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Francine Lorch (née Christophe)

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Copyright: Mélanie Péron acknowledges the USC Shoah Foundation for allowing her to transcribe into French and to translate into English the following testimony: **Francine Lorch (née Christophe)** (1995). For more information: <http://sfi.usc.edu/>

Disclaimer: The following verbatim transcription and translation were conducted by M. Péron and her students. They have not been officially verified.

Note about the translation

Francine's testimony jumps back and forth between the past and the present tenses. Even though telling her memories in the past tense would be more coherent in English, we also understand that the present tense describes more vividly certain episodes of her life. Thus, we kept the same temporal choices in our translation.

Sean (Soohyoung) Kim ('22), Rebecca Morse ('22), Elena Tisnovsky ('23)

[Interview 4590](#) conducted in Paris on September 4, 1995 by Sabine Mamou.

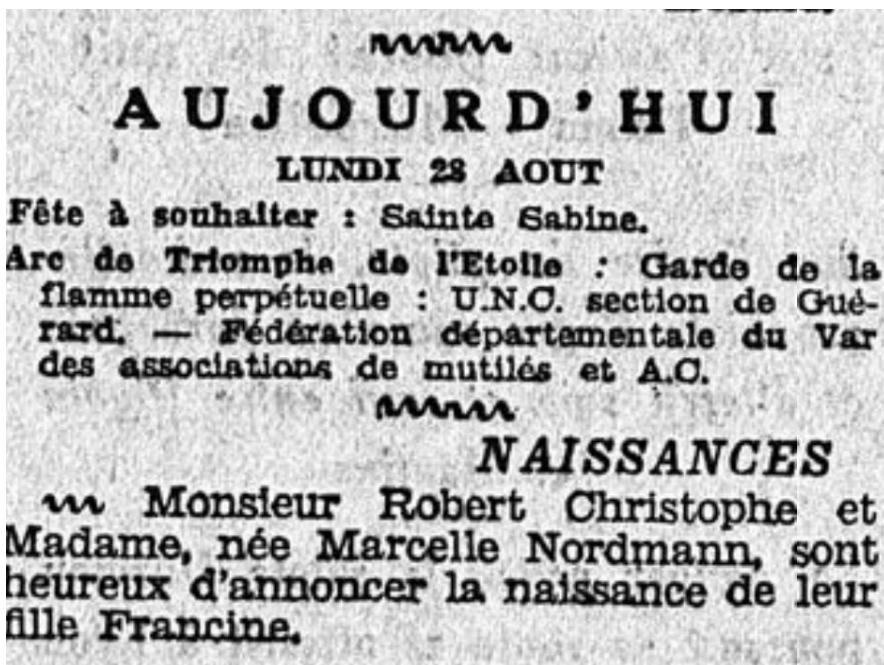
TAPE 1

Interviewer: Hello, today is September 4, 1995, in Rocquencourt, France. My name is Sabine Mamou and this is Francine Lorch. Mrs. Francine Lorch, I am going to ask you to introduce yourself, to spell your birth name and your married name.

Francine: So my birth name is Francine Christophe C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H-E and my married name is Lorch L-O-R-C-H.

Interviewer: When were you born, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: I was born on August 18, 1933. A bad year.



Le Matin on August 28, 1933

Source: [RetroNews](#)

Interviewer: Why a bad year?

Francine: Hitler's seizure of power.

Interviewer: In 1933, your family consisted of whom?

Francine: My father, my mother and me.

Interviewer: Can you tell us your father's name?

Francine: My father's name is Robert Christophe¹ and my mother is Marcelle née Nordmann².

Interviewer: Your father, in 1933, what did he do?

Francine: He was beginning his career as a historian. At first, he was a textile engineer. Should I tell the whole story of my family?

Interviewer: Please.

Francine: So my grandfather, Léon Christophe³, was from Lille. He was a fabric merchant, as was common in Lille, and he wanted his two sons to take over.

¹ Robert Christophe was born on July 12th, 1907 in Lille and passed away on August 7th, 1983 in Neuilly-sur-Seine.

² Marcelle Nordmann was born August 20th, 1907, in Paris and passed away October 21st, 1998 in Neuilly-sur-Seine.

³ Léon Christophe was born in 1863 in Metz and passed away in 1929 in Paris.

Léon Christophe

Lille, 22 juin. — Sous cette raison sociale, une société en nom collectif vient de se former pour l'achat et la vente de toiles et tissus en tous genres.

Le siège est à Lille, 110, rue de Paris, avec succursales à Paris, 16, rue du Sentier, et 13, rue de Mulhouse.

Le capital est de 620.000 francs.

La Journée industrielle on June 24, 1921

Source: [RetroNews](#)

That's why he sent the oldest son, Daniel, to a business school (HEC: Hautes Etudes Commerciales) and the second, Robert, to the spinning and textile school in Epinal⁴. But my father didn't like that kind of thing at all. He got into the business anyway because my grandfather died, leaving them both very young. They were, I think, 20 and 21 at the head of this business that was pretty big.

Inhumations

du 9 au 16 juin

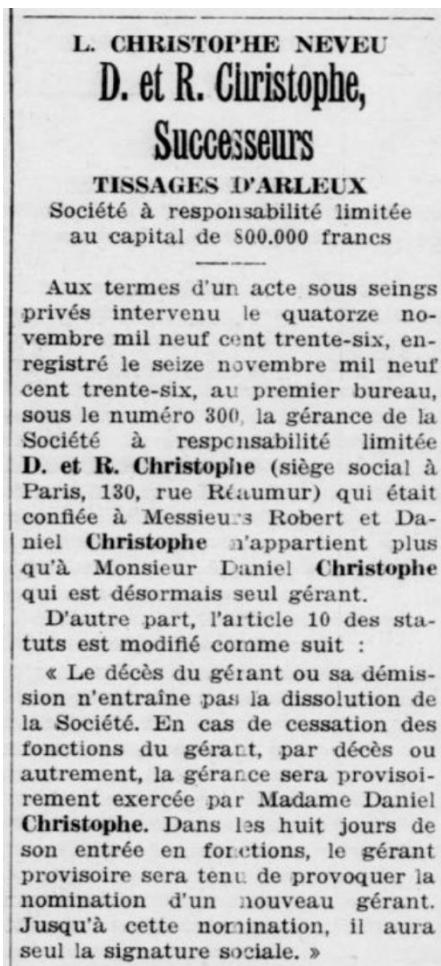
M. Lucien Ruben, 33 ans.
Mme Maurice Mucikant, née Fanny Bourstein, 66 ans.
M. Sion Nakache, 20 ans.
M. Albert Lion, 54 ans.
M. Jacob Dridzo, 45 ans.
M. Léopold Rozès, 32 ans.
Mme David Lipszyc, née Hinda Buchwald, 31 ans.
Mme Vve Charles Lambert, née Lucie Schuhl, 66 ans.
M. Jacques Lévy, 69 ans.
M. Hannoch Gamermann, 53 ans.
Mme Vve Moïse Flanck, née Rachela Beila, 54 ans.
Albert Zouari, 4 ans.
Mme Vve Joseph Bragdon, née Amélia Barnett, 57 ans.
M. Nephtalie Marx, 89 ans.
M. Léon Christophe, 66 ans.
M. Jacob Doboi, 76 ans.
M. Myrtile Uri, 73 ans.
M. Edmond Malabert, 76 ans.
Mme Léon Neuburger, née Claire Weil, 80 ans.
David Dahan, 1 an.
Huguette Moïse, 2 mois.

L'Univers israélite on June 21, 1929

Source: [RetroNews](#)

⁴ The École supérieure de filature et de tissage de l'Est, created in 1905 by the president of the Syndicat cotonnier de l'Est, Mr. G. Juillard-Hartmann, and the city of Epinal, specialized in the study of spinning and weaving cotton and other textiles. Initially located on Quai Jules-Ferry with the École industrielle des Vosges, the school moved in October 1913 to new specially built facilities at 85 rue d'Alsace, which included classrooms and workshops equipped with industrial equipment covering all sectors of activity in a textile factory. Recognized by the State since 1922, the school was authorized to deliver, from 1924 onwards, textile engineers' certificates and technical teaching diplomas. The school closed its doors on June 30, 2005, due to the decline of the French textile industry.

And my father was not attracted to that kind of thing. He was only interested in history. And one day he decided to go for it. He started writing historical articles for newspapers that did very well, that did very well. And one day, he said to my mother... The crisis of '29 had obviously impacted the business, there was fallout. He said to her, "What if I drop everything and become a historian, what do you think?" She replied, "That's a great idea, I'm going to learn shorthand typing right away." Which she did so she could take notes of everything he did and type his manuscripts. So in '33, he began a career as a historian that, unfortunately, was ruined by the war.



Robert passes on the family company to his brother Daniel

La Loi on November 28, 1936

Source: [Retronews](#)

Bon sang ne peut mentir...

LA PARTICIPATION DES JUIFS DE FRANCE

aux GUERRES de 1870 et 1914

par Robert CHRISTOPHE

On ne prépare bien la guerre qu'en la faisant. Que tous ceux qui sont valides se lèvent, l'invasion ne sera plus qu'un mot! Ainsi parlait Léon Fianchetti, au lendemain de Reichshoffen. Quel était cet audacieux? Ecoutez...

L'aigle alors commençait à baisser la tête. Douay battu à Wissembourg, Mac-Mahon écrasé à Wörth, Frossard refoulé de Forbach, la France envahie — terribles nouvelles. A Paris, la Chambre renversait le ministère. Trois semaines plus tard, l'annonce de Sedan éclatait comme une bombe au milieu d'une panique. Nommé gouverneur de Paris, le général Trochu, de l'aveu même du comte d'Hénisson, voulait faire placer une affiche, informant les Français qu'il avait « demandé à Sainte-Geneviève, la libératrice de Paris au temps des Barbares, de couvrir encore une fois Paris de sa protection. » Et tandis que les ministres ricanaien, un huissier apportait au général une carte où il put lire : « Léon Franchetti ».

Nous y voilà.

Le solliciteur était juif; ancien volontaire de 1855 aux chasseurs d'Afrique; ancien porte-fanion du maréchal Baraguey-d'Hilliers à Solférino; pour lors industriel, marié depuis trois ans, père d'un charmant bambin.

Général, dirait-il au gouverneur, nous sommes « flambés » si tout le monde ne s'y met. Offrez-moi votre appui, et je donne le signal à l'organisation de levées en masse!

Trochu répondit en riant :

— Amenez-moi dans la cour du Louvre un peloton de volontaires montés et équipés: ce sera votre premier examen.

Deux jours plus tard, vingt cavaliers venaient se placer sous les fenêtres du général. Ils s'appelaient Joly de Marval, Benoît-Champy, Le Fez, Rodriguez, Jules Crémieux, Lucien Worms, Armand Lévy, Gustave Fould, Leroy d'Etiolles, de Susini, Craibière, etc..., et leurs chevaux, harnachements et uniformes « à peu près militaires » avaient été payés soit par eux-mêmes, soit par MM. de Rothschild, Hollander, Camondo, de Grefühle et Halphen.

Excerpt from an article by Robert Christophe published in *L'Univers Israélite* on June 17, 1938

Source: [Retronews](#)

LE LIVRE DU JOUR
PAR PAUL REBOUX

BAZaine INNOCENT

par Robert Christophe



Ce qu'il y a de séduisant dans ce livre, c'est l'ardeur avec laquelle l'auteur nous a présenté sa thèse.

L'opinion publique a l'habitude de coller des étiquettes sur les gens, et de s'en tenir paresseusement à ce qu'elle a décidé.

C'est ainsi qu'il est bien entendu que Bazaine fut un traître, qu'il a joué au billard au lieu de s'occuper de la bataille de Saint-Privat, qu'il a livré Metz et l'armée, et qu'il porte toute la responsabilité de cette capitulation.

C'est à cause de cette capitulation « en rase campagne » qu'il a été condamné à mort par le conseil de guerre.

Or, M. Robert Christophe établit, d'une manière qui ne comporte pas de discussion, que Bazaine ne pouvait jouer au billard le jour de la bataille de Saint-Privat, puisque, ce 18 août 1870, il donna audience à vingt-deux officiers au rez-de-chaussée d'une maison où le billard se trouvait au premier étage.

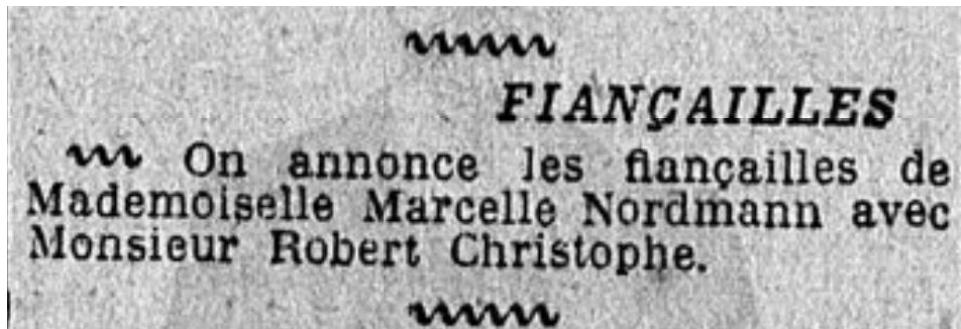
Review of Robert's *Bazaine innocent* in *Paris-Soir* on February 19, 1939

Source: [Retronews](#)

Interviewer: And your mother, Mrs. Lorch, comes from which family?

Francine: So my mother was from a Parisian family that had Lorraine or Alsatian origins like many Jewish families in Paris. But we had already been very Parisian for quite some time on my maternal grandmother's side. And my mother was raised in the enlightened Jewish bourgeoisie of that time. These were people who were very cultured, who loved the fine arts, who were very good, who had a great sense of moral values as

we say now. And my mother was unfortunately an only child because the rhesus factor was taking its toll in those days. We didn't know that. We found out later. And all the children that came after her died. And she was brought up in a very pleasant way with a lot of severity and rigor but a lot of tenderness and gentleness and joy. She was a great pianist. This was discovered by the Germans later on. I think I will have the chance to tell you about it. She could have had a career that she didn't have because she fell in love with my father when she was fifteen. And a career could have jeopardized that at the time. We didn't imagine combining marriage and a career.



Le Matin on September 30, 1929

Source: [RetroNews](#)

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, in 1933, when you were born, how old were your parents?

Francine: My parents⁵ had been married for three years.



L'Univers Israélite on January 3, 1930

Source: [Retronews](#)

⁵ Robert and Marcelle Christophe lived at 6 rue Georges Berger in the 17th arrondissement. It is at this address that Francine was born.

Francine: They were born in 1907, so they were the same age. They were about twenty-six years old. My father was twenty-six years old. My mother, not quite, she wouldn't be 26 until a few days later.



Marriage of Robert and Marcelle Christophe
Source: F. Christophe

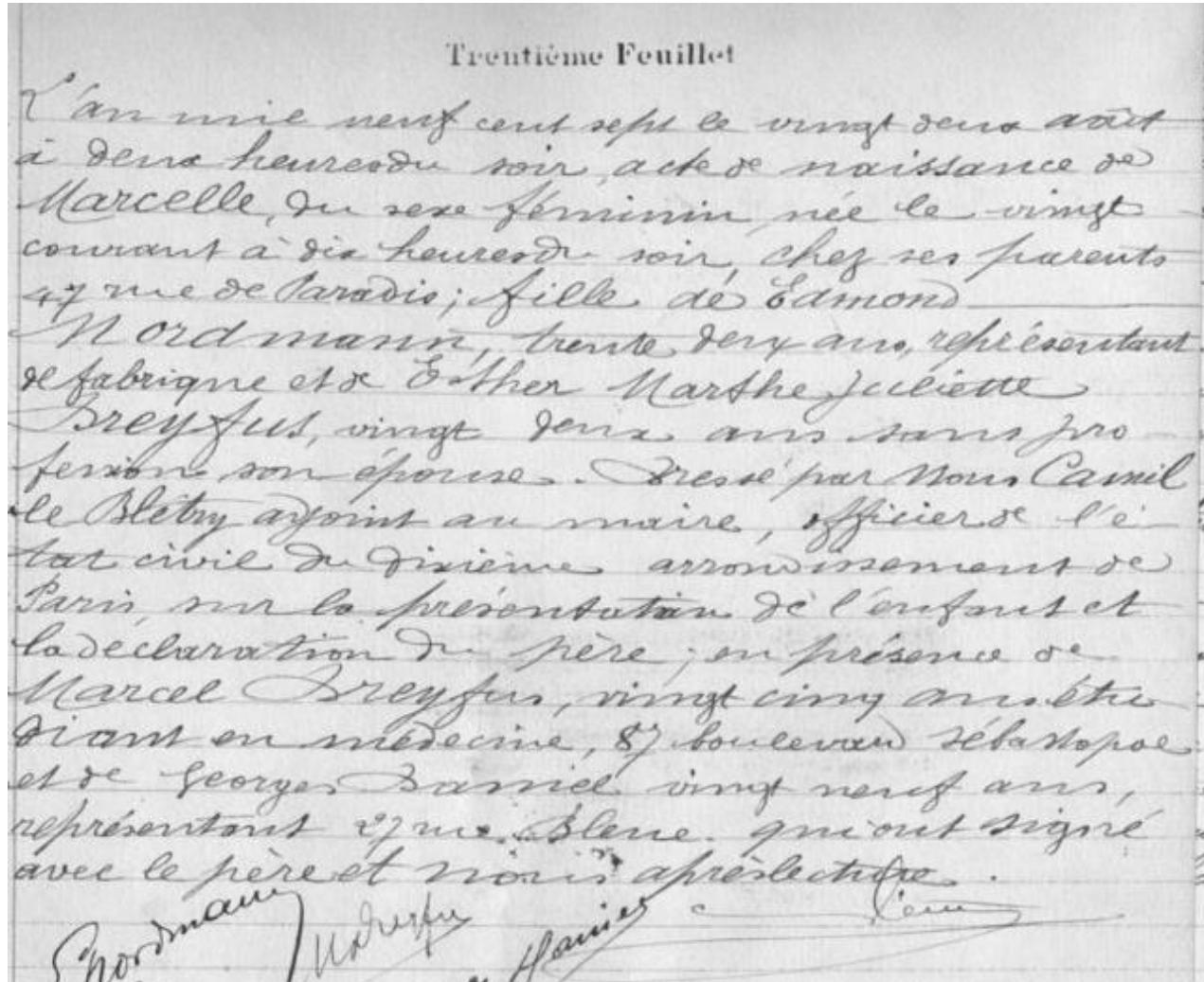
Interviewer: Who are the other members of your family?

Francine: So, my father had a brother named Daniel. That's his older brother who was married and already had a daughter when I was born⁶. My mother is, as I told you, an only child.

⁶ Daniel Christophe (1906-1995) married Suzanne Bernheim (1909 in Shanghai-1979). They lived at 219 rue de l'Université in the 7th arrondissement and had a daughter, Ginette, born in 1931. They had a second daughter, Marianne, born in 1934, then a son, Alain, born in 1946.

Interviewer: And you have grandparents?

Francine: So I have grandparents. On my mother's side, I still have my two grandparents named Edmond and Esther⁷.



Birth certificate of Marcelle Christophe née Nordmann in the 10th arrondissement

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (10 10N 369 - acte n° 3312 - vue 30/31)

⁷ Edmond Nordmann was born on April 19, 1875 in Geneva and died on October 26, 1938 in Paris. Esther Dreyfus was born on May 14, 1885 and died on April 12, 1952. They lived at 390 rue Saint-Honoré in the 1st arrondissement.



Esther and Edmond Nordmann at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931
Source: F. Christophe

Francine: And on my father's side, I have my grandmother. My grandfather Léon died, as I told you, when my father was twenty, twenty-one, something like that.



Source: F. Christophe

Interviewer: So Edmond Christophe...

Francine: No, Nordmann. Edmond is on the Nordmann side, on my mother's side.

L'« Univers » est en deuil.

M. Edmond Nordmann, notre administrateur, est décédé, mercredi matin, à l'âge de 63 ans.

Nous avons appris cette affreuse nouvelle au moment de mettre sous presse. Nous éprouvons une peine immense, qui sera ressentie aussi par tous ceux de nos lecteurs qui ont eu l'occasion d'entrer en contact avec cet homme aimable, dévoué à sa tâche et toujours prêt à rendre service.

Sa disparition est pour nous une perte irréparable.

Les obsèques de M. Edmond Nordmann sont célébrées ce matin dans la plus stricte intimité, au cimetière Montparnasse.

A sa veuve éplorée, à sa fille, à M. Robert Christophe, son gendre nous présentons l'expression de nos condoléances sincèrement attristées.

L'Univers Israélite on October 28, 1938

Source: [RetroNews](#)

Interviewer: And Esther has what last name?

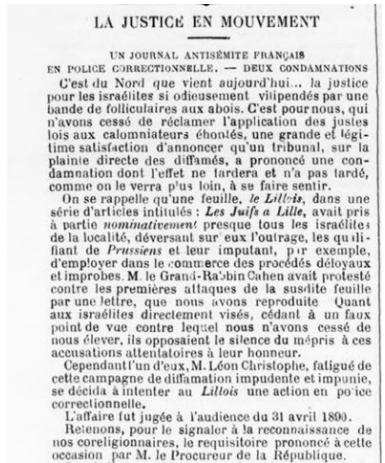
Francine: Dreyfus.

Interviewer: And on your mother's side?

Francine: That's my mother's side.

Interviewer: And on your father's side?

Francine: So, on my father's side, there is Léon Christophe who is the ninth of a family of eighteen children and the wife, Rosalie Veil⁸, who is called Nina because she hates the name Rosalie, has two brothers and a sister. I think that when I was born, she had already lost a brother who died very young.



Excerpt from an article about the trial filed by Léon Christophe against *Le Lillois* for its antisemitic publications
Les Archives Israélites on 26 Juin 1890
 Source: [RetroNews](#)



Nina (Rosalie) Christophe in 1931
 Source: F. Christophe

⁸ Rosalie (Nina) Weill (1881-1961), daughter of Daniel Weill (1845-1901) and Pauline Schnerf (1855-1935). She has one sister, Lucie (1879-1952) and three brothers, Edmond (1886-1887), Maurice (1884-1914) and Alfred (1883-1944). The latter supports Marcelle during the war. He was shot by the Germans on June, 12th, 1944, in [Maves](#) along with Albert Christophe (1882-1944), who was Nina's brother-in-law.

Interviewer: What is your first memory, Mrs. Lorch?

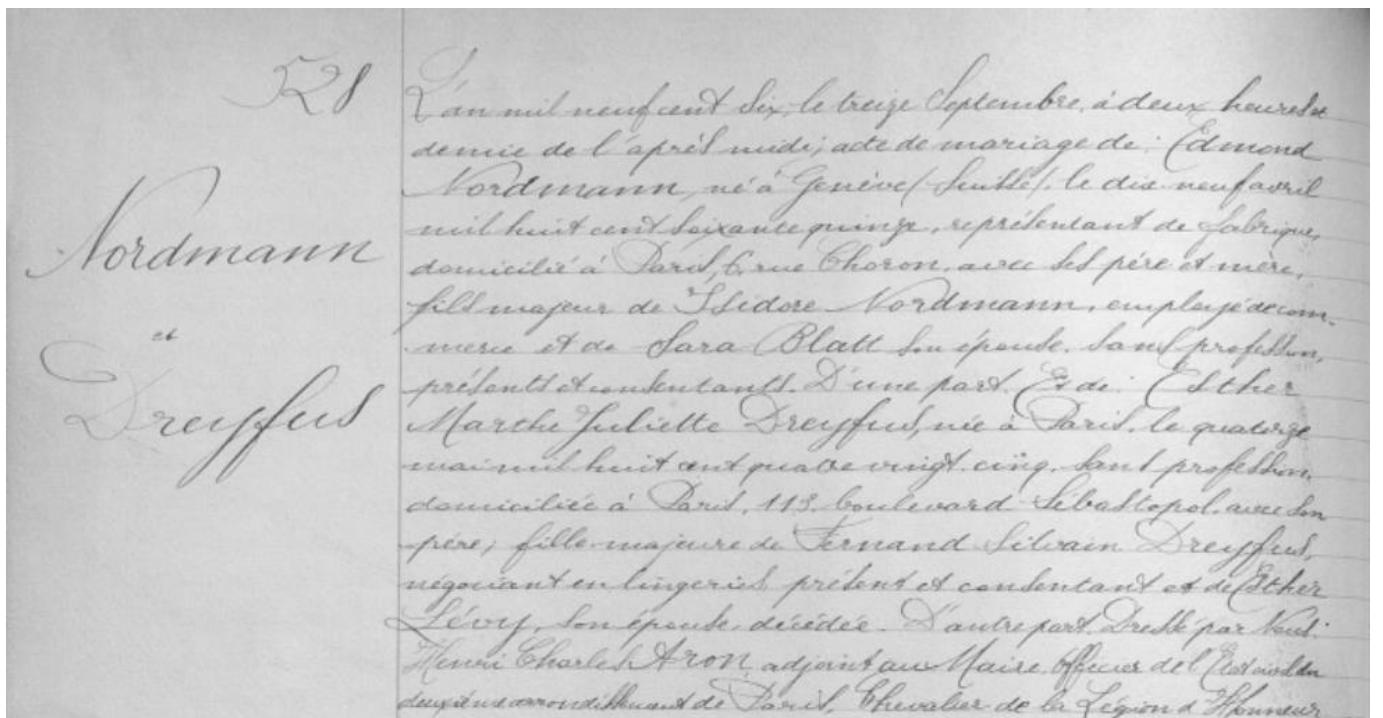
Francine: Oh, I have a lot of memories. Maybe memories of vacations... my paternal grandparents had bought a very nice property in the Sarthe⁹ region and we used to go there regularly. And I have very fond memories of that. I think I was three years old, not even three years old. My memories go back a long way, I see myself there with my cousins, we had a donkey cart and we used to go for rides. There was a dog. We would also go to the neighboring farm and our fathers would go hunting.



⁹ The property was called Beauchamps and was located in the municipality of La Ferté-Saint-Bernard.

Interviewer: Were your parents religious?

Francine: No, not at all, I was not from a religious family at all. My maternal grandmother, Esther Nordmann née Dreyfus, had lost her mother to puerperal fever, as was often the case in those days, when she was only four days old¹⁰. She was resolutely atheist. She would say, "How can you believe there is a god when he leaves you motherless, when you are four days old?" But she respected the religion of others. She got married in the synagogue because at the time, it was unthinkable to just get married at the town hall. It just was not done. So she went along with that, but she was really an atheist. As for my grandfather, he was also... let's say he was agnostic. And they raised my mother without religion. My mother always believed that there was a god, but that was as far as it went. I think she may still believe that.



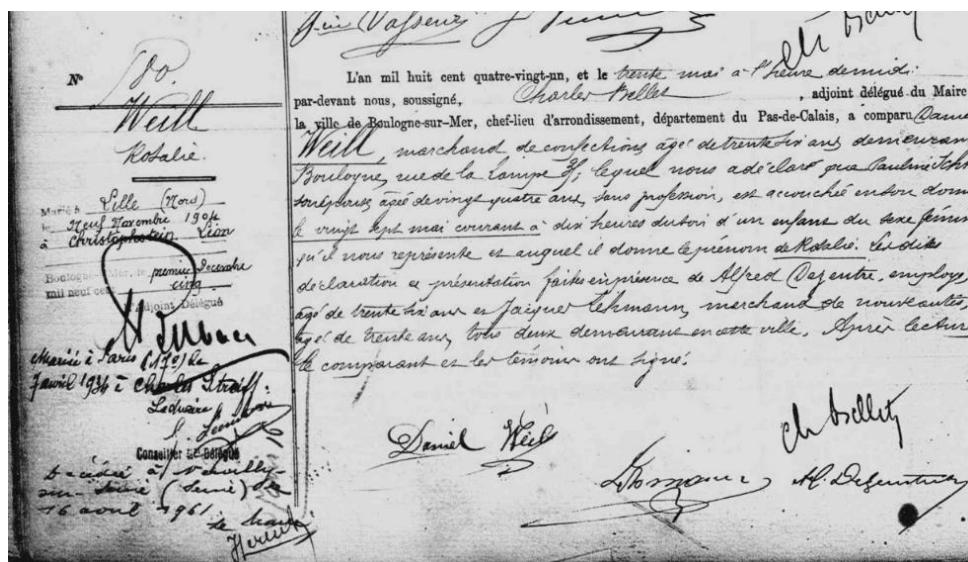
Marriage certificate of Edmond Nordmann and Esther Dreyfus on September, 13th, 1906 in the 2nd arrondissement

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (02 2M 160- acte n° 528 - vue 04/31)

¹⁰ The parents of Esther Marthe Juliette Dreyfus (1885-1952) were Fernand Sylvain Dreyfus (1853-1910) and Esther Levy (1861-1885).

Francine: So on my father's side, the Christophe family, the ones who had eighteen children, were extremely religious. So extreme that it put off all the children and they all became anti-religious. While respecting all the same, because we were very respectful of the beliefs of others. In our family, we never mocked or rejected the beliefs of others, whatever they were, we always respected them. But we didn't go to rabbis. We were not pious.

Robert I did not practice the religion of my ancestors. Neither did my parents. I had not even celebrated, in my childhood, this "religious majority" which, among the Israelites, corresponds to the first communion of the Catholics. However, a rabbi had blessed my marriage, out of respect for the memory of my grandparents. Did I believe in God, despite this family irreligiousness? This issue remained clouded in my mind. Jewish or not Jewish, it did not matter to us. My paternal grandparents lived in Metz under the Second Empire. Born in 1863, my father was in his eighth year during the famous siege of 1870. After the defeat, the Alsatians-Lorrains were warned that they would become Germans unless they opted for France and left their province. So my grandparents came with their children to settle in Lille, where I was born in the 20th century to a mother from Boulogne-sur-Mer. That is the point at which we considered ourselves to be French. (p.39)



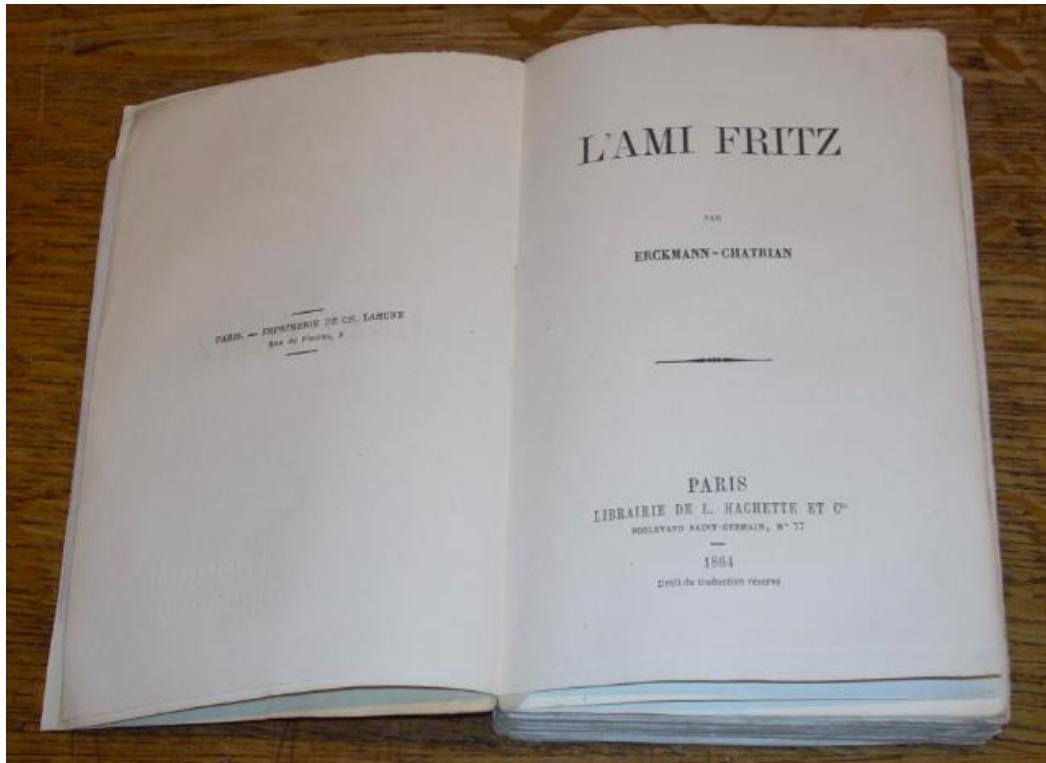
Birth certificate of Rosalie Weill

Source: [Geni](#)

Francine: There were conversions, by the way. In my family, in my mother's family, there is a saint.

Interviewer: At what point in time?

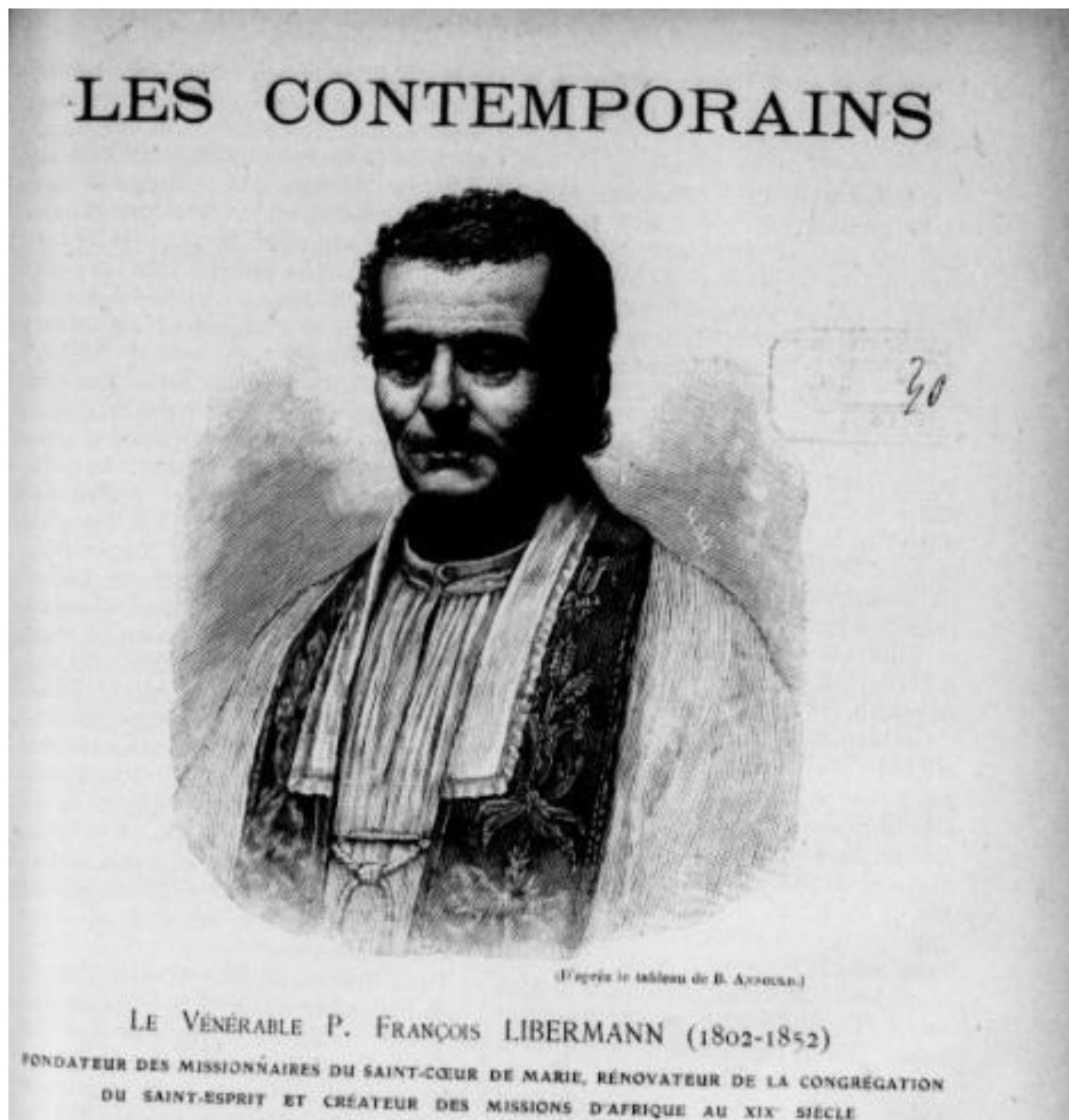
Francine: Under Napoleon III. It was a blessed period for the Jews of France and, at that time, there was such an enormous assimilation. There were many mixed marriages. There were some in my family. And so, in my mother's family, there was a family called Libermann. There were several children and it was in a village in Alsace. And you know that there was a way of life, in harmony, between all the religions in Alsace. They got along very well. You can read that in the [?] What's it called? *L'Ami Fritz*, a very great friendship between Catholics and Jews.



L'Ami Fritz by Emile Erckmann et Alexandre Chatrian published in 1864.

And there, François Libermann, his friendship became so great towards the Catholics that he converted.

This was absolutely terrible for the father. The father went into mourning. And Francis Lieberman not only converted but became a priest¹¹. And he even got a missionary order and went to Rome. The Pope received him and when he saw him, the Pope said "Sarà il santo" (he will be the saint). And that's what he became. He is not yet canonized, he is beatified. But he is called Saint Francis Libermann.



Biography of François Libermann in *Les Contemporains* on January 1st, 1911

Source: [Retronews](#)

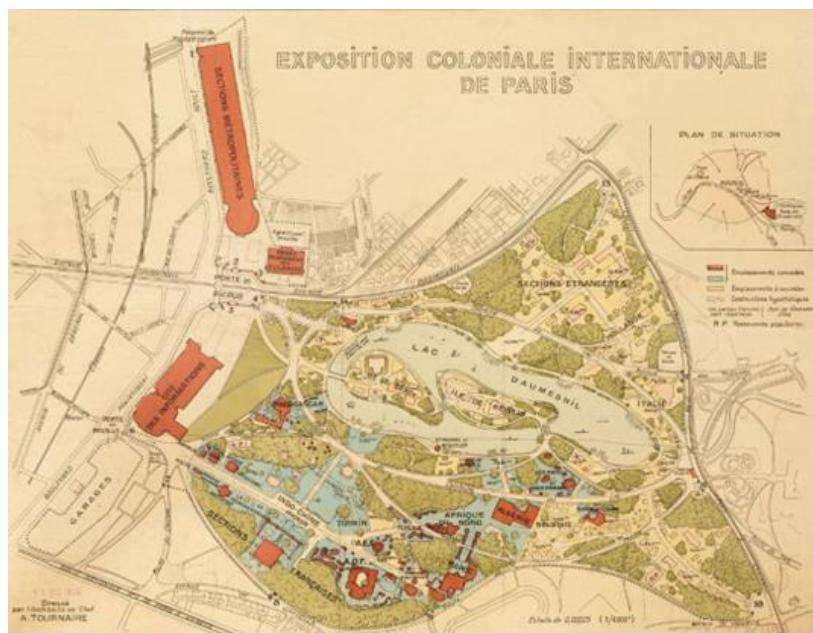
¹¹ François Libermann, né Jacob Libermann, was born on April 12th, 1802, in Saverne, Alsace. He was baptized on December 24th, 1826.

Francine: And there are still Catholic schools all over Africa that bear his name. At the Colonial Exhibition in 1930 [sic], I don't remember, at the Missions pavilion, my grandmother, who always had something funny to say, said to my mother: "Look, there's a bust of the cousin!"



The Paris Colonial Exhibition in 1931

Source: [Gallica](#)



Map of the Paris Colonial Exhibition

Source: [Palais de la Porte Dorée](#)

Interviewer: Who told you that?



Marcelle and Esther at the Colonial Exhibition of 1931

Source: F. Christophe

Francine: I must tell you that to compensate, the younger brother became a rabbi and, I believe, even became Chief Rabbi of Strasbourg¹². As for the third brother, he was completely outside of religion. He became a General. He commanded very well during the War of 1870.

Interviewer: Did they talk about this in your childhood?

¹² Two of François (Jacob) Libermann's relatives were important rabbis. His father, Lazard Libermann (1758 - 1837), was the Chief Rabbi of Saverne. His half-brother, Isaac Libermann (1815 - 1889), was the Chief Rabbi of Nancy and the Chief Rabbi of France. Source: geneanet.org and [Judaïsme d'Alsace et de Lorraine](#).

Francine: Oh yes, of course! It was a lot of fun, of course.

Interviewer: And what school did you go to?

Francine: I went to... I started my classes at the public school in Nice¹³ because we had come down to Nice at the time of the Phony War. And that's where my father, having had his first leave, came to join us.

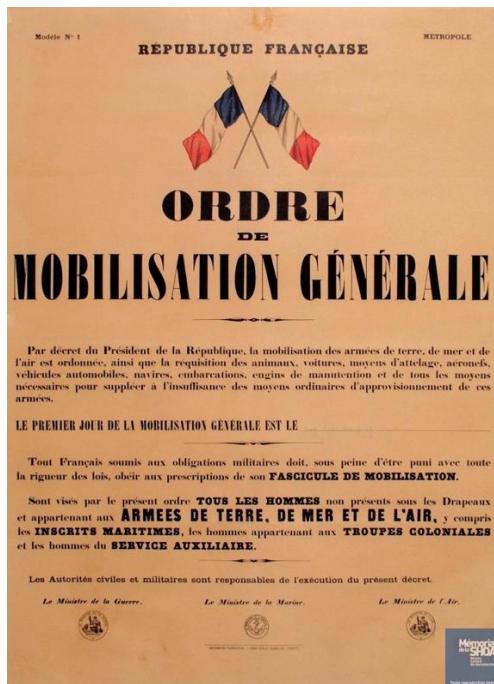


Nice - Francine and Robert during his leave
Source: F. Christophe

¹³ Marcelle Christophe found her mother-in-law, Nina, and her mother-in-law's second husband, Charles Streiff, who had an apartment in Cimiez near Nice.

Francine: And then, we went back to Paris after the invasion of France¹⁴ and I resumed my classes in the local school, in my neighborhood. I lived on rue Cardinet¹⁵ and I attended the public school on rue Jouffroy¹⁶. I went back to school with my little accent from the South of France since I had started in Nice. An accent that I very quickly lost.

Interviewer: Let's go back a little bit. In 1939, your father was mobilized.



Poster of a mobilization order posted on walls in September 1939

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Francine: We were on vacation, all in Deauville. My paternal grandmother had rented a villa for the whole family and it was from there that my father left for the war.

¹⁴ In her book, Francine specifies that in June 1940, she and her mother participated in the Exodus with Suzanne Christophe and her two daughters. They went to La Baule where they stayed with a local.

¹⁵ 106 rue Cardinet in the 17th arrondissement.

¹⁶ The school was located at 20 Rue Jouffroy d'Abbans in the 17th arrondissement. In 1941 or 1942, the schoolgirl Francine Christophe received the Maréchal Pétain Prize for the best prisoners' children in their class. As a gift, a book entitled Life of the Saints.

Interviewer: In the summer of 1939, how old are you?

Francine: I was six years old in August. But my father left a little earlier, I think. He left in the month of...I have his diary here, I haven't taken it out, I could take it out and show it to you. Do you want to stop for a second so I can go get it?

Interviewer: Yes, we can but if you want, we can wait until after the interview to film the diary. So, you're in Nice, your father has been mobilized and you're going back to Paris.

Francine: It was Deauville. Nice was for his leave. It was Deauville when he went to war.

Interviewer: And so you went back to Paris and you...

Francine: And it's a little later that we go down to Nice, another vacation.

Interviewer: And it's summer, in the summer of '41, you're... sorry, in the summer of 1940, where were you?

Francine: In Nice.

Marcelle I had left Paris at the end of May [1940]. As the German army approached the capital, we took the hard road of the Exodus. And we chose La Baule as a refuge, because my sister-in-law and her children were already there. We didn't think that the invaders could go that far. With my mother and my little Francine, aged six, we stayed in a room rented, after much research, in the apartment of a saddler. There were no beds available in the hotels.

Interviewer: And then, can you tell me the rest?

Francine: So, after my father's leave to relax, he went back to the front and we went back to Paris. And there, we led the life of all the women and children of prisoners in France. That is to say, a life that is not very easy because my father freelanced - he was a historian, journalist, lecturer - and it was not easy to live at that time, of course, for women whose husbands freelanced.

Interviewer: You didn't tell us how your father was imprisoned.

Francine: So, he was in Amiens when Amiens was attacked by the Germans. The city was taken and he left with his men. He underwent the entire assault on Amiens, which was a terrible moment in the war.



May 17, 1940 – The population of Amiens flees the city

Source: <https://www.amiens.fr/>

It would be a little too long and a little too technical, but he found himself on the Loire River with all the officers and there, the government made them give their word of honor that they would stay there, that they would not move. And he tells it in his diary that even if they see enemies, they must not move. This is the government of surrender. They have to give their word as French officers, that they will not move. That's how all the officers of the French army were taken prisoner. And in his diary, he says something that is premonitory of Gaullism. He says, "We are asked not to move. If I am a soldier, I accept." He spins it better than that by the way, he says "If I am a soldier, I say yes. If I'm a patriot, I say no." In the end, they didn't move and they were all taken prisoner.

XI Region General Staff	Nantes, June 18th, 1940
Third Office	TELEGRAM
	General Commanding the 11th Region to Mrs. G.S. Vannes G.S. Brest Préfets Vendée, Finistère, Morbihan, Côtes-du-Nord.
Official 2/A2	
Minister telegraphs the following:	
	Formal prohibition to all civil or military authorities against retreating. Everyone remains at his post, <i>even in the event of the enemy's arrival</i> . All violations of this order will result in the appearance of the offender before a <i>military tribunal</i> .
	P.O. The Chief of Staff Nantes, June 19th, 1940 ¹⁷

¹⁷ Telegram reproduced from the memoirs of Marcelle and Robert Christophe *A Family in the War* (p.16)

Rappelons-nous : les Allemands renouvelaient sans succès leurs tentatives pour franchir l'Aisne. De Laon évacué, nous continuions à tenir un front étendu. Une seule fissure subsistait cependant, un intervalle d'une cinquantaine de kilomètres entre Amiens et Bapaume. Les Allemands yjetaient des forces blindées en direction de la mer.

C'est le poids, le nombre et la tactique de ces forces blindées que nous n'avons pu surmonter.

◆

Nous étions cependant avertis depuis la campagne de Pologne, au cours de laquelle les chars blindés ne se comportent pas comme des engins d'accompagnement, un outillage tactique, mais comme des éléments stratégiques, de véritables armées.

Gringoire on June 20, 1940

Source: [Retronews](#)

Interviewer: And you and your mother, when did you learn about this?

Francine: We were in Paris at the time. I don't know exactly when we found out. I was a little girl. I experienced the war differently. I remembered more when I learned about it.

Robert Authorized by our couriers, some peasants offered us pieces of bread, chocolate, cigarettes or wine as we passed. A brave farmer handed me a postcard and said: "Quick, tell your family! I'll put the card in the mail!" Knowing that my wife and daughter had taken refuge in La Baule with my mother-in-law, I hastily wrote two brief lines. No sooner had I written the address than we heard the cry of Vorwärts! (Forward, march!) And the slow procession resumed... (p. 17)

Marcelle I received the card offered to Robert by a farmer between Clisson and Nantes in an envelope.

It was impossible to thank the generous farmer: her address was missing. After a month of anguish, the letter carrier finally gave me a letter from my husband. It was from the seminary in Laval and only half reassured me. Would the Germans release their prisoners? The Ouest-Eclair echoed this hope several times. But the feeling of the contrary did not leave me.

A second letter told me that the prisoners could receive visits. My mother told me, "I am going to go home. The Germans are correct. What's the point of settling in this Exodus that costs so much? Go see Robert with the little one, and then rejoin me in Paris."

I followed her advice and took the train to Laval with my daughter. At least to see my husband again, if the shipment across the Rhine became clear.

On August 14th, we arrived in Laval. (p.20)

Interviewer: And you remember what your mother said, her concerns?

Francine: Yes. I simply remember that, after being taken prisoner, all the officers were transported to Laval and that there, my mother and I, were allowed to go see him. There he was a prisoner. They were all kept in the major seminary in Laval because there was room. They were crammed in there and we had the right to go and see them. And my mother and I are going. I think we were going to stay with someone and we had the right to go see Dad until the day when it was forbidden. So we went back to Paris and it became forbidden because they were going to transport them to Germany. We learned from people who were there that they were going to leave for Germany.



The seminary of Laval
Source: <https://gertrude.paysdeloire.fr>

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, do you remember visiting your father who was a prisoner?

Francine: Yes, I remember it very well because that's where I celebrated my 7th birthday in August. There are still bakers who can still make cakes at that time. And my mother buys a cake and brings it to the big seminary. And the official at the entrance takes the cake and searches us of course. He doesn't open the box of cake but he shakes it and my mother yells "Oh the fool!" And all of a sudden, she realizes what she said. He was already an occupying soldier. We carry the cake and are allowed to enjoy it with my father's fellow prisoners. It's been smashed but it's still good. And everyone wishes me a happy 7th birthday. Of course, we weren't expecting what happened next.

Robert These ten days of daily visits were the best times of my captivity. As I had lost my capote at the time of my capture, Marcelle bought for me a woolen vest. With a little body linen, she brought it to me in a small

wicker suitcase. At the same time, she had acquired a narrow enamel basin. "So that you can wash yourself more easily, since you are lining up in front of your faucets." She added, "You can't find anything in the novelty stores, the bazaars, anymore, because the Germans buy everything." On the other hand, she could more easily bring me bread, butter, canned goods and fruit...

Alas, we had to contemplate our separation. My wife's wallet was getting too thin: she had to go back to Paris.

My dear visitors said goodbye to me on August 24th. (p.21)

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, what do you understand when you are a seven-year-old child and you see your father imprisoned?

Francine: I understand what war is like. So far it had been pretty joyful because I tried on a gas mask when I went down to the basement. It was all pretty amusing. I had a dad in uniform. He looked great in his uniform. I was very proud of him. And then my father left. I learned that war separates families.

Des masques à gaz ont été distribués aux petits Parisiens



Un groupe d'enfants sortant d'un centre de distribution.

Le Petit Courier on August 31, 1939

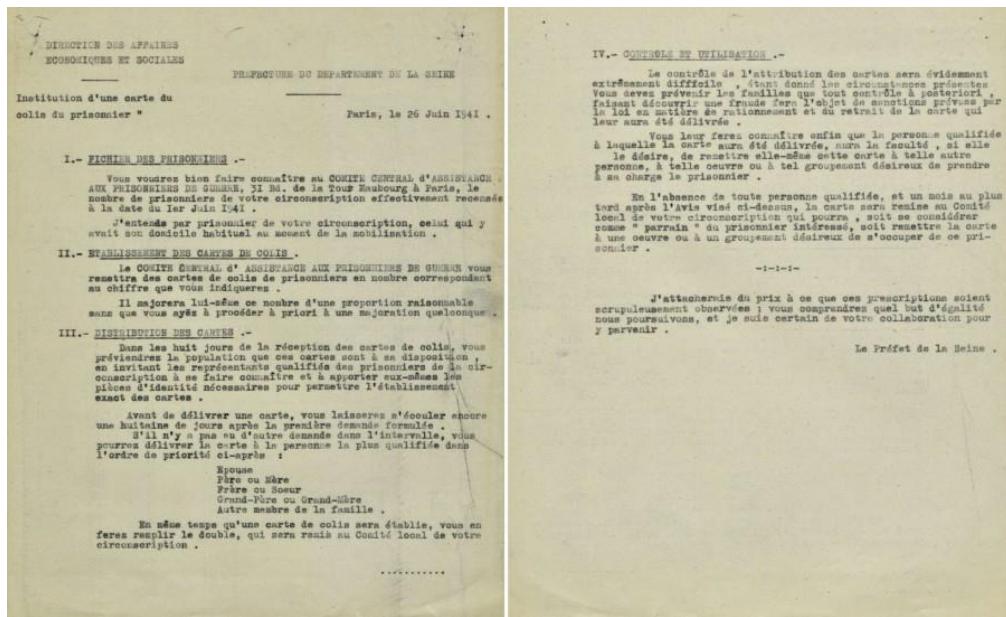
Source: [RetroNews](#)

Interviewer: Because you didn't feel separated when your father was a prisoner?

Francine: As long as he was in the army, it was like the other children. My father goes to the army. He does his duty, that's fine. He's doing his duty! Did I already understand that at that time? It's possible. It was when he left for Germany that I understood: because it's a war, of course!

Interviewer: Do you remember when he left, what your mother said when he left?

Francine: No, not very well. Afterwards, I remember, I remember very well that we received little forms that allowed us to send him packages.

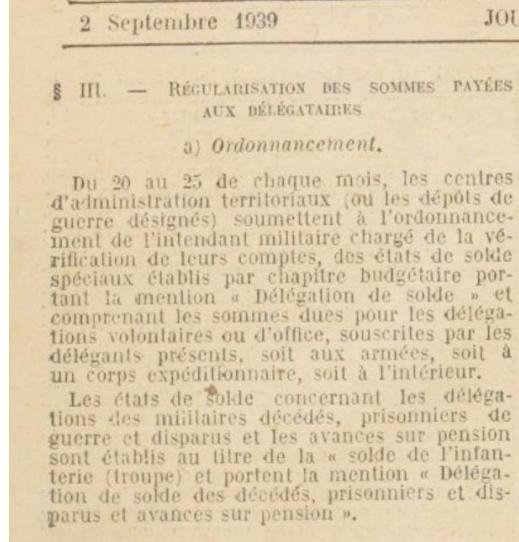


Letter from the prefecture concerning the introduction of a prisoner's parcel card to the mayors of the 20 arrondissements

Source: [Archives Paris](#)

And it was difficult to send him packages because times were getting tougher. My mother had very little money, as I told you. She got, I don't know how it's arranged, she got what's called an allotment of pay. All

the prisoners' wives got this allotment of pay, and we didn't live very well on that.



Decree of October 30th, 1939 concerning the delegation of pay

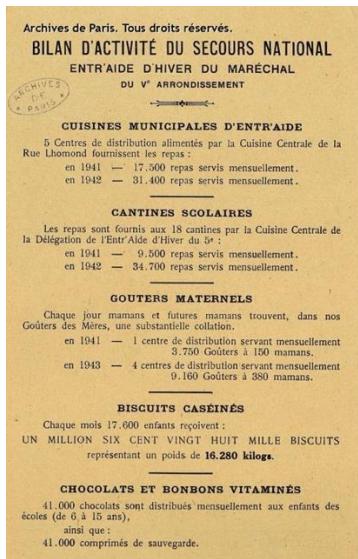
Source: [RetroNews](#)

Marcelle

Since our return home, on rue Cardinet, Francine had been going to the elementary school on

rue Jouffroy. She stayed there all day, until four o'clock. I had determined that she would eat at the canteen. First,

because the rationing was less severe. Then, as a cost saving measure. The meal was cheaper than the one at home.



Menus in schools

Sources : [Archives de Paris](#)

Marcelle In his camp, Robert received a salary in Lagermarks. By an agreement between Vichy and Berlin, the officers could divert a part of it, intended for their families. But the letter carrier was slow to bring me this "delegation of pay". I was not to receive the first portions until 1941. Hence the obligation, while waiting for these payments whose dates I did not know, to live modestly. As for the rent, a moratorium exempted the wives of prisoners of war. I still had to pay - logically enough - for cold water, electricity and gas. I am not talking about hot water or central heating: the boilers in the house were no longer working because of the coal rationing. Finally, it was necessary to dress, to feed oneself, to buy the food intended for Robert's parcels; and all that was costly. (pp.46-47)

Francine: And so, we had to send him packages. It was a little bit difficult of course.

<p align="center">MINISTÈRE DE LA GUERRE.</p> <p align="center">COMITÉ CENTRAL D'ASSISTANCE AUX PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE.</p> <p align="center">CARTE DE COLIS</p> <p>Commune d⁽¹⁾ _____</p> <p>Département d _____</p> <p>N° _____</p> <p>Signature du Maire : _____</p> <p>Timbre de la Mairie :</p> <div style="text-align: center;">[Large rectangular box for stamp]</div> <p align="right">J. 7741-A1.</p> <p>Les paquets et colis destinés aux prisonniers de guerre doivent être munis de l'étiquette-adresse réglementaire. Ils sont transportés en franchise. (1) Arrondissement, pour Paris.</p>	<p>Nom du prisonnier : _____</p> <p>Prénoms : _____ (Souligner le prénom mascul.)</p> <p>Corps et grade : _____</p> <p>Camp, — Gefangenend, er : _____</p> <p>Matrikel au camp : _____</p> <p>Domicile en France au moment de la mobilisation : _____</p> <p>Correspondant qualifié. { Nom et prénom : _____ Adresse : _____</p> <p align="center">NUMÉROS D'ORDRE DE LA DISTRIBUTION.</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: center;">9</td> <td style="text-align: center;">13</td> <td style="text-align: center;">17</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">6</td> <td style="text-align: center;">10</td> <td style="text-align: center;">14</td> <td style="text-align: center;">18</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">7</td> <td style="text-align: center;">11</td> <td style="text-align: center;">15</td> <td style="text-align: center;">19</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">8</td> <td style="text-align: center;">12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">16</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20</td> </tr> </table>	4	5	9	13	17	2	6	10	14	18	3	7	11	15	19	1	8	12	16	20
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Card to send packages to P.O.W.s

Source: [Archives de Paris](#)

Marcelle The first letter I received in Paris was dated October 1st. With what emotion I read it!...

Written on a letter with no envelope, it had 26 printed lines, on which each prisoner had to write, without ever exceeding them. There was no indication of the city where the camp was located. Only this mention: "Oflag XIII A, Unterlager B. Deutschland."

In this first letter, written in pencil because the searchers (I didn't know) confiscated the pens (...) [Telling me] that I could send him parcels by mail, Robert asked me to send him woolen underwear, a neckerchief, imperishable

foodstuffs and added: "When you write to me, don't exceed five pages..." But an anonymous hand had underlined these words in red and specified underneath "Forbidden." A statement that proved the lack of coordination between the announcements of the guards to their captives and the instructions given to the censorship. (p.28)

Francine: And I also remember the first Christmas when my father was a prisoner because we celebrated Christmas like many Jewish families. We celebrated Christmas. And I used to get presents. That year, of course, I didn't get any. And my mother, who is very respectful of all traditions and didn't want us to be sad, instead of a whole tree, she found a tree branch and she put the tree branch in front of the fireplace. I put my shoes in front of the fireplace and in my shoes I found a chocolate bar with "For Daddy" written on it because I believed strongly in Santa Claus and I thought: "But that's extraordinary, Santa Claus thought of Daddy, so here's a chocolate bar that we're going to put in the next package". And Mom had received a letter from Dad that she put in my shoes. I hadn't seen it before, so I had a letter from dad. Santa, for lack of toys, brought me a letter from dad, which is even more wonderful.



L'Echo d'Alger on December 25, 1941

Source: [Retronews](#)

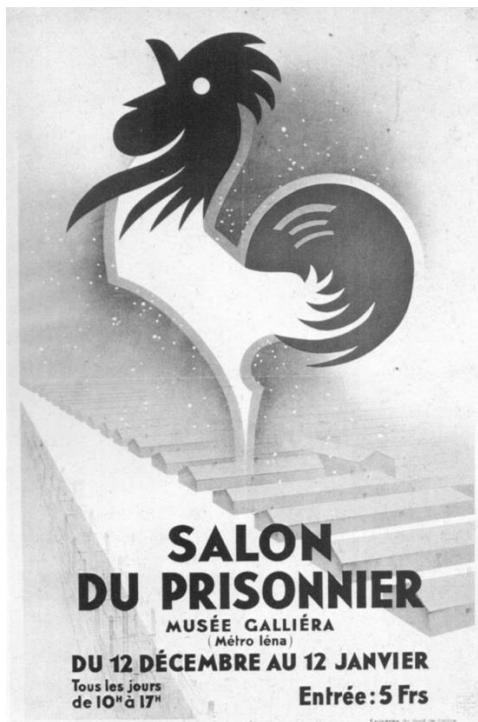
Marcelle When Christmas came, I didn't know how to give Francine the traditional little party. The precariousness of the transport hindered the florists' business. They exhibited few trees and sold them at such a high price that I had to make do with a branch. I put it in one of Francine's shoes, placed in front of the fireplace. Leaning against the other shoe, she would find the next day some toys, one of which was offered by our adorable concierge. I added a chocolate plate with the words "For Daddy." As well as a letter from him, received the day before, which I had hidden.

(p.49)

Interviewer: What year is this Christmas, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: So it's the Christmas of '41.

Marcelle We were able to send additional cards ourselves to our dear absent one. A "Salon du prisonnier" had just opened in Paris. We went to see objects made in the camps. Former P.G.'s served as guides and gave explanations that were obviously remote-controlled: they showed the Stalags and Oflags as places where one was not unhappy.



Source: [Zedlande](#)¹⁸

¹⁸ Watch the December 19, 1941 report about the salon in [Les Actualités Mondiales](#).

Each visitor had the right to buy a card, which was sent to Germany through an exemption to the monthly quota. As there were two of us, the little one and I, I was able to buy two. They bore this sentence signed "Ph. Pétain": "Christmas, my children, it is the night of Hope.



Source: [Ceres](#)

Interviewer: Christmas of '41. Do you remember if your mother told you about the threats to the Jews and to your father?

Marcelle *Naturally, my letters to Robert never contained a description of our shame and our dangers. He himself did not tell me that he knew them from the newspapers he received at the camp. We were playing a comedy to ourselves in pure loss. I realized this when I read the copies of the *Trait d'Union* that he had enclosed with his sweaters as souvenirs. This duck was indeed the brother of the collabos organs of Paris!... (p.62)*

Robert *If the distribution of parcels was slow, our hosts flooded the camp with free copies of *Le Trait d'Union*.¹⁹ Printed in Berlin, this bi-weekly, written in French, was nothing other than a Nazi propaganda pamphlet. Poisonous or disarmingly naive articles. Since my arrival in Nuremberg, I had been reading this rag. (...)*

¹⁹ Consult the [Almanach](#) of *Trait d'Union* of 1941 on the [Bibliotheca Andana](#)



Le Trait d'Union of July 30, 1942

Sources : [Archives de Côte d'Or](#)



Example of antisemitic propaganda in *Le Trait d'Union* on March 20, 1941²⁰

²⁰ Those who change their names

- Well, hello, Levy.

- You're wrong, I'm not Levy, my name is Dupont.

Other papers that the Germans did not distribute, but that we could go and read in the Napoleon Room of Block V, the collabos organs of Paris (Matin, Œuvre, Paris-Soir, Petit Parisien) and the Official Journal of the French State. I used to go to the Salle Napoléon to read these newspapers. One day, I saw a picture of the Berlitz Palace in Paris. On its façade, a huge sign: EXHIBITION THE JEW AND FRANCE. And a description as venomous as the article in the Trait d'Union.

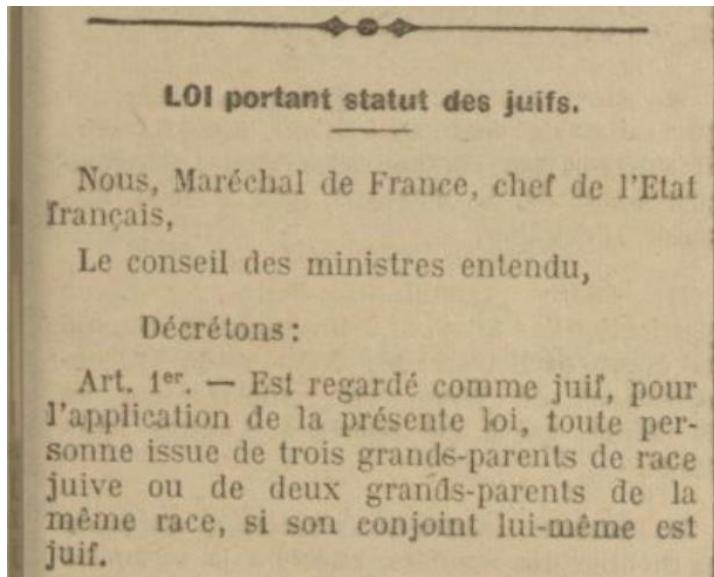


Une foule énorme se pressait hier après-midi à l'entrée de l'exposition « Le Juif et la France ». (Ph. Paris-soir.)

Paris-Soir of September 9, 1941

Source: [Retronews](#)

I saw it in the Journal Officiel of October 3, then October 4, "We, Marshal of France, Head of the French State..., decree..." It was a "Statute of the Jews".



Journal Officiel de la République Française of October 18, 1940

Source: [Retronews](#)

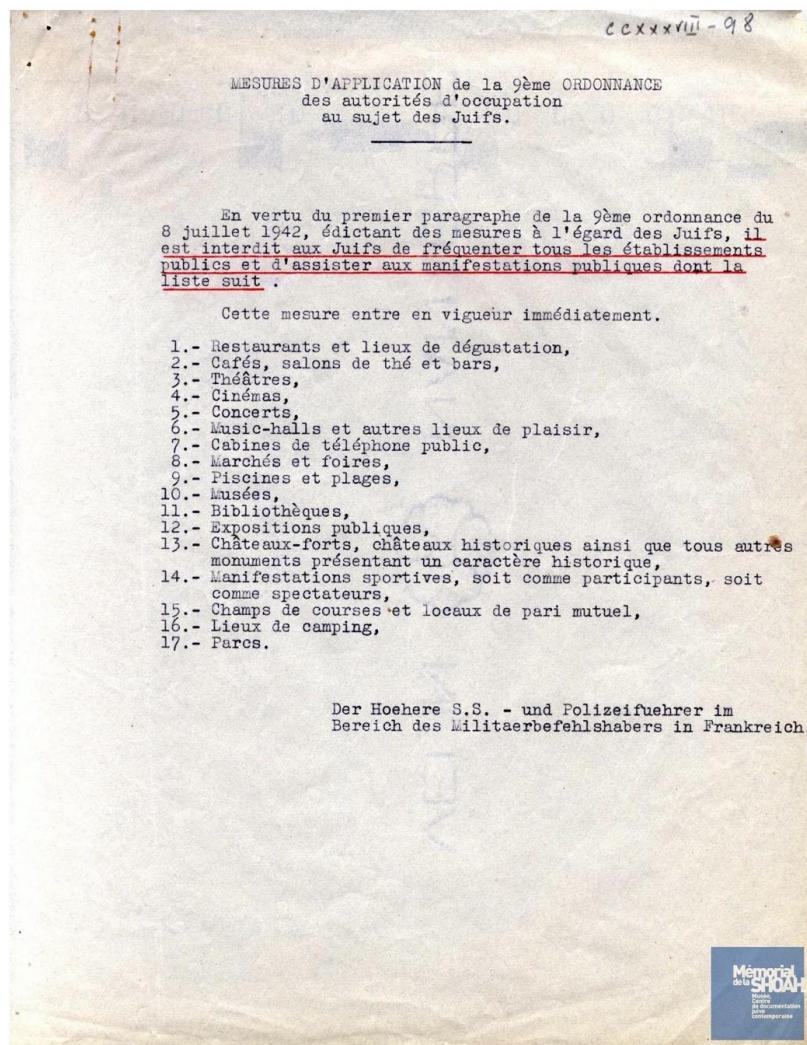
While the Armistice Agreement did not include any claims by the victors against the Israelites, the Vichy government anticipated Hitler's possible demands. It held out its hand to him. This statute prohibited Jews from any profession that brought them into contact with the public. They might as well have been condemned to starve to death! Based on the notion of race, while the occupying authorities still defined an Israelite only in terms of his religion, the Vichy Statute provided for a census of all Jews in France, at a date not yet fixed, without distinction of seniority, origin or religion. (p.39)



Le Matin of October 19, 1941

Source: [RetroNews](#)

Francine: I don't remember any threats at that time, at Christmas '41. I've since learned, I think, that the Statute of the Jews²¹ had been published, but I don't know. I don't know all that. I would begin to understand when the everyday measures that hindered my everyday life came. That is to say, I was no longer allowed to go and play in the public garden with my friends, I was no longer allowed to go to a museum, cinema, theater. I hadn't yet been to the cinema, to the theater, but I knew that we were no longer allowed.²²



Ninth order of the occupation authorities of July 8, 1942

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

²¹ The first Statute of the Jews was dated October 3, 1940 and published in the Journal Officiel on October 18, 1940. The second, dated [June 2, 1941](#), replaces that of October 3, 1940.

²² "I look enviously at the Parc Monceau. Through the bars, I can see my friends. I try to get into the Square des Batignolles, to join my friend, but because of the star on my chest, I'm sent back out. So I stand stupidly, shifting from one foot to the other, admiring the trees and the flowers from a distance, trying to hear what the other children are shouting as they play." *From a World Apart*, p.17

Marcelle *We lived halfway between the Square des Batignolles and the Parc Monceau. I would often take a walk with Francine in one or the other, so that she could breathe the air purified by the chlorophyll. When the authorities forbade Jews to enter public gardens, we had to give up this recreation. Perhaps our original sin was not stamped on our faces. But if a guard asked us for our identity cards, he would have seen the "JEWISH" stamp on them, stamped since the end of 1940 by the police. (p.108)*

Marcelle *Time passed, heavy with apprehension. The reading of the newspapers became a torture. They diluted with pleasure the ignoble National Socialist sauce. I remember a placard printed in all the newspapers. There were bottles labeled with skulls and shins. These bottles had carafe stoppers in the shape of heads. With hooked noses, hanging lips, fat cheeks, oversized ears, frizzy hair. And this caption in bold letters: "Beware of these vials. To purge France, join the FRIENDS OF THE INSTITUTE OF STUDY OF JEWISH QUESTIONS." (p.47)*



L'Oeuvre on June 14, 1941

Source: [Retronews](#)

Francine: And then naturally, the big thing was the star. And then I hear about... no that came after the star. I heard about people disappearing. That would come after. Yes, there was one thing already: the seizure of the Jewish stores.

L'aryanisation des entreprises juives

Paris (D. N. B.), 9 janvier.
— Un rapport sur la situation dans laquelle se trouve l'aryanisation des entreprises juives fait connaître que 11.000 entreprises juives ont été enregistrées. 6.000 sont de grandes entreprises juives, les 5.000 autres appartiennent à de petits et moyens propriétaires. Ces chiffres concernent exclusivement Paris.

L'aryanisation des entreprises juives sera exécutée par les autorités allemandes et françaises, en étroite collaboration. Un commissaire administrateur sera nommé. Il devra réaliser aussi rapidement que possible, par voie de vente, l'aryanisation de l'entreprise et il prendra en mains la direction des affaires jusqu'à ce que la vente soit effectivement réalisée. Ces commis-

saires administrateurs seront proposés à Paris par le préfet.

En ce qui concerne les entreprises juives françaises, des commissaires administrateurs français seront nommés. Lorsqu'il s'agira d'une entreprise juive étrangère, le commissaire administrateur sera de la même nationalité que celle à laquelle appartient la dite entreprise. Le montant de la vente de ces entreprises reviendra, dans tous les cas, aux anciens propriétaires juifs.

De nombreuses entreprises juives ne se sont pas encore fait enrégistrer ou essaient de se camoufler. Cette infraction à la loi, lorsqu'elle sera découverte, sera sévèrement punie.

Les autorités allemandes se réservent le droit de vérifier dans chaque cas le contrat de vente

La Petite Gironde on January 11, 1941

Source: [RetroNews](#)

And as my grandmother is the manager of a ladies' store, a children's store on rue Saint-Honoré,²³ something was going to happen.

240

L'UNIVERS ISRAELITE

Francine PARY
C O U T U R E

■

ROBES - MANTEAUX
ENSEMBLES - SPORT
MODÈLES EXCLUSIFS

■

265, rue Saint-Honoré
Téléphone : OPERA 94-58 1-1

HOTEL LUTETIA

43, Boulevard Raspail
PARIS

■ ■ ■

Mariages et Cérémonies

LE CONFORT PARFAIT
UNE BONNE CUISINE
UNE EXCELLENTE CAVE
A DES PRIX RAISONNABLES

Advertisement published in December 1937.

Source: [Retronews](#)

²³ These stores are called Francine Pary and Mirkey. The latter is a children's clothing store.



Francine wearing a Mirkey dress (right) and her cousin Ginette pose for the September 19, 1937 issue of *Nouveauté* magazine.

Source: [Retronews](#)

Interviewer: Do you remember that?

Francine: Yes. I especially remember that day when people who owned stores were obliged to mark

JEWISH on their windows.



Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

My grandmother, like everyone else, marked it, but there was an extraordinary reaction: all the French people, all the French Jews who were so proud, and rightly so, of their French nationality, all wrote on their windows what they had done for their country. That is to say, they hung up all the decorations that all our ancestors had earned in the service of the motherland and everything we had done when one had a scholar, when one had someone who had done something. And there were so many! There were such lists! We had done so much for our homeland that the authorities made us take it all away because, of course, the people who were Catholic found out that all these Jews had lived exactly like them and had served their country exactly like them. And even served it very, very well. So the authorities had all that removed.

Ordonnance du chef de l'administration militaire en France du 27 septembre

Les autorités occupantes ont pris une décision qui était attendue.

Depuis quelque temps, les juifs qui étaient revenus à Paris et dans les grands centres se montraient particulièrement arrogants. Ils semblaient n'avoir aucune conscience de leurs lourdes responsabilités dans les événements qui ont conduit la France à la catastrophe.

La population française supportait impatiemment cette attitude.

L'ordonnance qui vient d'être prise permettra de reconnaître les juifs pour contrôler leur activité.

En vertu des pleins pouvoirs qui m'ont été conférés par le Führer et Oberst Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht, je décrète ce qui suit :

I
Sont reconnus comme juifs ceux qui appartiennent ou appartenaienr à la religion juive, ou qui ont plus de deux grands-parents (grands-pères et grand-mères) juifs. Sont considérés comme juifs les grands-parents qui appartiennent ou appartenaienr à la religion juive.

II
Il est interdit aux juifs qui ont fui la zone occupée d'y retourner.

III
Toute personne juive devra se présenter avant le 20 octobre 1940 auprès du sous-préfet de son arrondissement, dans lequel elle a son domicile ou sa résidence habituelle, pour se faire inscrire sur un registre spécial. La déclaration du chef de famille sera valable pour toute la famille.

IV
Tout commerce, dont le propriétaire ou le détenteur est juif, devra être désigné comme « Entreprise juive » par une affiche spéciale en langues allemande et fran-

caise avant le 31 octobre 1940.

V
Les dirigeants des communautés israélites seront tenus de fournir sur demande des autorités françaises toutes les justifications et les documents nécessaires pour l'application de la présente ordonnance.

VI
Les contraventions à la présente ordonnance seront punies d'emprisonnement et d'amende ou d'une de ces deux peines. La confiscation des biens pourra, en outre, être prononcée.

VII
Cette ordonnance entrera en vigueur le jour de sa publication.

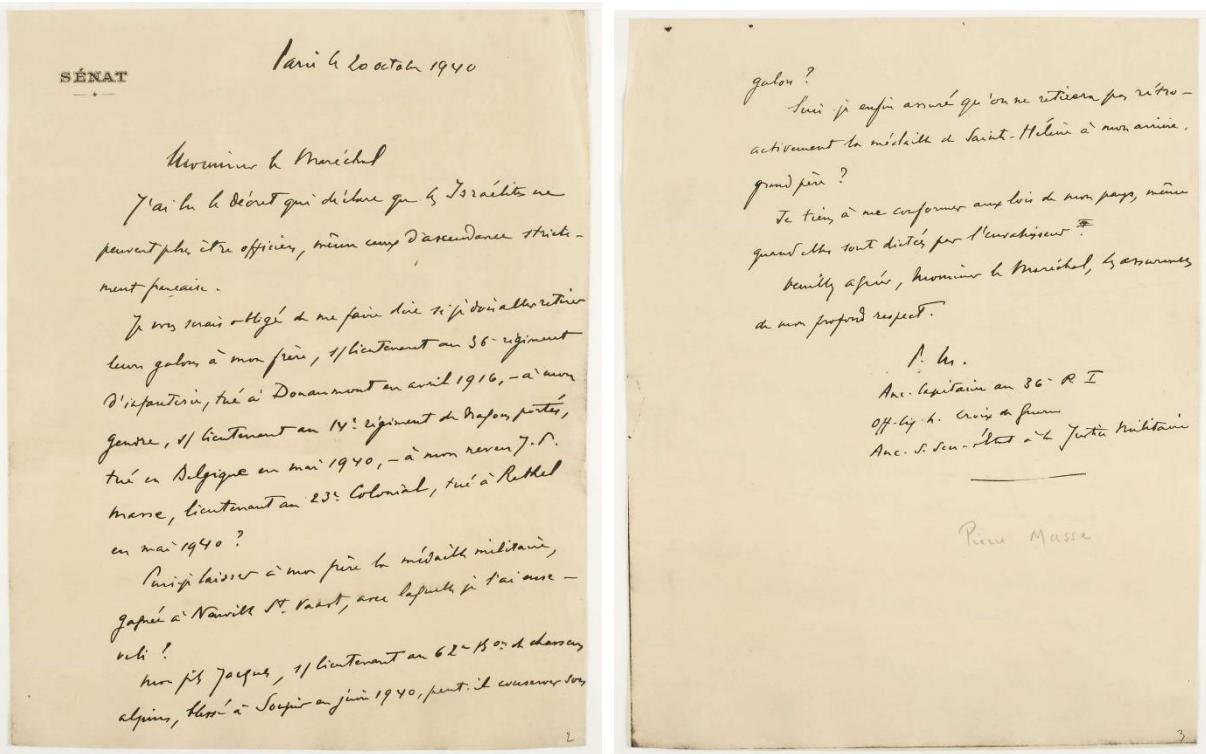
Pour le Commandant en chef de l'Armée,
Le Chef de l'Administration militaire en France.

L'ESPAGNE FÊTE SON CAUDILLO

Mardi, 1er octobre, — Aujourd'hui, mardi, l'Espagne fête la Journée du Caudillo par de grandes festivités. Le 12 octobre 1936, le général Franco fut officiellement chef de l'état espagnol.

German decree of September 27, 1940

Source: [RetroNews](#)



Letter of protest sent by Senator **Pierre Masse** to Marshal Pétain in response to the publication of the Statute of the Jews
Source: [Archives Nationales](#)

Interviewer: Did your mother comment on this? In front of you?

Francine: Oh, she didn't have to comment on it because I figured it out on my own.

Interviewer: And you understood it on your own?

Francine: Yes, it was easy.

Interviewer: Do you remember the day ... that your mother was added to the register?

Francine: Yes, I remember that we had to register, that JEWISH must be stamped on our identity card, that I remember. I also remember that we had to take our radio to the police station. I remember that we had to bring our weapons to the police station, the weapons that we owned, but that was not only for the Jews, it was for everyone. And we had a groundskeeper who had the soul of a resistance fighter and who went to all the tenants in the building who he felt had the same spirit of resistance as he did, and he went to get all these weapons and went to throw them into the Seine so that they wouldn't go to the police station. And then, my mother gave my father's shotgun, of course, to be thrown into the Seine, and my father was a fencer, and she even gave his sabres so that nothing would go... and all that, the groundskeeper went to throw it into the Seine.

J PARTICULIERS Nom : Prénoms : Né le _____ à _____ Nationalité : N° de la carte d'identité ou du CC : N° de la déclaration : Domicile : Date d'entrée en France : Profession : Biens et Participations <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Valeur et nature</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Situation (Indiquer les entreprises où sont investis les biens)</td> </tr> </table>	Valeur et nature	Situation (Indiquer les entreprises où sont investis les biens)	J PARTICULIERS Nom : Prénoms : Né le _____ à _____ Nationalité : N° de la carte d'identité ou du CC : N° de la déclaration : Domicile : Date d'entrée en France : Profession : Biens et Participations <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Valeur et nature</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Situation (Indiquer les entreprises où sont investis les biens)</td> </tr> </table>	Valeur et nature	Situation (Indiquer les entreprises où sont investis les biens)
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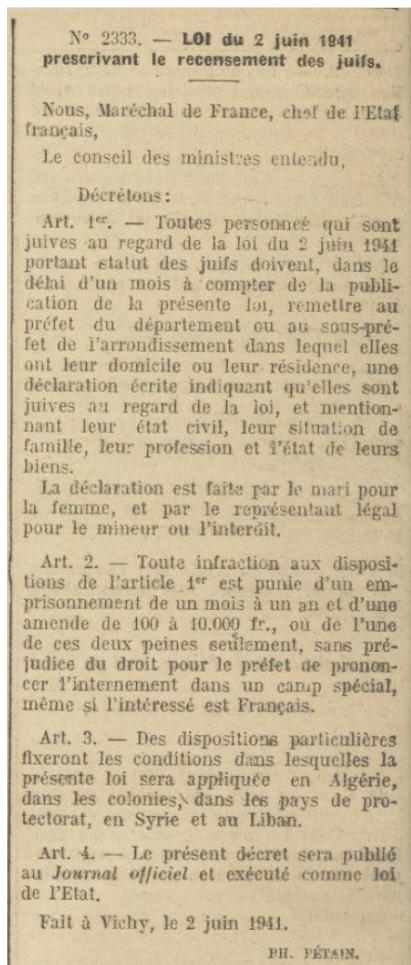
Jewish census forms
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Marcelle *When we went to my mother's house, we would come across an old newspaper seller in her neighborhood old newspaper merchant whom we came to know well. Selling the Paris-Soir, she would shout with a certain heroism: "Pourri²⁴-Soir! Ask for Pourri-Soir!"*

²⁴ Pourri means rotten

At the end of December 1940, [Paris Soir] and its enslaved brethren announced that the Israelites had to declare themselves in the police stations. With Francine, I took this offensive step. (p.58)

But a law appeared on May 8 [1941], prescribing our global census, and no longer individual, as in December 1940. And this French law, printed in the Journal Officiel, was signed by the head of state. Thus, the Marshal agreed with Berlin to register the Jews, even those whom Catholicism had confused with the Christians. The first goal of this measure was to engrave the word JEWISH on identity papers.

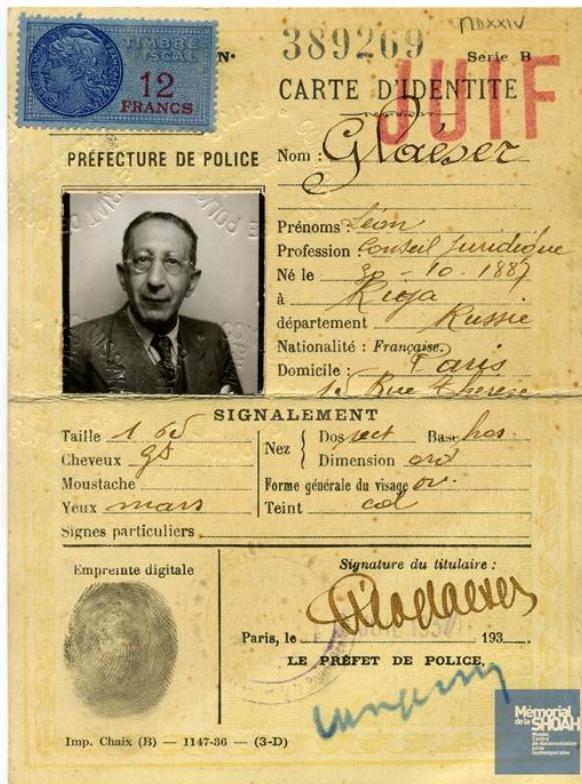


Journal Officiel de la République Française of June 14, 1941

Source: [Retronews](#)

Informed by the newspapers, we had to go to the prefectoral office on Victoria Avenue, near the City Hall. This is what I did, with my daughter. That day was reserved for Israelites whose names began with the letters A, B, C, D, E, F. Barriers channeled a long line of people on the sidewalk. And agents ensured the order there. I saw there people of all ages and all

conditions. After an hour's stroll, I entered the office, holding Francine by the hand. An employee examined my family record book and my identity card. She stamped the word JEWISH on it.



I.D. Card with the "Jewish" stamp
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

My poor kid was watching this operation with surprise. She asked me embarrassing questions. How could I explain to a seven-year-old the reasons for our blacklisting? Could she, at her age, understand that her birth made her a criminal? In class, we had taught her to sing, in chorus with her companions:

Maréchal, we are here!

Before you, the savior of France.

We swear, we, your boys,

To obey and follow your steps.

At the distribution of the prizes, she was to receive the most prized of the class: the Prix du Maréchal (a "Life of the Saints"). A prize which, given to a Jewish child, mixed the buffoon with the tragic. (p.62)

Interviewer: Do you remember how, since you were little, you were between 7 and ... you were almost 8 years old, how you lived that in your child's body? What did you ...

Francine: Well, I'm getting scared of course because there's also the time thing. We had to be home by 8:00, we had to be home by 8:00. All these little things start to more or less disturb me, of course. It's a little difficult because, as I explained to you, I come from a family that is not religious, that is above all patriotic, and it's difficult to understand that I am different. For us, to be Jewish is to be French of the Israelite faith, that's how we said it. We didn't even use the word *Jew*, we used the word *Israelite*. So, this word confused me.

Sixième ordonnance en date du 7 février 1942 relative aux mesures contre les Juifs

En vertu des pleins pouvoirs qui m'ont été conférés par le Führer und Oberster Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht, j'ordonne ce qui suit :

1°. — LIMITATION DES HEURES DE SORTIE.

Il est interdit aux Juifs d'être hors de leur logement entre 20 heures et 6 heures.

2° — INTERDICTION DE CHANGEMENT DE RESIDENCE.

Il est interdit aux Juifs de changer le lieu de leur résidence actuelle.

3° — DISPOSITIONS PENALES.

Celui qui contreviendra aux dispositions de la présente ordonnance sera puni d'emprisonnement et d'amende ou d'une de ces peines.

En outre le coupable pourra être interné dans un camp de juifs.

4° — ENTREE EN VIGUEUR.

La présente ordonnance entre en vigueur dès sa publication.
Der Militärbefehlshaber
in Frankreich.

Les mesures ci-dessus sont commandées par la nécessité d'une surveillance de plus en plus rigoureuse des éléments juifs. Il est, en effet, acquis que c'est dans le milieu juif que se recrutent les terroristes.

Le Petit Troyen on February 12, 1942

Source: [Retronews](#)

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of the curfew, of the time at which you had to go home?

Francine: Yes, very well, because we went to the home of some cousins who lived on Boulevard Malesherbes. His name was Dr. Georges Levy, he was a great professor at the Saint-Louis Hospital. He also served his country, oh so much. And I remember that one evening, we lost track of time while chatting and we came home, my mother and I, running like two madwomen. So afraid of being arrested for coming home late. But this, I don't remember if it was before or after we started wearing the star. It must have been, I think, after the wearing of the star because how could we be recognized? Because, as an official speech said, "we are well obliged to mark them since there are at least half of them that we don't recognize by their type."



Source: [Larousse](#)

Marcelle [I]t was necessary for us to go home early. The Israelites were no longer allowed to walk in the streets between eight o'clock in the evening and seven o'clock in the morning. One day, this obligation caused me great fear. The de Gassions²⁵ lived on boulevard Exelmans, in Auteuil. One afternoon, the little one and I had enjoyed the comforting contact of Maud, her mother, her sisters-in-law and their friend Lily Quernel, so much that we forgot the time of our curfew. Having taken the metro to change at the distant Havre-Caumartin station and get off at Malesherbes, we had to walk very fast (and not run, which would have designated us) through the underground corridors of Havre-Caumartin and on the sidewalks leading from Malesherbes to our house. We didn't get there until 9 o'clock. The kid and I couldn't take it anymore. Our legs were shaking, our hearts were beating like crazy. And always Francine's question: "But why, Mom? Why?" My explanations kept coming up against this childish logic: we weren't criminals, why on earth were we being punished? (p.109)

Interviewer: Do you remember...

Francine: My star?



Francine's star
Source: F. Christophe

Interviewer: Wearing the star?

²⁵ Maud de Gassion is the wife of Pierre Narçon who is P.O.W. in the same Oflag as Robert. Both wives become close. It is through Maud that Robert learns the arrest of Marcelle and Francine.

Francine: Yes, I remember it very well. Mom explained that it's over, we're not like other people anymore.

We'll have to mark that. I needed to understand that I was different from my friends. And that this difference would have to be marked. And I tried to explain that to my friends at school who, obviously, didn't understand it any more than I did because, for them, being Jewish, they who are Catholic, they made their communion, I went to their communion at their place, for them, the fact that I am Jewish doesn't matter. A child is not racist. First of all, the word doesn't even exist, we don't know what it means. And for them, it's all the same, I'm French of the Jewish faith. What is the difference? There is no difference. And so we went... I'll finish the story of the star. So we went to get this star.

Les Juifs devront porter l'étoile jaune

A PARTIR DU 7 JUIN

Sur le côté gauche de la poitrine et dès l'âge de six ans révolus

Le Journal officiel contenant les ordonnances du Militäerbefehlshaber in Frankreich publie l'ordonnance ci-après :

En vertu des pleins pouvoirs qui m'ont été conférés par le Führer und Oberster Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht, j'ordonne ce qui suit :

1. — Signe distinctif pour les Juifs

1^o Il est interdit aux Juifs, dès l'âge de six ans révolus, de paraître en public sans porter l'étoile juive.

2^o L'étoile juive est une étoile à six pointes ayant les dimensions de la paume d'une main et les contours noirs. Elle est en tissu jaune et porte en caractère noir l'inscription « Juif ». Elle devra être portée bien visiblement sur le côté gauche de la poitrine, solidement cousue sur le vêtement.

2. — Dispositions pénales

Les infractions à la présente ordonnance seront punies d'emprisonnement et d'amende ou d'une de ces peines. Des mesures de police, telles que l'internement dans un camp de Juifs, pourront s'ajouter ou être substituées à ces peines.

3. — Entrée en vigueur

La présente ordonnance entrera en vigueur le 7 juin 1942.

Der Militäerbefehlshaber in Frankreich.

(Lire en 3^e page les modalités de la distribution de l'insigne juif.)

AVIS

Les Juifs soumis à l'obligation de porter un signe distinctif en vertu de la 8^e ordonnance du 29 mai 1942 sur les mesures prises contre les Juifs, devront se présenter au commissariat de police ou à la sous-préfecture de leur domicile pour y recevoir les insignes en forme d'étoile prévus au paragraphe premier de ladite ordonnance. Chaque Juif recevra trois insignes et devra donner en échange un point de sa carte de textile.

Le chef supérieur de la police et des S. S. dépendant du Militäerbefehlshaber en France

La stupidité crée le mal

Une déclaration au « du syndicat des mandata



Le Matin on June 1, 1942

Source: [Retronews](#)

We had to go get it. I don't remember if we had to pay for it or not. I think we did, but what's most important is that, as they're made of fabric and at that point we already had ration coupons for everything, there wasn't much to go around, France was already in a period of scarcity, and we had to use a lot of our precious fabric allowance. So we had that much less with which to buy clothes. You had to use up credits to get this star. And that's a shame.

G ^A	F ^A	E ^A	D	C ^A	B ^A	A ^A	CLÉS TEXTILES												
U ^A	T ^A	GROSSESSES		R ^A	Q ^A	P ^A	O ^A	PAR ARTICLES (2)											
INSTRUCTIONS GÉNÉRALES pour l'emploi de la carte de vêtements et d'articles textiles pour adultes																			
<i>(text in French)</i>																			
48 ^A	47 ^A	46 ^A	45 ^A	44 ^A	43 ^A	42 ^A	41 ^A	52 ^A	51 ^A	50 ^A	49 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
60 ^A	59 ^A	58 ^A	57 ^A	56 ^A	55 ^A	54 ^A	53 ^A	64 ^A	63 ^A	62 ^A	61 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
72 ^A	71 ^A	70 ^A	69 ^A	68 ^A	67 ^A	66 ^A	65 ^A	76 ^A	75 ^A	74 ^A	73 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
84 ^A	83 ^A	82 ^A	81 ^A	80 ^A	79 ^A	78 ^A	77 ^A	76 ^A	75 ^A	74 ^A	73 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
96 ^A	95 ^A	94 ^A	93 ^A	92 ^A	91 ^A	90 ^A	89 ^A	88 ^A	87 ^A	86 ^A	85 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
108 ^A	107 ^A	106 ^A	105 ^A	104 ^A	103 ^A	102 ^A	101 ^A	100 ^A	99 ^A	98 ^A	97 ^A								
2 points	2 points	1 point																	
120 ^A	119 ^A	118 ^A	117 ^A	116 ^A	115 ^A	114 ^A	113 ^A	112 ^A	111 ^A	110 ^A	109 ^A								
2 points	2 points	2 points	2 points	1 point															
132 ^A	131 ^A	130 ^A	129 ^A	128 ^A	127 ^A	126 ^A	125 ^A	124 ^A	123 ^A	122 ^A	121 ^A								
2 points	2 points	2 points	2 points	1 point															
144 ^A	143 ^A	142 ^A	141 ^A	140 ^A	139 ^A	138 ^A	137 ^A	136 ^A	135 ^A	134 ^A	133 ^A								
2 points	2 points	2 points	2 points	1 point															
N ^A	M ^A	L ^A	K ^A	J ^A	I ^A	H ^A													

Coupons for textile items (1942)

Source: [Archives de Paris](#)

So my mother went to get it, I think it's at the Prefecture. She came back and it was specified that you must not hang it on, you must sew it in a very solid way, so that it cannot be torn off. And my mother, like many Israelites... it's a way of resisting, this star, we cut it well, we stitched it and even lined it so that it wouldn't be deformed. I even know one person who wrapped it with lace. And we sewed it on. And so the following Monday... We were wearing it one Sunday, we went to see my grandmother that Sunday. Mom was wearing her star, I was wearing my star and my grandmother was wearing her star. She lived on rue Saint-Honoré and we went down to the Madeleine, to the Tuileries, and we met neighbors who knew my grandmother very well. And the people who saw us were obviously captivated, and the people who saw us

crossed the street to come and shake our hands. Several neighbors said - my grandmother was dressed in black that day - and told her this star is very beautiful against the black. I remember that very well.

Marcelle The stars "solidly sewn to the fabric", specified the prescription. No safety pins.

First day to wear them: Sunday, June 7 [1942]. We could have waited until Monday. But we decided, my mother and I, to vaccinate ourselves against emotion by going out on Sunday. With the little one, of course. She too had to get used to it.

We prepared ourselves mentally for this ordeal (...) With our stars in my bag, my daughter and I joined my mother at her home. There, I sewed one on my dress, another on Francine's. Mom had preceded us in this operation.

We went down to the street in the middle of the afternoon. On this Sunday in June, the sun was shining. Walking shyly at first, you wanted to mock the bad luck. "Let's not be afraid to provoke people. Let's not be afraid to provoke comments. We must be immune." Very tall, she held me by the elbow, on her left; and Francine by the hand, on her right. We would stare at passers-by when they looked at us with insolence or pleasure. But these cruel compatriots were rare. Most of the pedestrians turned their heads away, more embarrassed than we were.

An elderly woman approached. "Let me shake your hand," she said. A man shouted at us, "They make you wear stars, they'll have wooden crosses!" At the turn of a street, we passed a family marked with the same sign. The father, the mother, two children between six and ten years old. Only a baby (under six years old) was not wearing it. (p.122)

Francine: And the next day, Monday, I went to school with my star. So I left for school with my star... I crossed the whole Place de Tocqueville that I knew so well, I took the Rue Déodat-de-Séverac, I took the Rue Jouffroy and there, all my friends were there. They look at me with amazement. I walked through the schoolyard. At the end of the schoolyard, there is the principal.²⁶ And the principal, you were right, we'd need a tissue ...the principal hugged me.

²⁶ Madame Périn

Premier jour du port de l'étoile jaune

La réflexion qu'elle a suscitée :

« Jamais on n'eût pu penser qu'il y avait autant de Juifs à Paris »

Depuis hier, les Juifs portent, cousue sur leurs vêtements, l'étoile de David, signe distinctif de leur race, dite improprement étoile jaune, puisqu'elle est noire sur fond bouton d'or. Selon les ordonnances, l'insigne était soigneusement découpé et solidement fini.

Cette floraison jaune qui s'était principalement manifestée, hier matin, dans les arrondissements périphériques et, naturellement, dans le ghetto, quartiers du Temple et de Saint-Paul, avait, dans l'après-midi, gagné les Boulevards.

Ainsi, les non Juifs purent connaître, en faisant leur marché, la race de bien des gens qu'ils croisaient ou rencontraient encore la veille chez les fournisseurs sans y prêter autrement attention, et il y eut quelques surprises.

Une autre surprise attendait les Parisiens l'après-midi, en constatant le nombre important de Juifs qui se promenaient, discutaient dans les cafés, se mêlaient aux files d'attente des théâtres et cinémas, ou bien encore prenaient simplement le métro. Et une par-

tie seulement de la population juive était dehors ! Il ne faut pas oublier qu'il y avait, en 1941, 1.200.000 Juifs en France, dont plus de 350.000 étaient absorbés par Paris et sa banlieue. Nous avons pu constater, une fois de plus, hier, que nous avions la mémoire courte.

Vers 20 heures, les étoiles jaunes se firent moins nombreuses. A 20 h. 1, les Juifs étaient rentrés chez eux.

CETTE SEMAINE :

- 240 gr. de viande de boucherie contre les tickets 4, 5, 6 et 9.

- 90 gr. supplémentaires pour la catégorie J3 contre le ticket DH.

(La validité des tickets 1, 2, 3 est prorogée jusqu'à nouvel avis et celle du ticket DG jusqu'au 14 juin.)

- Pas de nouveau ticket pour les autres viandes.

(Les tickets BC, BD et BE — 90 gr. chacun — restent utilisables jusqu'au 14 juin.)

Le Matin on June 8, 1942

Source: [Retronews](#)

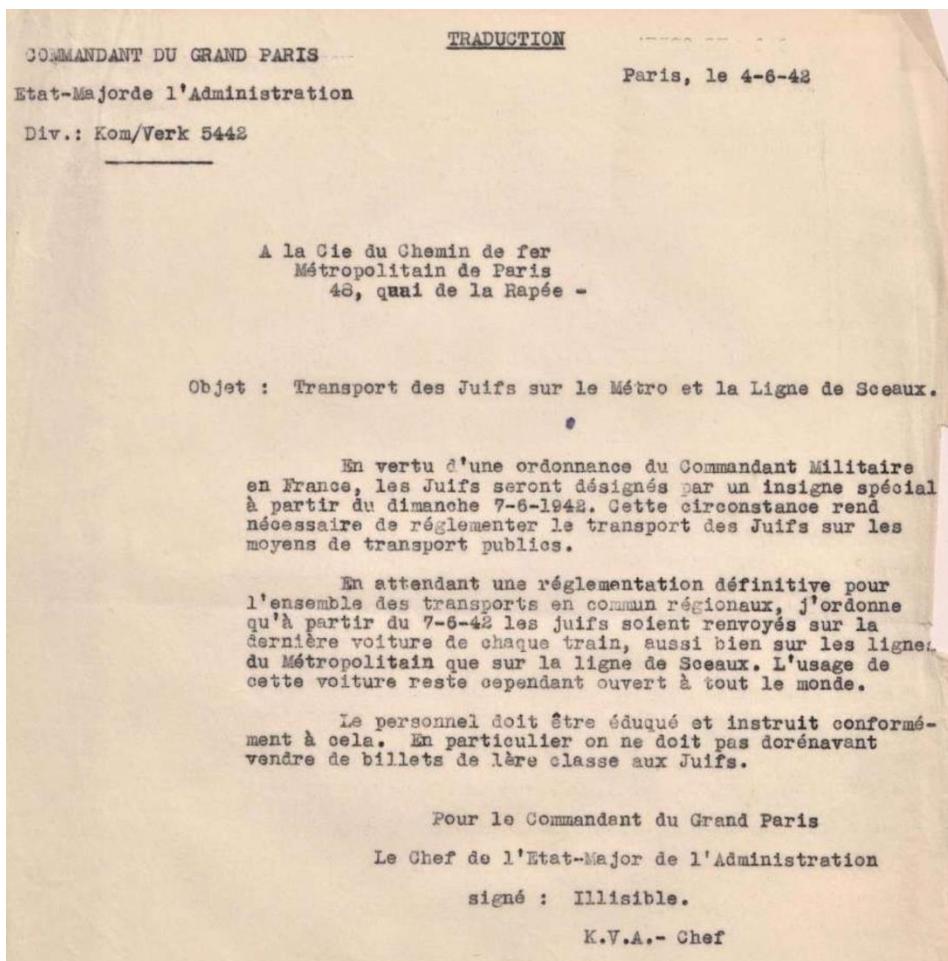
Interviewer: Do you know.... What was the first mandatory day for the yellow star, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: That Monday but I don't remember the date.²⁷

Interviewer: And why did you wear it on Sunday already, a day before? Do you remember?

²⁷ June 8, 1942

Francine: Because I think that was the day we had to wear it, that day we went to my grandmother's house who had her own star, so we wore it. We were not ashamed. We were very proud of ourselves because we had the class to wear it. And I think that was the day that we got on the subway, and at that time you gave your ticket to the ticket collector, and the ticket collector was horribly embarrassed and said to my mother and me, "You know, you're not allowed to go on every car. You're allowed to go in the rear car." And we got in the rear car because that was the only car in which Jews were allowed.



German decree about Jews on public transportation of June 4, 1942

Source: [Archives Paris](#)

Marcelle To return to my mother's house, to leave her there and then to return to our house, we had to take the subway. When we gave our tickets to the ticket collector, he mumbled, ashamed of the role that one obliged him to hold: "Ladies, forgive me. You must... get into the last carriage."

No sooner had we got there than three young men stood up to offer us their seats. German infantrymen, who were looking at us arrogantly, expressed their surprise with exclamations. (pp.122-123)

Interviewer: Thank you, Mrs. Lorch. We'll go to a second tape.

TAPE 2

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, can we go back almost 6 months to the time of the obligation to wear the star, i.e. in winter '41? December '41?

Francine: Yes, you mean when they came to arrest my father.

Interviewer: Do you want to talk about that?

Francine: Yes. So they came to arrest him... I don't know why at all. Since then, I've figured it out. At that time, I have no idea why, but I do know that the groundskeeper immediately said, "But you can't arrest him, he's a prisoner of war." And when the people who came to arrest him went upstairs, she said, "But the family is not here, you will not find anyone! I swear to you, he is a prisoner, it's the truth!" So they left, but of course I can't believe it. It amazes me that they come to arrest my father when he is a prisoner. Here you are.

Marcelle [The] anxiety exploded in the night of December 11 to 12. Towards 5 o'clock in the morning, I was awakened by the noise of a van stopping under my windows, of men jumping on the sidewalk and ringing at the entrance of the building. I got up suddenly and put on my bathrobe. Leaving Francine to her childhood sleep, I ran to open the door. Living on the second floor, I knew I would hear the questions and answers coming from the lodge. Our concierges were asked which floor Robert Christophe was staying on. German policemen, guided by Frenchmen, came to arrest my husband. "But he is a prisoner!" replied Mme Baux. "Prisoner of war", her husband said. (...)

The next day, Paris learned that the Germans and their accomplices had apprehended seven hundred and fifty Israelites. Almost all of them were veterans. Among them was a cousin of mine, Maurice Evard,²⁸ who was in his sixties. (...) After the attack on Pearl Harbor, America had declared war on Japan. As an ally of the Mikado, the Führer had been forced to declare war on the United States. In order to take revenge, he ordered this round-up.

And his victims were taken to the camp of Royallieu, near Compiègne; or to Drancy, near Pantin.

Two days later - on December 14 - the press announced that one hundred hostages from Drancy had been shot. That a thousand others had just been deported. Finally, General von Stuelpnagel, governor of Gross Paris, imposed a fine of one billion euros on the Israelites. It was up to them to find the money. (p.91)

25	Evard	Maurice	1882	f-d°	M	mari	ad Société "Foncière de la Seine"
1	Evard	Paule	1889	alsace	M	épouse	- op -
7	Evard	Leopold	1920	Seine	C	filo	- op -
	Evard	Monique	1921	S. et. o	C	filie	- op -
	Evard	Nicole	1923	Seine	C	filie	- op -
	Eazarine	Elena	1894	Roumanie	C	domestique	m ^e Evard

The Evards at 25 Avenue Marceau in the 1936 census

Source : [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 647 - Chaillot - vue 139/263)

²⁸ Maurice Evard, born on January 13, 1882, was the administrator of the Société Foncière de la Seine. He was married to Yvonne Paule Hemmendinger (1889-1953) with whom he had three children. His mother, Pauline Dreyfus, was Esther Nordmann's paternal aunt. In 1936, they lived at 25 avenue Marceau. Maurice was interned at Pithiviers in barrack 16. In the camp registers, his address is 51 rue de l'Assomption. He was deported on September 21, 1942 in Convoy 35 and did not return.



Paulette, Maurice and their children at Venice (undated)

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Interviewer: What do you understand at that moment?

Francine: But it's hard to say. It's a little bit mixed up. I don't remember. Well, I have a very, very clear memory, but I don't remember if it happens before the star is worn or after the star is worn. This very clear memory is that one day, my mother and I were returning from I don't know which errand, by the street Cardinet. And we pass in front of the building of friends, who are called the De Souza, and there is an enormous truck in front of their door that is being loaded.

M. Albert-Adolphe Lévy de Souza, né le 12 janvier 1903 à Paris, demeurant à Paris, 40 bis, rue Cardinet, agissant en son nom personnel et au nom de ses enfants mineurs: Bertrand-Bernard Lévy de Souza, né à Paris le 15 juillet 1928; Olivier Lévy de Souza, né à Paris le 23 juin 1932, dépose une requête auprès du garde des sceaux, à l'effet de supprimer le nom de Lévy.

Journal officiel de la République française on May 3, 1945

Source: [Gallica](#)

Marcelle One morning, the newspapers carried a speech by Goering. The Reichmarschall announced there that, to replace the furniture destroyed in Germany by the British planes, the troops of occupation in France would confiscate the furnishings of the Israelites having left their apartments. (p.109)



Opération Meuble²⁹

Source: [Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah](#)

²⁹ Opération meuble (Operation Furniture in English), or Möbel Aktion (German), was the Nazi operation led by Alfred Rosenberg to loot apartments formerly inhabited by Jews.

Francine: And my mother recognizes her friends' furniture. And she says to me, "You see, they're emptying the apartments of the Jews." That's it. So, I don't remember... But at that moment, my mother decides to start emptying our apartment.



Distribution of Jews' belongings to victims of the war by the French Militia

Source: [Archives de Paris](#)

Francine: And that's when some very dedicated people from the neighborhood who also had this absolutely wonderful spirit of resistance ingrained in them, helped her to empty part of the apartment. They make the maximum of what they can and, among other things, a street peddler offers to mom the room in which she stores her cart. She offers her the space to put some of her furniture in.



Street peddler

Source: [Paris Musées Collections](#)

We have a lovely friend who rents a maid's room on the 7th floor of the building to put my dad's desk and some of his library in. Our groundskeepers also have a room. A garage owner, who lives nearby, in the middle of the night, has some furniture, a painting, and various other things removed to put in the attic of her garage. Finally, a whole bunch of people started to take care of us and to empty the apartment in case someone came to empty it. Which happened later, of course.

**que n'a-t-on plus largement
recours aux biens Juifs**

Un sinistre, M. Georges Guillard nous a dit :
— Mon pavillon a été démolie de fond en comble une première fois, en mars de l'année dernière. On venait d'achever de la reconstruire ; fallait m'y réinstaller le 15 avril prochain. Il fut alors rendue une nouvelle fois, plus rien à la place est un entonnoir de cinq mètres de profondeur sur six de diamètre...

M. Guillard nous montre une liasse de papiers. Il écrit ces quelques lignes : « 466.000 francs pour l'immeuble, 170.000 francs pour le mobilier, plus 23.000 pour privation de jouissance. Pour le bombardement du 11 mars 1942, il n'a pas encore touché une centime d'indemnité immobilière.

— Je compte, poursuit-il, que c'est, au bas mot, 856.000 francs que me doit l'Etat toutes réserves faites quant aux coefficients de nos deux assassinages qui sont, l'une de 1938 et l'autre de 1941 — par rapport à ceux d'aujourd'hui... Je suis las d'attendre. Les journaux publient des listes des immeubles et propriétés de Juifs. On y voit figures des biens juifs. Je demande que l'on m'en attribue un, ainsi que des meubles de provenance juive également et destiné à être attribués à l'Hôtel Drômedar. Je tiens à voir où sur l'immeuble qui m'est due.

J'ai fait mes débuts sur un appartement de l'immeuble 13 de la rue de l'Amiral Coligny à Paris. Le prix de vente en est de 225.000 francs. Si vous vous reportez à cette adresse sur l'annuaire des téléphones, vous n'y trouverez qu'un seul locataire dont le patronyme soit spécifiquement juif.

juif. Ce nom, il signifie évidemment au yiddish "le Juif". Mais qu'un propriétaire soit ainsi étiqueté d'ors, quand je suis, moi dans la rue, avec les miens...

Je l'admetts d'autant moins que ma fille possède, aux environs de Rouen, une propriété qu'elle a mise à disposition des autorités. Aussi, il serait inadmissible qu'elle et moi nous fussions sans logis, pendant que des Juifs conserveraient les leurs.

La location des appartements détenus par des Juifs

La préfecture de la Seine communique :

En exécution d'une décision des autorités d'occupation et pour pallier les difficultés matérielles de logement, les appartements détenus par des Juifs, étant indisponibles dans le département de la Seine, ne peuvent être reloués sans autorisation préalable. Cette autorisation devra être demandée par écrit à l'Office de l'habitation, service des logements vacants et du relogement, 2, rue Pernelle, Paris (4).

Les examens de l'enseignement primaire supérieur

Le Journal officiel a publié un arrêté fixant : au 12 octobre (au lieu du 11) la date d'ouverture de la deuxième session du brevet d'enseignement primaire (section générale) et du brevet élémentaire (au lieu du 27) la date du brevet élémentaire et du brevet d'enseignement primaire supérieur (section générale) : au 5 octobre (au lieu du 4) la date du brevet supérieur.

Le Matin on August 23, 1943

Source: [Retronews](#)

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of one or two...of those people? | |

Francine: Of course! The garage owner was named Mrs. Delhaye, the street peddler merchant was named Mimi. Everyone in the neighborhood knew Mimi. Everyone. Because the day I went to school with my Jewish star, she kissed me in front of a German officer. And then, the friend who rented a maid's room to put our furniture in, was called Maud Narçon and her husband was a prisoner with my father. In any case, she will be married by proxy because, when he was taken prisoner, they were still engaged. And then my groundskeepers, who are Mr. and Mrs. Baux, who are extraordinary people. I continue to see their daughter. A very short time ago, I wrote to her, since then I have seen her but, I wrote to her to tell her that I had not seen her for a very long time and that I wanted to see her again, that I had not forgotten anything her family had done and she replied, "What my family did but it is simply natural." This is the mentality of the people, of the people of France. Let's do it!

1936 Census												
Adj. 1933. — 15 ^e arr. — N° 19006												
DÉSIGNATION DES RUES dans les villes	NUMÉROS PAR RUE			NOMS DE FAMILLE	PRÉNOMS (un seul prénom)	ANNÉE de NAISSANCE	LIEU de NAISSANCE (Département ou nation)	NATIONA- LITÉ	ÉTAT MATHONIAIS	SITUATION par RAPPORT au chef de ménage	PROFESSION	
	des maisons	des ménages	des individus									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
R Cardinet	104	959	suite	Soledis			Q	Nalley			abat	
	739											
R Cardinet	106			Baux	Suzanne	1900	H. Jassine	M. mari	empl. Compt.	Lidermeyer 1R. de la gare		
	260				Lucienne	1900	Cordemus	M. femme	concierge			
	737				Yolande	1927	Cordemus	C. fille				
					Marie	1885	Cordemus	V. mere				

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 653 - Batignolles - vue 169/254)

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, do you remember the letters that arrived from the Oflag³⁰ where your father was imprisoned?



Robert as P.O.W.
Source: F. Christophe

Francine: Yes, my father writes regularly. He is allowed, I think, 2 letters a month and 2 cards a month. I have since learned that my parents had a sort of code between them. And so, in this sort of code, my father, who was aware of everything that was happening because the collaborationist press invaded the prison camps - the prisoners knew perfectly well what was happening to their families - my father, in his sort of little code, explained to my mother that she had to go to the free zone to join his brother,³¹ who was in the free zone, and that we would be at less risk, that we would not risk being arrested in the free zone.

Marcelle In Laval, we had drafted a secret code. It was a question of giving a particular form to those of the

³⁰ Abbreviation of Offizier-Lager, "officers' camp". Prison camp, established in Germany or in the occupied countries during the Second World War, in which officers of the Allied armies were interned. Robert Christophe was a prisoner in Nuremberg and then in Edelbach in Austria.

³¹ Daniel Christophe is returned to civilian life after the defeat. He settles with his wife Suzanne and their daughters in the free zone, in Grenoble.

characters having to be removed from the text in order to reconstitute clandestine sentences. With the help of a magnifying glass, I wrote on a paper each of the letters in question. Here is what this little work gave: MELANGEASPIRINEAPASTILLESVICHY. Which, with a minimum of attention, provided this sentence: "Mixture of aspirin and Vichy pastilles. With the shipping of medicine prohibited, this detail shows how complicated life was during the war. (p.59)

Robert June 1, 1942. On the front page, this huge headline:

THE JEWS MUST WEAR THE YELLOW STAR

From June 7 on the left side of the chest and from the age of six

Immediately evoking my wife and my daughter (who was eight years old) with this yellow star sewn to her dress, I waited for the distribution of the first correspondence form to write to Marcelle, in our secret code, that I advised her to flee with the little one to the free zone. In Grenoble, she could join my brother, my sister-in-law and their girls. In Nice, my mother and my stepfather Streiff.

How did Marcelle accept my suggestion? (p.121)

Marcelle This time, the cup overflowed. Wearing the star was tantamount to a conviction. Our arrest in the streets would be facilitated. As for "crossing the threshold of the stores only between three and four o'clock in the afternoon", it was the time when, because of the restrictions, the stores closed.

Nevertheless, we had to obey. Another humiliation, this line in front of the police station. I received my six yellow stars: three for me, three for the girl. (...)

The Jews in the occupied zone were in danger of starving to death. Did this torment our torturers? They decided to move our shopping to the morning, between 11 a.m. and noon. That is why I was not at home when a terrible scene broke out in the building.

A German Jewess occupied the apartment on the same floor as mine, but on the courtyard. Escaped from the Reich a dozen years earlier, when Hitler was approaching power, she was living in Paris with a Christian lawyer, separated from his wife. She had given him three sons. The youngest lived in the country with sympathetic farmers. The two older ones, whose ages bordered on my daughter's, lived with their mother and father. Sometimes Francine would chat with these children from window to window.

One day, returning from the market around noon, I discovered the building in full revolution. On the steps of

her dressing room, Mrs. Baux told me, her face red with indignation, that French policemen, accompanying the Feldgendarmerie, had gotten off a bus from the Prefecture. In ten minutes, they had kidnapped my neighbor. Warned by telephone, the father of the two children had arrived too late to kiss his companion one last time. He could only take his sons home from school.

That day, July 16, 1942, the Nazis had arrested thirty thousand men, women and children. Nothing but foreigners. German, Austrian, Polish, Czech and Hungarian Jews who had taken refuge in France. They were interned in the Velodrome d'Hiver, without being given beds or food. This was the first stage of their deportation, the antechamber to their death in the German camps.

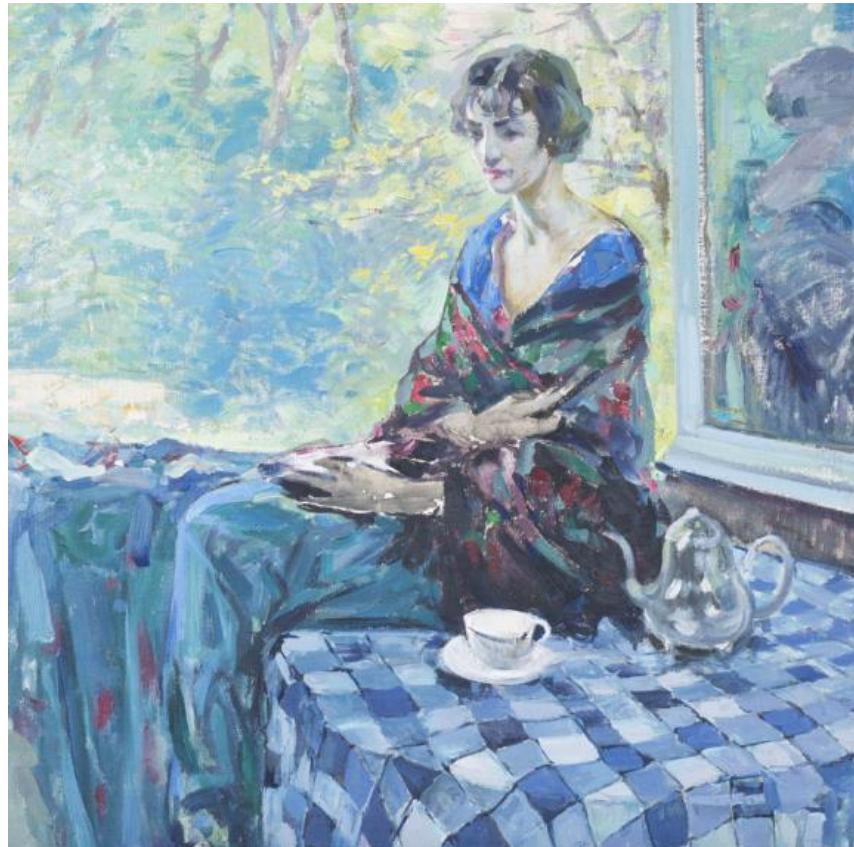
The rumor announced this news to all of Paris, even before the newspapers mentioned it. (...)

Finally, Robert sent me a coded letter, in which I could extract these characters: "BEG YOU TO JOIN DANIEL OR MOM." I did not hesitate any longer. "You come with us," I said to my mother. She refused, fearing that she could not afford to live in the free zone. And her discretion ordered her not to impose herself on my family-in-law. I begged her in vain. (pp.123-125)

Francine: Of course, we don't expect that one day the free zone will be occupied. So my mother decided to go to the free zone and I know that she had false papers made. I know that she contacted a smuggler, but I don't know how. And I know that we will leave from Clo Avy's house.

Marcelle Across the street from our house was a garage. I had a cordial relationship with its owner, Mrs. Delhaye. She had told me: "My nephew, an airman, was able to pass to the free zone, thanks to a smuggler that I will indicate to you. Keeping her promise, she gave me his name and address. I'll let him know," she said. You will take the train to Angoulême, where you will change. A train will drop you off at La Rochefoucauld. You will go to the café who is opposite. From there my smuggler will take you through the fields to the free zone. Don't have any luggage: they would point you out. Besides, you'd have a hard time carrying it on the march. (p.126)

Francine: Clo Avy is a painter friend of ours, the wife of Jean-Marius Avy who is a painter who was very famous before the war.³² They are great, great friends of my grandparents. And she is a widow and she lives on rue Boissonade,³³ in a painter's studio.



Femme au châle à la fenêtre by Clotilde Avy-Prégnard
Source: <https://piasa.auction.fr>

Francine: We will have dinner at her house and it is from there that we will leave to take the train to the free zone. It was at her house that we were going to remove our stars and that I was going to learn my lesson, that is to say that if anyone asked me anything, "You're not Jewish, you're not Jewish, you're not Jewish, do you remember, my dear? We're going to the free zone because there are so many restrictions here, that in the free zone we hope we'll eat a little bit better. That's why we're going there. That's what

³² Jean-Marius Avy (1871 - 1939) is known for his large-scale scenes depicting the leisure activities of Parisian high society during the Belle Epoque. He exhibited at the Salon des artistes français from 1895 to 1932. He married Clotilde Avy (née Prégnard) (1885 - 1970) on May 12, 1939, some months before his death. <https://art.rmnngp.fr/fr/library/artworks>

³³ At 45 rue Boissonade in the 14th arrondissement.

you'll have to answer if you're questioned." And the smuggler's name is Lalo and this name I'm going to remember, because by chance, in my class, there are twins named Lalo. So it makes sense, my mother says, "You're going to say you're going to see the Lalo family." So that's very good. Our luggage left under the name of Monsieur Rouger, who is one of our neighbors on Cardinet Street. Another act of resistance, having a Jewish family's luggage leave under his name. I still see the whole Rouger family. They are marvelous friends. And so, we leave from Clo Avy's house. We go to the Austerlitz station. And when we arrived at Clo Avy's, a little memory, I remember that my mother said to me, "You are going to fold your vest as if you were hot to walk in front of the concierge's lodge because this concierge, we know from Clo, that she can't be trusted. So you don't want her to see your star, so you're going to walk by and say "Oh I'm hot!" and your star will be hidden." And I did that. That way, we were able to come out without any stars. There you go.

Marcelle We had dinner at Mrs. Avy's. Before the meal, I unstitched the stars of our dresses and coats. The needs of the war obliged the networks, on the order of the Germans, to some changes of lines: the train of Bordeaux did not leave any more from the station of Orleans-Austerlitz, but from the station Montparnasse. Mrs. Avy accompanied us there. As we were leaving her home, she smiled at Francine and said: "You, the dirty kid, try to hold your tongue! Your mother told you: you know what you are risking!

Here we are, my poor child and I, on the sidewalk with Mrs. Avy. In the walking bag where I used to put Francine's bottle, I put my wallet, my papers, two letters from Robert with their detachable flaps for the answer, and finally some basic necessities. But I intend to find my suitcases in Grenoble, where Mr. Rouger has sent them in his name. I think of my Robby, there, in his camp. Is his heart beating faster tonight? He knows we have to leave, but doesn't know the date.

In front of the station gate, we exchange wet kisses with Mrs. Avy. (pp. 126-127)



Marcelle and Clo Avy in Grasse, 1955

Source: F. Christophe

Francine: On the train... well, we already went through a checkpoint because, at the entrance of the platform, they don't let people with a star go on, of course.

Interviewer: And they don't ask for the papers yet?

Francine: Yes, yes, but it's a fake document.

Marcelle Mom was able to obtain, for the little one and for me, false identity cards. No more Jewish stamps, of course, on them. (p.126)

Interviewer: What is written on it?

Francine: So it says that we are called Christophe because my father is a prisoner, he has that name but my mother changed her maiden name. Her name is Nordmann and the person who made the false papers wrote Norman. They made a very big mistake, I didn't know that until later, instead of...her name is Nordmann, which is "Man of the North" and the smuggler removed...the forger removed the [d], which is smart but he should have put it at the end to make it Normand like Normandie. He took the [d] and the second [n] out of Nordmann, and if a German reads it, and he will, the German in the zone... at the demarcation line, he'll read Norman and he'll think "Norman? Ah, maybe..." That's it. Whereas if he had written it Normand, with a [d] at the end, it wouldn't have made him pause. So, we took the train to Angoulême. In Angoulême, we change trains.

Marcelle At dawn, we arrived in Angoulême. Down on the quay, the little one and I were shivering, in spite of the summer season. From my walking bag, I took a Thermos bottle. The ersatz coffee it contained kept us warm. And we ate bread spread by Mrs. Avy.

La Rochefoucauld's train entered under the glass roof. In a low voice, I once again chided Francine, so that she would not make the mistake of denouncing us. Speak as little as possible. And I thought of my mother, who remained in Paris. So brave, my irreproachable mother... And so tender. (p.127)



The train station at La Rochefoucauld

Source: <https://www.cparama.com/>

Francine: We took a train to La Rochefoucauld³⁴ because it was in La Rochefoucauld that we had to find the smuggler. I don't know how, I don't remember how we had to find him at the exit of the station. Anyway, we change trains in Angoulême and we get on a train that goes to La Rochefoucauld. On this train, there is a man in our compartment who is smoking and I remember that I want to vomit because the smell is so nauseating. I can still smell it. And I think that, if it had been under normal circumstances, I would have said "Mom, I'm sick to my stomach." But then, I didn't say anything. And, I know that in La Rochefoucauld, there must not be any Germans. It's a place where we hadn't arrived yet. And when the train enters the station, we see Germans on the platform and we get off the train. And there, we have to show our papers and the Germans say, "To the right! To the left!" And so we found ourselves in a group with a lady and her children, and a gentleman. And they say, "Follow us!" We cross the station square. Probably the smuggler

³⁴ on July 26, 1942

sees us pass by. And we go into the offices. And there, the interrogation will begin. Shall I continue or do you have questions?

Marcelle Finally the train slowed down, then stopped in a station decorated with flowers. And the drama burst. I sensed it at once. Employees were on the landing stage and claimed the tickets in front of the cars, instead of taking them at the exit. Behind the gate, green uniforms were standing. Their officers pointed to the waiting room. There was no way to escape. (p.127)

Interviewer: By all means, continue!

Francine: So, I don't remember very well. We went up a staircase.

Marcelle Arrived at a house on which floated the red flag with a black swastika on a white circle, they made us climb a spiral staircase. "They are not going to beat us!" murmured Francine while holding on to my arm. "Shut up!" I replied, my voice unsure. (p.128)

Francine: Finally I know that I appeared before a table where there were German officers. They have their weapons there. There is a dog. I am very, very afraid of dogs already because, before the war, I had been knocked down by a big dog so I am never reassured when I see a dog. And this one scares me right away. They are flat-faced dogs. And he's at the end of the table. A German who types everything we say. There, they interrogate Mom in a room and they interrogate me alone. I am a very small thing in front of all these men in uniform. They ask questions and demand if I am Jewish. And of course, Mom made me repeat my lesson "You're not Jewish, you're not Jewish, you're not Jewish." And as the interrogation proceeded, of course, I got more and more scared, because there's one who whispers, who's very nice and then there's one who screams very, very loud and then there's the dog.

Marcelle *A soldier was guarding us, holding on to a leash a high-legged dog, with short, tawny fur, a squashed face, thick lips, from which hung a drooling tongue. Frightened, Francine leaned against me, her eyes fixed on this piece of scarlet flesh and on the enormous canines which surrounded it. (...)*

The Germans having seized our identity cards at the station, they were free to call us by our names. The door opened again: a hoarse voice said: "Madame Christrophe and za bédide!"

Here we were before our judges. There were two of them: a German and a French interpreter. Our false cards made us inhabitants of Toulouse, closer to La Rochefoucauld than Paris. So I could pretend that I had come to buy food. In those days of restrictions, this was not unusual. This is what I answered to the question: "What are you doing here? And I added, "I was told I could get butter, eggs, meat." And here I was, telling them, as if they didn't know, that we didn't hesitate to travel miles to find food. But I suddenly became confused, feeling my tongue become dry. Whoever has not undergone this kind of interrogation cannot form an idea of it! (pp.128-129)

Francine: And then there will be the decisive moment when they tell Mom... when the door opens and they say to Mom, "Look at your daughter! Either you confess or you can say goodbye!" In these cases, we confess. So we confessed, "I'm Jewish." "Well, that's good!"

Marcelle *Suddenly the German shouted: Jüdin! Sie sind jüdin! And the interpreter translated: "You are Jewish, you were trying to pass to the southern zone! Say that it's not true!"*

On my denials, he asked Francine the same question. Before leaving Paris, I had warned my poor kid so much that she answered the same way, but with a mumble. The German went to open the door. Der Hund!" he shouted to the soldier who was keeping the dog in the waiting room. The interpellant came with the enormous beast, Francine, distraught, threw herself against me. If you don't confess," said the German, "we will separate you from the girl.

Then I confessed all that he wanted. And I shouted, "Don't take my daughter away from me!" (p.129)

Francine: So we went back downstairs. We crossed the square again. It was the first time I had walked down the street surrounded by armed soldiers. I must have felt very small. And then we went up to the prison. The prison was the grain market and the party hall.



The grain market (currently a movie theater). June 2021.
Source: GoogleMaps

It was the building that had been converted into a prison. And there, we arrived, we were put in there, pushed in there. And suddenly, we were surrounded by a lot of people who were laughing, who were madly cheerful and who said, "Here we are, we are arrested but it's nothing, it's nothing! We will be freed! We'll be freed!" And Mom had this extraordinary word, she said, " Phew!" It meant, "We're arrested. We're arrested, okay! What's going to happen? Nothing! We are arrested. It can't be any worse than what we've been through so far, than the fear, than the famine, than the wearing of the star, than all these annoyances that are happening all the time. We are arrested, but we will be freed one day."

Marcelle Me, I have a curious feeling of relaxation. It is done, I am stopped. What I feared is not to be feared anymore. Naturally, this feeling will be only temporary. Because I think of my poor chick, that I cover with kisses. (p. 130)

Interviewer: And what did you think?

Francine: At the time, I started to cry in the middle of all these people, but they were laughing so much, they were so cheerful, so adorable... Crowdedness doesn't bother a child, so we slept there in this grain hall, with the party hall too. I remember very well that there was a stage where there were still props which had been used by the people of this small city for plays. We stayed there for four days. The older people went to get food. They went to get food, I think I remember, in a convent³⁵ where the food was made by nuns. We went to get the food by going through there.

Interviewer: Were they allowed to go out?

Francine: The incarcerated people?

Interviewer: Yes

Francine: Yes, to get food from the nuns. That's all, otherwise we didn't go out. And then afterwards, they told us that they were taking us away. So, the last day... so we knew we were leaving, Mom asked to do the food duty to go to the nuns' house to get the food and she asked the nuns if they would give her two hard-boiled eggs for her daughter. And the nuns gave her two hard-boiled eggs that Mom put in her pocket. That was something, at that time, two hard-boiled eggs, you have to understand.

Marcelle I see nuns: they provided the food of the prisoners. Then two French gendarmes, enslaved to the German leaders. They watched the interior of the building with bonhomie.

³⁵ The former Carmelite convent is located less than 100 meters from the grain market.

-Did you know Colonel Streiff? He used to command the gendarmerie of the North, in Lille. I am his daughter-in-law.

-Huh! What? Colonel Streiff! Of course I knew him!" exclaimed the older of the two men. And in Lille itself! I was under his orders there. And you are his daughter-in-law?

-Yes, he is the second husband of my mother-in-law. The little one and I were going to join them in Nice.

The brave policeman could not believe it. When he realized, at my lack of luggage, in what destitution we were, he went to get me soap and two towels with his number on them. Generous gifts in these days of restrictions. Francine and I could make a light toilette.

And he handed me a sheet of paper, an envelope and a pencil. Write a letter," he said, "I'll try to mail it. But not to the free zone! The Germans are watching us too, you know!

To whom should this letter be addressed without danger to the recipient? To Maud [de Gassion]. She herself would warn my mother. And Robert too, through Narçon. (p.130)

Robert On August 18, I was celebrating Francine's ninth birthday in my heart. While I was tidying up my pack, I was thinking about her seventh birthday, the courtyard of the seminary in Laval, the cake with seven candles, when, through the open window, I heard Narçon's voice. Robert," he shouted, "come down to the duckboard, I have something to tell you!

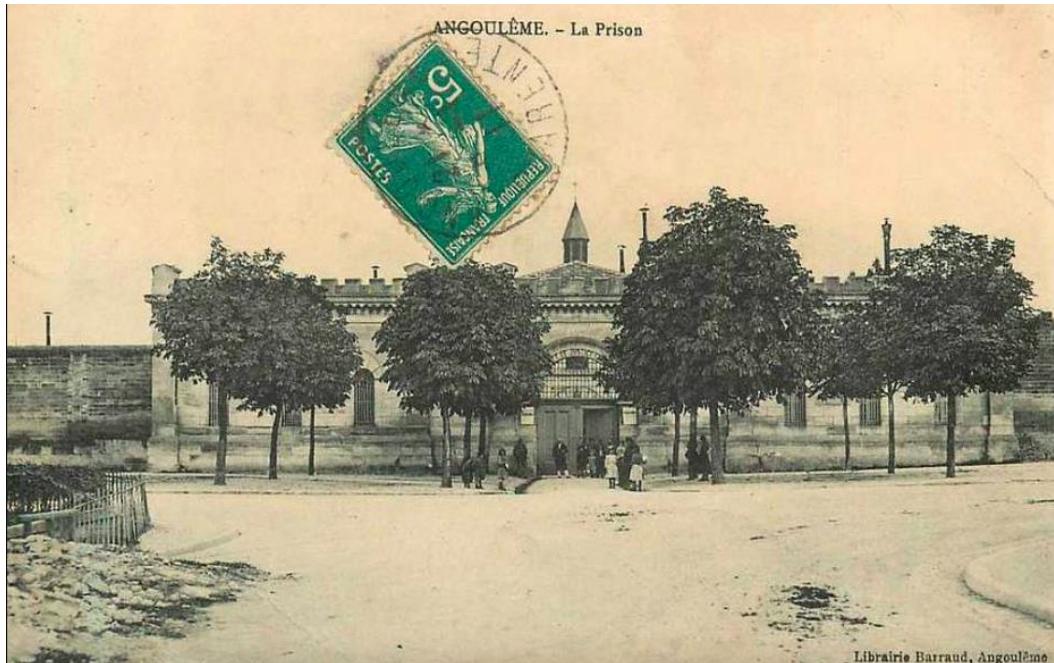
I joined him. I have just received," he stammered, "a letter from Maud. She tells me about Marcelle. The tone of his voice made me shudder. Speaking of Parisian events without major importance, he obviously turned around the pot. "Show me," I said, cutting him off. He hesitated. "Give it to me," I shouted. With a trembling hand, he handed me the paper. "Warn Robert (wrote Maud). His wife and daughter are being held for the time being in a youth camp. His mother-in-law is going to write to him to that effect, so that he will not be surprised at the lack of news. The poor man really didn't need this. Against this statement of "youth camp", placed there to avoid the redaction of the censorship or to mitigate my grief, pleaded the "lack of news" and the "poor man". I couldn't be mistaken.

I thought I was going crazy. (...)

Eighteen days after the announcement made by Pierre's wife, I received a letter from my mother-in-law. This so much awaited letter specified. It did not relieve. For the first time, I slept. Worn out with fatigue, I sank into sleep. Finally, I received a letter from Marcelle, "Matricule 15.322 - 4th floor - Staircase 14 - Room 16 - Camp de Drancy (Seine).

"Above all," she wrote to me, "do not believe that it was your advice that determined me to leave Paris. Many friends advised me to do so. I was lucky and that's all. (pp. 134-136)

Francine: And then, we left La Rochefoucauld in the direction of Angoulême. We had a collision. It's a long time ago, I told it in... my memory, it is fading. We had a collision with a car, we got off the bus. Well, we'll move on because I don't remember the details very well.³⁶ On the other hand, I remember very, very well when we arrived in Angoulême because the prison of Angoulême... Angoulême is a city built on a hill. The Angoulême prison is at the top. You have to climb. We climbed.



Source : [Delcampe](#)

³⁶ The accident actually occurred during their transfer from Angoulême to Poitiers and not from La Rochefoucauld to Angoulême.

And then the prison, it's a real prison. So this is the first time in my life that I've been in a real prison. I don't think I was scared! I have my mom. When you have Mom, it changes everything. And so we entered this real prison. It's interesting for a little girl to see a real prison, to see the men's quarters, the women's quarters, the guard with her huge set of keys that rattle, the corridors, the cells, the peephole in the door. She turns the key, we enter a cell. There are several of us in the cell. I don't remember how many. So we stay there for several days. We don't have a sink in the cell. You have to go wash in the courtyard which is being repaired. There are enormous constructions. The courtyard is full of pits, where we wash. And you can hear the men singing in the men's quarter. It's a pleasure. It lifts our spirits. And Mom gives me a quarter of a hard-boiled egg every day. It's always that because we have a little bit of meager thin soup. The prison gives us a little bit of meager soup, a piece of bread and one and a quarter cube of sugar every day. I don't know why. One and a quarter cube of sugar. We cut the sugar into four pieces. It's what we have to eat. So we stay there for four days. We leave. So, the set of keys, the long corridors. And we left Angoulême for the camp in Poitiers. Then here, I cannot say how... because I don't remember.

Marcelle We did not know our destination. The journey lasted all day, because an accident delayed it. The first bus hit a tourist car, driven by a German. It took several hours to call the gendarmes on duty in the department, to establish the damage and to draw up the report. Farmers approached, astonished to see old men, women and children being kept like criminals. Compassionate farm women brought bread and toast, offered milk to the children, cigarettes to the men. Those who still had ration coupons were able to obtain small squares of butter in exchange for them.

When we arrived in Poitiers around five o'clock, our buses took us to wooden barracks framed by barbed wire.
(p.137)



The main entrance of the Poitiers Camp

Source: [Conseil de l'Europe](#)

Francine: So the camp of Poitiers, it was horrible!³⁷ So there, really, I... because the prison interested me. I didn't see any horrors in the prison. I only knew the cell, but the cell is interesting when you're eight and a half years old. I tell you, the set of keys, it's interesting when you have Mom. In Poitiers, that's abominable because it's a camp. And I've never heard of camps. I didn't know what it was and I'm about to discover what a camp was. A camp is made of barracks surrounded by barbed wire. It's very interesting all the same. I am not afraid there. I continue not to be afraid in Poitiers. I am sickened because it is dirty, because we live in straw, we sleep in straw, because there are rats everywhere, because the rats run in the middle of the straw, because we find a rat in the soup. The camp is separated in two: on one side, there are Jews; on the other side, there are Bohemians.³⁸

³⁷ Between 1940 and 1941, Poitiers held 450 Romanis; in July 1941, it was transformed into a concentration camp for Jews. More than 1,600 Jews from the region, including 502 children, were sent from Poitiers to Drancy, then deported and murdered at Auschwitz. (https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH001360235/NLI)

³⁸ Consult the following sites for more information: <https://rm.coe.int/internment-in-france-1940-1946-factsheets-on-romani-history/16808b1c15>



III. 10

Baraques servant au logement des « nomades » dans le camp de la Route de Limoges à Poitiers (Vienne).

(Archives nationales, section Photographies (NAPS), F7 15109, 6 janvier 1942)

Caption reads: Barracks used to house the "nomads" in the camp of the Route de Limoges in Poitiers (Vienne).

Source: [Conseil de l'Europe](#)

Francine: I remember, I'm sorry to give you the details that stick in my mind, it's the toilets that are something unspeakable with white worms crawling everywhere. The walls are covered with maggots. I am a clean little girl, from a good clean family, it is quite monstrous. My mother washes me as best she can.

Well. That's all...

Interviewer: Who is there, Mrs Lorch, who is there in this camp next to you?

Francine: On our side, all kinds of people. Jews.

Interviewer: Numerous, you remember?

Francine: Yes, there are many people. In my memory, there are many people. There are men, women, children. Very numerous. I can't tell you if there are only French Jews there. There was probably a mix, but I don't remember. I only remember the filth in Poitiers.

Interviewer: Do you see people leaving or people arriving in this camp?

Francine: No, I don't remember that. Filth, rats, worms.

Interviewer: Where do you sleep?

Francine: On the ground, in the straw, in the barracks. With the rats.

Interviewer: And where does your mother sleep?

Francine: With me. I can't give any more details.

Interviewer: How long do you stay in the camp?

Francine: I think four days. I think I remember that we stayed four days in La Rochefoucauld, four days in Angoulême, four days in Poit... yes, four days in Poitiers I think also. And from Poitiers, then there, it is the first voyage thus in a cattle car. With a hygienic bucket in the middle. I think that's where it is, if I'm not mistaken. To Drancy. Well, I don't remember the trip so I can't tell you anything. That one doesn't make much of an impact on me.

Marcelle [The] situation [in Poitiers] lasted from Thursday until Sunday. Around one o'clock in the morning, Germans came and shouted in the barrack where, of course, we were sleeping dressed: *Aufstehen!* Outside, the coaches were parked.

Muted lanterns illuminated our new boarding. The departure took place at night, to avoid that the inhabitants of Poitiers came to protest, as they had done ten days before, in identical circumstances. We knew this from the gypsies. Black clouds obscured the moon and the stars. By order of the Germans, who feared the British planes, no light shone through the houses. The darkness was complete when the convoy reached the station.



Platform of Poitiers station

Source: <https://www.cparama.com>

A train was waiting for us. Running along the platforms, lanterns pointed to the entrance of the cars: cattle cars. We were pushed against their running boards, which were up to our chests. Einstiegen! Los! Los!

Protests mingled with the shouting. The young people helped the old ones up. A few Germans grabbed them and lifted them up, then threw them onto the cattle-smelling trays. The old men fell down with cries, sometimes bumping into the bucket - a delicate attention! - intended for the natural needs. The youngest children were thrown in like bundles.

How many of us were in each vehicle? I don't know. But we were so crowded that we bumped into each other in the dark. The Germans closed our doors. The sound of padlocks was more audible than audible. A long whistle sounded, and the train started. (...)

Eighteen hours after the departure, the train stopped, perhaps for the tenth time. The station was longer than the previous ones. The bar of chocolate and the piece of bread given to each traveler at Poitiers station had long since been absorbed.

The click of the locks was heard. The doors slid open. A bright light entered, dazzling us. To stand up, we had to lean on the heads and shoulders of our neighbors. And the terrible voice of the Feldgendarmen: "Aussteigen! To make us get down faster, their clubs came into play. They spared neither the children nor the old people.

They parked us under the station's marquee. Blowing for a second, I saw the name on the enamel plates: BOBIGNY. We were north of Paris and in the immediate suburbs. Our wait lasted a long time. Two old men were missing, whose bodies were found, it seems, in a carriage.

Parisian buses were waiting for us in the street. They made us get on under threats. Francine was frightened and held on to me. (p.140)



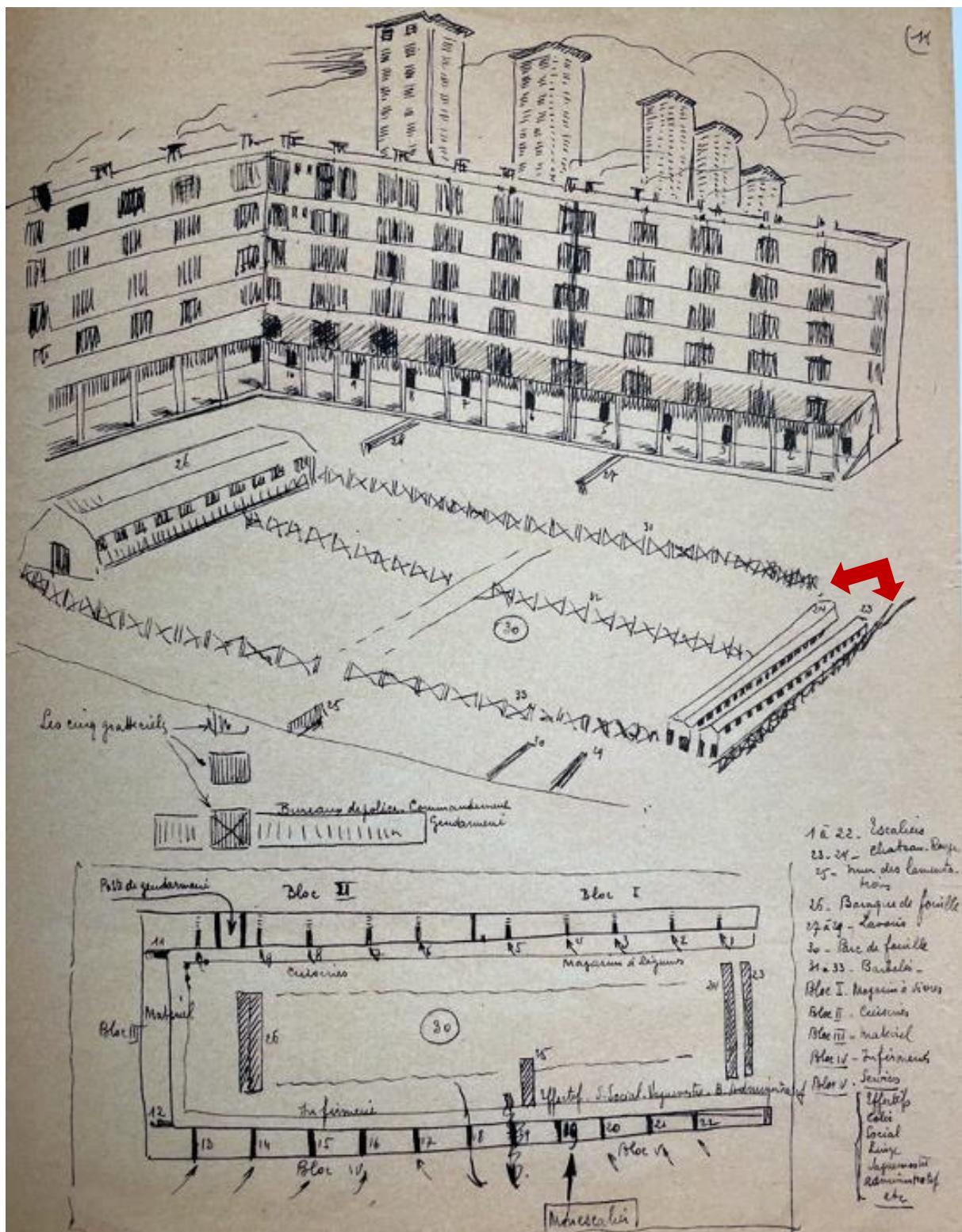
Train station at Bobigny
Source: <http://garedeportation.bobigny.fr/>

Francine: So the arrival at Drancy.³⁹ The arrival at Drancy is a horror! And that's when I really start to be afraid, at Drancy.⁴⁰ It's really happening there. Because Drancy in 1942, the summer of 1942, is something abominable. It was there that, I would find out later, that all the foreign Jews were arrested, I didn't know that yet, and Drancy is something unspeakable with this enormous courtyard covered with cinder. Later on, it will become beautiful, Drancy, for the propaganda. There is this cinder, how to describe it? It's like a kind of crushed coal that when you walk on it, at first you walk uneasily on it, and it's black, it's dirty, your feet are always black. And there, they put us in rooms... Drancy is a low-cost housing project; I believe it is the first low-cost housing project in France that was not completed at the time of the war. There is only the structure and the plumbing. And they put us in these rooms. So we live in them. It's horribly dirty where they put us. And there are dozens of feather mattresses - where do they come from? We don't know - they're ripped open, they're covered in feces, blood, vomit. It is something abominable. We go into these rooms in the middle of this filth. And I have no idea where it comes from. My mother will realize it, will know it very quickly. I don't know. All I see is this filth, that we are going to live in this filth. We're going to live by twisting our feet on these pipes. It was horrible in Drancy at that time. We went to relieve ourselves in what was called "the castle" or "the red castle"⁴¹ which was at the end of the camp and we were only allowed to go there when there were a certain number of us. There must be about ten of us, I think. And all the ... so sometimes we need to go when we can't. You ask someone, "Do you want to...?" "But I just went, I risk being noticed."

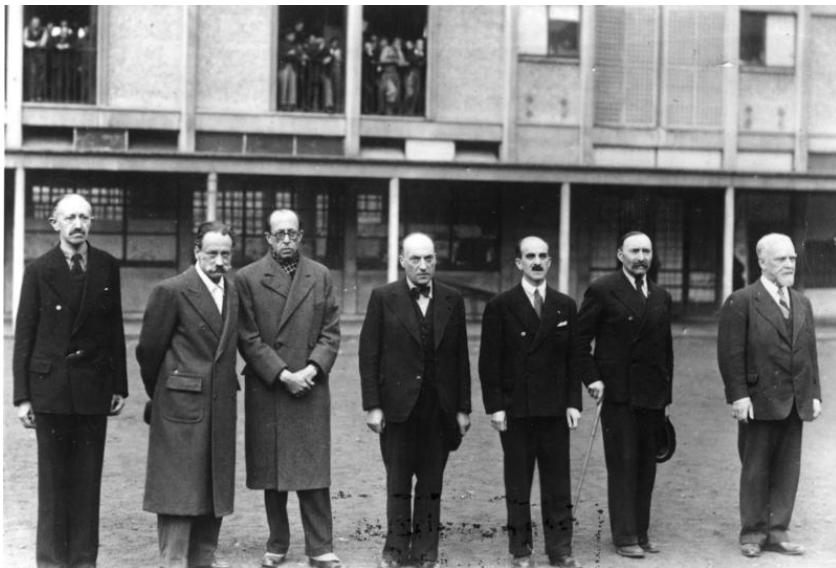
³⁹ On August 7, 1942

⁴⁰ From 1942, the Drancy camp, named after the town of Drancy, was the main internment camp to which arrestees were sent before being deported to concentration camps. The camp buildings were located near two train stations that the Germans used to facilitate systematic deportation. While some of the Jews deported from Drancy to the East, i.e. to the killing centers, were French citizens, the majority were foreign-born Jews who had immigrated to France in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly from Eastern Europe. Many distinguished French Jewish intellectuals and artists were detained at Drancy, including the poet Max Jacob, the choreographer René Blum, and the playwright Tristan Bernard. In total, less than 2,000 of the 64,000 Jews deported east from Drancy survived the Holocaust. Today, these buildings have become affordable housing. (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/drancy>)

⁴¹ On the map of the camp below, G. Horan-Koiransky indicates the red castle by the numbers 23 and 24



Marcelle When we had finished "settling in", we were allowed to go down to the courtyard. I took advantage of the authorization, thinking that I would meet Maurice [Evard]. I was not mistaken. We embraced with emotion. "Quickly," he whispered to me after our first words, "go tell the 'staff' that you are the wife and daughter of a prisoner of war! Do you have any of Robert's letters with you? - I have two," I replied. - Then go! Here, it's over there, near stairway 20. At the moment, they are not deporting the women and children of the prisoners. You will enter the "Military Office". The man who runs it is also an internee. A veteran, like me. And a great war veteran, Master Edmond Bloch. (p.141)



Maîtres Weill, Théodore Valensi, Azoulay, Ulmo, Crémieux, Edmond Bloch and Senator Pierre Masse⁴²
At the Drancy Camp in August 1941

Source: [Bundesarchiv](#)

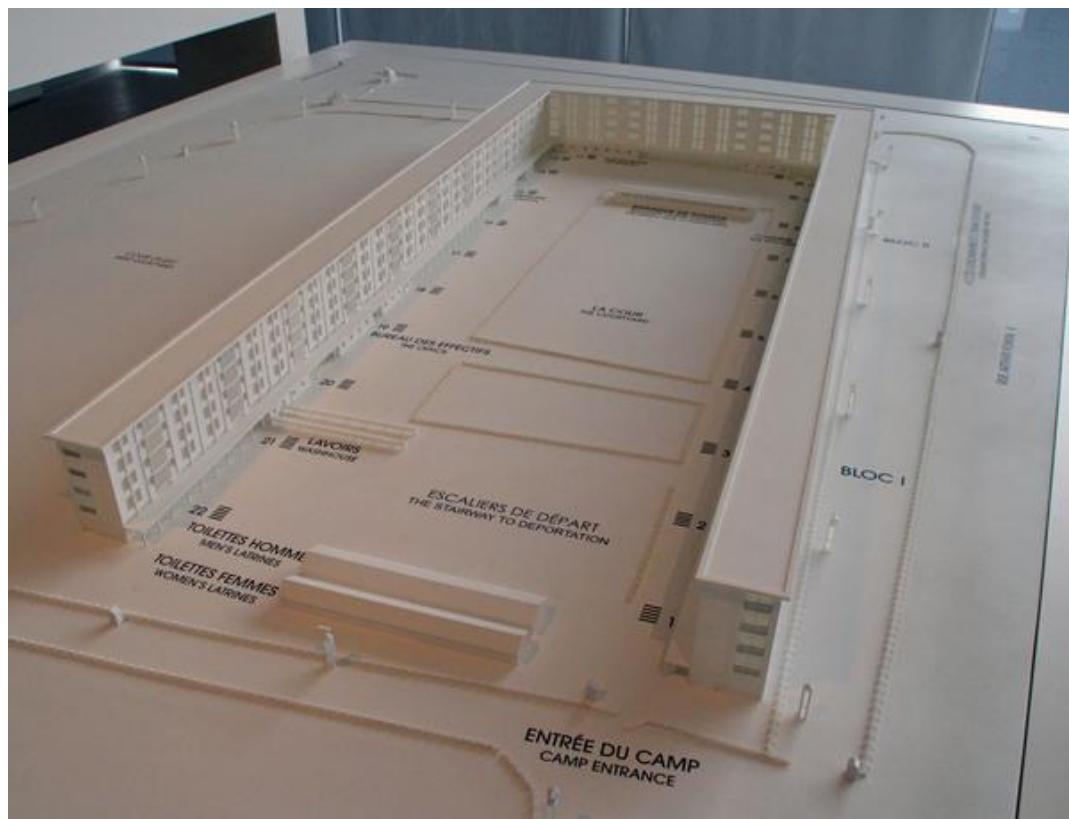
Francine: Terrible things happen when we're... I'm not aware of it at all, at all. On the other hand, something abominable is going to happen, these are the deportations, but I don't know that they are deportations. In the center of the courtyard, there is barbed wire. There is a barrack called the search barrack. All the people that they put in the middle of this barbed wire will go through the search barrack so

⁴² In her memoir *Une famille dans la guerre*, Marcelle recounts: "On September 12 [1941], I read an article in Pourri-Soir entitled: I saw them, these Jewish millionaires, ex-celebrities of the Parisian Bar, interned in a camp near our capital. Seven photographs showed lawyers with faces gnawed by pain. (...) the whole article was of the same mud." (p.83) Read the article published in *France* on September, 9th, 1941.

I know that they are stripped of everything they have. When they put them inside the barbed wire, I remember that the men were shaved and their hair flew everywhere in the middle of the cinder block. And all these people were stripped of everything they had. It depends on the time of year. They're going to leave but I don't know where they're going to leave to.

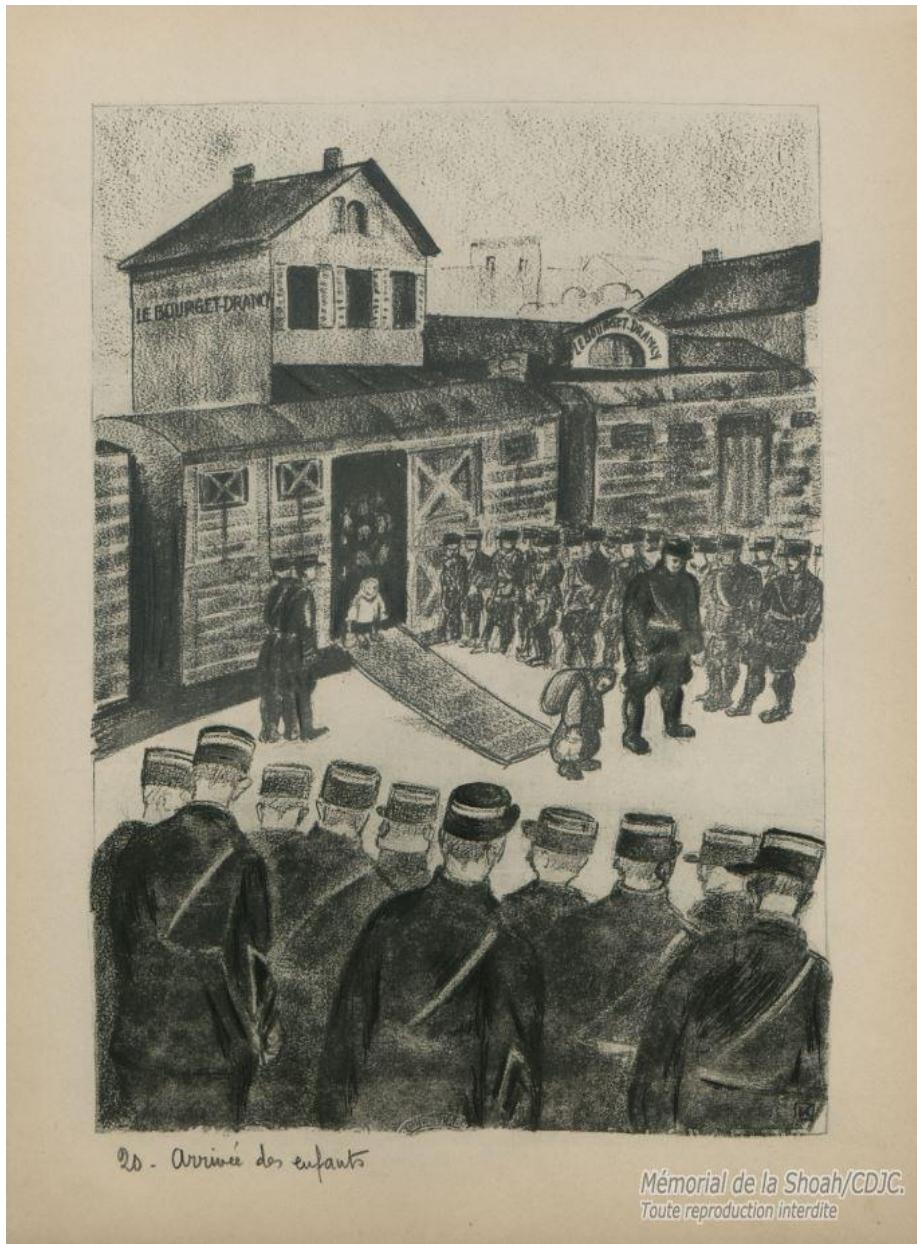
Marcelle

When the victims were not shot, they were deported. The singular barracks was constantly receiving new residents, and had to be emptied to make room. Without distinction of sex or age, the inspectors registered a thousand people for Pitchipoï, a nickname which, in the new slang of Drancy, designated this unknown person who every week caught the unfortunates struck by fate. They changed rooms and went to sleep in the "Departure Staircase" for their last night at Drancy. This was the name given to one of the buildings 3, 4 and 5, which were not permanently occupied and were used in turn for this purpose. Together with Stairway 2, which served the floors above the peeling room, they were the closest blocks to the "Grand Exit" of the camp. Each of the twenty-two blocks bore the number of one of the twenty-two staircases that crossed it. (p.142)



Source: [Mémorial de Drancy](#)

Francine: But I'm going to see something abominable there. It's the departure of the children. Because the departure of the adults, it's abominable but I don't ... there too, I live a little bit in my world because I have Mom. I've always said that I was fortunate, but it's true. You are fortunate when you have your mother. And, I have Mom. So I have to explain why I have Mom and why I'm going to keep her. That's when I find out that I'm going to keep her. My father was a prisoner of war. In Europe there is what is called the Geneva Convention. The Geneva Convention is always signed by the belligerents. It allows a respect, a respect for the prisoner, that is to say that if the Germans take a French prisoner, they agree to respect him, not to shoot him if he escapes. The same thing on the other side. This Geneva Convention says that the family of the prisoner must be respected. So, my father being a prisoner of war, one must respect his family. Well, we're Jewish. That's going to be a problem. So we were arrested at the demarcation line because we had crossed the line, which was punishable by, I believe, 15 days in prison. But after 15 days, we were kept because we were Jewish. But, we will have a different fate and this is where I have to talk about the children. So, in the middle of the barbed wire, in Drancy, I will see herds of children arrive, because you can't call it anything else. They are herds of children. I will know later that they are the children of foreign Jews. They were separated from their parents. And I see them arrive there, some of them tied with ropes. They are all dirty. Some of them are covered with sores. They almost all look dazed. We try to approach them when we can. We ask them what their names are. They don't even know it anymore. The big ones try to take care of the little ones. Some carry them. It's something abominable, these children, these herds of children. So I was really afraid and I threw myself into my mother's arms. I remember very, very well that I threw myself into my mother's arms, shouting, "But not me, not me, Mom! Not me?" "No, no, not you." But after all, why? I was still afraid.



20 - Arrivée des enfants

Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC.
Toute reproduction interdite

Arrival of the children (drawing by Georges Horan-Koiransky)

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

It is so horrible these children, without parents, in such a state, who are taken away in the morning. So I am not taken away because I am respected, I am a prisoner's daughter. But I am a Jew. What are they going to do with us? We will be kept. And they're going to keep us in a slightly different way. We were only going to stay in Drancy for three weeks. And from Drancy, we were sent to Pithiviers.

Marcelle During the permitted hours, Francine played in the yard with other kids. One morning, she went back to the room, shaking with sobs. "Mama! Look out the window! All that group of children! The youngest are two or three years old, the oldest about ten. They no longer have a mother or father. Are they too going to leave for Pitchipoi?" All my life, I will hear the exclamation that bursts from Francine's throat after this explanation: "I can't! Mom I can't!"



A painting by G. Horan-Koiransky
Sources : [Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah](#)

With the other women in my room, we looked out the window. The children had gotten off the buses that had brought them and were walking in the middle of the yard. The older ones were pulling the younger ones by the hand. Among the latter, several were tied by a string tied around their necks. Two or three hundred children entered that day. In the following days, we saw more and more of them arrive. They had been arrested with their parents during the great round-up of July 16, and then transported to Pithiviers, where they had been separated from their fathers and mothers, who had left for deportation. The youngest, given their age, did not know their names. You could hear them shouting: "Mama!", crying, laughing less often, bickering with the adults who were trying to direct them. Some carried small bundles. The others had no luggage. In their turn, these innocent people left for Pitchipoi... (p.145)

Interviewer: Sorry to interrupt, we're going to move on to the third tape.

TAPE 3 [transcription starts at 00'58]

Francine: Drancy is separated into several blocks, so we are in a different block. And, I have to say why we approach them, how we approach them... I don't know. Is it by going to the infamous "red castle"? Is it by going down to do chores, maybe to get food? Was it on the way down to do the chores⁴³ that we were doing? It's possible. But I know that 2-3 times it happened that we could approach them.



Reading to children. Portrait of René Blum.

Source: *Le camp de Drancy, seuil de l'enfer juif. Dessins et estampes* [The camp of Drancy, threshold of the Jewish hell. Drawings and prints], 1942-1947.

Interviewer: Were they locked up somewhere?

⁴³ «Mother peels vegetables in the « cook-house » for hours at a time. Standing up. Among the vegetables peelers is a handsome, distinguished elderly gentleman whose memories help them forget their painful, sometimes bleeding, hands. He is a great musicologist and the ex-director of the Monte-Carlo Ballet. His name is **René Blum** (1878 - 1942), brother of Léon Blum (he would die in Germany). » *From a World Apart* (p.30)

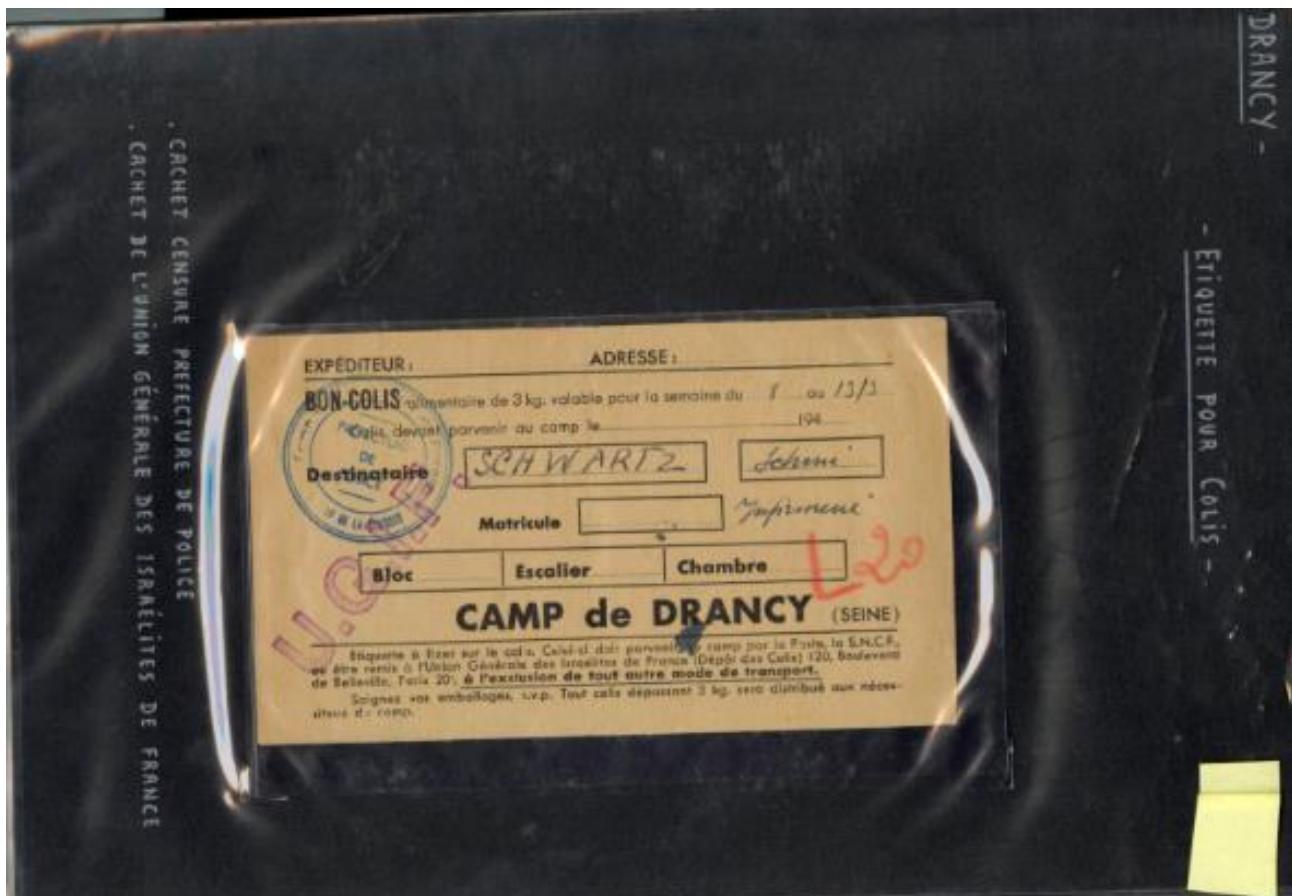
Francine: Yes, they are in the center of this courtyard of Drancy, where there is this famous barbed wire, where they put all the people leaving. So, as they are leaving, they are there in the middle of this barbed wire.

Interviewer: When they arrived, how long did they stay?

Francine: I don't know. That I can't say. I don't remember that. It's impossible. No, I only see the horror, I only see the panic that this could happen to me, that I could be separated from my mother and that the same thing could happen to me. And that's when I'm going to learn, when I'm going to see these herds of children being transported, that's when I'm going to learn that they're leaving me with my mother and that they don't intend to make us leave. Where are they going? I don't know.

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, how is the correspondence between your mother and father going?

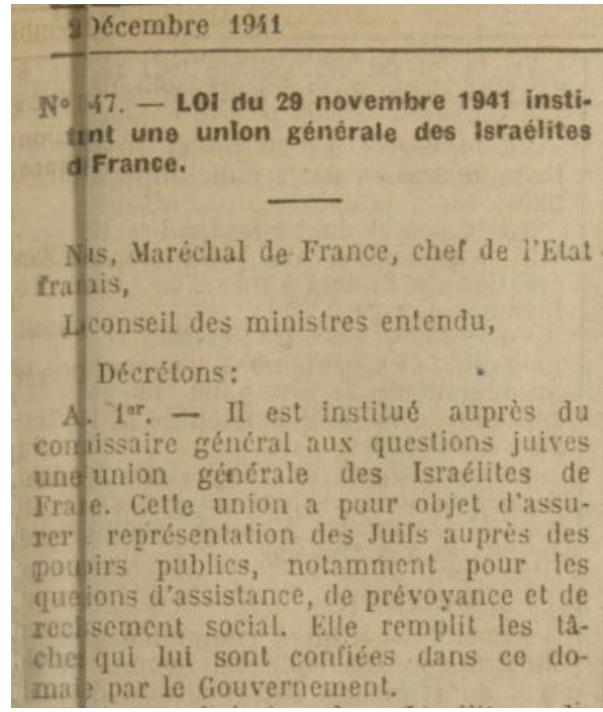
Francine: At Drancy, I can't tell you, I don't remember. I can tell you later. I know that my mother has news from my grandmother because my grandmother still lives in Paris and there are always... anyway, there have always been people who are very kind who, at the risk of their lives, pass on mail. So my father found out that we were arrested. He first learned it from my grandmother and then I think he learned it officially because he was told, "There is no more question of escape for you, otherwise it is your wife and your daughter, whom we have in our hands, who would be the ones to suffer." So he knows that he must not escape. But to tell you from Drancy how the correspondence goes, there is inevitably some because to prove that my mother is a prisoner's wife, she must therefore present letters from my father. But to tell you how it happened, I don't remember.



Package slip for the Drancy camp

Source: [Cherrystone Auctions](#)

Marcelle Sometimes no mail arrived at Drancy; sometimes we could correspond with our families, depending on the mood of our head guards. And even receive packages, fixed at three kilos. We had special labels which, in addition to the essential information (name and address of the sender, number, room and staircase of the addressee) bore this sentence: "Parcels for Drancy are received, 120 boulevard de Belleville". This was the headquarters of the "Union générale des Israélites de France". The U.G.I.F., as it was called, was a shortened version. What did this organization represent? A deception. Since 1941, the "General Commission for Jewish Questions" had been operating in Paris. Appointed by the Vichy government, the former deputy Xavier Vallat headed it. He was the creator of the U.G.I.F., which he said was intended to defend our interests. In fact, the General Union facilitated the arrests, since it knew the addresses of the Jews. (p.145)



Extract from the law of November 29, 1941 instituting the U.G.I.F.

Source: [Retronews](#)

It is thus at the head office of the U.G.I.F., boulevard de Belleville, that my mother had to bring the parcels which she intended for me. She risked a lot by doing this. The German police were watching the U.G.I.F. and did not hesitate to arrest its visitors. This danger did not slow down the audacity of my good mother. She sent us woollens, linen, shoes, foodstuffs, school books for the little one. And she sent me back our yellow stars, which had been left at Mrs. Avy's house on the evening of our departure from Paris. The camp management obliged us to wear them. (p. 146)

Francine: So, after Drancy, we left for Pithiviers.

Interviewer: Can you specify the date?

Francine: Three weeks later, if you calculate, so it's July-August, or something like that.⁴⁴ Summer, well I don't remember exactly. Where do I celebrate my birthday? I don't remember. So, we arrive in Pithiviers.

⁴⁴ Marcelle and Francine are transferred to Pithiviers in late August 1942.

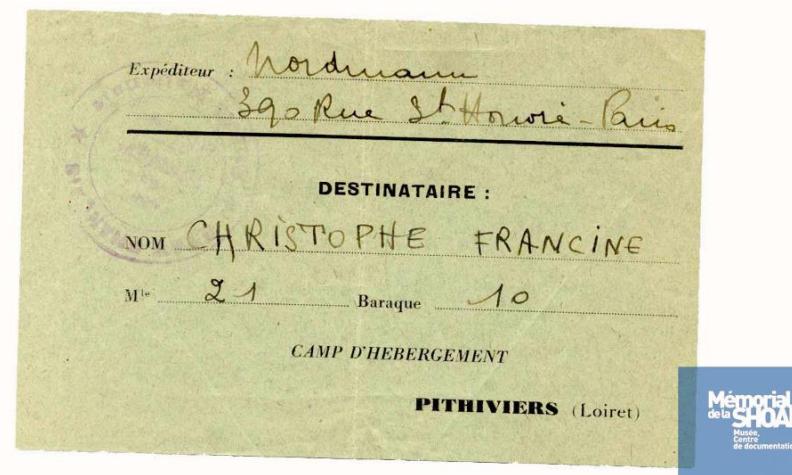


Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S69236
Foto: o. Ang. | 1941

The Pithiviers camp in 1941

Source: [Bundesarchiv](#)

In my memory, Pithiviers⁴⁵ was a camp where only French Jews were put because French Jews were beginning to be arrested. Until then, it was foreign Jews. The French Jews began to be arrested and the camp filled up little by little.



Slip of a parcel sent to Francine by her grandmother
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

⁴⁵ See [report](#) from November 1941 for detailed description of the organization of the Pithiviers camp

We met a woman named Madelon Lang whose husband would soon be in the same camp as my father. He is not there yet, but we know that the husband is a prisoner. She was arrested with her son and she left Drancy for Pithiviers with us. And in Pithiviers, she saw her sister and two of her nephews.⁴⁶ And in Pithiviers, we see an uncle.



A photo of Edmond Nordmann, Maurice Evard and Marcelle Christophe in 1934.

Source: F. Christophe

⁴⁶ Madeleine Lang née Bens[o]ussan (1916 - 2013) was born in Salonika. She was married to Pierre Napoléon Lang (1912 - 2000), officer prisoner in the same oflag as Robert Christophe. Their address was 12 rue Leconte de l'Isle. Madeleine was deported with her son, Jean-Claude (1939 - 1995), in convoy 80A on May 2, 1944 to Bergen-Belsen. Madeleine's sister, Letizia, was married to Jean Ferdinand Gattegno (1906 - 1942). They lived at 16 avenue de Villiers. Jean was deported from Compiègne in convoy 1 on March 27, 1942. Letizia (1911-1942) was deported from Pithiviers with their children, André Jacques (1936-1942) and Éliane France (1939-1942), on September 21, 1942, in convoy 35. A third child escaped arrest.

So, we see a number of people. And, my memories are vague in Pithiviers. I just remember that the camp was guarded by French gendarmes. And I remember that in Pithiviers, there was a dreadful deportation. There, I was really very, very afraid. A terrible deportation. And in that very deportation, Madelon's sister and nephews and my uncle Maurice Evard left. And I was listed to leave in this deportation. This was not at all normal since I had the status of a prisoner's daughter. I was supposed to stay in Pithiviers. And when they read aloud the list, my mother obviously blamed herself. She ran around the camp like a madwoman, holding my hand to see what was going on. "What's going on? What does this mean? Why does my daughter have to go and not me? What's wrong?" Do you realize how upset we were? We were absolutely distraught. And we addressed the gendarmes, "But we don't know! We don't know!" And here I must tell you that my paternal grandmother, Nina, was a very young widow after my grandfather Léon Christophe died and she had remarried to a Catholic who was a colonel in the gendarmerie. His name was Charles Streiff. I considered Charles Streiff⁴⁷ my grandfather since I had never known my real grandfather. And he considered me his granddaughter.

⁴⁷ In her book, Francine recounts: "As soon as he was informed of our arrest, [Streiff] left for Vichy, where Marshal Pétain, whom he had known for a long time, received him. Tonton entered the office, and Pétain was sitting down, compiling posters for Mother's Day. Tonton talks, explains, tells. Pétain does not flinch. Then, Tonton, at the end of his arguments, pointing to the posters, says: "But it's also about a mother, and her child." Philippe Pétain raises his head: "Bah! Jews..." he says. So we will not be liberated." (p.45)



Nina and Charles Streiff

Source: [Geni](#)

Francine: And this marriage will allow my grandmother to be saved as an Aryan spouse. And so this surrogate grandfather was a Catholic, I told you, and as a former colonel of the gendarmerie, my mother thought that perhaps he was still known among the gendarmes who guarded us. And so she went to ask and she found a gendarme who actually remembered Colonel Charles Streiff very, very well. And to tell you exactly how it happened... well... because there were some who had told my mother, "But send her to the search, you'll get her back afterwards!" But we knew very well that once we were caught in the path of the search, then it was over. That was it. So, thanks to this gendarme who knew Uncle Charles, that's what I called him, finally I managed to be taken off the list. Well, we know very well that all the people on that train died. There were no survivors. So that was one of the first miracles of my deportation. And so I was saved. The night of the deportation, I remember, that camp that was empty and there was straw everywhere, that's all I remember, that camp. I can't describe it. I remember this appalling emptiness, this misery of emptiness. This camp that had been full of people, there was nothing left. There was Madelon, there was her son, there was Mom, there was me. Were there others? That's all I see. There was the search barrack and the search was done by boys who were 20 years old, who were French, who were what we

called Darnand's "black shirts."⁴⁸ I remember that my mother went into the barracks and took... she picked up one or two things, including a watercolor representing the Gurs camp.⁴⁹ No, I'm talking nonsense, that watercolor, she picked it up after the search in Drancy. She picked up a small object that belonged to a lady. This little object, the lady was very fond of it. It was a family memento and Mom picked it up, and we still have it. Because the lady didn't come back, of course. And Mom couldn't help but say to those boys, who were from her country, "How good your 20s look!" A miracle, she was only kicked out. They could have done worse. Well. That's all I can say about Pithiviers.



Soldiers of the Milice Française of Joseph Darnand

Source: [Alamy](#)

Image ID: E1ENPY
[www.alamy.com](#)

Marcelle

From Drancy, buses took us to the Bobigny station. And cattle cars, attached to a passenger

⁴⁸ Reference to the black shirts of Joseph Darnand's Milice Française.

⁴⁹ Internment camp built in the Basses-Pyrénées by the Daladier government in 1939 for Spanish Republicans. From 1940, the camp was used to intern Jews before their deportation to Drancy and then to the East.

train, to the one in Pithiviers. Our number reached several hundred people. (...) A few days later, another arrival from Drancy brought me back to Maurice Evard, René Blum and Théodore Valensi.⁵⁰ Happy to see them again, I was naive enough to believe that they would not be deported any more than my daughter and me. But contrary to the promise made at Drancy before our departure, Pithiviers was not a way out. A boarding for Pitchipoï shook our confidence.



Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Théodore Valensi
Source: [Gallica](#)

The French authorities announced it the day before, for the next day. The next day was the day of Yom Kippur, the biggest religious holiday in Judaism. People were prepared to obey the rite by not eating, praying all day and not traveling! And now they were told that they would have to make the most inhumane journey! A feeling of revolt gripped the whole camp. At the end of the day, the news rang out: the deportation would not take place. Immediately there was an extraordinary joy. Although I was not religious by nature nor by education, I let myself be won over by this joy. Two or three hours later the counter-order arrived: the deportation would indeed take place on that date; and an infinite, dramatic sadness tightened the throat of all the internees.

⁵⁰ Théodore Valensi was born on June 21, 1886 in Tunis (Tunisia). He was a lawyer of the bar of Paris. He lived at 31 bis Boulevard Saint-Martin in the 10th arrondissement in Paris. He was arrested on August 21, 1941 in Paris and interned in the Drancy camp (Seine-Saint-Denis). He was married to a non-Jewish woman. After a stay at the Tenon hospital (15/10/1941), then at the Rothschild hospital (12/12/1941), he was returned to the Drancy camp on 09/04/1942, to be transferred to the Pithiviers camp (Loiret) on 01/09/1942, and returned to the Drancy camp on 12/07/1943. He was deported via Cherbourg (Manche) to the Anglo-Norman island of Alderney on August 12, 1943. He was returned to the Drancy camp and transferred to the Picpus camp and then to the Lambardie camp on June 21, 1944. He was returned to Drancy on July 17, 1944 until the camp was liberated on August 18, 1944. Théodore Valensi died on September 10, 1959 in Nice (Alpes-Maritimes, France). Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

The night passed. The next day, Francine and I attended the roll call of the departed. The French gendarme who was calling out the names, reading them from a list, called out my daughter's name. She and I looked at each other in panic. Had we misunderstood? At my request, the gendarme repeated, "CHRISTOPHE Francine. "The little one and I," I said to the reader, "are child and wife of a prisoner of war. At Drancy, I was promised that as such we would not be deported or separated. - It is not me, he replied, who drew up this was! Always give the little one. Afterwards, you will go to claim her. Older companions advised me not to obey. "If you give your daughter away, you will never see her again.

At the end of the camp stood the gendarmerie house. Pulling Francine by the hand, I ran towards this shack. The officer who greeted us heard a lot! Referring to my husband, a lieutenant and prisoner of war, my brother-in-law, a captain, and my father-in-law, a colonel in the gendarmerie, I told him that to get the girl away from me, he would have to kill me, kill us both. Impressed by my anger, the officer finally recognized that there was a mistake, and struck Francine off the list. She and I left there exhausted. We fell to the side of the road, embracing each other, crying our eyes out. (pp.147-148)

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, you are nine years old. We are in 42?

Francine: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you, your mother, or the two of you know about the destination of this train⁵¹

Francine: Me, nothing. Me, nothing at all. Since then, I have heard. After the war, my mother told me that before she was arrested, she had heard, because she went to our groundskeepers, our special concierges Mr.

⁵¹ Convoy from Pithiviers or Beaune-la-Rolande to Auschwitz -
Convoy 4 (June 25, 1942): 1000 deportees, 80 survivors
Convoy 6 (July 17, 1942): 928 deportees, 99 survivors
Convoy 13 (July 31, 1942): 1052 deportees, 21 survivors
Convoy 14 (August 3, 1942): 1034 deportees, 5 survivors
Convoy 15 (August 5, 1942): 1014 deportees, 10 survivors
Convoy 35 (September 21, 1942): 1000 deportees, 37 survivors - stopped at Coseł, in Silesia, where 200 deportees were requisitioned to work.
Source: [Convois du Loiret](#)

and Mrs. Beau, they listened to the English radio and she went to listen to it in secret at their place like other people in the building who hid, in the evening. We put blankets against the doors so that... and then we turn the English radio on so that no one would hear because it was obviously dangerous. We could be shot for that. She had heard on the English radio that Jews were being transported to Germany and that they were being killed. And my mother knew that Jews were being killed in Germany. And she never told anybody. And even later, when I tell you what she did, she never said it. She couldn't say it. That would have been worse. And she knew. But I didn't.



The story as published by the Daily Telegraph on 25 June 1942

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, how long did you stay in this camp?

Francine: So, I don't remember how long we stayed in Pithiviers. I put it in my book but... because I wrote it right afterwards but now I don't remember how long I stayed in Pithiviers.

Interviewer: You remember if...

Francine: Maybe 15 days, maybe something like that, maybe 15 days-3 weeks. As much as in Drancy I think. I don't know anymore. Now I'm talking nonsense. Since I passed 60, my memory is not so good anymore. Finally, from Pithiviers, we went to Beaune-la-Rolande.⁵²

Marcelle A train of cattle cars took us to Beaune-la-Rolande. It took twenty-four hours to cover the sixteen kilometers of railroad tracks. In the convoy were Madelon Lang and her son. Wife and child of a prisoner of war, they were, like Francine and me, "in deportable". At least we were promised that.

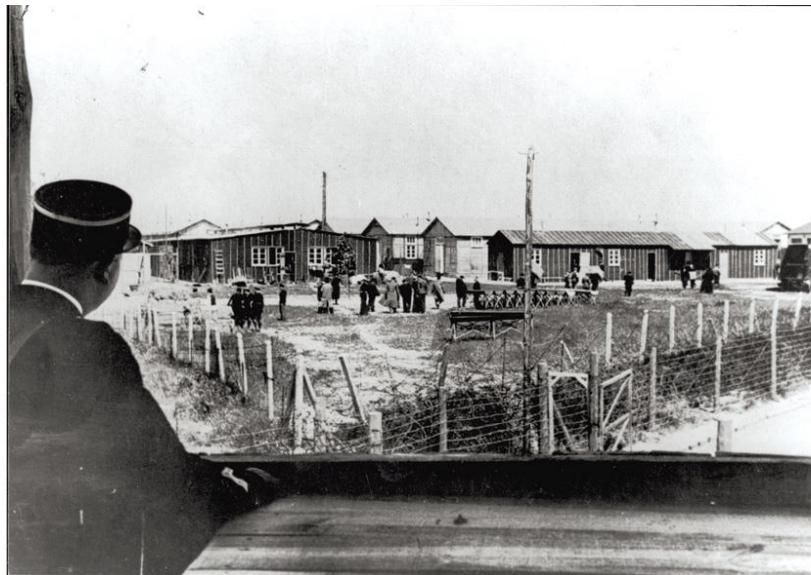
This assurance also applied to "Aryan spouses" of both sexes and to internees who, claiming to be non-Jews, were classified as "doubtful cases.

The members of the latter categories stayed only forty-eight hours in Beaune. Then they left for Drancy. Among them, Me Théodore Valensi. And there were only six women left in our new camp. (p.150)

Francine: And Beaune-la Rolande⁵³, I make everyone laugh when I say that it is happiness. A certain happiness. That is to say that, for several months, I have led such a horrible life, I have seen such abominable things. I saw people beaten, of course, in Drancy. I saw crazy children being separated from their parents, and separated in such a way. I was hungry. I was dirty, I lived in horror, in filth, among the rats. I was afraid, I was guarded by people with guns. I have seen so many abominable things that arriving in Beaune-la-Rolande seems to me a kind of paradise. Because in Beaune-la-Rolande, we are guarded by French customs officers who don't look mean. For some of them, they are even very unhappy to be doing what they're doing.

⁵² During September 1942

⁵³ See [report](#) from November 1941 with detailed description of the organization of the Beaune-la-Rolande camp



The Beaune-la-Rolande Camp

Source: [Cercil](#)

Beaune-la-Rolande is a camp, of course, I know what a camp is. But it's a camp in the French countryside, it's a camp in the middle of the fields. There are apple trees all around. We can wash ourselves in Beaune-la-Rolande. And we are very few, for the moment. The camp was going to fill up, but there were so few of us, at the beginning, that we filled one barrack, only one barrack, which we cut in two, one half for the men and one half for the women. In fact, something abominable happened in Beaune-la-Rolande, before us. But I am only half aware of it because seeing the apple trees makes me so happy. What happened is that the children that I saw in Drancy, that was where they came from, from Beaune-la-Rolande. It was often there that they had been separated from their mother. In Beaune-la-Rolande, there must have been tons of blankets, disgusting, soiled by all those children. And Mama and Madelon were forced to wash these blankets for days and days in cold water. They scrubbed them. They had two French nurses as bosses who gave them a piece of chocolate to congratulate them when they had worked well.

Interviewer: Why do you say forced, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: Because it's forced labor.

Interviewer: But only them?

Francine: Yes, because they are the only ones at the beginning. When the other people arrive, the blankets will be washed. And the nurses will leave. They will be replaced by wonderful women. Two women from the French Red Cross, one is Protestant, the other is Catholic: Mademoiselle Monod,⁵⁴ Mademoiselle Roland.⁵⁵ And they will really do everything they can to improve our life in Beaune-la-Rolande. They will bring us things from outside. They will carry mail, that's very important. Carrying messages. They were wonderful.



Annette Monod (centre) au camp de Pithiviers

Source: [Le Cercil](#)

⁵⁴ Read the testimony of [Annette Monod](#)

⁵⁵ Madeleine Rolland (1891-1964), originally from Pithiviers, was a nurse and later a social worker for the Red Cross. Many survivors of the Beaune-la-Rolande camp speak of her generous presence, like [Raymonde Frazier](#) (née Nowodworski):

"So mademoiselle Rolland was like a fairy for us. She came with chocolate. She had cans, cans of chocolate cream and then little cakes. So when she came it was really a party. We had this, she came to see us, she had a big navy blue cape like we were wearing at that time."

Source: [La République du Centre](#)

Marcelle *I said a painful goodbye [to my cousin Evard]. Maurice entrusted me his watch. I promised him to have it given, if possible, to his wife, And I was going to be able, a few days later, to entrust it to a delegate of the Red Cross (Miss Monod or Miss Rolland, I do not know which), who was able to join my cousin. (p. 148)*

Francine: And then, there is also another person named Mademoiselle Hautval.⁵⁶ I don't remember well, but I know that she was a Catholic,⁵⁷ a friend of the Jews, who was also going to be... I don't even know if she was going to be the first head of the barracks, but that I found out later, I don't remember very well.



Source: [France Culture](#)

Marcelle *The barrack leader was a Christian doctor, Miss Adélaïde Hautval. Wearing the FRIEND OF THE JEWS banner on her chest, she had saved a number of them at the demarcation line and in other circumstances. Thanks to the sympathy emanating from her and to her great intelligence, "my brain becomes again that of a literary woman - I noted again for my mother -, and we can discuss interesting subjects, chat books during the rains. (p. 151)*

⁵⁶ A psychiatrist, Adélaïde Hautval (1906-1988), known to her family as Haïdi, was arrested when she tried to cross into the occupied zone. In her cell, she showed solidarity with a Jewish woman incarcerated with her yellow star. Outraged by this marking, Adélaïde made a paper one for herself. In retaliation, the German authorities declared her a "Friend of the Jews" and interned her in the "camps for Jews" of Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande, before deporting her to Auschwitz-Birkenau and then to Ravensbrück. In Birkenau, she refused to participate in the medical experiments conducted by the German doctors Eduard Wirths and Joseph Mengele. She was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1965. Source: <https://www.yadavashem.org/>

⁵⁷ Adélaïde Hautval was a Protestant.



Haïdi Hautval

Source: [Cercle d'étude de la Déportation et de la Shoah](#)

Francine: Yes, because what I forgot to say about Drancy was that you had to wear your star, of course.

There were Catholics arrested who wore a little banner that said "Friends of the Jews". That's beautiful.

Interviewer: Who were they?

Francine: Catholics or Protestants arrested with Jews.

Interviewer: Do you remember?

Francine: Yes, I see the little banner marked "Friend of the Jews", I see it.



Calico worn by Haïdi Hautval during her deportation

Source: [Yad Vashem](#)

Interviewer: What was the shape of this little banner?

Francine: It's a little long thing like this [Francine gestures]. That I can see. Because one must always wear their star in a camp. At Beaune-la-Rolande, it's a little strange what will happen to us. It's a camp that's a little bit outside of the other camps. We had to wear the star too, but the authorities had forgotten to send them. But as the regulation requires us to wear it anyway, yellow paint is bought and, with a stencil, stars are painted. Stenciled stars are cut out. So we are guarded by customs officers who are from the southwest of France, who have a small note of a regional accent. Except for the chief who is not always nice, the others really do what they can. They are not happy with what they are being made to do. And I was admiring the apple trees. And one morning, when I woke up, at the end of my bed, there was a bag, that is to say an official customs officer's bag, which was full of apples. It is a customs officer who is a father and who went to get some apples and put them at the end of my bed. This too is risky. It is also an act of resistance to bring apples to a little Jewish girl. There are several customs officers who do things like that. By the way, I forgot to tell you that when I was arrested in La Rochefoucauld, there was a gendarme who was very nice. My mother told him - she told him that she was the daughter-in-law of Colonel Charles Streiff, a gendarmerie colonel, and he had known him too - and she said to him: "I am with a child. I need a towel. Would you please go and buy me a towel? And then, would you mind going to the pharmacy and buying me something with vitamins for my daughter, a pick-me-up?" And the policeman went to buy me vitamin pellets and then he brought back two towels saying, "The stores are closed, I'm bringing you two towels from my trousseau. My wife gave them to me, you keep them." And we were left with the towels embroidered with his initials by his wife. That's beautiful too. There were people like that, fortunately.

Marcelle My poor kid had head lice. I had to cut her hair very short: a tragedy for her. And the lack of food having caused impetigo on her scalp, I had to remove the scabs with my hand, using an ointment that I could get.

With her, however, a small tragedy of not understanding was going to make me suffer. I find this allusion in a letter to my mother: "What is terrible between the little one and me is that, in her mind, I have lost the mystery of the mother. We take showers together; she sees me defleaing; she has suffered the same offenses as I have; she has shared the same painful hours since La Rochefoucauld and, in her little nine-year-old brain, imagines that she is my equal. She hardly respects me and no longer obeys me."

I could no longer find the strength or the appetite to crack down. I could not deprive her of dessert or toys: the poor child had no more desserts or toys. To scold her? More often I kissed her (pp. 151-152).

Francine: So at Beaune-la-Rolande, as people were arrested, the camp filled up. But anyway... I remember very well that the camp was still empty for Christmas, because for Christmas, Mademoiselle Rolland, one of the two ladies of the Red Cross, bought a small pot of flowers that the women of the barracks - my mother had already been appointed head of the barracks... Yes, elected head of the barrack by all the companions - and the comrades read her a compliment⁵⁸ and offered her this flowerpot that Miss Rolland went to buy. And there was a lady, called Mrs. Montefiore⁵⁹, who writes very nicely, and who writes her a compliment that ends with "Hurray for our barrack leader!"⁶⁰

123	1 { Montefiore	2 { Bedin	Jeanne	1877	Paris VIII ^e	M	riant	
			Mo Berthe	1894	2 ^r Ch ^e	C	lame a tout faire	16 R. Civry

Jeanne Montefiore resided at 16 rue de Civry during their census of 1936

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 642 - Auteuil- vue 208/303)

⁵⁸ "Accept, Mrs. Christophe, this modest gift with the testimony of our deep and warm sympathy. May it always prove to you our deepest gratitude for all the devotion you have always shown. May your self-sacrifice and your complete forgetfulness of yourself in these days of trial, in these conditions of life so painful, be rewarded, and may the new year be merciful and favorable in the sense that it will see, soon after its birth, the return of your dear prisoner, and that a beneficial peace will then reign in your regained home. All your "boarders" of barrack 16 bis."

⁵⁹ Jeanne Montefiore (née Machiels) was born on December 20th, 1877. She lived at 16 rue de Civry in the 16th arrondissement. She was deported from Drancy on July 18th, 1943 on convoy 57. She died in deportation.

⁶⁰

Compliment of New Year's Day 1943 / When we have a sore knee, / Lice, or even nothing at all / We look for Madame Christophe! / For a migraine or a cockroach / To find the powder or blush / A piece of thread or a piece of cloth. / She opens to her ungrateful sisters / A small suitcase, and a big heart, / And puts an end to their quarrels. / Her sceptre is a small broom / Which often, alas, disappears / In the bosom of her rebellious subjects. / She knows as well as a Paul or a Joseph / How to empty a garbage can and fill a ladle / How to impose silence at bedtime / How to command with a short tone / How to make her fingers glide over the keys of the piano / And put a smile on our guards' faces / While remaining a leader / And if sometimes we abuse her gentleness, and deserve / A blow of the cane or a truncheon, / We have to ask for her forgiveness / And shout all in unison: / Hurray! our barracks leader.

And on the 31st, at midnight, we knock on the partition and the men, on the other side, in the other part of the barrack wish us a Happy New Year. We did not lose our morale. We are convinced that we will soon be released, that it will not last. We are sure.

MARIAGES

— On a célébré, hier, au temple de la rue de la Victoire, le mariage de M. Raoul Montefiore, avec Mlle Jeanne Machiels. M. Zadoc Kahn, grand rabbin de France, a adressé une touchante allocution aux jeunes époux dont il connaît depuis longtemps les deux familles. Reconnu dans le cortège nuptial et dans l'assistance, très restreinte en raison de la mort récente de la princesse Ferdinand de Lucinge-Faucigny, née Cahen d'Anvers, cousine des mariés :

Mmes de Ricei, Gaston Hesse, Louis et Albert Cahen d'Anvers, Hendlé, comtesse de Camondo; MM. Eugène d'Eichtal, baron de Machiels, Albert Cahen d'Anvers, Edouard Demeure, marquis de Torre-Alfina, Albert Dubois; baronnes de Rothschild, baronne de Koenigswarter, baronne de Machiels; Mmes Emile Javal, Alexandre Ellissen, Porgès, Kann, Flahaut, Halphen, Deutsch de La Meurthe, Ephrussi, Guillaume Beer, Bourget, Lina Koenigswarter, de Reinach, Kohn; MM. Bamberger, Stern, Ephrussi, Porgès, de Saint-Julien, de Goldschmidt, Obermayer, Bousquet, Bertier, Oppert, de Berly, de Romilly, Sarchi, comte de Forceville, etc.

La quête a été faite par Mlles de Machiels, Kann, de Ricci, Hadamard, de Camondo et Hesse.

Le Figaro on December 22, 1899

Source : [Retronews](#)

Marcelle Cut by a partition, our barrack had two rooms: one for the men, the other for the women. I was in charge of the second. In the first room, there were magistrates and lawyers whose names I don't remember. Also, a general engineer of the navy, the admiral Kanapa. A banker of great intellectual culture, Mr. Christian Lazard. The pianist Léon Kartoun (sic)⁶¹, of world fame. The playwright Max Viterbo, former director of "La Cigale". And then

⁶¹ Léon Kartoun (1895-1981) Arrested in July 1942 in Hagetmau (Landes), he was interned in the Camp de Beaudésert (Mériméac, Gironde), then in Drancy from August 26th. A week later, he was transferred to Pithiviers, then to Beaune-la-Rolande on September 25th, 1942.

As the "spouse of an Aryan woman", Léon Kartoun was "provisionally non-deportable". In Beaune, "Kartoun, stoic and bitter, was in charge of garbage collection every morning. I could see him coming from afar, with two comrades who were pulling the dump truck. Kartoun had thick gloves with which he tried to protect his hands, his precious pianist's hands which, so many times in Paris, had given us hours of enchantment... (...) Kartoun, carelessly, with his only gloved hand, picked up the garbage... ". Poof, poof, poof", he sang absentmindedly. And I knew he was composing his symphony. (Madeleine Fauconneau du Fresne in *De l'enfer des hommes à la cité de Dieu*, Éditions SPES, 1947.) Back in Drancy

shopkeepers, workers, and finally a mobile guard (I think they didn't say C.R.S. yet). Arrested in uniform, he was casting sad glances at the gendarmes (his comrades!) who were standing guard beyond the barbed wire. All these captives were doing the big chores of the camp. I still see Leon Kartoun (sic) sweeping with dignity. (p.164)



Léon Kartun

[Léon Kartun & his orchestra - "What a quickness" - 1933](#)

on July 12th, 1943, Léon Kartun was transferred to Cherbourg on the 16th, then deported from August 12th, 1943 to September 2nd, 1944 to the Channel Island of Aurigny (Alderney) where the Todt organization needed manpower to build the Atlantic Wall. Evacuated to the mainland by the Germans in May 1944, he escaped from Questrecques (Pas-de-Calais) in early September. In 1949, he testified at the trial of the two SS officers responsible for the Nordeney camp in Alderney. Source: [Musiques régénérées](#)
Read also: Christophe Bennet. *Pianist Léon Kartun, Composer Ralph Erwin: From their celebrity to internment in the French département of Loiret. 2015.*



When my patients gave me a break, I went to talk with Theodore Valensi. A small court surrounded this fine talker, whose poetic erudition delighted us. With him, other lawyers and several magistrates were talking about their memories. What pleasant relaxation in their company! Léon Kartoun (sic) did not display such eloquence. But this world-class pianist gave music theory lessons to children. I saw my Francine take his lessons, and heard her sing in the choirs that he orchestrated (p.186).

Interviewer: Can you specify the year? December 31 of what year?

Francine: So, it's December 31, 42, that's right. 42 and we're going to move to January 1, 43. And so from '43 on, the camp will gradually fill up. We are able to remove the barrack partition because it is going to be filled with women. There will be barracks for men and barracks for women. The camp will fill up with French Jews and we are going to meet people we know. We will see friends, cousins. The camp will fill up. It will become a society. Because French Jews will be arrested. There are people from all professions, all kinds of people. There will be young people, old people. Children, old people, all of them will fill Beaune-

la-Rolande. There will be a kind of society life in Beaune-la-Rolande. So Mama will be appointed head of the barracks. This is where she will reveal herself quite a bit. She, who comes from a bourgeois family with a sympathetic ease, who was raised as a spoiled only child, with a great rigor, a great discipline as it was in those families - this is what allows her to do what she is going to do - but finally a joyful life, she is going to reveal herself as a woman of intelligence and with extraordinary strength, capable of standing up to the authorities, capable of helping all those who will be in sorrow. She will do a wonderful job. She will be a part of the camp: a nurse for a part of our incarceration in Beaune-la-Rolande, and a part of our incarceration as a barrack leader. In both parts, she will have accomplished a colossal job.

Interviewer: Do you feel protected by her?

Francine: Yes, tremendously. I feel protected, in Beaune-la-Rolande, by my mother and protected by my status as the child of a prisoner of war. At that time, we are completely convinced that nothing will happen to us. We know from the mail, from the official mail and from all the mail that arrives secretly - mail that goes through the resistance camps, through people who help, through people from outside - we know that my father is going to great lengths to try to have us freed, that my father is writing everywhere, everywhere. He tries to knock on every door, every authority trying. Really how can you keep a French officer's wife in a camp? When one believes in Pétain, one always believes in him. Fools that we are. We have cousins, who served under Pétain, who were arrested by the French Milice, of course. We still believed in it at that time. My God! We were stupid.

Interviewer: Madame, in Beaune-la-Rolande what do you eat?

Francine: At Beaune-la-Rolande, the camp diet is better than at Drancy. It's not colossal, but you have the right to packages. Having the right to parcels changes everything. And my grandmother must deprive herself - in what way? - but at least she sends us parcels. And then, we collect wild lamb's lettuce and dandelions. It provides nutrition. We make salads with that. When we have parcels, it makes a difference. But the camp's diet is less terrible, I think the soup must be thicker than at Drancy. Maybe we get more bread than at Drancy.

Interviewer: You are not too hungry?

Francine: No. I don't remember being hungry in Beaune-la-Rolande because of the packages. And you know, it's always the same thing, I have my mother. When there is a mother with her child, the one who must be hungry is the mother. Maybe mom is hungry... I don't know. I, with my childish selfishness, eat.

Marcelle *On November 11th, 1942, the situation was very different! The Nazi armies occupied all of France. They were rounding up people in the departments they were passing through. The result for us was that the number of people in Beaune increased.*

The front page of the French newspaper *Le Matin* from November 12, 1942. The masthead features the title "Le Matin" in a large, ornate font, with "LE MIEUX INFORMÉ DES JOURNAUX FRANÇAIS" below it. To the left is a small illustration of the Eiffel Tower. On the right is a map of France with a route marked. The date "JEUDI 12 NOVEMBRE 1942" is at the bottom right. The main headline reads: "Les troupes allemandes traversent la zone non occupée pour défendre les côtes méditerranéennes contre les débarquements immédiats des Anglo-Américains". Below this is a sub-headline: "Un double message du Führer aux Français et au Maréchal Pétain". The left side of the page contains columns of text, including "ABONNEMENTS" rates and a "Dernières nouvelles du monde entier" section. The right side has a "EN SORTANT CE MATIN SACHEZ QUE:" list.

Le Matin on November 12, 1942

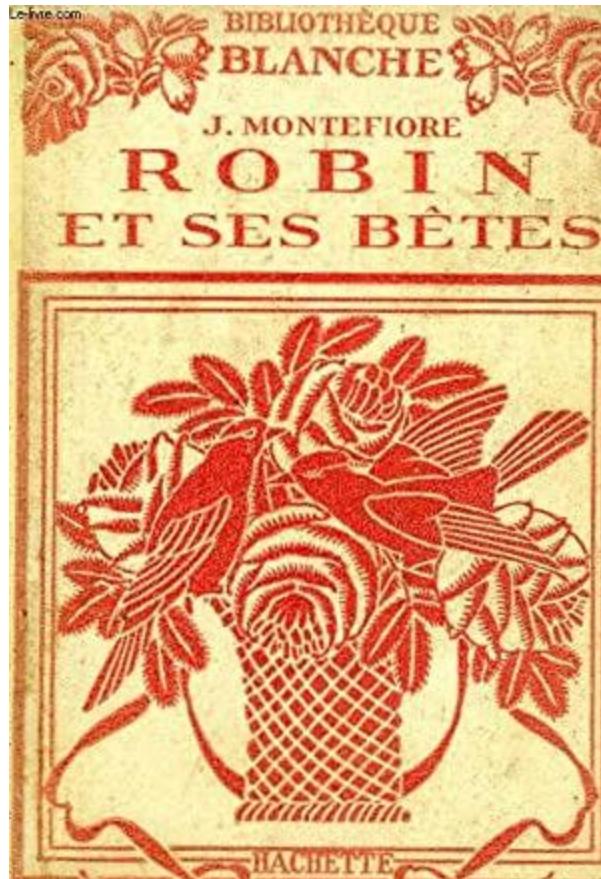
Source : [Retronews](#)

The food for all these people posed problems. In the canteen, which had recently been set up, we could hardly find anything but fruit and Viandox-type products. When warned, the U.G.I.F. sent parcels to internees without families or who refused to compromise relatives or friends by writing to them. A truck from this "General Union" brought a load of food, clothing and blankets. (p. 165)

Interviewer: Are there other children in Beaune-la-Rolande?

Francine: Yes, little by little, there will be. Because little by little, all the prisoners' children arrived at that time. At that time, they decided, the authorities decided to keep the women and children of prisoners, to respect the Geneva Conventions. They are not going to deport us. I think that's when we got the status of hostages. We become hostages. So they keep us in good health because we can be used as a bargaining chip. So, little by little, there will be women and children prisoners and...others. The camp will fill up. There will be a social scene. There will be parties, there will be school. The headmistress of my school on rue Jouffroy, Mme. Périn, will send me books. I was a very good student and she sends my books to Beaune-la-Rolande; my books arrive. There are prisoners who will teach us. I remember two. There are undoubtedly others. There is Mrs. Montefiore⁶², this excessively distinguished old lady who writes poetry so beautiful that she makes us practice in class.

⁶² [Suzanne Vier-Novodorsqui](#), who was interned at the age of 10 with her two sisters, Raymonde and Flore, remembers Jeanne Montéfiore: "I knew, and I remember, Mrs. Montéfiore who tried to teach us: dictations with pencils on pieces of recovered paper (usually un-crumbled packaging), a little French, but above all, a lot of stories that she invented. Every day she kept us on the edge of our seats with what we did not yet call a "serial novel". Mme Montéfiore was our "Comtesse de Ségr". We called her "Grandma". She had written a novel for children, "Robin and his beasts", which she had told us: we had no book. Later, we had "Esther" by Racine that we learned by heart and had to interpret. We didn't perform it, but those plans were a goal in our lives."

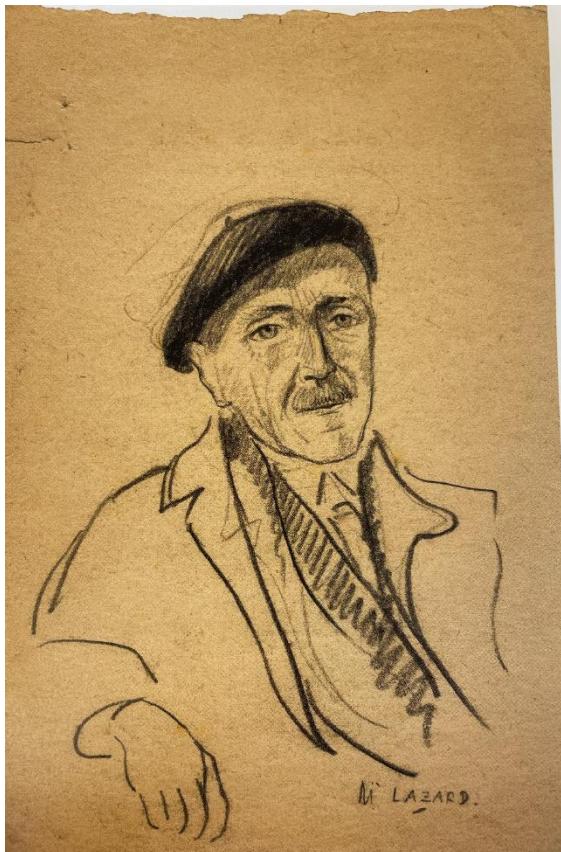


Work by Jeanne Montefiore published in 1931

Source : [abebooks](#)

And the banker Christian Lazard⁶³, who was a good-looking gentleman, who was arrested with his golf breeches and who taught us also.

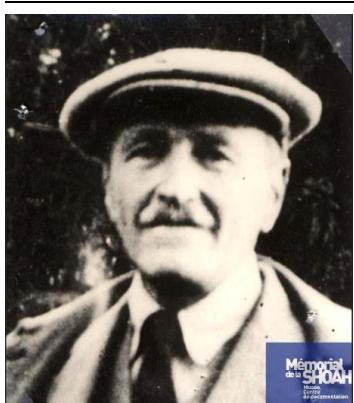
⁶³ Christian Lazard was born on July 15th, 1880. He was the youngest son of Simon Lazard, co-founder of the Lazard bank. He lived in the Château de la Couharde in La-Queue-les-Yvelines, which was Aryanized and administered by M. de Brommer. Arrested in July 1942, he was interned in Drancy, then in Pithiviers and Beaune la Rolande before returning to Drancy. He was part of convoy no. 57 on July 18th, 1943, bound for Auschwitz, from where he did not return. From 1926 to 1942, he kept a journal. The diaries written in captivity reached his wife, Annette May (1883-1976), through the intermediation of a nurse in Drancy. See the work of Cyril Grange (CNRS) on this diary.



Portrait of Christian Lazard by G. Horan-Koiransky

Source: *Le camp de Drancy, seuil de l'enfer juif. Dessins et estampes*

These people want to... maybe that's where our good spelling comes from. Thanks to them. Because they have a strong spirit. And they believe we will be released. We kids need to be able to spell like other kids. They help us. And in Beaune-la-Rolande, I have my Beaune-la-Rolande class notebook. Another miracle. It made it out of the camp. I will show it to you.



Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)



Francine's class notebook

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

My academic level is extraordinary. You'll see - we did science, geography, history, music, spelling, arithmetic. It was at a much higher level than my grandchildren, who are the same age. And there are songs in there. Among others, a beautiful song that is full of hope. I should have taken it and sung it to you. Do you want me to get it for you and sing it? Because this song is very beautiful, it has lyrics... - when you think that all those who sang it, except me, are dead - and it has so much hope! So Beaune-la-Rolande is great. The authorities let us go and get a piano. My mother, who is a remarkable pianist, because before the war she played the piano for 4 to 6 hours a day. My mother will be able to play. She gives a concert. Then we have a lot of people - we have Max Viterbo⁶⁴, an actor at the Cigale, which is a very famous Parisian theater at the time.

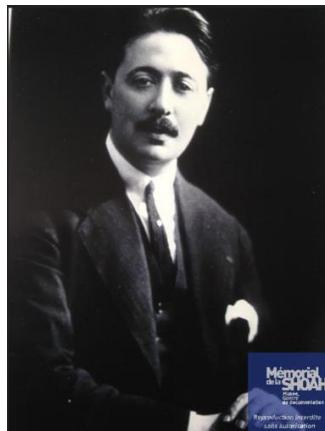
⁶⁴ Read the testimonies of [Suzanne Vier-Novodorqui](#) and [Raymonde Frazier](#) (née Nowodworski) about Max Viterbo (1882-1953) with the children of Beaune-la-Rolande.



Paris qui chante on Novembre 15, 1924

Source: [Retronews](#)

We have Marguerite Solal⁶⁵ who is a little bit of a singer like ... not Edith Piaf but another... I forget. We have a lot of people. We have Marcel Lattès who is a composer⁶⁶.



Marcel Lattès

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

⁶⁵ The opera singer Marguerite Solal was born on August 16th, 1909 in Toulon. She was deported to Auschwitz on convoy 57 on July 18th, 1943. She was then transferred to Ravensbrück from where she returned in 1945. "On Sundays, we used to meet in a large room. I think it was the canteen. There we gave a show: all the talents were used. Marguerite Solal would sing (she would sing roulades for hours at the sinks where the water was so cold, to cultivate her voice which was very beautiful)." Testimony of [Suzanne Vier-Novodorqui](#)

⁶⁶ Marcel Lattès (1886-1943) pianist-composer born in Nice (Alpes-Maritimes, France). A student of André Messager, he won first prize for piano at the Paris Conservatory in 1906. He composed operettas and music for about thirty films. In 1941, he lived at 26, rue Victor-Massé in Paris 9e. He was arrested during the so-called roundup of notables and interned in the Royallieu camp in Compiègne (Oise). Jean-Jacques Bernard, after the war, wrote in "Le Camp de la mort lente" (The Camp of the Slow Death): "The composer Marcel Lattès arrived [at Royallieu] with his hands in his pockets, without a suitcase, without a blanket, smiling, convinced and repeating to everyone that this story was funny and that we would be freed within 24 hours. He was transferred to the Drancy camp, under the number 5338, and assigned to the mattress-making department. He was released after Sacha Guitry and his brother Georges Lattès, a banker, intervened with the German authorities. He was temporarily exempted from wearing the yellow star (because he had been married to Yvonne Colsy, a Catholic, since 1923) and was authorized to compose for the cinema and the theater in derogation of the law known as the "second status of the Jews". On October 4, 1943, Lattès was arrested at his home, in the 9th district near Pigalle, after an argument with a German officer about a woman, outside a nightclub on the Champs-Elysées. He was interned again at the Drancy camp and assigned to the Austerlitz camp in Paris. On November 27, 1943, he was reintegrated into the Drancy camp. He was deported without return by convoy 64, which left the Drancy camp on December 7, 1943, bound for the Auschwitz camp. Sources : [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) et [Operetta Research Center](#)

We have Franck⁶⁷ who is the director of the choirs of the Opera. Well a lot of people, of course. When you arrest the Jews, you get a lot of intellectuals too. So we'll be able to put on a lot of shows, do extraordinary things because a prisoner always puts on shows. It's well known. And we'll do a lot of things. I did a show.⁶⁸ I danced the bourrée auvergnate because I thought myself to be a very good dancer of bourrée auvergnate.

Marcelle Christmas was approaching. Max Viterbo obtained from our guards the loan of a piano, which the men went to seek in town. They prepared a party, by asking me to hold the keyboard. So I wrote to my mother, asking her to enclose Chopin's Nocturnes, Liszt's Rêve d'Amour, and some other scores of a lighter kind with her next package. (...) The party took place. (p.167)

Francine: And then, the spouses of Aryans. Because in Beaune-la-Rolande, there are also the spouses of Aryans, that is to say, men married to Catholics, women as well. Only the Protestants are allowed to have visits. Their spouses could come to see them. There will be some releases. A woman who is, for example, from the family of the Finaly bankers and who will manage to pass herself off as crazy, will manage to get

⁶⁷ Maurice Franck (1897-1983) Professor at the National Conservatory of Music and choirmaster at the Opera. He was a prisoner of war with his brother Paul (1890-1946) in the same Oflag as Robert Christophe. They were liberated on August 14th, 1941. Robert gave them a photo of himself to give to Marcelle when she returned to Paris. "The Franck brothers lived on rue Edouard-Detaille, two or three hundred meters from my house. Knowing from Robert that they would give me his photo, I could not curb my impatience. Instead of waiting for their visit, I went to ring their doorbell. On the picture they gave me, I saw my husband in the middle of seven companions. "His fellow soldiers," one of the brothers said. (A Family in the War, p.89) Maurice was arrested again on December 12th, 1941 in Paris and interned at Camp Royallieu in Compiègne. There he directed a small amateur choir. Transferred to Drancy in 1942, he was released the day Francine and Marcelle arrived there for the first time: "(...) I bumped into Maurice Franck. He said a quick hello and added: "I'm leaving, I'm free! This former companion of Robert's in the Oflag benefited from miraculous luck. His professorship at the Conservatory and his position as conductor at the Opera saved his life. His colleagues and, I believe, a famous singer had been able to secure his release from the Germans. He almost fled, and I understood why: our guards gave out orders so easily." (p.141). The third brother of the Franck family, Louis (1891-1944) was deported from Drancy to Auschwitz on March 27th, 1944 on convoy 70. His wife Jeanne (1900-1944), née Friedmann, was deported from Drancy to Auschwitz with their five children on convoy 69: Gilbert born in 1926, Nicole born in 1927, Robert born in 1928, Claude born in 1930, the twins Lise and Jacqueline born in 1934. Only Gilbert returned. Paul died in 1946. After the war, Maurice was the conductor of the Paris Opera. Sources: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) and [Musiques régénérées](#)

)

out of the camp. There are two or three miracles. It is wonderful. Until the day when, lo and behold, everything changes. And then the word deportation comes back up.



Rosita Finaly's weekly
Source: [Gallica](#)

Marcelle In the infirmary, I was not idle. One morning, they brought me a crazy woman. Née Finaly and related to the director of the "Bank of Paris and the Netherlands", this fifty-year-old was famous, before the war, under the pseudonym of Rosita⁶⁹. Married two or three times, she wrote verses, gave lectures, and shone in the salons. She was less brilliant in Beaune-la-Rolande. Not washing herself, not eating much, she let herself go. Her incoherent words, her nervous gestures, her dirtiness impressed me. I helped Dr. Haas to look after her. One day he said to me: "She's acting: "She is acting. Suddenly an ambulance arrived. Who sent it? I never knew. It took Rosita away and took her to a mental asylum. (I had the opportunity to see her again after the war. And she was not crazy at all! She invited me to her house, quai d'Orsay, where she offered literary matinees. Recalling her stay in Beaune: "Do you think I had them!" she said to me). (p. 185)

TAPE 4

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, would you like to sing us the Beaune-la-Rolande song?

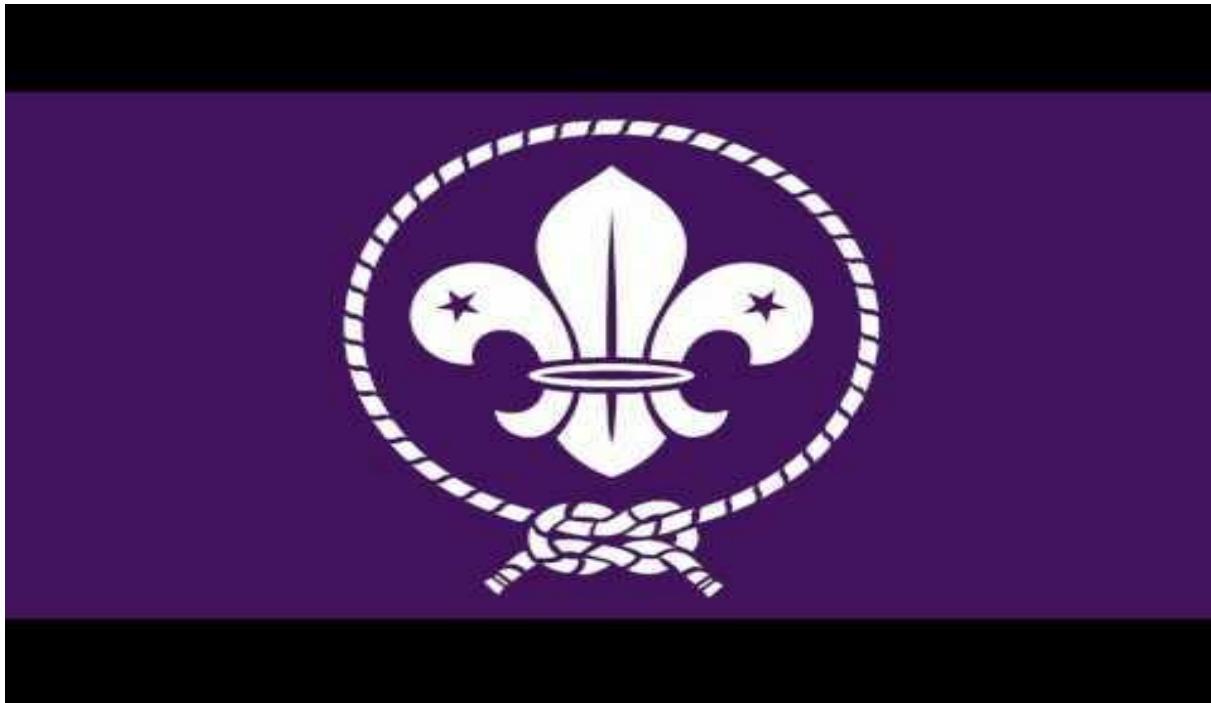
Francine: Yes. I'm going to sing this song because it's a song that was sung by scouts even before the war.

Anyone who had been a scout knew it. So obviously, in Beaune-la-Rolande, I had scouts with me. And it's a

⁶⁹ Rose Anita Finaly (1885-1955), daughter of the banker Hugo Finaly, founder of the Bank of Paris and the Netherlands, woman of letters and creator of the weekly magazine Rolet.

song that is full of hope and I find that with hindsight every word counts when you know what happened after. So this song was taught to me by people who are all dead now, so I'm the only one in the group who is alive.

Unissons nos voix ! • Chants scouts



Let's unite our voices before we leave

I'm going to travel to other places

Life is so sweet and the world so beautiful

Let's sing this last goodbye.

I'm going through the world, taking my joy

And my songs for luggage

I sing love and I sing my faith

I'm going on a very long journey.

I go through the cities and I go through the fields

My heart does not know hate

My pockets are empty and I throw my songs

That ring out high over the plain

And if I meet death on the way

Ripping through the ranks of the beggars

And yes, I leave ready for my last journey

I will say my last goodbye.

I go through the world, taking my joy

And my songs for luggage

I sing love and I sing my faith

I'm going on a very long journey

They all made that long journey, those that sang it with me. I find that every word counts when you know what happened. This song is in my Beaune-la-Rolande school notebook, which is a very special notebook - I'll show you later - because the cover is made of a kind of paper that was used to patch the holes in the barracks when it rained on us. That's all there is to it. So life in Beaune-la-Rolande. It is going to change from one day to the next when the deportations are mentioned. And there, a lot of people to whom I got attached are going to leave. First of all, a first cousin of my mother's named Pierre Nordmann⁷⁰, not even 25 years old, who was arrested at the Spanish border while trying to join de Gaulle.



Pierre Nordmann
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

⁷⁰ Pierre Nordmann (1918-1943). Son of Edmond Nordmann's brother, Armand Nordmann (1878-1957). Pierre was deported from Drancy to the Sobibor camp on March 25, 1943, on convoy 53.

"After all, things aren't that bad here. I have almost enough to eat, I play with my friend Odette [Itelsohn], I pick dandelions behind the toilets, I am an old hand in the camp. Even my cousin Pierre Nordmann comes to join us. Very tall, very blonde, very handsome, twenty years old. Dressed in a sheepskin jacket, taken at the Spanish border, trying to join de Gaulle's forces." (p.42)

And then a lot of people who have become my friends. A gentleman I call Léni⁷¹, a Jewish policeman who is deported in his uniform. And then, a lot of people I love. And then I start to be afraid again. I stayed in Beaune-la-Rolande for almost a year and I was never afraid. But now, here it is, it starts again. When I see all these people leaving, it starts again. And then, it will be us who have to leave. And we are taken back to Drancy.

Interviewer: What month, Mrs. Lorch, Drancy? Was it spring or summer?

Francine: Ah, I have it written down... Let me see, given that we stayed a year in Drancy and that we left Drancy in the spring... I don't know anymore.

Interviewer: It doesn't matter.

Francine: You, you know, you read my story. I have to find my story.

Interviewer: In your story, you say that it was June 21, 1943.

Francine: That's right, it's right after my father's birthday. Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about your arrival at Drancy?

⁷¹ "[Odette Itelsohn and I] both adore a sort of giant with a shaved head "You'll see, that way I'll never be bald!" a very good man, whom we call Papa Leni, and his inseparable friend, as tall as he is and a gendarme (ruined by Vichy). One day, I say to Mother: "You know, he's not really called Leni, but Léni." Mother blanches, because she knows his name is Lévy and he's going to try to get released for mistaken identity. In the meantime, he brings a paternal ray of sunshine into our lives, deprived as we are of our own fathers, since Odette's has been deported, and mine is a prisoner." *From a World Apart* (p38)

Francine: Yes.

Interviewer: The trip from Beaune-la-Rolande to Drancy, how is it done?

Francine: There is one trip that I didn't tell you about, I think it was from Beaune-la-Rolande to Pithiviers.

It was the worst of all. It is done in a cattle car. And Beaune-la-Rolande - Pithiviers are very close. A few kilometers. And we do it, I don't remember, in one whole night, something like that. It is a terrible thing. I don't know if that is when they throw us in the car with the dogs. I was so scared. I'm getting confused.

When are the dogs? Was it Beaune-la-Rolande or was it... well, I'm mixing it up here.

Interviewer: In any case, Mrs. Lorch, you talk about the trip when you leave Pithiviers to arrive at Beaune-la-Rolande.

Francine: Yes, that one was a horror.

Interviewer: And do you remember the trip from Beaune-la-Rolande to Drancy in June 1943?

Francine: Not anymore.

Interviewer: And your arrival at Drancy?

Marcelle Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by an announcement which, naively, I no longer expected. On June 19, the commander of the camp informed us that, the day after tomorrow, the women and children of the prisoners

of war would return to Drancy. I hope," I wrote to my mother, "that I will never know any other sky than the Parisian one. I am moved to leave my infirmary and my patients.

Hoping to be able to spare me the knowledge of these "other skies," my chiefs gave me a certificate which, forgetting to point out my functions as a subordinate nurse before becoming chief, nevertheless stated:

"I, the undersigned, Doctor Rousse, Chief Physician of the camp of Beaune-la-Rolande, certify that Mrs. CHRISTOPHE Marcelle, Mle 126, has directed the Women's Infirmary from March 24, 1943 to this day, in the capacity of Chief Nurse, with competence and devotion.

"Beaune-la Rolande, June 19, 1943.

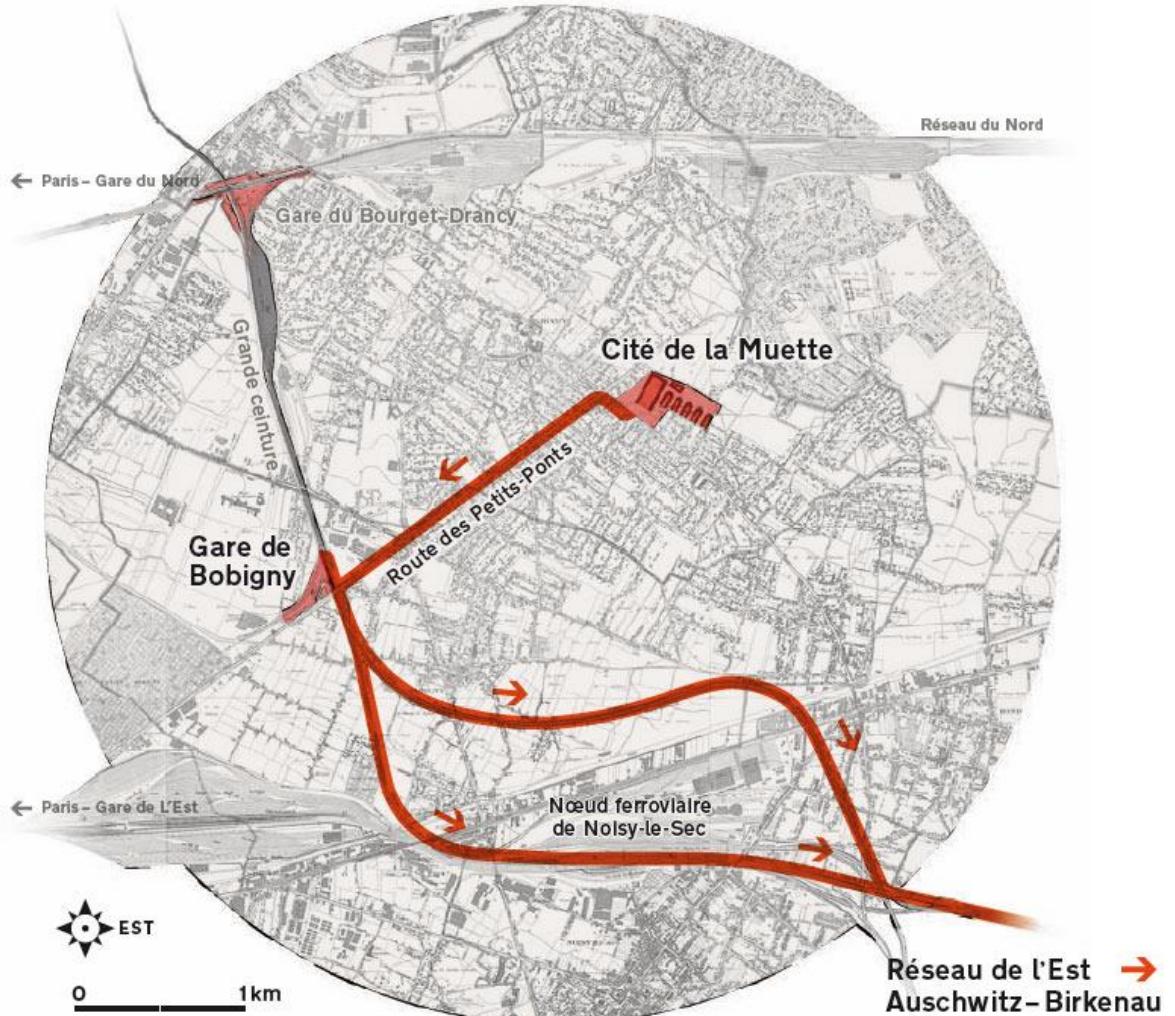
To the signature of Dr. Rousse, the city doctor detached to the camp, were added those of the four Jewish practitioners interned with me. The customs lieutenant added his own. Thus armed to obtain a similar position at Drancy, I was counting on - innocent! - to escape deportation.

[We] boarded a cattle car once again. The trip took fifteen hours. It was the sixth trip for Francine and me. And we were headed for our seventh purgatory. The "Theater" of La Rochefoucauld, the prison of Angoulême, the bohemian camp of Poitiers, the concentration camp of Drancy, that of Pithiviers, that of Beaune-la-Rolande and... back to Drancy. Will we ever see the end of it? I won't describe the journey or our crowding, the lack of air in the padlocked car, the foul-smelling use of the toilet bucket, that new nightmare night - it was all similar to our previous peregrinations. (pp. 187-188)

Francine: Yes, there is one thing that struck me immediately upon arrival at Drancy. It was that the internees, when they saw us with our stenciled yellow stars, looked distraught. And they quickly, quickly went to the clothing store to get us real stars to put on, because they told us "Don't keep those stars, it's not at all the same regime. If they see you with these at Drancy, they will punish you." I remember that very well. Well, I also remember when we were put in a separate block. They put all the prisoners' wives and children in a block, all the people, in principle, who could not be deported.

Marcelle

When we arrived in Bobigny, Parisian buses took us back, as they had done eleven months earlier, to the sorting station for deportation that was Drancy.



Source: [Ancienne gare de déportation de Bobigny](#)

As soon as we were installed on the third floor of Staircase 13, we saw a departure. The very afternoon of our arrival. We experienced the horror from our windows. Access to the huge courtyard was forbidden at such times. In the herd that was being pushed towards the buses, I saw the brother-in-law and the parents-in-law of one of my cousins. Then three more of my acquaintances.

Where on earth were these unfortunate people being sent? Always the same answer, tinged with a sad mischievousness: Pitchipoi. What could this barbaric word mean? It meant a mystery that, fortunately, we did not know. But that Robert, on the other hand, knew.

Robert Alas! Yes, I knew him. In my Oflag, I was constantly obsessed by the prospect of the "Drancy Deportation-Asphyxiation" process and rejected the possibility of such a horror, but I was no less overwhelmed when I learned of my little family's seventh move (p. 188)

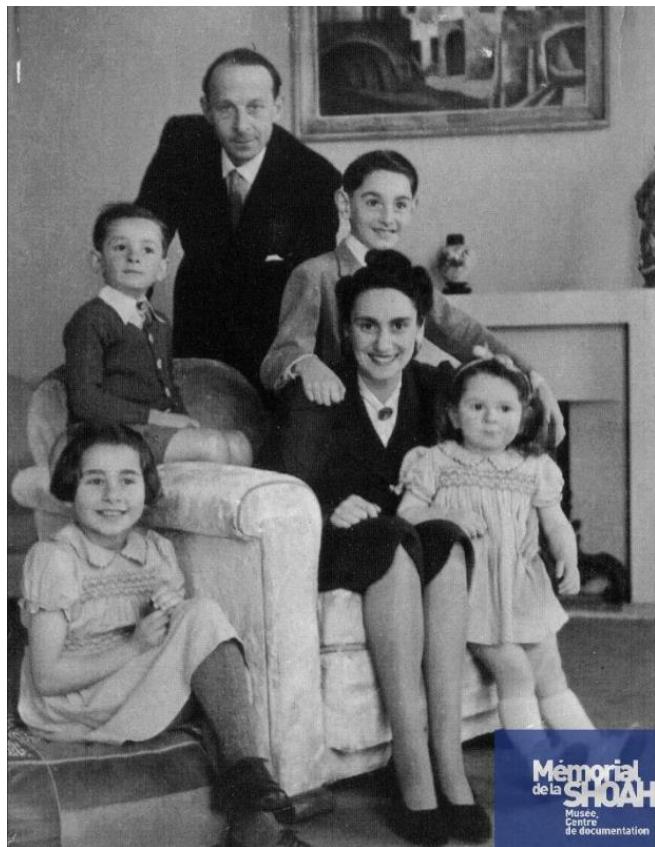
Robert [Two Polish soldiers] belonged to the battalion that guarded us. In Poland, therefore, there were "in spite of ourselves", as in our departments of Alsace and Lorraine. Thousands of them, the singular sentinels affirmed. One of the two men was, I believe, from Krakow. The other was from a town whose inhabitants had been expelled by the occupiers. I don't quite understand the name: I think it was (without guarantee) something like Oswiencim. The Germans had renamed the village and called it Auschwitz. This name did not evoke anything in me, when my Polish comrade told me the story. To his fellow prisoner and officer, the man from that village told him about a rumor that was circulating in his home province. There were rumors of a transformation of the town. A real camp where trains from all over Europe were arriving. When the deportees left the convoys, they entered the camp and never left. They died by the hundreds, if not by the thousands. They were asphyxiated in "houses" set up for this purpose.

Thus, in 1943, what everyone in France did not know was revealed to me. I could not believe - it was unthinkable! - in the reality of such a horror. Restrained by an excusable superstition (above all, not to attract bad luck!), I was careful not to say the slightest word to my comrades. But I wonder if, the revelation having spread, they themselves were not aware of it. And if they hid it from me for fear of increasing my anguish. I suppose they rejected such a statement. I myself thought it was crazy (p. 176).

Francine: There was also the famous Block 3 which was the block for people that we thought were more privileged than us, who, in fact, will all be deported: it was the camp management or the people who were part of the UGIF. They would also leave. I made a friend there, Myriam⁷². She left with her family⁷³. I envied her because she had her father with her. Well, she had him all the way.

⁷² "Myriam was my best friend. We played. A child must play, no matter what. Behind the big building on the left, the earth was clay. We would shape it. And because the Baur were very devout, I had made clay prayer tables to give to her mother." (Interview March 15th, 2022)

⁷³ Myriam is the daughter of André Baur. André Baur was born on March 18th, 1904 in Paris. He is the husband of Odette née Kahn. They have four children, Pierre born in 1933 in Paris, Myriam born in 1934 in Paris, Antoine born in 1937 in Paris, and Francine born in 1940 in Paris. The family lived at 8 rue Alfred-Dehodencq in Paris 16e. André worked as a banker. He was president of the Union libérale israélite, treasurer of the Keren Kayemeth LeIsraël (Jewish National Fund) and head of the Committee for the Coordination of Charities of Greater Paris. Asked in 1941 by Xavier Vallat to organize the General Union of French Israelites (UGIF), he accepted the position of vice-president. He directed the operational authorities of the UGIF at 29 rue de la Bienfaisance in Paris in the 8th arrondissement. On February 11th, 1942, he replaced Albert Lévy as general president of the UGIF in the northern zone and then resigned in February 1943. He was replaced by Raymond-Raoul Lambert. André Baur was arrested with his wife and four children on July 21st, 1943. The six members of the family were deported on convoy 63 from the



Mémorial
de la SHOAH
Musée, centre de documentation

André et Odette Baur avec leurs enfants (de g. à d.) Myriam, Antoine, Pierre et Francine
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Interviewer: What are the differences between Drancy in the summer of '43 and Drancy in '42? What did you find was new?

Francine: Well, it will change because, first of all, Drancy will be transformed from a physical point of view. The Germans will want this camp, for their propaganda, to be seen as a wonderful camp, a recruiting

Drancy camp (Seine-Saint-Denis) on December 17th, 1943 to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp (Poland). André's registration number in Auschwitz is 169749. He is noted as entering the hospital of the camp of Auschwitz III Monowitz between January 17th, 1944 and January 27th, 1944. He was transferred to the Birkenau camp on February 27th, 1944. None of the family members returned from deportation. Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

camp for Jews before transporting them to another country where they will be made to work.⁷⁴ And so, the work will be done, of course, by incarcerated people.



Propaganda photos taken at Drancy⁷⁵

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah/Wagner](#)

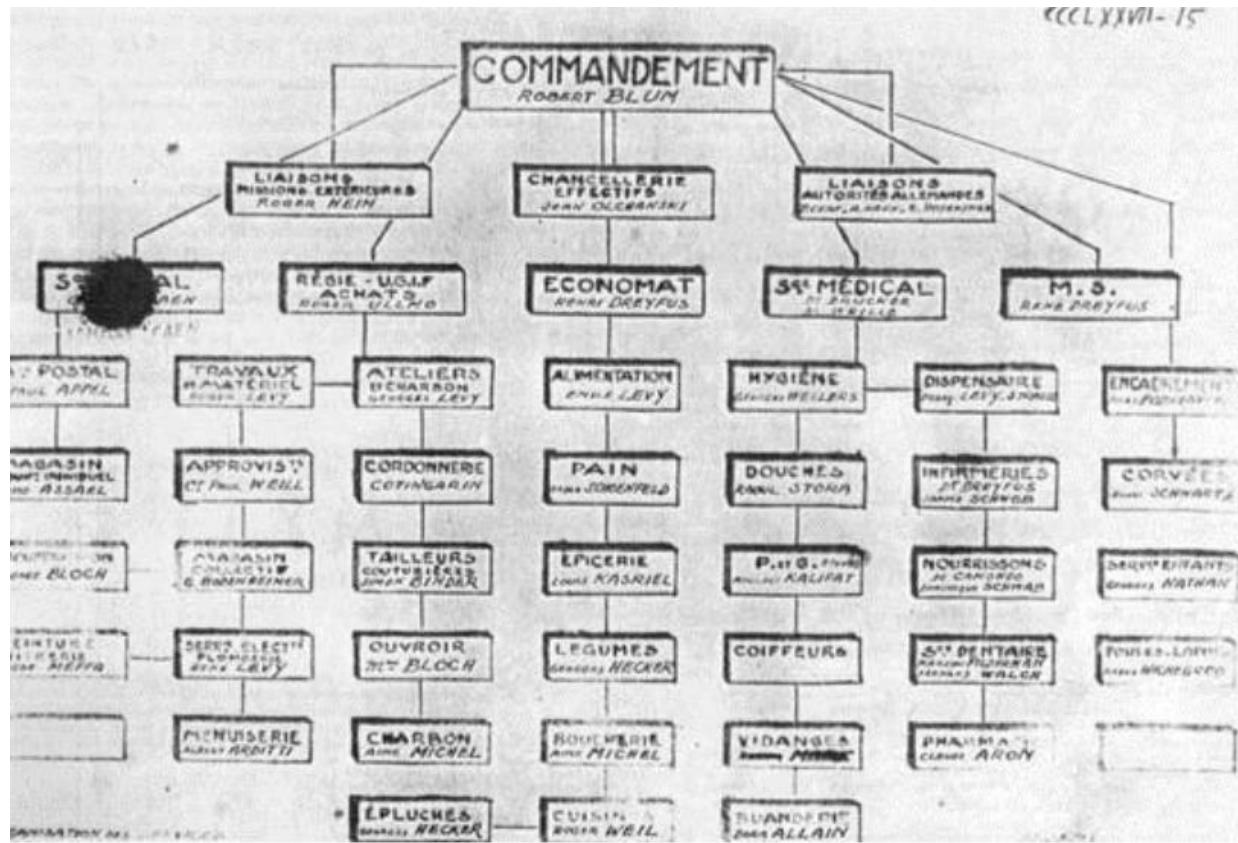
Marcelle We had left in August 1942 and returned in June 1943. We found a better organized camp than the previous year. There were fewer crowds: every two or three weeks, a convoy left for Germany. But new internees came to replace those who left. Prisoners occupied the key positions. One of them, Colonel Blum⁷⁶, performed functions more or less identical to those of the deans of the Oflag. There was one difference, however: he risked being sent to

⁷⁴ "A circular track, surrounding an oval lawn equipped with two watering turnstiles, was completed in October. A barnyard, a pigsty and a hutch were provided for the use of the Germans, as well as a garage, built next to the camp entrance where the barbed wire was replaced by a monumental gate." Source: SciencesPo

⁷⁵ December 1942, therefore before Alois Brunner's leadership. The caption in German reads, "A place where Jewish women feel good."

⁷⁶ Robert Félix Blum (1888-1944) - Lieutenant-colonel of the reserve, Knight of the Legion of Honor, Croix de Guerre 1914-1918. Resistance fighter in the Combat movement in Isère, he was arrested by Klaus Barbie in January 1943. Interned in the Royallieu camp near Compiègne, he was given administrative responsibilities. Transferred to Drancy in May 1943 with a group of internees from the same camp, he was appointed "Jewish commander" of Drancy by the SS Brunner, who took over the camp in July 1943. He joined the team that began, on September 15th, 1943, to dig an underground tunnel for a collective escape. When the almost completed underground tunnel was discovered, Robert Blum was deported to Auschwitz on November 20th, 1943, with 65 randomly selected camp managers.

deportation. A memory that remains with me: this colonel, in civilian clothes and decorated with the yellow star, cycling through the courtyard of the H.L.M., which had been transformed into a concentration camp.



Organization chart of the Drancy camp with Robert Blum in command

Source: [Mémoire juive et éducation](#)

As soon as we arrived, we were given new personnel numbers. To Francine, 460. To me, 459.

On July 2nd, Germans came to take the place of the French gendarmes and policemen. Their leader was named Brunner⁷⁷. This SS captain had evil eyes and a monotonous voice. Assisted by an interpreter, he made all the internees appear before him individually. (pp.206-207)

⁷⁷ Accompanied by his mobile team of Austrian SS men, Brunner appeared at the Drancy camp on June 18th, 1943 and, in three days, sifted through two-thirds of the 2,500 Jewish internees whose deportation was resumed as of June 23rd. He took over the management of the camp from July 2nd, 1943, confined the French gendarmes to its external guard and modernized its operation, trying in vain to involve the UGIF in its internal administration. Following his protests, the vice-president of the UGIF, André Baur, was arrested. A system of terror descended on the internees, who were subjected to bullying and strict discipline. However, in return, food and hygiene conditions improved, thanks to the communal parcels of the UGIF. According to techniques tried and tested in Vienna, Berlin and Salonika, Brunner finally created a Jewish police force within the mass of internees, whose hierarchies he reorganized. He confiscated their property and issued receipts in zlotys before deportation. From September 1943, following the armistice signed between Italy and the Allies, Brunner began tracking down the Jews who had taken refuge in Nice and the surrounding area: until December 14th, 2,500 were arrested and transferred to the Excelsior Hotel near the Nice train station, where they underwent a medical examination by Dr. Abraham Drucker, a Jewish doctor at the Drancy camp, to which they were later transferred. In 1944, Brunner initiated the round-ups in the provinces and in the Paris region, issuing a directive in April 1944 ordering the arrest of all Jews of French nationality and their families. Source: [SciencesPo](#)
See also: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/11/01/free-nazi-war-criminal-says-he-would-do-it-again/7b740216-1860-4984-87e6-ca3f16beecae/>



Alois Brunner

Source: [Le Monde](#)

Brunner forbids [the parcels]. His pretext? The U.G.I.F. was supplying us. Its trucks brought foodstuffs, clothing. But these anonymous donations were hardly enough for our needs. And they lacked the touching side of family parcels, which warms the heart. Our ordinary food consisted of a piece of bread of about 250 grams; an ersatz acorn coffee, artificially sweetened (saccharine or grape sugar); and above all two vegetable soups. Plus some fragments of canned food brought by the U.G.I.F., which had to be shared.

At the same time as he prohibited family packages, Brunner prohibited letters. Except for letters from prisoners of war to their wives. For that, he obeyed the Geneva Convention. Since I could no longer write to my mother, it was my husband who was obliged to give my news to my mother, who lived four or five kilometers away from me, from his camp 1000 kilometers away.

However, I was able to correspond with her in a clandestine way. In Beaune, I had met a pharmacist from Paris. His pharmacy was on rue Duphot. By a happy coincidence, it was very close to my mother's home. She was a customer and knew the owner's wife. His name was René Lévy and he had a brother-in-law who was a doctor. Also interned, the doctor and his wife were living in Drancy when I returned, preceded by Lévy for a month or two. The pharmacist introduced me to the doctor. And the doctor arranged for me to pass some tiny papers that I was scribbling for my mother. When the illegal mailmen brought them to her, she couldn't get them without paying them. They risked a lot, but they abused a little.

Thanks to this system, I was able to receive chocolate and sugar, nutritious foodstuffs in a reduced volume. My courageous mother obtained them without ration cards - since I no longer had any - and at the risk of her freedom, and therefore her life. The doctor's messengers brought them to him so that he could give them to me (p. 208).

Although driven out of the camp by Brunner, ["our French gendarmes"] continued their duty outside. Didn't they stay in the towers above us? Sometimes we saw their women at the windows, shaking rags. Seeing them in freedom broke our hearts.

Behind our buildings was a small courtyard. We could, in the absence of the Germans, appear there on rare occasions. Francine played there with a girl leader and other children. I believe that the doctor, brother-in-law of my pharmacist in Beaune, used to go into this courtyard to give my letters to sympathetic gendarmes. And that he received from them the answers from my mother. For a fee, of course. But these occasional letter carriers risked a lot, and that excuses them (pp. 216-217).

Francine: We're going to remove that ugly clinker. We'll replace it with a lawn.

Marcelle Suddenly, almost the entire staff of the U.G.I.F.⁷⁸ arrived: André Baur, its president, with his wife and children; Armand Katz, the general secretary, and, with them, nearly seventy people: secretaries, steno-typists, cleaning ladies. Even visitors who had had the misfortune to come to the U.G.I.F. on the day of the roundup⁷⁹, and in whom I saw two or three faces I knew.

As in 1942, the clinker in the courtyard gave off a dust that obstructed my eyes and nostrils. In 1943, our guards decided that the captives would coat it with concrete. I can still see them doing this work. Many volunteers, who hoped to

⁷⁸ Read the article by Michel Laffitte, "L'UGIF face aux mesures antisémites de 1942" in [Les Cahiers de la Shoah](#)

⁷⁹ "André Baur protested to the Vichy authorities against the brutality imposed by Alois Brunner, head of the SS commando group operating from the Drancy camp. This reaction led to his arrest and internment, under the pretext of the escape of one of his cousins. On July 30th, Aloïs Brunner raided the headquarters of the UGIF's social assistance service on rue de la Bienfaisance. There he seized lists of assistance with fictitious addresses, thus revealing part of the clandestine service of placement of assisted persons, and in particular of children, operating under the legal umbrella of the UGIF. As for Raymond-Raoul Lambert, he was arrested the following month by the SS at his home in Marseille, on his way back from a protest trip to Vichy. Lambert and Baur were deported with their wives and children to Auschwitz in December." Source: [L'UGIF, collaboration ou résistance](#)

cut through the deportation. Naked to the waist, they concreted the yard. Among them was Mr. Baur, the president of the U.G.I.F. In the middle of the median, they laid two large lawns.

When the work was finished, Brunner showed his satisfaction by registering the members of the U.G.I.F. on the list of the deportable. They left, and Francine mourned once again the disappearance of a new friend, little Myriam Baur, who had been shipped off with her parents and brothers to an unknown destination. One could not get attached to anyone (p. 211).

Francine: We're going to do some installations. It's not going to look like the monstrosity that it did in '42.

It's not that nice, though. There are hidden parts. That is to say, there are cellars where they torture, but it's less visible. We will have a synagogue. We will have shows. There will be a lot of beautiful things. But there will still be the creation of the departure stairs. Mom will work on them. Mr. Hallphen, unfortunately, is dead. Mr. Hallphen was the head of the departing stairs. Mom was his assistant.

Interviewer: Do you remember Mr. Alphen's first name?

Francine: No.

Interviewer: How old was he?

Francine: He was older than Mom. But I don't remember. I had the opportunity to see his daughter again.

Interviewer: What was her name?

Francine: I don't know... she is married... I don't remember. I had the opportunity to have dinner at a friend's house with her. If you want, I can easily introduce you to her. So, Mom was a departing stair assistant. It was a terrible job because, in this Drancy that had become so beautiful, the deportations were coming one after the other. And people will arrive, sometimes spend a night in Drancy and then leave immediately. They leave for what is called Pitchipoï. We don't know what Pitchipoï is. There are some who have premonitions, who commit suicide. Very few. There are few suicides. I haven't seen many. And Mama is going to do this work, which is something abominable, which will shake her health for the rest of her life. It's awful to prepare people to leave when you know they're certainly going to die, and you can't tell them because, if she told them what she heard on the English radio, it might be worse. Maybe death would be there, but in bloodshed. Maybe more people would die. So she can't afford to say that. Besides, she doesn't know for sure. She heard it on the radio, but she's not sure if it's true. We mustn't let all these people lose hope. And this preparation, this work that she does on the departure stairs, it's terrible because the people who leave... are forced to leave the old people, the very old people... the sick people, the comatose people... are forced to leave the women who have just given birth... or the pregnant women... are forced to leave the babies who have just been born.

Marcelle In November [1943], I was promoted. Appointed "assistant of departure stairs", I plunged further into the torments of deportation. My job? To supervise the distribution of soup and the cleaning of the rooms, to support the morale of the women with children, to provide them with bottles for the journey, to distribute linen, clothing and shoes from the stocks accumulated by the U.G.I.F. before its decapitation. For their last night in Drancy, the unfortunates had only straw mattresses on the floor. The men were isolated from the women and all slept without undressing. They were given a snack and words of consolation.

The other internees could not come for a final farewell: barbed wire isolated the camp from the departure stairs.

My boss - the boss of all the stairway assistants - was named Halphen. He showed a courage that did him credit. At the time of departure, the Germans did not always find their way. Each of the four isolated buildings housed 250 departing soldiers. Total: 1,000. If several of them were missing or had committed suicide, the person in charge of registration no longer counted 1,000 deportees. So the Nazis "stole" a man or a woman as they passed, and took him or her away without giving him or her time to pack. Disdaining this mortal risk, Mr. Halphen did not abandon his post in front of the queue. And shouted to his assistants, if we tried to imitate him: "Don't stay here, ladies! If they are missing a woman, they will take you despite your armband! Despite your situation as a prisoner's wife!" We reluctantly obeyed (pp. 212-213).

Interviewer: Did you see all that, ma'am?

Francine: I've seen it all. All this, I see it from the windows of my block. All this... I see them leaving.⁸⁰ I see my mother taking care of them, running like crazy to make a hot water bottle for someone who has a stomach ache... to help someone who just swallowed a pill of Gardenal to commit suicide. Who sometimes runs to our house to take her own sweater to give to these people because there is someone who is cold... to go without food to give it away... anything. She tries to make them feel better. She tries to do anything. Moreover, morally, it is terrible for her because all these people who leave, among them, there are some who say to her, "But *you* are staying? Why can you stay?" She explains why she is staying but she is unhappy

⁸⁰ Among these deportees was Odette Itelsohn (1931-1943) with whom Francine spent her days in Beaune-la-Rolande. The girls smoked their first cigarette, made of crushed lime blossom rolled in toilet paper, behind the camp toilets. Odette and her family lived at 6 rue Melingue. She was arrested with her mother Ida, and her sister Simone, when they tried to cross the demarcation line at Villefranche-sur-Cher, on October 8, 1942. They were deported, without return, by convoy 55 on June 26, 1943.

1936	Itelsohn	Naubert	o f P	11 ch	f Commecaut	20 v
	4	Ida	o 8 P	11 ij		
		Odette	31 P	c ✓		
		Simone	43 P	e ✓		

The Itelsohn family at 6 rue Melingue in the 1936 census. Source : [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 689 - Combat- vue 178/273)

to stay.⁸¹ Indeed, she thinks that it is unfair. Why does she have the right to stay because her husband is a prisoner of war and she is a hostage?

Marcelle When the deportable were spending their last days in the camp, I was not content with my job as a staircase assistant. To leave them a last beautiful memory, I accompanied modest shows on the piano. I remember a Hungarian woman who, although she was in her fifties, danced the czardas with gusto. And a pretty French teenager. Miss Haïm, actress at the "Théâtre du Petit Monde". She was singing Trenet and imitating the composer. Dressed as a man and with her hat tilted on her head, she raised the enthusiasm by cooing: The sun has an appointment with the moon⁸². The unfortunate woman had an appointment with death. So did her little sisters, fifteen and ten years old, friends of Francine. They were unaware of it, thank God! Just as we were all unaware of the destination of the departed. They are happy," I wrote to my mother, "for this last good moment before the Unknown. (p.214)

On the eve of deportation, part of the camp remained lit all night. The social service, the infirmary, the laundry, all these people worked hard to satisfy the demands. The deportees imagined that they were going to populate a German city, emptied of its inhabitants and reserved for Jews.

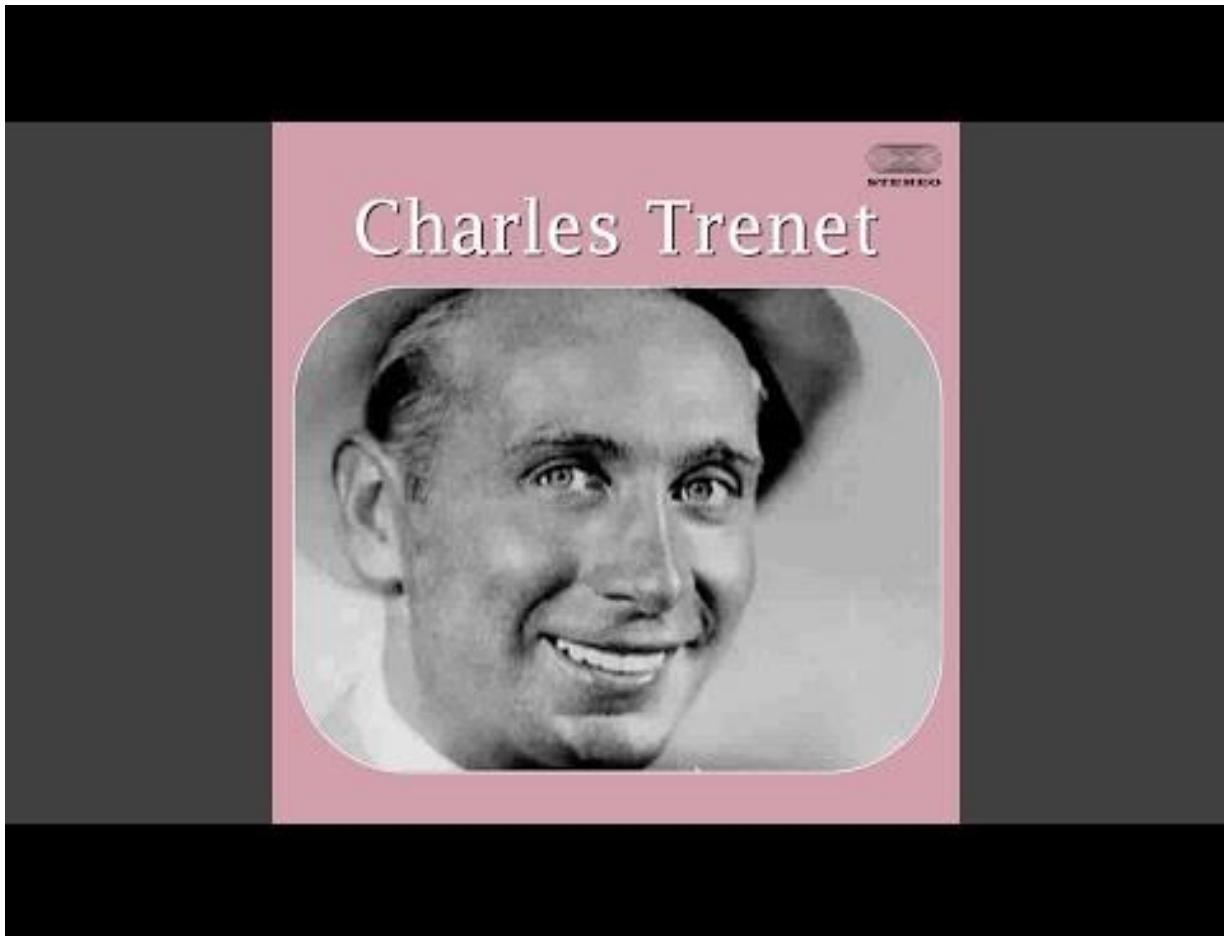
After their departure, there was a collective phenomenon of nervous joy. For some reason, the hot showers worked every time a train left. Then you could hear cries of joy under the trickling water, which showed the happiness of the remaining people and masked their anguish for the future. (p.220)

Excerpt from a letter from Marcelle to her mother:

"My friends and I, who are sedentary, can no longer bear to see this incessant parade, these day and night arrivals of buses with babies, old people, the impotent. We get attached to nice people, and then two weeks later we leave, we are torn away. If you saw the envious look of those who are leaving. If you heard their exclamations, always the same: "You are lucky!" All of this obsesses. Some days, if I didn't think of the pain I'd be causing you and my Rob, I'd leave with it." (p.219)

⁸¹ Poem left for Marcelle Christophe by an internee from the departure staircase: "To Madame Christophe / The rare smiling Providence in the Camp of Tears / Drancy, November 1943 / Maurice Level. Who is leaving / Oh heaviness among all others! / Barbed wire our every dream invades / This world so close and filled with rumors / Into the distant silence fades" *From a World Apart* (p.59)

⁸² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOKi8Kk77XQ>



Francine: So, we are going to be a fairly large group of hostages. In the end, there will be about 80 children and not far from 200 women. And there are some of us, some of them, who are not real prisoners' wives, who have made it look like that by managing to get by, by showing letters that were passed to them. There are women arrested from everywhere among us. There are some who are authentic Resistance members, who were arrested in the Resistance. Some of them came from Lyon actually and were recognized as Jews and put among us. There are some from all walks of life. And there are not only French women among us, there are Polish women whose husbands served in the French army as foreigners or some because their husbands were French soldiers but they had not yet been naturalized. Some of them speak Yiddish, a language that we do not understand at all, at all. They are surprised by this. They are very surprised that

Jews can't understand Yiddish, but we have to explain to them why, but they find it very difficult to understand. Not all Western Jewish families speak Yiddish. Where would we have learnt it?

Interviewer: Is there some kind of school in Drancy?

Francine: Yes, there are going to be a lot of things at Drancy. I am even going to take classes from a rabbi. I think it was the rabbi of Lyon, as I remember, who was an absolutely wonderful guy.⁸³ He is actually forced to shave his beard. The authorities force him to do so, and this rabbi is a wonderful man who teaches us and even teaches me a little Hebrew. At the end of my stay in Drancy, I can read Hebrew without understanding it, but I can read it. And I even know a prayer that I can sing, no, I can recite. [*Francine recites the prayer*] I learned it in 1943. I still know it. I've never recited it since. It's funny.

Interviewer: You were ten years old?

Francine: Yes. It's funny. That's it. I don't know the rest. [*she sings in Hebrew*] But I hope that this rabbi, he's at the right hand of God, he was so good! He was great. And he didn't know Yiddish either! But he was also a patriot.

Interviewer: How long do you stay in Drancy the second time?

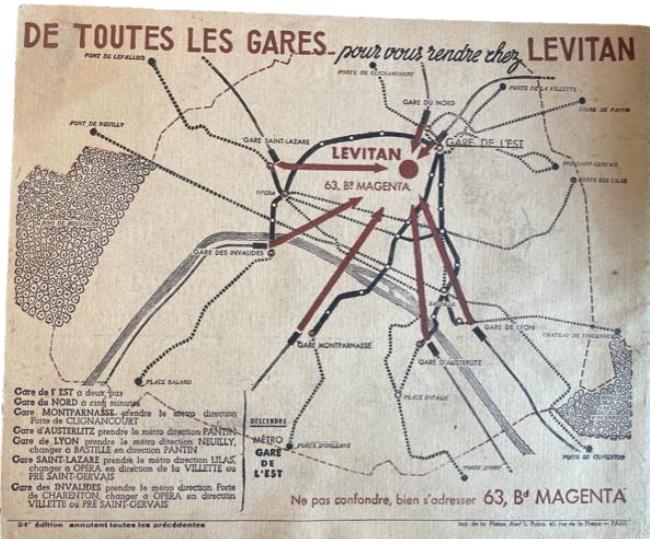
Francine: One year. So we see a lot of people come and go.

⁸³ "The rabbi (former Chief rabbi of Lyons) is young, dynamic, full of new and modern ideas. He gives us religious instruction, teaches us canticles, and tries to instill in us a respect for mankind and goodness. I still have glowing memories of this smiling man, with his collar-like beard, which the Germans make him shave, against his religion." *From a World Apart*, (p.54)

Interviewer: And when do you leave?

Francine: In the spring of 1944. So, there are prisoners' wives among us who are busy working at Levitan.⁸⁴

Levitran was a very famous furniture dealer before the war who was of Jewish origin, and since he had very large warehouses, that's where they are going to store all the furniture that they take from all the Jewish apartments because they empty all the Jewish apartments. And there are several of us whose job is to go to work every day at Levitan, packing furniture, objects, knick-knacks, everything that is going to Germany.



Source : Catalogue 1949

⁸⁴ Located at 85 Faubourg Saint-Martin, this modern department store, owned by the Jew Wolf Levitan, was requisitioned by the Germans in July 1943. It was used as a depository for stolen furniture, arranged by period in the stalls. Nazi dignitaries came to help themselves. Jewish prisoners from the Drancy camp - spouses of Aryans with a somewhat privileged status - unloaded daily the removal trucks of the "Operation Furniture" set up in 1942. The Levitan building was located near the Gare de l'Est from where the furniture was shipped to Germany. After the war, the store resumed its activity until its closure in 1984.

Marcelle Two other [furniture depots] existed: quai de la Gare (d'Austerlitz), and rue Bassano (near the Etoile). In these forced labor camps, the living conditions were, we were told, more suitable than in Drancy. The prisoners' wives worked there with Aryan wives and husbands of Aryan women. Depressing work, of course.



Visit of the occupying authorities to the Levitan camp

Source: [Images d'un pillage](#)

At least these slaves of Hitlerism did not have to defend, if they were pretty, the enterprises of a Reich! This character had just appeared at Drancy, and had taken on considerable importance with Brunner. Brunner wore the epaulette of an SS captain. Reich⁸⁵ was Austrian and Jewish. The latter, who was interned with us, had made a name for himself as an international soccer player. Both had known each other before the Nazi era. In every drama, there are traitors. Reich was one of them. He left the camp almost every night. Accompanied by the SS, he would go hunting for Jews who were hiding. He flushed them out thanks to the denunciations that were paid for at a high price in the police stations or at the Parisian Delegation for Jewish Questions. In the morning, the traitor and his employers would bring their game back to Drancy.

⁸⁵ Oscar Reich was sentenced to death by the military tribunal on February 9th, 1949, and executed on July 5th of the same year at Montrouge Fort.

Appointed by Brunner as "internal inspector", Reich became his eminence grise. Tall and slender, this unusual internee took advantage of the trust placed in him to consolidate his position. I can still see him holding a dog on a leash. A big animal with wild hair.

It was said that he had a private room in Block III, the only almost finished building of the immense H.L.M. And that he attracted women who, in order to save a husband or old parents, accepted the appointments of the cynical Don Juan.

Refusing his advances meant deportation. (pp. 214-215)

Ce Soir of March 1, 1946

Source: [Retronews](#)

Francine: And we learned that our apartment was emptied, that everything is gone, even my toys.

Moreover, when they emptied our apartment, we learned from people who were part of the Resistance that our neighbors, who knew us very well in our neighborhood, all our neighbors, witnessed this. There

was a Kraut who had fun with my doll and people started to scold when they saw that, and he stopped. And so, you never lose your sense of humor.

Marcelle Women returned from the Levitan, Bassano and Quai de la Gare packing centers. Many of them had found themselves in front of their own furniture or that of friends. Punished for taking pictures of loved ones in the drawers or breaking glasses and plates in order to mismatch sets, they returned to Drancy to be deported. None of them were wives of prisoners of war (p. 242).

Francine: So, Mom does this abominable job. She, too, is kind of packing up when she assists departing people. It's a horrible thing, those departure stairs. I can't even begin to capture the horror of those departure stairs. It's monstrous, you know. It's counted, a departure, it must be a thousand, not 999. And sometimes, there are some missing because there are some who have died in the meantime, there are some in a coma who have been transported somewhere else, there is one who might be hiding under a staircase. I remember that, sometimes, Mr. Alphen would say to mom, "Mrs. Christophe, hurry, hurry, hurry, go back to your block! There are some missing, there are some missing, you're going to be caught, quick quick quick, run away!" She could hardly run away because she wanted so much to help them, to help them. She would come into our room, she would throw herself on our straw mattress. She would be sobbing. It was abominable what she was doing and she did it until the end. You have to see what it's like, these departures, and in the morning in these Parisian buses. All those people being packed. I remember once, there was a whole group of children, they had scarlet fever. My God, they were sick! They all left. "We'll take care of them!" Then, at the same time, there was the orchestra. At the same time, Mom, who was this great pianist, had to give recitals for these people who were leaving. And the Germans knew a lot about music, they came to listen of course. They saw that she had talent. They filmed her for a propaganda film⁸⁶. They

⁸⁶ "The piano must have been installed by the Germans in one of the apartments. It was a set for a propaganda film that has never been found. It showed how the Jews "lived well" in Drancy.

must have enjoyed listening to her Chopin, she was quite a specialist of Chopin and Schumann. But she played Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*⁸⁷ well. When there was a departure, a big deportation, when she was really in a terrible state, she would go and play *La Cathédrale Engloutie* on the piano because at a certain moment, you know, you feel that the water is rising, the water is rising and everyone is going to die. And long after the war, when my grandmother died, she sat at the piano and she played *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. I still have my mother, and when she dies, I have prepared a tape so that over her grave, we can play *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. So, after Drancy, we were hostages.

Robert On November 10, I received a letter dated October 30. (...) In this letter, my wife wrote to me: "Having been given permission to organize shows, the director of Tabarin, Mr. Schmidt, put together a first program, which was very successful. In the second, I lent my pianistic assistance. After a musical silence of fifteen months. I played your "Scherzo" and your "Cathédrale engloutie", dedicating them to you from the bottom of my heart in thought. I obtained a nice success, having surprised my listeners by the suppleness of my fingers, in spite of so many various works; and by the fidelity of my memory, since I played without music. In addition, I am part of a small choir that performs works done at the camp by the composer Marcel Lattès, a charming companion."
Marcelle Lattès, I knew of him only a work Xantho chez les courtisanes, which my wife and I had seen at the Théâtre des Nouveautés around 1937. Arletty and Gabrielle Ristori sang the main roles. And Marcelle met the composer in Drancy!
(p.204)

Francine: I don't know what happened at that time - was it because of the Resistance or was it a punishment? I don't know. So they decided to deport us too, the prisoners' wives and children.

Interviewer: How long before you left did you find out, Mrs. Lorch?

In Beaune-la-Rolande there was also a piano, but that was another story. It was the mayor of the village who, knowing that there were many musicians among the internees, had the piano taken from the town hall to the camp. There is a street in Beaune that now bears his name because he did many good things." (Francine Christophe, interview with M. Péron, March 15, 2022)

⁸⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=levGISzDmj8>

Francine: A few days before, maybe. Probably a couple of days before because I remember all the mothers were packing to go. They all packed. Everything that we could we got, that is, what we had been able to keep from the camp, which was not huge, and especially packages because we were still entitled to packages. They kept all that, they packed. And then we left.

Marcelle *In March [1944], great news: permission to receive two parcels of food. Mom and her friends told me about it and I was thrilled. Francine and I unpacked the food with emotion. How happy we were to have enough to eat! My colleagues received as much, and we shared our reserves. (...)*

April came, and with it an alarming authorization: that of a "small parcel" of clothes and toiletries. To "My dear Juliette" I wrote to ask for "a light dress for me, a blue blouse and barefoot shoes for children (37), a terry towel, Arden apricot powder, a tube of toothpaste". Thus, I thought to reassure mom by my desire of a beauty product. Believing me to be as feminine as before, she would worry less. (p.243)

Francine: And then, we left via the Gare de l'Est, by truck. Not by the Parisian buses. We left by the Gare de l'Est and I remember very, very well.

Letter from Marcelle to Robert:

"My poor beloved, I resume my correspondence interrupted a few moments. Take courage, I have just been informed: we are leaving this evening, the little one and I, for a distant destination. Do not lament too much: I keep my energy, I have faith in the future, I swear it on our love. Trust in God, he will not abandon us."

Our luggage was quickly packed and we left the room to go up one of the stairs. We thought (although we were told, "Tonight") that we would spend one more night in camp. We had such a habit... And that, imitating our predecessors, we would sleep on straw mats on the floor. But Brunner had a gentler treatment in store for us.

At about four or five in the afternoon, our little group was directed to the exit of the camp. We numbered about 50 people, including the children. The other women from P.G., employed in the packing centers, had not joined us in Drancy.

First surprise: a covered truck, not a bus, was waiting for us beyond the barbed wire. Sitting inside, on our luggage or on benches (there were a few), we drove for a long time to Bobigny, from where the deportation trains left.

Second surprise: when our guards lifted the tarp to order us to get off, we saw the Gare de l'Est in Paris.

We were parked under the columned peristyle in front of the left entrance. There, we waited for quite a long time. Soldiers were guarding us, weapons in hand. Passers-by were glaring at us. Seeing our yellow stars with the word JEWISH printed in the middle, they could not mistake us. Their eyes showed surprise. Sometimes sorrow (pp. 244-245).



Gare de l'Est, postcard from June 26, 1942

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The Gare de l'Est, I remember very well, I see us herded under the arcades of the Gare de l'Est, guarded by armed soldiers of course. Women and children, and there were some very small ones. And people were passing by. It was early in the morning, so people were passing by on their way to work. Some would pass by with their heads down. Some would walk by and look up, looking at us. There were looks, looks of great sympathy. Sometimes a hand was even raised. And there was one of our companions, Rose-Marie Leriche⁸⁸, she spoke German very well. There was one of the Germans, an old Kraut, I don't know what got into her, she said to him while pointing at us, the children, "It's beautiful what you're doing, aren't you

⁸⁸ Rose-Marie Leriche née Gerstein was born on January 27th, 1914 in Paris and arrested in Maulévrier (Maine-et-Loire) with her son Michel, born in Angers on December 12th, 1940. Wife and child of a prisoner of war, they were deported on convoy 80A on May 2nd, 1944 to Bergen-Belsen. Both of them will be survivors after the war.



Michel
Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

In July 1946, Rose-Marie testified about the fate of Simone Seidengart (née Cerf) and her daughter Elisabeth, with whom she had been locked up in the major seminary of Angers on July 23rd, 1942. Source: [La Shoah dans l'arrondissement de Saint-Nazaire](#)

ashamed?" And then - another miracle! - instead of hitting her, he replied, "We will be punished one day."
That was the only time in our lives, in our entire incarceration, that we heard a sentence like that. He was an old man. Maybe... he wasn't SS. But you'll say that the Wehrmacht made the same mistakes. But this one, maybe he understood.

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, do you remember the day or the month you left the Gare de l'Est?

Francine: It was in May 1944.⁸⁹ So we left with great hope because we were sure that the Allies would arrive. The alternative was impossible. It was going to end finally, this mistake.

Interviewer: How does the trip go?

Francine: The trip goes well for us because we are hostages, so no cattle cars. We left in third-class cars, but even that is aberrant. It is the illogicality of the Nazi delirium. There are people on the train who, in order to get to the restaurant car, went through our own car. We had some money left over, we were able to buy a couple of things in the dining car, you know. This is an aberration.

Marcelle [the leader of the soldiers] made us enter the station. There, third surprise. In a passenger train, a third class car was waiting for us. Our luggage in the nets, our backsides on the rounded wooden seats, we smiled at this comfort forgotten for two years, at least for the "old-timers", Madelon and me, and for our children. Traveling seated, contemplating the landscape through the windows, using the toilet at the end of the corridor and not a toilet bucket, all this formed, despite the presence of our guards, a satisfaction that quickly turned to optimism. There was no doubt that we were being taken to a castle in the Ardennes, if not to Baden-Baden, the famous spa town.

⁸⁹ Convoy 80A of May 2, 1944



Advertisement for Baden-Baden from 1938

Source: eBay

Almost all of us had some money. I had received some from my mother. We used it to improve our travel routine. We asked a waiter in the restaurant car who was passing by in the corridor for a drink. He got permission from the German officer and brought us cider, even hot broth for the children. With the bread, margarine, sausages and canned food brought from Drancy, we had enough to last. (pp.245-246)

Interviewer: Overall, what did you normally wear?

Francine: Normally we had our clothes, which were old and terribly patched. But anyway, we had our clothes.

Interviewer: Were you in good physical condition, in general?

Francine: Yes, we weren't in too bad a shape physically despite our long months of incarceration. We had been given a care package. That changes everything when you have packages. We weren't fat, but we weren't at the last threshold, as we would be later.

Interviewer: Do you know where you are headed?

Francine: No, we didn't understand. I don't remember what happened, if we heard or read or saw it. We knew we were going to B.B. Naivety... We're always naive. It's the naivety of people getting arrested thinking they're going to be saved by Marshal Pétain. It's the same naivety that prevails when we think of B.B. as Baden-Baden, a water city where there are hotels, it's very, very good. That's where we are heading.



L'Ouest-Eclair on February 14, 1937

Source: [Retronews](#)

So we leave on this train. The journey, the first part, is not terrible. We ride through the Belgian Ardennes.

It was very interesting. We look at the place where the famous king of the Belgians, Albert, killed himself in the mountain.



And then, we enter Germany. We changed trains. In Hanover, the station was bombed. There too, we were put in a shelter with German civilians and soldiers. We are hostages. So we are not beaten, nothing bad is done to us. And then, we take another train. This last train, however, is less comfortable. But there is something that surprises us: we don't have the same guards anymore, we have "Gestapists", guys with long leather coats. That indicates something more frightening. Then when we arrive, B.B., surprise, it is not Baden-Baden. It is Bergen-Belsen. It does not ring a bell. It will when we walk through the gates of the camp.

Marcelle *The alarm finished, one made us go up in the station of Hanover. And we were directed towards a new train: a suburban train, dilapidated cars, broken windows. When we arrived near a village north of the city, we saw French soldiers in red breeches, and we were amazed by this pre-1914 outfit. Guarded by sentries, these prisoners were working on the railroad tracks. We did not know that they were Israelites, and that the red-garance pants were worth our yellow stars for them.*

L'UNIVERS CONCENTRATIONNAIRE DANS LE SYSTEME NAZI



Source: [Mémoire de Guerre](#)

In a station surrounded by beautiful villas, we were taken down. New guards greeted us with a boner in hand and made us climb into a truck. Stimulated by them, we piled under the tarpaulin of a heavy vehicle. It took the road in the middle of a countryside that we guessed through the cracks of the canvas. A peaceful countryside, speckled with pine trees. Soon, barracks appeared behind lawns and flowerbeds. Scents of wet trees flattered the nostrils.

But the picture changed. The small forests were followed by a yellow plain, with a light wind blowing a smell that was difficult to identify. Suddenly, watchtowers, sentry boxes and barbed wire fences appeared. We heard the creaking of a door opening. The truck passed through it.

As it drove along, we saw five or six prefabricated houses on our left. Some SS men were coming out of them, others were going in.

The truck crossed a second barbed wire wall through a second door. And drove on a long avenue, straight. To our left, more barbed wire fences. They surrounded the barracks. For the first time we saw men in striped pajamas. They look like convicts," I thought, clutching my daughter. Where the hell were we going? Almost all of us were silent. The children themselves were no longer talking (pp.246-247)

Interviewer: What is your first image or your first memory of discovering Bergen-Belsen?

Francine: The Russian prisoners first, because Bergen-Belsen was first a Russian prison camp, so we see the Russian prisoners. They are not pretty to look at because the Russian prisoners, as we will know later, are condemned to death by hunger. That was the fate of all Russian prisoners.



Bergen-Belsen in April 1945

Retronews : [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Interviewer: How are they dressed?

Francine: They are in uniform. I vaguely see that. And then, we arrive at our barracks. Bergen-Belsen is separated into several camps and there is our enclosure which will later become what will be called "the star camp". They put us in our enclosure. There are barracks. We disembarked with our packages. I think I remember that we were surrounded, how to say, not attacked, but we were jumped on, nicely, by the Dutch who were there before us.



Source: [USHMM](#)

Marcelle *Descended from our vehicle, we gather with difficulty our luggage and our provisions. Pushed in a hut, we see it without tables, without seats of any kind. For all furniture, nothing but two-story beds. As soon as we entered, we were joined by men and women. "Do you have bread?" they ask. At Drancy, the social service had given us paper bags containing pasta and oblong loaves of bread. Give us these loaves of bread," said our visitors. Here, we put everything in common." Unsuspecting, most of our group obeyed. We were not to see any of it again (p. 247).*

Francine: And soup is brought to us; I remember this soup. Peuh it seemed monstrous to us. There are a few roots with dirt in it. We refuse it. And the Dutch who are there, they ask us for our soup. How can they eat it? We come from Drancy where we have washed soup, washed vegetables. We eat what we have in our packages. Our attitude soon changed.

Interviewer: Sorry to take you back a bit, when you get off the train, you only see the prisoners? Who helps you get off the train? Are there people?

Francine: They put us in trucks. Trucks took us away.

Interviewer: And was it prisoners or was it... who welcomed you?

Francine: Germans in uniform. The SS who call us in alphabetical order, and who misspell our names, and who are not happy when we don't understand, but maybe we don't understand on purpose. To make them repeat themselves.

Marcelle *Installed in front of the only table of the boat, a woman and a man in plain clothes ordered us to give them our identity papers. And they gave us new registration numbers (p. 248).*

Suddenly the order rang out: "All the new girls and their children to the showers, to be disinfected!" (...) So here we are in the shower room. No booths. Pipes up against the ceiling, with sprinklers. And duckboards under our feet. We were left naked for about an hour before the water ran. For the mothers it was excruciating, especially for those who had boys.

Finally, water fell from the ceiling, sometimes hot, sometimes cold. Barely having time to dry ourselves, the two showermen forced us to go to the locker room to collect our clothes, and to cross a corridor where four SS officers laughed - roughly - at the insult inflicted on our modesty.

Clothed on damp flesh, with clothing that stuck to our skin, we set off again on the path to Camp IV. Seeing once again, as we passed, these kinds of mannequins dressed in striped pyjamas, above which were grimacing mummy-like grins.

We still did not know the name of the immense phalanstery. On the main door, even those who understood German could not see the sign through the slits in the truck's tarpaulin:

AUFENTHALSTLAGER BERGEN-BELSEN

Words that meant, we later learned:

BERGEN-BELSEN LODGING CAMP

B.B. were the initials we heard in Drancy. We had understood that it stood for Baden-Baden. And why: "Camp de Séjour"? We would learn that too later. Because its forty or forty-five thousand inhabitants were not subjected to the harsh work of the penitentiaries of Neuengamme, Dachau, Oranienburg, Dora or Ravensbrück. Bergen-Belsen was a "hospice" where the other camps dumped the useless mouths when their crematoria proved insufficient to "liquidate" the waste. (pp.248-249)

Prisoners' wives and children, we were not to be considered as ordinary deportees. But as hostages. So for us, no tattoo of the number on the wrist. No striped dresses either: they left us with our clothes. (p.250)

TAPE 5

Interviewer: In your testimony, you are at May 7, 1944, when you arrived at Bergen-Belsen with your mother. You have small objects with you and you are received by Dutch prisoners.

Francine: Dutch deportees.

Interviewer: Dutch deportees, sorry. Would you like to continue your story?

Francine: So the beginning in Bergen-Belsen... Of course, it's horrible. It's a camp, but it's not yet as horrible as it will become because, at the beginning - how can I put it? - we are housed in a barrack, we have one straw mattress per person, we have the opportunity to wash ourselves, and we even manage to... it's always this... how can I put it... this strength that human beings have within themselves. An example: my mother tells herself, "Well, maybe we'll be here for a while, my daughter has to learn German." And there was a Dutch woman, Mommy says to her, "I'll pay you. I'll give you some bread. You're going to give German lessons to my..." because she spoke fluent German. Mommy gives her either a little bread or a little soup, I do not remember what, and she gives me German lessons. You see, there is a social life. You cannot help it. It's stronger than you are. You always try to create something, to hold on. So you organize yourself. And of course it is horrible. There are the roll calls and everything is awful but we have so much hope. So much hope. That is going to change very quickly. All the same, my mother is appointed head of the barrack there too. She will always be known as... she who is extraordinarily gentle, who has always been extraordinarily gentle, will be known as a strong woman, who holds it together. It's a very big responsibility to be a barrack leader because the mothers, during the day, all go to work in commandos. So my own mother has the responsibility of all the children and these 80 kids. You have to keep them clean.

Still, there were the vermin that would plague us. We have to eat, we have to be clean, we have to not get sick. And she's the one who has to take care of that. She is also responsible for the sick, for those who are not going to work in commandos. So, if there are people faking sick, she is the one who will be punished. She is responsible for the cleanliness of the barracks. It is a very big job. And as always, she does it with dedication. And it's very hard to be the head of a mother's barrack with children. And, there is not the same fabulous solidarity among us that there was in the other camps. In our group, I mean. Not that we hurt each other, far from it, but you have to understand, every mother defends her kid first. So, if anything, it's for her kid - which is normal! So, we defend each other less, while... there is still some solidarity but it's one's own kid first. It's quite normal. So, there are people among us... It's going to be a little bit special, the Bergen-Belsen camp. These Dutch people who were there, who were waiting for us, are diamond dealers from Amsterdam. They are also considered privileged, as hostages, because diamond cutters could be very useful to the Germans. They need them for their war industry. Actually, something terrible is going to happen sometime later. It's that the Dutch will refuse to work for the Germans. And they will be separated from their families, whereas here they arrived as a family⁹⁰. And then, there are among us, people who are a little out of the ordinary. I remember Pierre Ogouz⁹¹ who is a French journalist. Why was he there? I don't know.



Article by Pierre Ogouz in Paris-Soir on April 30, 1938

Source: [Retronews](#)

⁹⁰ Read about this subject *Diamantkinderen: Amsterdamse Diamantjoden en de Holocaust* by Bettine Siertsema (2020) (English title: *The rescue of Belsen's diamond children*)

⁹¹ Born on December 6, 1909, Pierre Ogouz was deported on July 23, 1944 by convoy 80D with his wife Dora (née Khoudy) and his mother Véra (née Levinsohn). Mother and son died in Bergen-Belsen. Philippe Ogouz, Pierre's nephew and Véra's grandson, adapted for the theater *La Rafle du Vel d'Hiv* by M. Rajsfus and wrote the screenplay for *Mr. Klein* by J. Losey. He also adapted for the theater Francine's memoir *From a World Apart* in 2000. Read his [open letter](#) to Eric Zemmour in 2015.

There is Mr. Reinach⁹², who is a state councilor, who is deported with his wife.



Julien Reinach

Source: [De Gruyter](#)

There is Mr. Meyer⁹³, who is the Mayor of Le Havre. There are several celebrities with us, but I couldn't say why.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Léon Meyer

Source: [Gallica](#)

⁹² Julien Reinach (1892-1962) lived at 14, rue George Sand. He was appointed State Counselor on September 10th, 1940. He was interned at Drancy on September 27th, 1943. His wife, Rita (née Lopez Silva di Bajona), arrived at Drancy on October 26th, 1943. They were deported on convoy 80B on May 3rd, 1944. Upon his return from deportation, Julien Reinach resumed his functions at the Council of State. Sources: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) and [Persée](#)

See also [The House of Fragile Things](#) by James McAuley

⁹³ Léon Meyer (1868-1948) Deputy mayor of Le Havre, former minister. In 1940, he voted for the full powers of Pétain. A year later, he was stripped of his mandate as a deputy by virtue of the law of June 2nd, 1941 on the status of the Jews. He withdrew to Bordeaux, then took refuge in Grenoble in 1942, where he participated in the Resistance around Uriage. He escaped the Gestapo for the first time, but was arrested on February 6th, 1944 and transferred to Drancy. He was on the list of convoy 69, which left for Auschwitz on March 7th, 1944. But he was deported on May 3rd, 1944 to Bergen Belsen (list 80) then to Terezin. Liberated by the Allies after 17 months of captivity, he found his city of Le Havre completely destroyed. Sources: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) and [Assemblée Nationale](#)

Interviewer: How well do you remember them?

Francine: More or less. The journalist Pierre Ogouz, yes, very well. He died of typhus. I remember him because... he was fabulous, he was a storyteller.. Even in Bergen-Belsen, we tells stories, we sing songs to each other, we recite poems to each other and then we give each other recipes. I will tell you about the recipes later. All people who have been hungry give each other recipes. Yes, Pierre Ogouz, I remember very well because he was an autograph collector and he told us that, as a little boy, he had jumped on Marshal Foch's horse to get Foch's autograph.



Pierre Ogouz (right) with Walt Disney (left) in 1935

Source: [Disney books blogspot](#)

So, life in Bergen-Belsen, at the beginning, the children even managed to give my mother a little party on her birthday, on August 20th. I still have the program for that party. Because we still have some paper, we still have some pencils, and we made a program.

Marcelle *On August 18th, Francine reached her eleventh year. She had to be satisfied with a moist kiss as a birthday present. Two days later, my own birthday. My poor kid found a way to celebrate. Without telling me, she prepared a "show" with the help of Mrs. Cherkawsky's⁹⁴ son and daughter. I kept the poster, written in capitals on a sheet of school paper:*

PROGRAM OF THE SHOW

Performed on August 20th, 1944 at 7:30 p.m. at the Theatre

of BERGEN-BELSEN

In honor of the BIRTHDAY of Mrs. CHRISTOPHE

This program included an excerpt from "Le Cid"; a comical piece entitled "Le Jambon"; a "three-part chorus" by the "Chœur des Provinces Françaises", sung by several children. (p.270)



Berthe Tcherkawsky and her children before the war

Source: [ajpn](#)

⁹⁴ This is about Berthe (née Moscovici in 1908) and her children, Colette (born in 1932) and Claude (born in 1930). Maurice Tcherkawsky was made a prisoner of war. On January 15th, 1943, Berthe and the children were arrested during the round-up of Jews in Rouen. The next day, they were sent to Drancy, then transferred to the Beaune-la-Rolande camp where they stayed for a month. They were deported to Bergen-Belsen on May 2nd, 1944 on convoy 80A. The family was reunited on June 25th, 1945 at the Hotel Lutetia.

Read Colette's memoirs entitled [Une enfance en otage. "Protégée du Maréchal" à Bergen-Belsen](#).

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, does your grandmother or your father, does anyone in your family know where you are?

Francine: So, my father knows because, still by this strange Geneva Convention that stipulates that the prisoner of war must be allowed to write to his family and must be able to receive news from his family, he'll have the right... he'll learn that his wife was deported to Bergen-Belsen. So, he'll have the right to write to us in Bergen-Belsen. And we will have the right to answer him. The first letters are in French, but very, very soon after we have to write in German. This poses a problem for us. Of course, we have to find someone at the right time who can translate the letter for us, which is not always easy.

Robert In the pile of mail that I was able to bring back from Germany in 1945, I found today a letter in which the Red Cross of Geneva provided me with:

First, the exact name of the camp and the address of my wife:

BARACKE 24, AUFENTHALTSLAGER BERGEN-BELSEN, Kreis Celle, bei Hannover, Deutschland 20.

Then the name of the organization through which I had to go: Reichvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (Concentration Office of the Jews in Germany), Berlin N 65, Iranische Strasse 2 (...)

Finally, the Red Cross gave me this indication: "Only cards written in German are allowed, not letters. (...)

[On August 20, two postcards were distributed to me, of the model used by German civilians. Both came from Bergen-Belsen. The first dated July 9, the second August 2. So sent almost a month apart; and received by me the same day! These two cards were written in German. Marcelle did not know this language, she had written, I thought, under the dictation of a companion, short sentences of which here is the translation: "My darling, Francine and I are well. We are in good spirits. We are allowed to receive German cards and ordinary unregistered packages. Love from both of us.

The second card, with identical wording, was not in his handwriting. But her signature, which was real, was followed by Francine's. What luck: they were alive! (pp. 255-256)

Marcelle To each of Robert's cards, I had to answer in German. Mrs. Heidemann was my interpreter. I

had written the translation of my first answer under her dictation. My impaired eyesight prevented me from writing legibly, so we decided that she would write it herself; I would just sign. The husband of this German Jewess lived in a nearby barrack. She herself was kindness personified. In her happy youth, a French governess had taught her our language. Of her daughters, who had fled to England, she naturally had no news. (p.217)

Francine: And it is my father, I think, who will tell my mother-in-law... my grandmother, sorry, that we were deported, because we don't have any contact with my grandmother. My grandmother is in hiding. My grandmother is in Paris, hiding as a Jew and as a Resistance fighter. She belongs to a network that recovers British and American pilots whose planes have been hit and who have parachuted onto French soil.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of this network, Madame?

Francine: Not at all, but I remember... not at all, I don't remember the name of the network, I never knew it, but I remember that there was Father Ménardais in it. Father Ménardais⁹⁵ was the parish priest of Chalmaison next to Provins, and he was also the chaplain of the dancers at the Opera. Father Ménardais was an absolutely extraordinary guy who saved dozens of Jews in the orphanage he had next to his parish in Chalmaison. He hid weapons in his bell tower, he hid weapons in the tombs, he did fabulous things. And there was also Madeleine Baruch in this network. Madeleine Baruch was a pharmacist on Rue Duphot. She was a neighbor of my grandmother, and as she spoke German very well, she questioned all the German

⁹⁵ Henri Ménardais, born in Genêts in 1882, was a religious figure and a Resistance fighter in the Manche region. He was the parish priest of Chalmaison (Seine-et-Marne) from 1934 to 1952. During the Second World War, he gave support to the weakest, then, after the call of General de Gaulle in June 1940, he joined the active resistance. His parish "gradually became a major regional command post," according to the Resistance fighter Madeleine Lévy, who fought alongside him against Nazism. And his activity was insatiable: he welcomed in his presbytery Allied pilots whose planes had been shot down over France, parachutists, resistance fighters, but also Communists and Jews who were fleeing from the occupying forces, in particular children. "He was what he always was, a man of heart, pushing his priesthood to the point of total self-sacrifice, with that contempt for danger that many of us have known," adds Madeleine Lévy. Sources : [Musée de la Résistance et Comité français pour Yad Vashem](#)

officers who came to her house. She sold them perfumes, souvenirs of Paris for their wives, she bamboozled them and she managed to know a lot of information for her network, to the point where people in the neighborhood thought she was a collaborator and that, on the day of the Liberation of Paris, my grandmother had to rush to her house and say, "Quick, quick, Madeleine, put on your Resistance armband, they think you're a collaborator! They're going to shave your head, quick! Quickly! Hurry!" The people in the neighborhood couldn't believe it, but she was really a great Resistance fighter.



Plaque at 390 rue Saint-Honoré (residence of Esther Nordmann)
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Marcelle [A]fter our return from Germany, I will learn of Mom's heroism. The wife of the pharmacist, much younger and very daring, was in charge of a rescue network of airmen who had jumped by parachute from their

flaming planes. These Englishmen, these Canadians, had to be hidden until a guide accompanied them to the Spanish border. On several occasions, my mother's apartment served as a haven for these waiting survivors. One evening, around ten o'clock, the doorbell rang. She opened it and saw one of her recent friends, the Abbé Ménardais⁹⁶, with an airman whom the good priest had brought to her house. Don't sleep here," the abbot told her, "go to your neighbor's house. Leave us your apartment, we'll leave tomorrow. And tomorrow you yourself will go and live with Mrs. Avy. Don't come here again. So my mother took refuge at the home of this friend, the artist-painter at whose house Francine and I had dined on the evening of our departure for Angoulême before taking the train. (...)

The priest of a village in the district of Provins, [Abbé Ménardais], chaplain to the "little rats" of the Opera, took them for a breath of fresh air to an institution in his parish, where he was the director of consciences. The dancers were cared for by nuns. Among them, the priest hid Jewish girls. Even boys in dresses.

Once my mother had taken refuge at Mrs. Avy-Prégard's, he would come from time to time to boost her morale, bring her food for my clandestine parcels and... bring her new Allied airmen. The painter thus also entered this heroic network (pp. 209-210).

Interviewer: Mrs. Lorch, if you don't mind, we're going to go into a little more personal memory. In the summer of 1944, you are 11 years old and have already been interned for two years. How do you, as a little girl, manage to... understand something about the system? Are you hungry? Are you cold? How do you...

Francine: For 2 years, I have been locked up first. Even if my incarceration is relatively privileged, as I always say, I am already locked up. Being locked up means a barbed wire and seeing freedom on the other

⁹⁶ Henri Ménardais, born in Genêts in 1882, was a religious figure and a member of the Resistance in the Manche. He was the parish priest of Chalmaison (Seine-et-Marne) from 1934 to 1952. During the Second World War, he gave support to the weakest, then, after the call of General de Gaulle in June 1940, he joined the active resistance. His parish "gradually became a major regional command post," according to the Resistance fighter Madeleine Lévy, who fought alongside him against Nazism. And his activity was insatiable: he welcomed in his presbytery Allied pilots whose planes had been shot down over France, parachutists, resistance fighters, conscientious objectors, but also Communists and Jews who were fleeing from the occupying forces, in particular children. "He was what he always was, a man of heart, pushing his priesthood to the point of total self-sacrifice, with this contempt for danger that many of us have known," adds Madeleine Lévy.
Sources: [Musée de la Résistance](#) et [Comité français pour Yad Vashem](#)

side of the barbed wire. It is already something abominable when you are a little girl. So, I suffered, as I told you, the hunger, the cold. I saw the separation of many, many people, including these children with the fear that it would happen to me. Everything is scary. I am even afraid of having my head shaved, you know? It sounds silly like that, but a shaved head is a terrible thing for a little girl from that time when little girls always have such beautiful long hair. I am always afraid they will cut off my hair.

Interviewer: Have you seen children being shaved?

Francine: Of course.

Interviewer: And in Bergen-Belsen?

Francine: No, when we arrive, we are hostages, we are left with our hair. We keep our clothes. My hair... it will become something unspeakable. My mother will cut it short, so short that I will be infested with lice. I'll have what is called impetigo. I had it in France, by the way. The impetigo, they are disgusting crusts. When the scabs are torn off, we don't have what it takes to treat them. In Bergen-Belsen, we will shave the hair around it. But I will still have "three hairs on my head". It's better than being completely shaved. We will have body lice too. Body lice are different. They're called Kraut lice because they have a pattern on their back. They itch.

Interviewer: What pattern?

Francine: A kind of swastika. That's why they call them Kraut lice. I was hungry. And the hunger in Bergen-Belsen is going to get worse and worse because the packages we made are going to run out. It won't last

long. We are going to eat the soup very soon! With the sand, with the dirt in it. And we will be hungry, really hungry. The hunger that really makes you see the evil. Until then, I have been hungry, sometimes I was so hungry that I said to Mommy, "I'm hungry, Mommy! I'm hungry!" But, it wasn't torturous. In Bergen-Belsen, it is going to be a torturous hunger. That is to say, a hunger that really hurts, that hurts your stomach, that makes you want to roll around on the floor screaming. And me, I am going to say to Mommy, because a mommy is who brought you to the world, a mommy is made to bring you happiness, and I am going to reproach her for it. I will tell her all the time that I am hungry so that she knows it well, so that she understands it well. My poor mother! I never leave her alone. Every time I'm hungry, I tell her "Mommy, I'm hungry!" Then she hurts even more. But I can't help it. I need to hurt her. I'm in so much pain myself. I'll have an appendicitis attack too in Bergen-Belsen. When we saw the state of the infirmary, we said to ourselves that maybe it was better not to have an operation. And then, we have all types of sores.

Interviewer: Did you... so you did not have an operation?

Francine: No, because the camp doctor⁹⁷ told Mommy, "If she's holding up, I don't want to operate on her. I can't do it. First of all, I don't have any anesthetics and then I have nothing. It's not safe. I have a scalpel that is a knife." It went away. I was operated on later. The regime in the camp changed little by little. We heard about the Allies' landings in Normandy. I still see it. We heard about it, we took out a table and we were jumping on that table and singing. On July 14, we did something absolutely extraordinary. So, we had our clothes on. Our clothes were in a pitiful state, I might as well tell you. They were old, patched, holes, you know, everything you can imagine. Dirty. Full of lice. Lice hide in the seams, in the pockets,

⁹⁷ Probably Dr. Jean (Jan) Alalouf who will be rewarded by the French Ambassador and the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina. Source: *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten*

everywhere. But, we succeeded, on the day of July 14, to dress the three women who were in front of the group in blue-white-red. We had to leave in rows. And, the three women who were in the front row, we dressed them in blue-white-red. They left to work, as commandos, in blue-white-red. And there was no punishment. We never understood what had happened. And we sang the Marseillaise. And then the days passed. The camp filled up. People came from everywhere. Barracks were built, barracks and barracks. And the camps that were... The Russian prisoners disappeared. I don't remember how. Don't ask me. One day there were deportees instead of Russian prisoners, and that was it. There were more and more deportees, in every corner, in striped suits of course. Here, I should have thought about it, we're talking about camps, I am wearing a striped dress... They were everywhere. They looked much more miserable than us, you could see that they were beaten, you could see that they were starving. And we were always under a regime, a little different. We were not beaten. We were getting hungrier and hungrier, but we weren't beaten. Of course, we were getting sicker and sicker. There started to be deaths among us.

Interviewer: To be...?

Francine: Deaths. And then the regime changed. So we were entitled to these letters from Dad. In this crazy world, we received letters from Dad. Dad was even allowed to send us packages. Everything arrived. We received three. Three packages. He was starving himself in his camp. He was dying of hunger because he had been transported to a reprisal camp. I forgot to tell you that the Jewish officers were put in a separate barrack and then in a special camp, the reprisal camp called Lubeck. There were all the Jewish officers there, mixed with noble officers, mixed with other officers who were a bit special, considered

separate. There was Leon Blum's son⁹⁸, there was Churchill's nephew, there was Stalin's son. There were the Rothschild sons.

Interviewer: How did they... I'm sorry, Mrs. Lorch, how did they, in the Offlag where your father was a prisoner, how did they know, among these officers, who was Jewish and who was not?

Francine: They were put in the... well, then wait. Let's go back. So my father was taken prisoner. From Laval, he was sent to Germany. There, he was sent to a large camp in Nuremberg. And in Nuremberg, prisoners from all over the world came to the camps. There, they made selections and, from there, they sent him to Austria to the camp in Edelbach, which was Offlag 17A.⁹⁹ And it was there, in Offlag 17A that

⁹⁸ Robert Blum (1902-1975) Only son of Léon Blum with his first wife Lise Bloch.



Léon Blum accompanied by his third wife, Jeanne (née Levylier), and his son Robert (right, with satchel) upon their arrival at Washington DC airport, USA. 1946 (Photo by KEYSTONE-FRANCE/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images) Source: Getty Images

⁹⁹ In *A Family in the War*, Robert Christophe specifies his address "Offlag XIII A, Unterlager B. Deutschland." He also recounts that "[his] hosts flooded the camp with free copies of *Le Trait d'Union*. Printed in Berlin, this bi-weekly, written in French, was nothing more than a venomous or disarmingly naive pamphlet. Since [his] arrival, [he] had been perusing this rag. In the issue of September 26 [1940] (...) [he] had read an editorial with the title : Jewish Infiltration in France. It was a call for the expulsion, if not the massacre, of the Israelites of French nationality. A caricature

the orders came to put the Jewish officers in a special barrack.¹⁰⁰ So they were put in a special barrack. It was okay. And my father had not been designated, since his name was Robert Christophe... Well, he had not been designated. He went to denounce himself. He went to put himself in the special barrack. He said, "There's no reason not to!" Some of his buddies said, "But maybe you're wrong. You might have... if something happens to us..." He said, "No, I can't! I can't leave the others." There, there were extraordinary scenes because, among all these officers, there were some who were collaborators, of course, who were bastards. And then there were some good Catholics who came immediately to the barracks of the Jews. The Germans came and said, "No non-Jewish officers here! Will you get out!" And I still remember, among others, among others but there were many who did this, among others, General Badoy, well who was not a general at the time, who became General Badoy who is now a very old man, who was Intendant General of France, who at the time was Lieutenant Badoy, who turned to the Germans and said: "Sir, there are no Jewish officers or non-Jewish officers here. There are only officers of the French Army!"

Interviewer: Did your father tell you that?

Francine: Yes. We always continued to see Badoy. All his life, we kept seeing him.

Interviewer: If you don't mind, let's go back now to the very last days of January 1945 in Bergen-Belsen?

Francine: So, my father was sent to the reprisal camp in Lubeck and there, in Lubeck, he finds out that we are in Bergen-Belsen. He knows that the Allies have landed, that the Allies are invading to liberate France,

illustrated the article, with this caption: Peasant! The Jews will never be behind the plow, but at the Bourse du Commerce, to speculate on the fruit of your labor." (p.38)

¹⁰⁰ Oflag 17A was one of the P.O.W. camps reserved for French troops, but especially for military officers.

that the Allies are invading little by little and he knows that the first camps have been liberated.¹⁰¹ He has found out that. And he knows, among other things, the existence of Auschwitz. And he knows about the concentration camps. He knows what is happening there. He learns about it in his camp.

**A LUBLIN
DES DIZAINES DE
MILLIERS DE FRANCAIS
ONT ETE MASSACRES
PAR LES ALLEMANDS**

Moscou, 13 août (par câble de J. Champenois à l'A.F.I.).—Des dizaines de milliers de Français ont été asphyxiés électrocutés, incinérés dans les fours de la fabrique de cadavres de Lublin. Leurs vêtements et objets personnels soigneusement triés et désinfectés avec le même gaz qui avait servi à les tuer ont été envoyés en Allemagne et distribués à des dizaines de milliers d'Allemands, hommes femmes, enfants, qui les portent actuellement. Des centaines de milliers d'Allemands portent la dépouille d'un être humain assassiné, français grec, polonais, yougoslave, belge, hollandais, tchèque, soviétique.

France on August 15, 1944 (journal published in London)

Source: [Retronews](#)

¹⁰¹ Lublin-Majdanek, a concentration camp in Poland, was the first camp to be liberated by the Allies on 24 July 1944. As the Red Army advanced, the Germans forcibly evacuated many of the internees to other camps. In January 1945, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, the largest of the extermination camps. In the following months, the Americans and the British liberated the camps of Buchenwald, Dora-Mittelbau, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme.

Sources: Mémorial de la Shoah and <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/liberation-of-nazi-camps>

Despite everything, he sends us parcels because the Geneva Convention allows him to do so. These parcels arrive half-emptied, but we receive them all the same. It is quite extraordinary. And the little that we have left in them we use as barter. And, therefore, as I told you, we heard about D-Day and, by the way the camp is filling up, we understand that other camps in Germany are emptying. And among other things, one morning, we see on the other side of the barbed wire, quantities of women who are shaved, who are thin as skeletons and who are in striped suits. And we begin to talk to these women, and we realize that they are French women. And we realize that some of these French women we knew at Drancy. My mother recognizes some of the women she brought to the departure stairs. And we ask them questions through the fence and that's how we learn, that's when we learn that there are camps worse than ours. There are... that's when we learn that there are gas chambers and crematoria. Well, not crematoria, because we have them in Bergen-Belsen, but gas chambers. It is there that we learn that people are systematically killed, from these women who are the survivors of Auschwitz, the survivors of the death march that were sent to Bergen-Belsen.

Marcelle *One day at the end of January 1945, one of our friends ran into the barrack and said, "Come and see the next camp, on the other side of the gate! Lots of women are coming! I recognized several of them: they were with us in Drancy!"*

Turning around, the informant disappeared behind the post office. A few of us followed her. When we reached the barbed wire surrounding the block, we didn't dare approach it too closely. Guards could appear, with their truncheons. A few meters and two fences separated us from the newcomers. Many of them had shaved heads. We could recognize their sex by their uniform dresses, dirty white, with blue stripes along the top. Their bare feet were shod with wooden shoes.

The clamors of surprise, the greeting of the ones to the others filled the air. It was necessary to shout to be heard. And to hear what? The presentation of a revelation that upset us.

To our irritation, the "stripes" opposed an unexpected phlegm. Each time we asked her about her husband or her parents, recognizing one of them by her voice rather than her appearance, she answered in a monotone: "gassed" or "burned". Not without difficulty, I identified a Viennese woman who, at Drancy, looked like a goddess. And what was left of her? A kind of mummy. I said to her: "Your mother? - Burned," she answered. "And your aunt? - Burned."

Standing next to me, Francine recognizes Fania¹⁰², an artist who used to make the children dance at Drancy. To what did this unfortunate woman owe her life? In Auschwitz or Birkenau, I don't know, she played in the orchestra. But yes! The convict women left for the construction sites to the sound of triumphal marches. Less tired, the musicians could survive. But Fania's brown hair had turned grey.

The barbarity of the camps of the East unrolled its dramas in our ears. We did not imagine that there were prisons more inhuman than Bergen-Belsen. The gas chambers were not an invention of anti-Nazi propaganda (p. 287).



Fania Perla

Source: [Open Library](#)

¹⁰² Fania Perla (born Goldstein and later known under the name of Fania Fénelon) was born in 1908 and died in 1983. Deported to Auschwitz on January 20th, 1944 by convoy 66, she was a member of the camp's Women's Orchestra under the direction of Alma Rosé. She recounts her experience in her book *Sursis pour l'orchestre*, published in 1976 and adapted for the screen in 1980.

In *From a World Apart*, Francine also mentions Fania, who kept the camp children busy: "To keep us busy, between roll calls and soups, the radiant Fania Perla, crowned with a thick brown plait, gathers us together and enchants us. She can do everything. With the help of the Haïm sisters, aged between eighteen, fifteen, and ten, and all three dancers and actresses at the Petit Monde theater, she puts on a show." (p.49)

Sources : [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) and [Washington Post](#)

Interviewer: So we're... what month is that, please?

Francine: This is January '45 or maybe a little before, I don't know when the death march took place.¹⁰³

Auschwitz was liberated in January '45, or maybe a little earlier, I don't know, but it is in the middle of winter. And I remember that these women are freezing to death. Among other things, I remember that they have no panties under their dresses, and we organize a donation. We have extra panties left. We throw them over the barbed wire. We throw them what we have, what we have left. We realize that there are people even more miserable than us. And then we will inherit these women and we will also inherit their camp leaders. And the infamous Kramer, the infamous camp leader of Auschwitz, will come to manage Bergen-Belsen.¹⁰⁴ We will have him as our camp leader.



Josef Kramer
Source: [USHMM](#)

¹⁰³ During the Soviet advance into the eastern possessions of the Third Reich, the SS began forcibly removing prisoners from concentration camps in order to hide evidence of their atrocities. These "death marches" were done by train but also on foot, with the Germans murdering any prisoner who could not keep up. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Allied forces "often asked German civilians to see the exhumed bodies of those who had died on the marches." (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/death-marches>)

¹⁰⁴ Josef Kramer (1906-1945), nicknamed "the executioner of Belsen" and "the beast of Belsen," was the commandant of Birkenau. He was known for his cruelty to prisoners, including torturing them and releasing dogs on them. In 1945, he was captured by British forces, tried for his crimes and hanged. Source: <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/afe00000940/liberation-du-camp-de-belsen>

Marcelle

I see myself in my bed, looking for sleep to forget, but sickened by the smell of the crematorium that penetrated under the window seals. I also remember the soup chores. Soon the men stopped doing it for us. Female teams were put in charge. As head of the barracks, I had to set an example and join them. We had two kinds of soup: 25 and 40 liters. With only two handles. Impossible, consequently, to carry them to more than two women. For slimmed down bodies, an exhausting work. We felt our backs cracking. Especially when we climbed the bumps in the terrain. If we spilled the precious load, it was as many ladles that we lost. Also, what a din in the hut! With these ladles, we had to stir up the bottom of the pots, so that each woman and each child could have a little bit of vegetables or a few rare pieces of meat. During one of these daily trips to the kitchens, I saw a motorcyclist with a round face and a build that showed he was not hungry. He was wearing the uniform of an SS officer. Someone said to me, "That's Kramer, the camp commandant." (p.272)

[The Belsen Trial: War Crimes of the SS \(1945\) | British Pathé](#)



Interviewer: Do you remember that?

Francine: Yes, because the regime changed and also, I saw it.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about it?

Francine: Yes, so the regime is going to change. That's for sure. Even for us. Even for us, the privileged ones.

Marcelle "*Hold on*", I have already quoted this word. It haunted most of us. "*Hold on*", until deliverance. But how to "*hold on*" when dysentery makes you run to the latrines every moment? They ended up overflowing. The personalities became bitter. We were warned that the kapos would come to police our block. They arrived under the direction of a leader named Hanke. Big in body and short on legs, this "common law" man was serving a sentence for murder or theft. Along with this German came two French kapos, convicted of black-marketing and released from a French prison. We already knew them because we had seen them beat up the internees in a block next to ours. With us, they were less harsh.

On the Appelplatz, we saw Albanians of both sexes who had come from other blocks. The men, wearing fur coats and big moustaches, looked like characters from Edmond About's famous novel, King of the Mountains. Kapo Kasimir struck with such rage that people claimed, rightly or wrongly, that he killed his victims.
Our misery did not prevent the children from making toys. They used the silkworm cocoons brought by our companions who used them in the workshops. Modeling these silkworm larvae, they pierced them with pieces of wood, and produced small animals or characters. The singular toys stank. (p.275)

Francine: We will have less and less to eat, we will be more and more crowded because, as the camp fills up, Bergen-Belsen will really become the dumping ground of Europe. It will become the sewer. For me, it's really the sewer, the number one sewer in the world, in Europe at least, because they are going to put

everything that's left in Bergen-Belsen to rot. It's a camp where one rots. There are no gas chambers, but people rot. Everyone rots in Bergen-Belsen.

For me, as a little girl, it's a memory of mud. Mud, garbage, with people, the living dead who die in there. That's Bergen-Belsen for me. It's a rotten place! Nothing but rot! And then, above that, people screaming, armed people screaming. That's Bergen-Belsen for me. That's all there is to it. We will get hungrier and hungrier. We will have more and more lice. Typhus is gaining ground. Oh, I forgot to mention that we were supposedly vaccinated against typhus. It was a horrible vaccination. It was a shot in the breast that is horrible, that hurts terribly. It was 3 doses in 1. I heard they added alcohol, I don't know, but I do know that you wring your hands and scream when you get that shot. And it didn't stop us from getting typhus. It didn't prevent anything.

Interviewer: Was your mother there too?

Francine: Yes. Mommy is getting more and more awful. She is covered in sores. She already had sores in the camps in France, but now they are horrible. She is covered in sores, and you can see her bone sometimes. My God! To think that she used to be a beautiful woman!

Interviewer: But, Mrs. Lorch, in your parents' book, your mother also recounts this scene, saying that she was in so much pain that she offered you...

Francine: Help.

Interviewer: You remember...

Francine: I didn't want to. I didn't want to, yes. I had my pride. I said, "No, no, I'll go by myself!" It was horrible. What becomes more and more horrible are the roll calls. The calls, it is an abominable moment in all the camps. It existed in all the camps. It already existed in France. It's horrible. They count us. They count us, they recount us. It is part... It was part of this policy of dumbing us down, of debasement. We have to be made into animals. So, anything that can make us even more unhappy, even more sad, even more stupid, they make us do it. The call lasts for hours, hours, hours, whatever the weather. They will become longer and longer. The calls in the summer are something terrible because Germany is a country, what we call continental, that is to say that it is very, very hot in the summer. And these calls under the burning sun, we were suffocating and there were what we called German flies. I'd never seen those flies anywhere else, those kind of black bugs that clung together. And the calls in the cold, it was going to be more and more horrendous because obviously we didn't have enough clothes against the cold, we weren't fed. And a call lasts for hours. We are counted and recounted as if any of us could have escaped. But they always make a mistake, they must do it on purpose: they forget, they forget a sick person in the barrack. And when someone falls, we are not allowed to pick them up. I remember one day Mommy fell in front of me in the snow and I wasn't allowed to pick her up. I wasn't allowed to touch her. I wasn't allowed to bend down and touch her. And I was standing there at attention and I saw Mommy lying there and inside I was thinking, "Will she get up?" She did get up. When we came back from those calls, we were so cold, it was horrible! You felt like your fingers and toes were going to come off. We would tap on them to try to warm them up. I remember, I was flexible at the time, I remember putting my big toe in my mouth to try to warm it up, it was so cold, it was so cold. That cold, what a horror! We couldn't get warm anymore.

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, in January 1945, when you see the deportees arriving from Auschwitz, at the same time as the discovery that there were gas chambers, you also learn that the Allies are liberating the camps?

Francine: Yes.

Interviewer: So...

Francine: So hope overtakes us, of course. There, at that moment, hope and despair win over us. Hope because we think that maybe this is the end of our misery. And despair too, because we have reached such a point that we think we won't survive. We can't take it anymore, for some of us. We've already had deaths.

Interviewer: And how is your last hour in Bergen-Belsen? How did it go?

Francine: My last hours. Well, I must say first that we are witnessing the bombings. There were bombings in Bergen-Belsen. There are troops all around Bergen-Belsen.

Interviewer: Troops from...

Francine: German troops. It's a training camp, Bergen-Belsen. The troops train in the forests around Bergen-Belsen. Sometimes you can see them marching and singing. It is scary, by the way. They sing very well, these people. And it's very scary to see them marching there in the Black Forest. And then, we hear the sound of the guns and we hear the planes more and more. The Allied planes come to bomb the region. And they put... they have the intelligence to put rockets at the four corners of the camp so as not to bomb it. Despite it all, there were bombs that fell. There are craters in the camp. There are bombs falling. One on the kitchen, which is going to complicate things. And one, I think, on the crematorium. And besides, the crematorium can no longer handle so many dead and we have to make large mass graves, to dig and to put the bodies in the graves and we put lime for...

Interviewer: Did you see that, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: Yes, and then the death cart comes by every day, to pick up the dead. There are more and more of them. The cart comes by. There is the Lager Strasse, that is, the central road in the middle of the camp, and the cart goes down there every day. It is pulled by deported women, of course. They pick up the bodies... they stop... in front of each enclosure, they pick up the bodies. And they carry these bodies, naked, because the clothes always need to be recovered. They carry them, they throw them on the cart and I saw, I saw someone who was pulling the cart who fell, who was not completely dead and who was thrown on the cart. And, I am afraid during the bombings. I am horribly afraid. The barrack shakes. I hold on to Mommy. At that time, we no longer have two straw mattresses. We only have one for two people because the camp has filled up so much that we have this little thing where we are nested one inside the other to sleep. We sleep badly there anyways. The time when we would fall asleep at night... is over, I didn't tell you, it's true... I wanted to tell you: by giving each other recipes. As we were hungry, we would share recipes at night. There was a deportee among us named Mérika Burgas.¹⁰⁵ She was a tall woman with red hair. She had had a rather eccentric life before the war. She had been to the greatest restaurants, which none of us had. And so she would say to us before we went to sleep at night, "Tonight I'm taking you to Maxim's. Tonight..."

Interviewer: Sorry, Mrs. Lorch, we have to go to another tape.

¹⁰⁵ Anna Bourgas Roselli was born on March 22nd, 1904 in Paris 8e. She is the wife of Jean Bourgas. She lived at 71 avenue Marceau in Paris 16e. She was deported by convoy 80D from the Drancy camp on July 23, 1944. She was liberated in Tröbitz on April 22, 1945 by the Soviet army. She was repatriated by plane to Paris on May 18, 1945. Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

TAPE 6

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, please forgive me for not being able to let you continue with the story of the recipes exchanged between the hungry, but I would like you to talk now about...

Francine: The end of Bergen-Belsen

Interviewer: How do you leave the Bergen-Belsen camp?

Marcelle For many weeks, so many repatriates from the camps in the East had been crowding our camp that the barracks had to be regrouped. Mine was too small for the number of its inhabitants. Then we saw this painful thing: several women from the P.G. were forced to sleep in men's barracks.

When April arrived, the commando of the dead, overwhelmed with work, could no longer pick up all the corpses: they piled up in the Waschroun. Our liberators were approaching, we were told. Suddenly, there were no more calls, nor guards inside the blocks.

On April 7, around nine o'clock in the evening, the guards appeared again. To announce that the wives of the prisoners of war and their children had to go to the showers (...)

We slept tightly during the following night.

At daylight, the SS came back, increasing our fever with their barking. Around noon, trucks came, in a long line, to park on the central road. So many vehicles for less than three hundred people? it surprised us. But a German shouted: "The Albanians, the Greeks, the Dutch, men and women, and also the French women with their children, you will get into the trucks! Given the lack of places, the most able-bodied will follow on foot to the station!" That was between one thousand and fifteen hundred people (p.327).

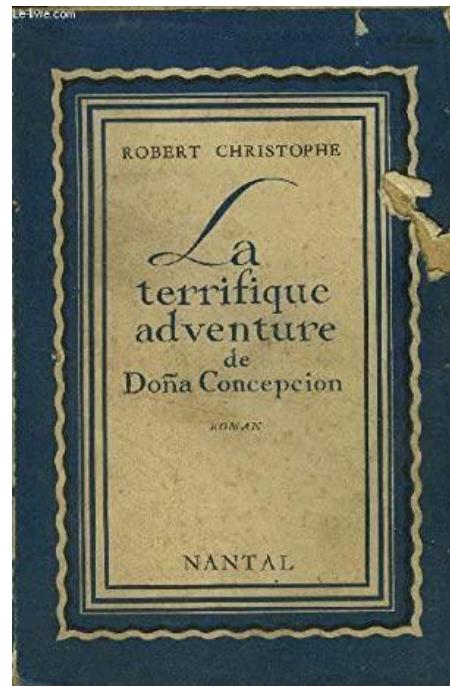
Francine: Yes. So we hear the cannon. We don't know but it is the English cannon. It's the cannon of... well, we suspect that it is the cannon of deliverance. But we hear it without knowing if it is really the one that will deliver us. The camp is becoming more and more horrible. I tell you, there is typhus. Everyone is

sick. It is awful. And, there is one thing that consoles us and that is that we know that some kapos caught it. And we know that there are Germans who caught it. And there we learn that we will be taken away. So we feel at once hope and despair because... hope because, we say to ourselves, if we get out of this cesspool, of this sewer, we will perhaps make it but, on the other hand, if we are being liberated, we will be taken further. Well, we won't actually be freed. We are not given a choice. They make us leave. And they tell us, "No luggage!" So the few small things that we have carefully kept, we have to part with them. We kept... Mommy kept the knife that she used to cut bread for so many years when she was a barrack leader.



Couteau de Marcelle

Source : Mémorial de la Shoah/coll. F. Christophe



Source : [AbeBooks](#)

And 2-3 small souvenirs, among others, the cover of the books that my father had published before the war. Books that mother used to entertain us, the children, because it must be said that she read us, reread these

books simply so that we could hear our language, so that we would be able, if we were one day liberated, to speak our language properly. So we leave. Some leave by truck, some on foot.

Interviewer: How do you and your mother leave?

Francine: By truck. There are people who try to escape from Bergen-Belsen and get on our truck. They are shot right away, right in front of us. I remember... I remember that... they fall there in front of us. Boom!

We arrived at the Bergen station and there was a huge pile of rutabagas and a huge pile of fodder beets. We fought with each other to pick up this and take that. We got into the cars, we rushed into these cars to try to find a seat, something. There were us, the wives and children of the P.O.W.s, there were the diamond dealers, what was left of the Dutch families, there were some Greek Jews from Salonika who had also been considered privileged. And we got on these trains, which were filthy trains, they were covered with lice.

We found out later that they had been used to transport those infected by typhus. And we got on there...pfff...there were mad people because typhus makes you crazy. We were fighting. It was horrible! We were fighting on that train. We were fighting to find a little corner to sit down. How to tell you? We were going crazy. We were so hungry. We couldn't take it anymore.

Marcelle Excited, everyone quarreled with their neighbors. One night, Francine was sleeping in her usual place, near a woman who, on her knees, was holding her retarded baby, moreover half dead. The mother herself was feverish. Unconscious, she hit my daughter to push her off the bench. I returned the favor, and Francine was able to resume her seat. My poor child was not crying anymore. She didn't even whine, as she had at the beginning of our misfortunes: "Mommy, I'm hungry! She understood that, in the near future, she would know death or deliverance.
(p.331)

And the train left.¹⁰⁶ And the train ran for three weeks.¹⁰⁷ They were trying - we found out much later - to get to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁸ But the train never made it, because everywhere it went, Allied troops were coming. So it went in circles.



Itinerary of the ghost train

Source: [Mémoires de déportation](#)

¹⁰⁶ Three trains left the camp between April 6 and 11, 1945, each containing about 2,500 prisoners. Their destination was the Theresienstadt concentration camp in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. Eventually, only one train reached the camp. Dozens of its passengers were killed in an Allied aerial bombardment. A second train, later known as the "ghost train," ran back and forth for two weeks between the battle lines, was caught in Russian-German crossfire, and finally stopped near the eastern German town of Tröbitz, where the prisoners were liberated by the Red Army.

¹⁰⁷ Francine and Marcelle were on the "ghost train"

¹⁰⁸ Theresienstadt/Terezin was a ghetto, detention camp, transit camp and labor camp primarily for Central European Jews. It was also an important [propaganda tool](#) for the Nazis, designed to conceal the fact that those deported to the East were destined for the extermination camps. Source: [USHMM](#)

And that train became a kind of walking nightmare. We had more and more people sick with typhus and when someone died, we threw the body out of the window. One could have traced us by following the corpses along the track. The first few days, our guards gave us a little bit of bread. We had the rutabagas that we had grabbed at the Bergen station. Then the last few days, we had nothing. So when the train stopped, we went to pick up some nettles that we found. We made a fire under the cars with these nettles. And the Germans would come by and kick the fire because they said we might set the car on fire. And we had dysentery. Here I have to be... to give a trivial detail but it is necessary to give it to show how we lived. The train ran for hours and hours and we had dysentery. That meant that we emptied ourselves on the floor of the train. So we lived in our own feces. So we lived in there for 3 weeks. When the train stopped, if there was a stream, we went to the stream to try to wash ourselves. We would take off our clothes, we would try to crush our lice clack-clack-clack. It really became a kind of horror, this train. We were bombed because the Allies thought it was a German troop transport. There were wounded, I think even some dead. Anything white we had left, we hung it on the train so that, from up there, they would know that we were not fighters. And then, the last few days, the guards left. At least, the officers. There were only a few troopers left who eventually left... well, there was almost no one left. No guards left. And in the last few days, once the train stopped, the women who were still able-bodied tried to go and get something in the fields, or maybe on a farm. And my mother also went to try to find maybe some potatoes, something, and when the women came back, Mommy wasn't there anymore. The women got back on the train. The train started moving again and Mommy was gone.



April 13, 1945 – Prisoners of one of the three trains that left Bergen-Belsen¹⁰⁹
Source: [Haaretz](#)

Interviewer: And you were 12 years old?

Francine: And I was... not yet 12. I mean, I was 12 when I was liberated. I was 11 and a half and that was the most horrible moment of my life! Of my life! It was those few hours that I spent in the train without Mommy. Because a child can bear anything if she has her mother. I remember that in Bergen-Belsen, I didn't leave a barrack fast enough when we had to change barrack. The stick fell, it fell on my back. I didn't run fast enough. But it didn't matter! I put up with the blow because Mommy was there. But there, there

¹⁰⁹ This train was the first to leave Bergen-Belsen for Theresienstadt on April 7, 1945. Luckily, the prisoners were freed by American soldiers six days later. Source: [Haaretz](#)

was no longer Mommy And that was unbearable. A child can't stand anything if she doesn't have her mother. And the train rolled, rolled, rolled. And I remember looking at all of them and saying, "You can all die! I don't care anymore! You can all die but not Mommy!" And 50 years later, when I think about that moment, I hurt. It really hurts. And then, at the next stop, Mommy came back up. Mommy came back up. Because she had actually almost died in a field and a friend had managed to pull her up. But she didn't have the strength to get up to our car. So she got into the back car. The cars didn't connect, because there were all kinds of cars. There were 3rd class, there were German 4th class, there were cattle cars, there were even flat cars, without roofs, that had been running like that. With women freezing to death on them. So I found Mommy in a bad state. Well, and then, we heard the cannon a lot. We heard the airplanes a lot, a lot. And then, one night, the train stopped. We didn't hear anything. We slept. And in the morning, when we opened our eyes, there were Cossacks, Cossacks. The Russians because the Russians... the Soviets who liberated us - a country doesn't change that much - were dressed like Cossacks. With Russian shirts. They were on horseback with the astrakhan cap. And we saw our guards walk by with their hands in the air. Those who were left.

Marcelle *The SS officer had disappeared, the soldiers were becoming rare. The cannon ceased to thunder in the evening of April 22, and the convoy fell asleep, at the stop. Around five o'clock in the morning, I was awokened by the sound of horses. Curious but tired eyes peered out. And what did we see? Unknown soldiers, dusty furs. "Russians!" the rumor went through the whole train. Afterwards, it fell back into silence. Great joys can be as silent as great sorrows. And then, did we know what fate our liberators had in store for us? Couldn't they have mistaken us for Berliners fleeing the battles? Moreover, the anti-Semitism of the Russians of yesteryear bothered those travelers who had suffered from it. An advice flew from car to car: "Tear off your yellow stars!" Those who had scissors, knives, lent them to others; and all these wheels were disconnected. (p.331)*

Francine: So, we were not in very good shape. We were near a village. The Russians told us, "The village is empty. Come in!" We entered this village. It was called Tröbitz. It was 80 kilometers south of Berlin.

Interviewer: Can you spell it?

Francine: T-R-O-"-B-I-T-Z We went into the houses. We washed ourselves. You can't imagine what it's like to wash when you haven't washed for so long. We burned all the clothes. There were lots of lice. We washed, washed, washed, washed. Then we ate. They had provisions in their cellars. They had jars with vegetables. They had chicken coops. My mom, so sweet, I remember, she skinned a rabbit like that... we ate everything in it. Which was crazy by the way. Because we could have died from it. Some people died from eating too much the first day unfortunately.

Marcelle *Around two o'clock, [Dora] returned from the village. She announced that Nana was waiting for us in a house chosen by her. Our little group set out, guided by Dora. The village was called Tröbitz. The whole train crawled through it.*

We arrived at an abandoned house. Ever dynamic, the smiling Nana had just set the table. A white tablecloth, real glasses, earthenware or porcelain plates. We were crying with emotion. No longer cattle, we were going to become human beings again?...

Taking off our rags, we cleaned ourselves on the kitchen sink. We raided the cupboards to dress ourselves with the dresses of the escaped German woman, her children and even with the shirts of the husband, because we were too many: Nana, Madelon and her son, Rose-Marie and hers, Madeleine, Francine and me, finally Dora and her cousin Berthe. Seven women and three children.

It was April 23rd. Having left Belsen on the 9th, we had been wandering for a fortnight. Having left the western part of the Reich, our traveling prison had just ended up in the east. Rumors spread in the village told us that the SS, when questioned by our liberators, had confessed to their ultimate plan: to bring the convoy to a bridge on the upper Elbe and blow it up. When you can no longer negotiate hostages, you kill them (pp. 332-333).

Francine: And then, well we got typhus anyway. So the Russians came. They told us, "We have to quarantine you because you have typhus. And then after I don't know how many days, Mom became delirious. Her temperature went up to 41 Celsius. She had typhus. She was taken to the hospital. And

there I thought I would lose her again. She said goodbye to me. She told me to be good in my life, that she hoped she had done her duty all her life, that she hoped I would do my duty too. We always did our duty in the family.

Marcelle *From my first day in the hospital, I have only two memories. I felt that something cold was being placed on my head. I put my hand on my skull: it was smooth. I had just been shaved, for hygiene reasons. Then I see myself in the shower. Someone was holding me under my arms, to prevent me from falling. Then, nothing more... I came out of a coma of unknown duration and saw my room mates. Like me, they had billiard balls in place of heads. My baldness did not bother me, I was too sick. Besides, it was terribly hot. I kept pushing back my hospital gown, which was split in the back. When the doctor arrived, he found me naked.*

I was lying on the second level of a two-story bed. Next to me lay the walking bag that I used to use when Francine was a baby to take her to the Parc Monceau making her carry her snacks. I had it with me when we were arrested, and I never parted with it. Seeing him on my hospital bed, I recognized him with difficulty: the disinfection oven had shriveled him. Sometimes I vaguely understood my situation, sometimes I was rambling. When the illness loosened its grip a little, I was able to search the bag: I discovered there, more or less intact, all the correspondence received from Robert at Drancy and Belsen; also his watercolor portrait, painted at Edelbach. I was contemplating it with love when a young Russian nurse appeared. Looking at the little painting, she spoke words that were incomprehensible for me. Trying to make her understand that it was my husband, I said, placing the portrait against my lips: "My darling! My darling!" The next day, the nurse in turn showed me a picture of a man and said, "My darrrling, my darrrling."
(pp. 349-350)

Francine: So I lived in my village, with the survivors, knowing that my mother was recovering little by little, that she was not dying. But we were far from everything. Outside of everything. We knew nothing. In the Russian zone. We didn't know anything anymore. We didn't have much to eat. It's not that the Russians were depriving us. It's that there wasn't much. The Germans returned to their village. They were, how can I put it? I know that I was not mistaken because I heard a French officer on television who said the same thing. They were flat. It shocked us to see that these people, who had conquered Europe in a horrible way, were capable, once defeated, of becoming carpets. It was strange! They no longer had any dignity. We

had more dignity than they did. So my father, for his part. So when he was liberated by the British troops, he went to Bergen-Belsen. He even searched through the mass graves to find us. He had no idea where we were. And someone, who was very sick, told him: "They left. I don't know where they went." He returned to France. We're not going to tell that story, it would be too long. It's quite a book in itself. But finally, he made some appeals on the radio. He found a woman from where we were, who told him, "This is where they are. So if I may say in a hurry, he managed to get through the Iron Curtain, that was also an incredible adventure, he found us in Tröbitz. With the help of dozens of people, he managed to find transport, ambulances, to bring us back. Finally, it's a whole story too. I found myself in Paris on June 12, my father's birthday. I told him that it was the best day of my life... No, it was the day I found him that I told him that, on June 6th. "Dad, this is the best day of my life!"

Marcelle "*Little darling mother (...) I am in good health; I have put on a lot of weight. I am alone with Rose-Marie and Michel; Madelon went to live in Kirchain with Nana. Rose-Marie takes very good care of me. As for all the things you asked Madelon for, cakes or other things, it is impossible, because we have absolutely nothing. I learned that you have no more fever; you think what a joy for me, I kiss you a thousand and one times... " I think I remember that I cried when I read these words (p. 350).*

Robert *Entering Tröbitz, we found the streets deserted. Driving at a slow speed, the car went around it. No one (...) Continuing its rounds, the car retraced its steps. We remained mute inside: the sight of this desert took our breath away. Arriving in the middle of a triangular square, we finally saw a living being. A boy of about ten years old.*

The car stopped. I jumped on the road. The kid sees me. We run towards each other. I say to him: "Are you French? - Yes, Sir, and so are you! - Are you from Bergen-Belsen? - Yes, sir! - Do you know Madame Christophe? I am her husband. - She's in the hospital. - Alive? - Yes, yes! But wait here, I'll run and get Francine!

The kid¹¹⁰ leaves me stunned. Alive. Marcelle is alive! I feel like I've been reborn myself... I see the boy running. After a hundred meters, he turns right and disappears in a house. A few moments later, a little girl comes out and runs towards me. Is it Francine? I don't recognize her. I haven't seen her since the seminary in Laval, five years earlier. She probably doesn't recognize me either. But the boy's call and the sight of my uniform dictate her haste. She arrives scarlet, breathless, jumps to my neck, and I grab her, holding her tightly against me in the air, sweaty hands knotted under her buttocks. Our tears mingle on our cheeks. I hear her say, "Daddy... My daddy... This is the best day of my life" (pp. 325-354)

Marcelle When I was not sleeping, I did not try to think anymore. At times, I was rambling again. I was aware of it, but could not stop my tongue. And I admired the coquettishness of Dora, already recovering, who, in spite of the intolerable heat falling from the roof of the barrack, tied a scarf around her bald head.
One day, I was dozing off, when Mrs. Jacobi entered the room that I shared with seven other patients, including Dora. "You are going to experience a great joy," said Mrs. Jacobi. "I have come to tell you. "
She stopped smiling. And I stared at her, wondering what she was getting at. "Your husband," she said, as Dora climbed onto my bed, took off her scarf and tied it around my head. I did not understand her haste to hide my baldness. But I remember that a cry choked my throat: my Robert was standing in the doorway (p.351)

Robert Not being able to hold myself back, I jumped up, soiling the bedding on the second floor with my soles. And I embrace the one for whom I have been trembling for so many years. Seized by my impetuosity, she loses a scarf which covered her head, and I see her baldness. While we cry, embracing, I feel that another woman joined us, trying to put back the rag on the head that I cover with kisses. Marcelle expresses in the middle of her tears: "Do you believe that I am ugly!"

"It will grow back," throws out a neighbor. One centimeter per month!"
Someone knocks, from outside, against the windows. Marcelle turns around and "Francine! It's Francine! My darling..." Through the window, I see our daughter sending kisses to her mother (pp. 355-356).

Francine: Dad, mom and their daughter. At last.

¹¹⁰ Maurice Zylberstejn was deported with his brother Jacques and his mother Berthe (or Brandla, born Goldman in Lublin) while his father, Isaac, was a prisoner of war. They lived at 12 rue Lepuy (or Lepeu) Prolongée, which has since disappeared. Sources: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#) and the film [Les enfants juifs de prisonniers de guerre déportés à Bergen-Belsen en 1944](#)

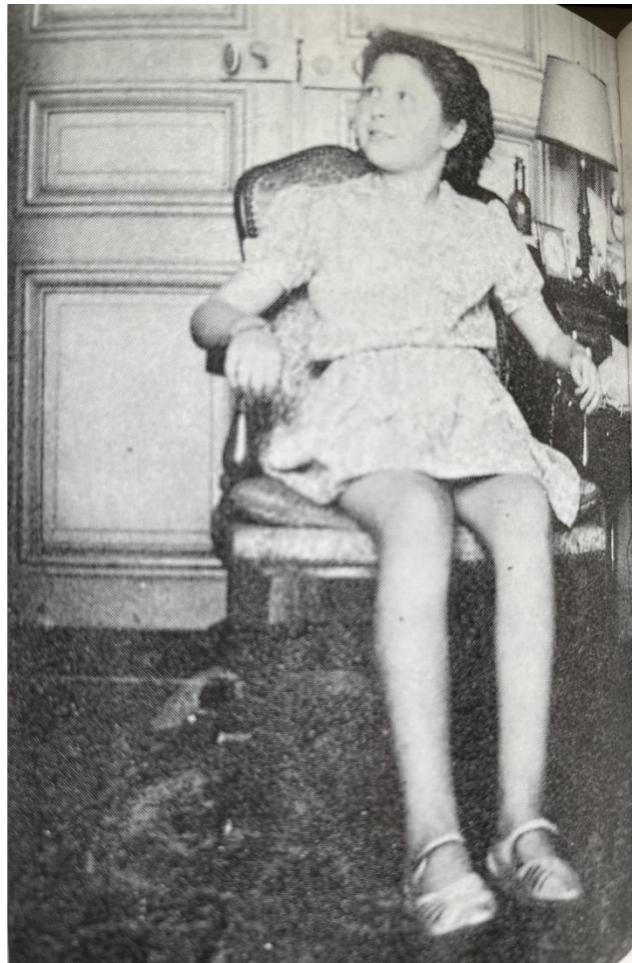


Marcelle 6 weeks after her return to Paris
Source: *Une famille dans la Guerre* (1940-1945)

Robert *The doctor invites me to lunch at her table, in the hospital itself. This meal will bring together seven guests. Among them, Colonel Maximov, the other doctor and a French lieutenant whom I do not know, who came by a miracle that I do not try to understand. He wears his stripes on his epaulets. He calls himself "Wiasemsky" as he holds out his hand to me. During the meal, he will serve as interpreter. Smiling, very friendly. And I will learn that he is the son-in-law of François Mauriac. (...) The German woman who serves us fills our glasses with a pink liquid. A mixture of vodka and red wine. Bordeaux, I believe, found by the Russians in Germanic cellars. Colonel Maximov toasts Marshal Stalin. The guests drink to his health. All the contents of the glass go into it, and I imitate my dinner companions. A second toast, this time for de Gaulle. Although I am not used to any kind of cocktail, especially in the last five years, I still absorb the contents of my glass. "To Churchill now!" says the colonel (...) The table, the walls, the guests, everything starts to turn. The waitress, obviously, did not fill Francine's glass, who laughs at my confusion.*

She is having a great time, and I am trembling. For whose health are we going to drink again? Fortunately, my torment ceases. And we leave the dining room.

On the ground which surrounds the barracks, I walk while leaning on the shoulder of Francine, who laughs at me. What a triple intoxication! I found my daughter, then my wife, and I am almost drunk. Ah, this June 6th, 1945! (p.357)



Francine 2 days after her return to Paris

Source: *Une famille dans la Guerre (1940-1945)*

Robert Our convoy did not reach the Parisian suburbs until nightfall [on June 11th, 1945].

Marcelle was obsessed with one thing: "The tall buildings. I want to see them. When I see them, I'll know we're getting close. It becomes delirium. Over and over she repeats, "Can you see the tall buildings? Can you see them?"

But Paris is not yet on the horizon. We will see the big buildings only at night. Marcelle can't take it anymore. And here the train, after a long stop, starts to reverse. The rumor runs from car to car that it cannot enter Paris and that, moving

away from it, it rolls now towards Reims. The whole convoy is in turmoil. I run from one car to another, to get information. Discovering by chance an employee of the Chemins de Fer, I get a reassuring word. The train does not go to Reims: it makes a detour, because the Gare du Nord is crowded. It takes the way of the East station... (...)

"Paris!" my daughter exults, opening her dazzled eyes. "Where are we going?" murmurs Marcelle - "To the reception center for deportees, the Hotel Lutetia.

A quarter of an hour is enough to reach it. The streets are so deserted at night in 1945... (pp. 373-374)



The family reunited in Nice
Source: Personal archives of F. Christophe

Francine: What else do you want to know?

Interviewer: Your job? Your engagement? Your current family?

Francine: Well, getting back on track was first very difficult because we were sick. All of us, even my father. On top of that, he had suffered immense hardships. More than a normal prisoner of war because he had been in a reprisal camp, because he had deprived himself to try to free us, all his food, he had used it as barter. So, he had really suffered from hunger, almost as much as a deportee. He was very sick. In addition, he had a freelance job. He had to start writing again. Mom couldn't do anything. She was in a pitiful state. I was not very fresh. Very scarred. Very scarred. We had to recover our apartment that had been confiscated¹¹¹. To buy back the furniture that had gone to Germany. Everything had to be started over. Everything had to be started again. It's your whole life that you have to start over. Then, you no longer think like the others. You no longer have the same way of seeing life. So you have to readjust completely. It's hard. We did it. At the time, there was no psychiatrist. Fortunately, we loved each other. Probably, if I hadn't had the love of my parents, I would have had it less easy because 3 years - that's a long time - to be removed from everyday life when you are a child! You are not the same person anymore. I met again my little friends from school, who were adorable with me, but we didn't understand each other anymore. So you want us to move on to my engagement? I met my husband quite by chance. The fact that he was Jewish was also a coincidence, because I didn't care about marrying... no, I would have preferred not to marry a Jew, because I wanted to leave, to leave everything Jewish. I never wanted to hear about Jews again. I especially didn't want to have Jewish children. And so I hesitated to tell the truth...yes, I have to be honest. So I hesitated to marry him because he was Jewish.

¹¹¹ In *Une petite fille privilégiée*, Francine explains that the new occupant of the apartment asks for 15,000 francs to return it to the Christophe family.

Interviewer: Can you tell us his name?

Francine: Yes, his name is Jean-Jacques. It bothers me because...oh well, Lorch L-O-R-C-H. I keep my name Christophe, which I like very much. And then, we got engaged. I hope "they lived happily ever after," right? We made two children.



1957- Francine and Jean-Jacques on their wedding day with their parents and Nina

Source: F. Christophe

Interviewer: Your husband too, just to... quickly because he's going to be interviewed too... he's a survivor too?

Francine: He is a survivor but he was not arrested. No, that was something else. He hates talking about it and I need to talk about it, I always talked about it with my parents. My father died unfortunately. Too young. My mother is still alive. Very deteriorated. So I can't talk about it with her anymore. I can't talk about it with my husband because my husband lost his family, so he can't talk about it. So he says to me, "You can talk about it because it ended well." Maybe. Anyway, it's a personality thing. I absolutely need to talk about it. I would be very unhappy if I didn't talk about it. I talk about it by myself sometimes. (...)

Interviewer: What does being Jewish mean to you, Mrs. Lorch?

Francine: A big pain in the ass... Remember the prayer of the people in the Warsaw ghetto who never lost their sense of humor? "God, thank you for making us the chosen people, but please, couldn't you choose another one?" Why do men have to tear each other apart because they are this or that? I am a Jew, as Shylock says in The Merchant of Venice "If I am pricked, I bleed like the others."

Interviewer: Ms. Lorch, what did you do? Did you have a career or anything that you enjoyed doing?

Francine: Yes, I was a decorator.

Interviewer: Where?

Francine: I was a decorator, I learned my trade at Printemps, a department store. Then, I started my own business. All my life I have set up stands in international exhibitions.

Interviewer: Are you continuing now?

Francine: No. I am retired. I am retired.

Interviewer: Since when?

Francine: Oh quite a few years ago because I was quite sick and I had to stop.

Interviewer: To conclude the interview, and before filming the documents, is there anything else, any message, anything else you would like to say?

Francine: Yes, I would like to say that you should always keep hope inside you, of course. My father, shortly before he died, and God knows how difficult his life had been because he didn't only have those 5 years of war, he had a very difficult life, we had a very difficult life after the war, we lacked everything. Our reintegration, as we say now, was difficult. And my father, shortly before he died, said to me, "Life is beautiful!" I said, "It is, Dad." He said, "Remember that! Life is good! You have to say to yourself every day of your life, "Life is good!"" And it is true. When we were, my parents and I, very poor, after the war, really poor, it took us a long time to start again, but it doesn't matter, we loved each other so much. That didn't stop us from fighting, but we loved each other. We were sick too, it doesn't matter, we loved each other. That's my message: that people should stop not making an effort. You have to make an effort even to love yourself, so what? We made an effort in the camp. The effort you have to make every day of your life

is not as hard as in the camp. So there you go. And then, I would like us to stop fighting because of religions. I don't... yes, I do want to say that: my father used to say, "I don't introduce myself by saying Robert Christophe, Jewish. But on the other hand, I don't accept that anyone hurts them. Honestly, that's when I pounce!" And I do the same thing. My father used to say: "I am neither proud nor ashamed of a state for which I am not responsible. I assume it with dignity." And that's what I do. And that's what I've explained to my children. And that's what they do. I don't want anyone to touch a hair of a Jew's head. But I am not carrying my Jewishness on a platter. I am a human being like everyone else. That's all there is to it. Period.

Interview: Thank you, Mrs. Lorch.

[23'10 end of transcript]