful rugs. She had books. She had many friends. She had a good social life and little by little her social life deteriorated. Although, I know that at the end of her life in 1941 . . . I have a program of chamber music that she played among friends. She described how life

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⁴⁹ *'Kindertransport'* is the name given to a series of rescue missions that assisted Jewish children in leaving Nazi-occupied Europe. The United Kingdom took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany and the occupied territories of Austria, and ex-Czechoslovakia. The children were placed in British foster homes, hostels, and on farms. Some transports were organized by *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE) in France where German-Jewish children were put up in a series of OSE children’s homes. Beginning in March 1939, several transports brought children from Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt and other places in Germany to France. When the Germans occupied France, the 144 children, in two separate transports, were smuggled out of France into Portugal where they caught a ship to the United States. The first transport left on June 21, 1941 and the second on September 1, 1941. Altogether the OSE sheltered and assisted in getting nearly 1,600 Jewish children out Nazi-occupied areas.
became more difficult. She had to leave her apartment. She had to move to a house that belonged to the Jewish community. She describes how the windows don’t close, and it smells musty, and there’s no light, and she has to share the bathroom . . . She was used to living comfortably. But she was able to keep one piano and that made her happy. She described how more and more of her friends were taken away in those letters. She also said that when the time will come, she will take her life.

Then she handwrote a letter to my mother. [It was] a farewell letter to my mother, which I have in my possession, saying that she can not stand it anymore and trying to console my mother, her only child, that it was the best thing, and that she should continue her life with her husband and her two little girls. It’s a very sad letter, of course. She just couldn’t go on living in those conditions. She even said at one point that she would have liked to have left, but it was too late. She had no money. She couldn’t. She really ended miserably. She made arrangements. She had a lawyer. In her final letter, she encouraged my mother to get in touch with that lawyer.

She was actually buried in the Jewish cemetery in Hamburg. I went there and I could not find her tomb, but I know that my mother went there and found the tomb. I’m really surprised that she was able to get a Jewish burial in November 1941, but she did. I found my grandfather’s tomb but I didn’t find my grandmother’s tomb. But I know she’s there, because I have a photograph of it.

Ruth: Going back a little more to your own marriage, how did you end up in Atlanta?

Manuela: I came to the United States in 1960. I lived a year in New York. Then, I went to San Francisco, where I met my husband and we got married. He was an engineer. We lived a year in Hawaii. He had a job in Hawaii. That’s actually why we married so quickly. I had to go back to France. I told my parents I would be gone one year. He had a job in Hawaii—opposite ends of the world. We decided to get married in Paris for a year. Then we lived in Hawaii for one year. We had a one-year honeymoon in Hawaii.

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50 Heinrich Himmler had obtained permission from Hitler to begin deporting Jews from Germany in September 1941. In October 1941, German authorities began deporting Jews from the so-called Greater German Reich—including Austria and the annexed Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. They were sent to ghettos, labor camps, shooting sites, concentration camps, and killing centers, primarily in German-occupied Poland, the German-occupied Baltic States, and German-occupied Belarus.
Then on January 2, 1963, we came back to San Francisco. By that time, my parents had moved to San Francisco. We lived ten years in San Francisco, from 1963 to 1972 actually. My first son was born in 1963 in San Francisco. My husband worked first as an engineer with the city of San Francisco. Then he had a job with a private firm, working on the design of [the Bay Area Rapid Transit system]. In 1971, the job was coming to an end.

My father had worked in San Francisco. With my mother’s help, he was able to start a new business. It was quite successful. My mother helped him with the books and she gave French and German lessons. They decided to go back to France in 1971. The realized that the Murray’s job was ending. They knew that the BART project was ending, so they knew that we would be sent elsewhere. My brother at the time was married and lived in Madison, Wisconsin, and also would go somewhere else. My sister’s husband was a diplomat and was traveling all over the world. They decided to go back to France. In 1971, they went to retire in Cannes [France]—the most beautiful place at that time. That was good.

Then, indeed in 1972, my husband was transferred to the headquarters of his company—Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas—to the New York office. We lived in Princeton [New Jersey] for four years. Then in 1976, [the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority] was being designed. There were three firms. It was a joint venture between three engineering firms—Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas, Tudor, and Bechtel.

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51 Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is a rapid transit public transportation system serving the San Francisco Bay Area in California that began operation in 1972.
52 Madison is the capital city of the United States state of Wisconsin.
53 Cannes, a resort town on the French Riviera, is famed for its international film festival.
54 Princeton is a town in New Jersey, known for the Ivy League Princeton University.
55 MARTA is the common term for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, which was created in 1965. During the 1970’s, MARTA began acquiring land in and around the city of Atlanta, Georgia for construction of a rapid rail system. Today, MARTA operates a rail system with feeder bus operation and park-and-ride facilities throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.
56 Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas was founded in 1885 in New York City as Parsons Brinckerhoff. Among its many notable projects, the firm designed the original BART transportation plan in San Francisco and worked on the rapid transit project in Atlanta, Georgia known as MARTA. The company was acquired by Balfour Beatty in 2009 and then sold to WSP Global in 2014. In 2017, Parsons Brinckerhoff changed its name to WSP USA. Today (2019), it is a multinational engineering and design firm with approximately 14,000 employees.
57 Tudor Engineering Company was founded in 1950 in San Francisco, California. The firm specialized in highway and bridge work, hydroelectric projects, transportation, and heavy civil infrastructure facilities, including a joint venture project which built the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART) and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) in Georgia. In 1989, Tudor Engineering Company merged with Kaiser Engineering in Oakland.
58 Bechtel Corporation is a global engineering, construction, and project management companies that began in 1898. Today, Bechtel is the largest construction company in the United States.
Bechtel separated, so the other two firms needed more engineers. Many engineers were moved to Atlanta at that time. That’s how, in 1976, we moved to Atlanta.

Ruth: So, was this it for you?

Manuela: This is it. My husband passed away in 1982 unfortunately, but my two sons are both married. Both live in the area. I have a grandson.

Ruth: A wonderful grandson. I saw his picture.

Manuela: Ryan Murray Bornstein. He’s two months old.

Ruth: Are you involved in any Holocaust related activities because of your experiences?

Manuela: I joined the Hidden Children Foundation a few years ago.\textsuperscript{59} Even though I don’t consider myself a hidden child because I had the wonderful fortune to be with my parents all the time and to be out in the open. We were not hiding at all. We were refugees. Still, I support the organization because they do a good job. I speak occasionally at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. I also support the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum] in Washington [D.C.].\textsuperscript{60} I was honored recently to light one of the torches\textsuperscript{61} on \textit{Yom HaShoah}.\textsuperscript{62} That’s really all I do.

Ruth: That’s a lot. Why do you feel it’s important to give back to these Holocaust-related organizations?

Manuela: First, I think my story is a wonderful story. It’s a happy story. I mean, it has its very sad moments, but it’s a happy story. I think it’s important for the children in the schools to learn what good people can do. Even though those people—except for the mayor probably—did not do anything actively, still, by keeping their mouths shut, they were active [in resisting the}

\textsuperscript{59} The Hidden Child Foundation was established in 1991 and held its first meeting in New York City, New York. Members are former children who survived the Holocaust by hiding, either physically or under assumed identities.

\textsuperscript{60} The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is the United States’ official memorial to the Holocaust. It was opened in 1993, adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{61} The Memorial to the Six Million was dedicated on April 25, 1965 in Greenwood Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia. It is an open-air structure composed of four L-shaped walls of varying heights made from granite blocks. The walls interlock to form a single "interior" space. In the center of the space are six white torches, which rise above the walls and are lit during special ceremonies, such as \textit{Yom HaShoah}, and represent the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Yom Hazikaron laShoah ve-laG’vurah} [Hebrew: Day of (remembrance of) the Holocaust and the Heroism] known colloquially in Israel and abroad as \textit{Yom HaShoah}, or in English as Holocaust Remembrance Day. It marks the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and is on the 27th day in the month of Nisan.
Nazis]. They did not denounce us. They supported us. Maybe they were passive, but being passive was helpful—except for the mayor, who gave us the false ID papers. I think it’s very important for the children to hear the story so it doesn’t become forgotten, because the Holocaust survivors are disappearing rapidly. I’m one of the younger ones. I’m 67. I hope to have a long life in front of me, but people who are 70 and 80 are disappearing. We are the last generation who was there. We can talk. We know what happened.

Ruth: Describe some of the experiences in your visits back to the community that really saved your family’s life.

Manuela: First, we went back to the little village. This is in conjunction with a project of my niece. After her father, my brother, passed away, she realized that she really didn’t know anything. Of course, my brother was born in 1943. He didn’t know. She realized that my sister and I were the only [remaining] survivors of her family’s experience, so she interviewed us. She went to the village a few years before we all went—she went with her two cousins—to see if people remembered us. This was in 1995 and it was 50 years before. They were gratified to see that all the people she contacted—we gave them the names—remembered us. Some were dead already, but everybody remembered us fondly. Her name is Jessica Mendels. She stayed in contact. First, she was going to make a ten-minute little film. Then she realized that she had enough material for a full size 55-minute documentary. She—my brother’s daughter—and my sister’s daughter, who is a historian by profession, made arrangements and appointments with those people that they had talked to two years before.

We had a week of very hectic running around. The two cousins, Jessica Mendels and Anne-Emanuelle Birn, my two nieces, went [along with] my sister, Jacqueline Bern, and two young artists—a filmmaker and a video maker, I believe. My niece, Jessica, is a photography major. That’s how she had already some idea what to do. We went to see those people and they received us with open arms. Some of them had a meal for us or snacks and things to take with us, food. They had all kinds of anecdotes to tell us.

Some people . . . We asked them, “How come . . . What did you do to save us?” [They responded.] “Well, it was normal. There was no reason to give you up, to give you away. It was a normal thing to do.” Another woman said, “We were all very afraid. It was a center of resistance and there were other refugees—not in the village, but the adjoining village—Spanish
or people from Azas.” There were a lot of refugees. You didn’t know who was pro-Nazi or who was against, so you kept to yourself. You did not talk. You kept quiet.” Also, we were a nice family. We had a baby—my mother became pregnant just like the other women—and two little girls.

We mixed in. We had black hair like they do. Another thing that helped us I’m sure [is that] my sister and I had no accent. We were French. My parents were not French and they had some of an accent but it was a light accent. We didn’t keep kosher. We ate like everybody else. Maybe it’s sad to say, but it saved our life. I really think behaving . . . We blended in as much as possible and that helped us. I’m sure if we [had] dressed differently, if we [had] had accents, it would have been much more difficult. The fact that we were already very assimilated helped us.

**Ruth:** Is there anything that you would like to add? Are there any final thoughts about your experience that you’d like to leave for future generations?

**Manuela:** There are a few things I’d like to say. One thing is: keep a record of your life. Write it down. Write everything down like my parents did for us. Your children will be grateful. Your grandchildren will be grateful. Stay close to your family, have a close family. You hear of family relationships being disrupted and it’s so sad, because there is nothing like family. Have friends. Stay close to your friends. Beware of antisemitism, of segregation, of any kind of law that sets you apart. It may start with a very small thing and it may escalate into a major problem, especially for us Jews. We always have been suffering from discrimination. We have to be forever vigilant. I’m grateful. I’m grateful to the French. I’m grateful to my parents. I’m grateful to my family, to my children, and I’m happy to be alive.

**Ruth:** Thank you very much.

**Manuela:** You’re welcome.

<End Disk 2>

**INTEEVIE ENDS**