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Arlette Testyler (née Reimann)

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[Interview 7584](#) conducted in Paris on December 7, 1995 by Hélène Lévy.

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

Colin Brown ('22), Jasmine (Yuhan) Jiang ('22), Olivia Libonati ('22)

TAPE 1

Hélène: Hello, we are in Paris on December 7th, 1995. We are going to interview Mrs. Arlette Reimann, married name Testyler, and I am Hélène Levy Wand-Polak. Thank you.

Hello Mrs. Testyler, I am going to ask you to give us your birth name, maiden name, spelled out and your date of birth.

Arlette: Hello, madam. My name is Arlette. A R L E doubleT E. Reimann. R E I M A N N. My date of birth is March 30, 1933. I was born in Paris, in the 12th arrondissement¹. I am French by birth.



Rothschild Hospital
Source: [Paris Promeneur](#)

Hélène: And your married name is...

Arlette: My married name is Testyler. T E S T Y L E R.

Hélène: And now I'm going to ask you to try to tell us about your life as a child during the war.

¹ At the Rothschild Hospital located at 5 rue Santerre. "Located in the heart of the 12th arrondissement of Paris, the Rothschild Hospital was built between 1912 and 1914 on the initiative of Baron Edmond de Rothschild. It was initially intended to treat and accommodate patients of the Jewish faith. Declared an auxiliary military hospital during the 1914-1918 war, it received, without religious distinction, the wounded from the front and the civilian victims of the war. In the aftermath of the war, it returned to its original mission until the period of German occupation when, placed under a management approved by the occupier, it became a detention center." Source: [Hôpital Rothschild](#)

Arlette: My life as a child during the war...

Hélène: Before the war, excuse me.

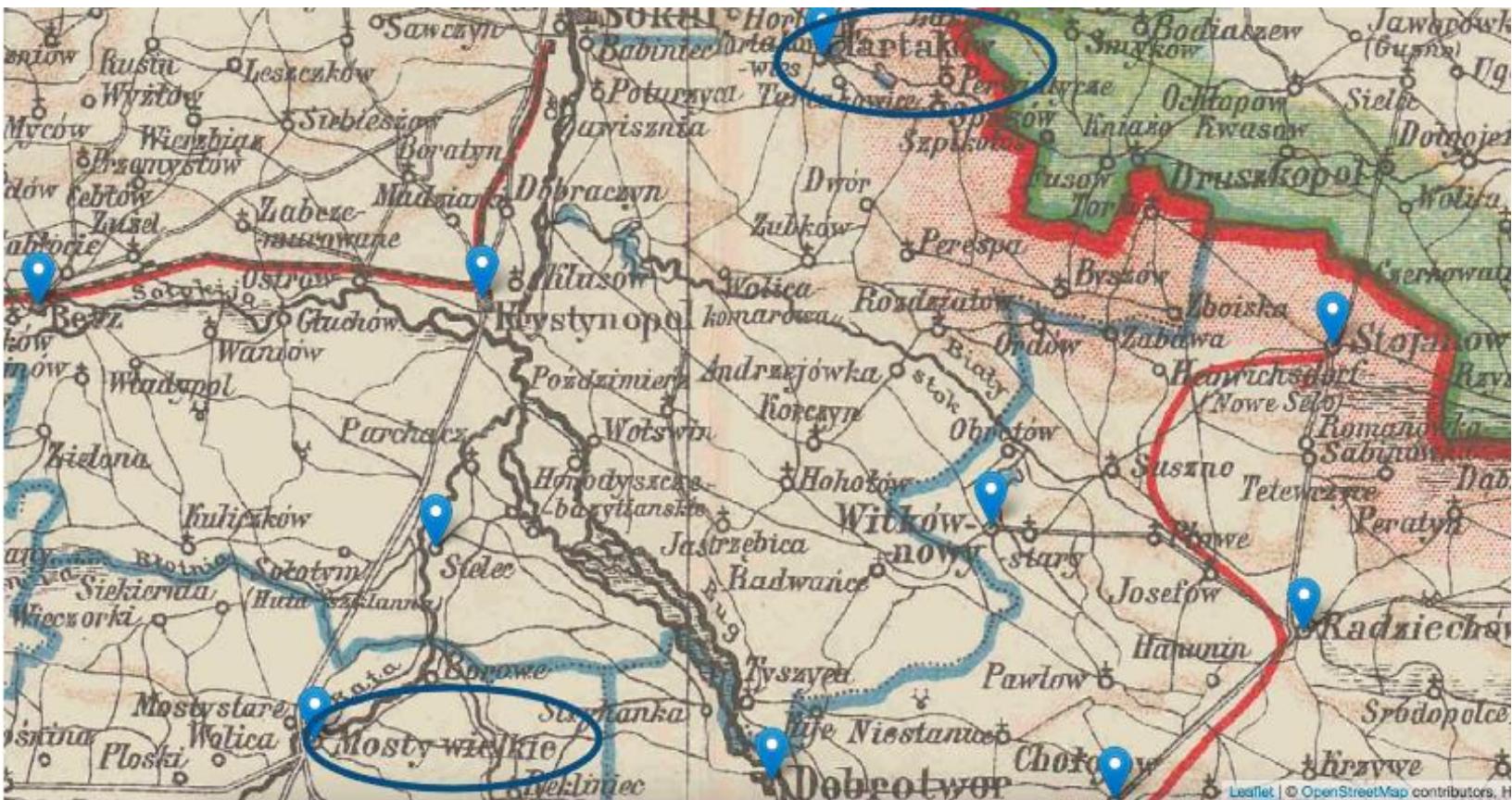
Arlette: Before the war, I had a privileged life because I had parents who were well-off, who were very happy. Unfortunately, they didn't stay together very long because my mother waited for my father for years in her village² because they were village promised, what was called village promised. My father came here to France I think in 19... around 25, 27 and precisely to bring his wife here because the poverty was great in Poland. There was not enough work. And he came here to work. And he had promised my mother, of course, his promised wife from his village, that he would bring her over when he had enough money.



Abraham (left) and a friend at the Bois de Vincennes in the late 20s

Source: A. Testyler

² Abraham came from Motszky Wielki while Malka came from Tartakow. Both villages were located in Polish Galicia and are now in Western Ukraine, in the Lviv region.



Native villages of Abraham et Malka – respectively Mosty Wielkie and Tartakow

Source: [Atlas of the Shtetl](#)

And then there's an anecdote that was very nice because even my mother, she used to tell us all the time that her father was very, very worried, because one year would go by, two years would go by. It was not like now, people did not call each other, there were no telephones, no communication like that in those days. My grandfather³ was worried, one day he said to one of his friends, "You know, you go to France, go see this boy. He promised to marry my daughter and then I don't see anything coming. She will turn into an old spinster one day!" – because my father and mother were about the same age – "and she will really turn into an old spinster!" And this man came back to the village afterwards and said to my grandfather, "Don't worry, he's serious, he's working, and the day he brings her there, she'll be a princess." And that's how it went. So she came here, in 19... I think in 1930. Early 1931, they got married.

³ Juda Zolkwer

Reimann
et
Zolkwer

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Le quatorze mars mil neuf cent trente-un, dix heures quarante-cinq, devant Nous ont comparu publiquement en la maison commune : Abraham REIMANN, fourreur, vingt-six ans, né le vingt-six octobre mil neuf cent quatre à Mosty-Wielkie (Pologne), domicilié à Paris, rue du Docteur Goujon 17, précédemment place du Marché Sainte-Catherine 3, fils de Fischel REIMANN et de Chaja LAM, époux sans profession, domiciliés à Mosty-Wielkie, d'une part, / - Et Malka ZOLKWER, sans profession, vingt-neuf ans, née le vingt-sept décembre mil neuf cent un à Tartakow (Pologne), domiciliée rue du Docteur Goujon 17, précédemment à Tartakow, fille de Juda ZOLKWER et de Keila LAM, époux commerçants, domiciliés à Tartakow, d'autre part . - Aucune opposition n'existant . - Les futures époux déclarent qu'il n'a pas été fait de contrat de mariage . - Abraham REIMANN et Malka ZOLKWER ont déclaré l'un après l'autre vouloir se prendre pour époux et Nous avons prononcé au nom de la loi qu'ils sont unis par le mariage . - En présence de : Hermann SALZMANN, fourreur, rue des Lions 3 et de Jules PECHNER, fourreur, rue du Docteur Goujon 17, témoins majeurs, qui, lecture faite, ont signé avec les époux et Nous, Emile Jules Jean Baptiste Bruno LECOEUR, adjoint au Maire du douzième arrondissement de Paris, Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur . /

A. Reimann et Zolkwer Ch. Lecour et Pechner

Wedding certificate of Abraham Reimann and Malka Zolkwer on March 14, 1931

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (12M285 - acte n° 292 - vue 19/31)

Hélène: They were all alone, so there was no family present?

Arlette: No, they were by themselves. My mother came... I think she even came with her sister's birth date on her papers due to the dates of birth that were allowed to leave or not. Well, I think her date of birth is not quite the real one. It's something like a year or two off. And when she came here, she was a princess, she had a really blissful life, a beautiful life, a crazy love that you rarely see. In fact, the rest of the story will show that for her, he was the only one that counted, who was very, very important.



Source: M. Testyler

Hélène: And the memories you have, your parents spoke in Yiddish, in Polish...?

Arlette: Polish no, not at all.

Madeleine: [My father] had learned French. He sang "J'attendrai," the famous song that everyone knows and I always cry when I hear it. My parents spoke French like emigrants and they often spoke Yiddish to each other so that the children would not understand. ([Fréquence Tel-Aviv](#))



Click on the record to listen to *J'attendrai* (1938)

Source: [Internet Archive](#)

Arlette: They spoke Yiddish, this is true, but my father I think had come here to France with an ideal of France. You know how they used to say at that time, "France of freedom, France of equality". So he spoke French a lot. I didn't learn Yiddish - and I know it well now, I speak Yiddish well, but my husband taught it to me after the war because I married a deportee - but my parents spoke French a lot, it's true, they tried to speak French but they spoke Yiddish so that we wouldn't understand. In the end we understood anyway, it was done on purpose. They really weren't very religious people. They were traditionalists but my mother lit candles every Friday night. And there was one thing I didn't understand either, as soon as she lit the candles, as soon as she put this lace on her head, she would systematically start to cry and she would be so

pensive, she would talk about her father and her mother. And the candles were lit and immediately... I didn't understand very well. Now with age, I understand that these Shabbat candles represent many things.

Hélène: So she talked a lot about her father, did you have an image of your grandfather?

Arlette: Of the grandfather yes because we went back to Poland. I have a very very very vague memory of him but I must have been four or five years old at the most when we went back to Poland. I remember the train, the wooden benches, blond, waxed as they were,, that I slept and the arrival in this village. But very vaguely. I must have been five, four five years old. That's all. That I do remember.

Hélène: Did you meet your grandparents⁴?

Arlette: Yes, yes, we went back during vacations, we took the train, I remember that very well.

Hélène: The contact was maintained?

Arlette: Yes, yes, the contact was maintained. Besides, it seems that my grandparents were shocked because we did not keep kosher. My mother admitted right away, that we did not keep kosher. We didn't really eat pork, but we didn't keep kosher. The holidays were celebrated at home, it's true, we celebrated the traditional ones. The most beautiful holiday of course was Pesach. My father owned a large furrier's workshop⁵, he had a lot of machines and at Pesach we took out all the flooring. There was a hardwood floor and then everything was washed with soap and bleach, and afterwards he played with us on the floor that smelled fresh, washed as it was. It was fabulous because I can still see him sitting on the floor with us, tracing triangles with chalk, putting nuts on them and we played as if they were marbles, and it was fabulous to have our father playing like that. And then we would go to synagogue. His first synagogue was actually an oratory. It was the oratory on Rue des Rosiers⁶, a little *shtibele*, as we used to say a *kleyn shtibele*.

⁴ According to the marriage certificate, delivered by the city hall of the 12th arrondissement, Abraham was the son of Fischel Reimann and Chaja Lam from Mostie-Wielkie. Malka was the daughter of Juda Zolkwer and Keila Lam, both merchants living in Tartakow, Poland.

⁵ The Reimanns' workshop and home were located at 114 rue du Temple in the 3rd arrondissement.

⁶ The synagogue located at 17 rue des Rosiers in the Marais district (4th arrondissement), in the heart of the Pletzl, is a non-consistory Orthodox synagogue, affiliated with the Habad/Loubavitch Hasidic movement.



Oratory on 17 rue des Rosiers

Source: [Wikimedia](#)

I remember one year very very well, perhaps it impressed me more than the others, when there was my sister⁷ and me and we were dressed very very nicely. We had on little yellow coats with the little brown velvet collar, little brown velvet buttons, the little half-belt, and then the matching little white rice straw hat, little gloves. Then I can see my father lifting me up like this, when the Torah passed by so that I could kiss that Torah. I remember that very, very well. That was at Pesach. My mother used to change the dishes on Pesach. Despite the fact that we were not very religious, the dishes were changed. There were these big boxes of dishes that we changed for the holidays. Otherwise, there was no *kheyder*, no, I didn't go to the *kheyder* yet, I think I was still too small, because I must have been six, seven years old. Regarding my parents, I can say that they went on vacation, they had a car, we went to the countryside. They had one of those big cars that you still see, that look a bit like London cabs, those big cars. So we would leave, there was the wicker basket, there was the china-there was no plastic then - so there was this china. And it was not very far. We were going what? maybe 20 or 30 kilometers away. But there was the picnic, there was the hot drink, the cold drink. In fact, everything was taken care of. And it was really an adventure, yes, I remember that. But otherwise, the rest is rather vague.

⁷ Madeleine Testyler was born on November 4, 1931 at the Rothschild hospital. She became a successful artist. She married Joseph Testyler, a Polish survivor of the Holocaust. In 2006, they emigrated to Israel. Sources : <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3942285.00.html> et <https://www.madeleinetestyler.com/>



The Reimanns (end of 1933)

Source: M. Testyler

Hélène: Did your parents bring family from Poland or did they try to. Do you remember anything

Arlette: No

Hélène: Around '39, '36...?

Arlette: No, that I don't remember. There were some second cousins here. Whether they had a close relationship, I don't know. I don't know if they had a very close relationship. No family came.

Hélène: So the friends around your parents were mostly French?

Arlette: No. There were a lot of... they were Jewish families. We were very close to a family⁸ who was in the furniture business, who were furniture dealers, who lived in Montparnasse, families who lived in the building.

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114	24	4	Arlette	1933	80	C	elle		

The Reimanns living on 114 rue du Temple in the 1936 census

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 550 – Sainte-Avoye- vue 244/245)

There were four families who lived in the building⁹ where they would meet from time to time. I think they would play rummy or something like that.



Raymond and Michel Crespin



Max Gerszt

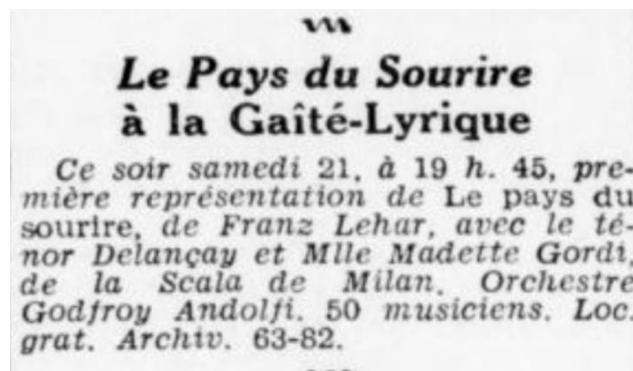


Charles Gerszt

⁸ The Schussman family lived avenue du Maine. They had three daughters Léa, Edith and Suzy the younger, to whom Arlette was close.

⁹ Of these four Jewish families living at 114 rue du Temple, none of the deported members returned:
The Crespin family - Malka (Marie) née Kavous on 2/4/1905 in Bresno, Raymond born on August 19, 1929 and Michel born on June 14, 1939.
Arrested while trying to cross into the free zone, they were sent to Pithiviers (barrack 9) and deported on September 20, 1942 by convoy 35.
The Gerszt family - Selik (born in Poland), Chana (born in Poland), Max born on 3/10/1932 and Charles born on 17/8/1937. The mother and children were arrested on July 16, sent to Pithiviers and deported on August 26 by convoy 24.
The Szajnbuk family - see p.40 Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

My parents went out a lot, they went to the theater. I can see my mother going out, getting dressed to go out. They went to the theater. My first big outing was to the Châtelet¹⁰ to see *Le Pays du Sourire*¹¹, I'll never forget that. I can see myself. My father's seat must not have been far from the aisle because I can see myself standing in the aisle and sitting on the floor to watch, and walking up almost to the orchestra pit. So, I remember that, as little girls, they already wanted us to be immersed in culture because for my father, we could do the most silly things but we had to be good students. I think that was important to him.



Announcement published in *La France au travail* (December 21, 1940)

Source: retronews.fr

Hélène: So school was very important?

Arlette: Very. Very important. That was the first thing he always said and I remember when my sister went to school¹², we went to school at the age of six. At that time, a pen, it was not like now. My father gave her a gold fountain pen. For a child who enters school at six years old, who cannot write, it was fantastic, really, you had to believe that for him it was a token. You had to learn, you had to be educated. It was the first thing to possess.

Hélène: You went to French schools?

¹⁰ It is possible that Arlette is mistaken about the theater because *Le Pays du Sourire* was created on November 17, 1932 at the Gaîté-Lyrique. Although the play had made its tour of France and was performed at the Théâtre Antoine in 1935, all documents found indicate that, in 1940-1941, the play was performed at the Gaîté-Lyrique. Source: retronews.fr

¹¹ *Le Pays du Sourire* (Das Land des Lächelns) is an operetta in three acts written by Franz Lehár. Watch the 1941 news presenting the operetta performed at the Gaîté-Lyrique: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJaKB4SaqZs>
Source: <https://boowiki.info/art/compositions-de-franz-lehar/le-pays-du-sourire.html> and <https://www.operette-theatremusical.fr/2015/08/19/le-pays-du-sourire/>

¹² Elementary school located at 8 rue de Montmorency



Arlette and Madeleine's elementary school on 8 rue de Montmorency
Source: [Google Map](#) (August 2020)

Arlette: Oh yes, yes, I went to the local school. I went to the local school on rue Chapon in the third arrondissement because we lived at 114, rue du Temple, in the third arrondissement. I started my kindergarten on rue Chapon, then I went to the school on rue des Vertus and then, at the end of the war¹³, we ended up on rue de Montmorency. All of these schools were in the third arrondissement, since that was our neighborhood.

Hélène: You have particular memories? Your mother spoke French with you, so at that time ...

Arlette: Yes yes, my mother spoke French, yes yes, absolutely. We had a maid who came to pick us up from school, and I used to lament it a lot because I only wanted one thing—for her to treat me like the other children who had their grandmothers or moms come to pick them up from school. Well, I had the ... So, it bothered me, I wanted my mom to be seen as she was always dressed up, wearing a hat and matching shoes. I can still see her like that. She must have had moments when she was not well dressed, like everybody else, but that's how I see her. A seamstress who came every week to the house, to make the clothes for us, for her. It was a privileged life for Jewish children at that time because not everyone lived like that, I am aware of that.

¹³ Arlette is referring to the period after the armistice signed in June 1940.

Hélène: And do you have any recollection at school of having felt anything in particular as being different or ... ?

Arlette: Yes, I became aware of it, it was in kindergarten. There was a fact that we could see that we were different because my snack was systematically stolen. And we had these little cardboard lunchboxes. I had a red one, my sister, hers was blue, and the snack was put inside.



Source: [Brocante](#)

Then inside, my mother put my snack and systematically it was stolen. One day, she came to see the director or the teacher, and the teacher asked her, "But what do you put inside it?" And she said, "I put cookies in it, I put bananas, I put fruit, I certainly put candy, lots of things." And the director said to her, "But ma'am, this is a lot! It's enormous, it's tempting for the children. There are children who don't have all this." The little pain au chocolat, I remember, we used to pass by the bakery, she would buy me the little pain au chocolat, we would put it in the lunchbox and leave for school. So it must have been a lot for ... these were not neighborhoods where there were very, very wealthy children at that time.

Hélène: But you don't remember that you were singled out as children of Jews or children of...?

Arlette: Oh no, not at all

Hélène: This is something you never felt until the beginning of the war?

Arlette: Not at all, not at all. No, never. No, never. No. Never. No racism, no anti-Semitism. I didn't suffer from it at all. We lived like other kids. I didn't see any difference then. At all.

Hélène: And as a little girl, did you begin to feel... Do you have any memories of the beginning of the years '39, '40? Was it something that...you were too little?

Arlette: No, it's not that I was too small. There are some memories because my father volunteered to serve France, because for him it was France. He wanted to be French. My mother followed him, followed him during his military service everywhere¹⁴. And there, I realized that France meant a lot to him. And she had sent us to a boarding school for a while, but I don't know if it was a Jewish or non-Jewish school. It was a boarding school for all children. And the first bombings, I remember a bombing that happened, and we went out into the yard. And I must have heard something about the Jews because, when I came back to Paris and there was a bombing and the sirens started going off, I remember, with my sister, we stepped out and we said, "This is the Jews' fault!" And my mother, it made her... she said, "Where did you hear that?" And we said, "Well, it was in boarding school that we heard that." So there, I must have experienced something but that I suffered from it, no not at all. I really didn't.



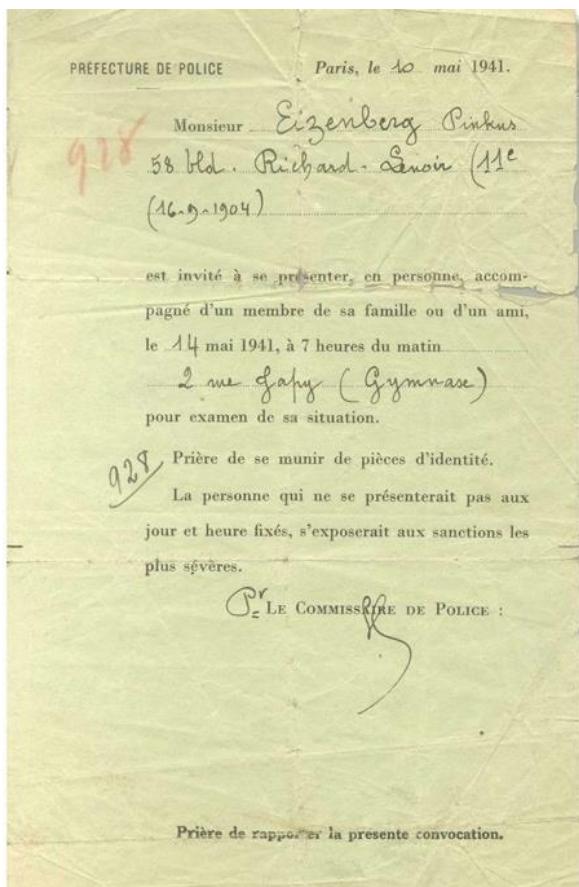
Abraham in uniform (1939)

Source: M. Testyler

¹⁴ Abraham was stationed at the Barcarès camp. The 21st Regiment of Foreign Volunteers (RMVE) was created on September 29, 1939 in Barcarès, in the Pyrénées-Orientales. It was composed of 2,800 foreign volunteers enlisted for the duration of the war. Sources : Souvenir Français et Pyrénées Orientales

Hélène: So your father came back from his military service¹⁵?

Arlette: Yes, my father came back from his military service so he must have resumed his activities, I don't know. And then right at the beginning when they started taking the Jews, he received a little green paper¹⁶ like this.



Nominative convocation¹⁷ also named « Green ticket » sent to foreign Jews and list of items provided to the accompanying person

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

And it said, "Please go to the police station to verify your identity." And my mother, she had, you know these women who have a sixth sense, who tremble a little bit? Maybe she was less integrated than my father

¹⁵ Abraham was demobilized in June 1940 in Toulouse

¹⁶ In her book, Arlette specifies that two French police officers came to the family home on Tuesday, May 13, 1941, to hand over the green bill on the letterhead of the Prefecture of Police (*Les enfants aussi !* pp.56-57)

¹⁷ This convocation requested that the person report to the Gymnase Japy. There were other convocation centers including the Napoleon barracks (4th arrondissement), the Minimes barracks (3rd), as well as district police stations and in the Paris suburbs. Source: [Blind Magazine](#)

CM L XV Prière de se munir de :

2 Couvertures

1 Drap de lit

1 Rechange de linge de corps

1 Couvert

1 Gamelle

1 Verre à boire

Article de toilette avec serviette

Carte d'alimentation

Des vivres pour 24 heures.

who had been there, who had come before her. She said to him, "Don't go, don't go! Avroum, don't go! " His name was Abraham but she called him Avroum. "Avroum, don't go!" And my father said to her, "What do you mean, don't go? I served in the army, I have children who are French and besides, in Zola's France..." And then he started quoting Voltaire, listing names... And he says, "I'm going." And of course, he went. I remember, we all went there. He went to the police station on Rue Beaubourg, which still exists, and he never came out again. From there, he was sent to Pithiviers.

Madeleine: My father was caught in the so-called Green Ticket Roundup, and my father went almost voluntarily to the convocation since he had previously done his military service and his captain had told him, "My children, you are French now!" And when he received this convocation, he told my mother, "I am not afraid. My captain told me that I am French." He went to the green ticket convocation, he never came out again. (...) I was born in France. I was born in Paris. I loved my country very much, the country where I was born, but my father, who only lived in France for eleven years, I think he loved this country even more than I did. He was really convinced that it was a beautiful country and that he would be protected by it. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))



© Mémorial de la Shoah

May 14, 1941 : Women bringing back the items requested for the men arrested (in front of the Gymnase Japy)



© Mémorial de la Shoah



© Mémorial de la Shoah

Men boarding the buses requisitioned for their transfer to the Austerlitz train station where they left to be interned in the Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande camps

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Hélène: Do you remember being with your mother?

Arlette: Yes, yes. Oh yes, at the police station, yes. Very well.

Hélène: Did you all go with him?

Arlette: Oh yes, I remember that very well, and when my mother... every time we felt that she was hoping he would come back or something like that, I never asked the question, but in my little girl's head, I would say to myself, " Well, since he talked about Zola¹⁸ and all that, they're friends. But why don't they do something about it? Where are these people?" But I didn't realize that it was the France of freedom that my father was talking about. They were not friends. I thought they were friends because a seven year old child doesn't know that freedom was transmitted through Zola, through all these great writers who were important.

¹⁸ Émile Zola was a French writer and journalist, born on April 2, 1840 in Paris and died on September 29, 1902 in the same city. Considered the leader of Naturalism, he is one of the most popular French novelists, the most published, translated and commented all over the world. The anti-Semitic hate campaigns, increasingly virulent in France in the 1890s, prompted Émile Zola to become involved with the Dreyfus affair with the publication in January 1898, in the daily newspaper L'Aurore, of the article entitled « J'accuse...! »

In December 1897, in his "Letter to youth", Emile Zola was indignant at seeing anti-Semitic students demonstrating in the Latin Quarter: "There are such things as anti-Semitic youth? So there are new brains, new souls, that this imbecile poison has already unbalanced? What sadness, what concern for the twentieth century that is about to begin! One hundred years after the declaration of the rights of man, one hundred years after the supreme act of tolerance and emancipation, we are back to the wars of religion, to the most odious and foolish fanaticism!"

Sources: [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Zola#Affaire_Dreyfus_\(1894-1899\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Zola#Affaire_Dreyfus_(1894-1899)); <http://www.actuj.com/2018-01/france-politique/6142-de-l-antisemitisme-en-ce-21e-siecle-qu-aurait-dit-emile-zola>

Hélène: And do you remember when you went to Beaubourg with... Do you have any memories?

Arlette: No, that's all. No, no, I don't remember the rest.

Hélène: Except that you went home alone.

Arlette: That's all, yes, I remember that very well. My mother who wept, who wept all the time, constantly. That I remember.

Hélène: That was before the wearing of the star, anyway. It was in '41?

Arlette: That's right, it was before the star was worn. Well, after that she took care of everything. She was an energetic woman who fought. My mother was a woman who knew how to fight and who knew how to cope. Until a certain point, as long as she had hope that my father would come back. And that, we saw it afterwards, she fought all the time. All the time, she was a mother-courage, she fought, she coped, for that yes, she was someone who was very energetic. She had to take over... I don't know what she did.

Hélène: And at that time, your father left for ...?



Men arriving to Pithiviers (May 14, 1941)

Source: [Cercil](#)

Arlette: Pithiviers¹⁹. My father left for Pithiviers and... it was precisely one of the things that prompted her to fight. Because she said to herself, "I have to get in touch with my husband." And she found, I don't know by what means, someone who lived in Pithiviers to put us in an accommodation in Pithiviers. And she found no less than a gendarme²⁰ who was guarding the camp in Pithiviers. He was an Alsatian. He would pass on letters to the prisoners who were in the camp. So thanks to him, we were able to see my father.

Madeleine: [My father] was taken to Pithiviers. A few months later, my mother tried to visit him in Pithiviers. She managed to see him. Some time later, she tried again to go to Pithiviers and was unable to go. So she met a lady on the train who said to her, "Why are you crying?" My mother said to her, "I couldn't go to see my husband." "What did you want to do? "To bring him a parcel." And this lady said, "Give me the package. I'll take care of it." So my mother had nothing to lose, she gave this package to this person. And it turns out that this person, her husband, was a guard in the Pithiviers camp. So why was this person interested in my mother and why was he a guard in the Pithiviers camp? Later on, we understood why: he was from Lorraine. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))



Barrack 7 where Abraham lived
Source: [Archives Nationales](#) (F/7/15101)

¹⁹ For a precise description of the operations of the Pithiviers camp, read [the report](#) by André Jean-Faure from his inspection on November 27, 1941.

²⁰ Emile Schiffmacher

Madeleine: Afterwards, my mother became friends with this woman and she asked her, "Can you keep my little girls?" This lady agreed to keep us and we stayed almost a year in Pithiviers, with this camp guard. And we would go to see my father. I think I was the last one to see him, a few days before my father was sent to an unknown destination. The Germans would come to the house. My sister was very blonde. They took her on their knees. (...) The Lorrainers were compulsorily enlisted, either in the army or in similar positions, so I suppose that this gentleman, who was probably not a Nazi, had been more or less forcibly enlisted. Actually, in civilian life, he was a test pilot. So it was not his profession at all to be a guard at the Pithiviers camp. And there was another Jewish family, the Sivis²¹ (spelling?), that came to live with these people -whose name was Schiffmacher- and who were later deported. So he was putting himself in danger by protecting the Jews. (Qualita)



The Schiffmacher family (photo annotated by M. Testyler)

²¹ According to a more detailed description provided by Madeleine during a telephone conversation on June 2, 2022, it might be the Zivi family: Joseph (6/21/1883), Rose (9/27/1895) and their daughter Mathilde (4/25/1925) born in Germany and whose last address is 20 rue de la Tour d'Auvergne in Clermont-Ferrand. They were deported on November 20, 1943 by convoy 62. Source: Mémorial de la Shoah

And we stayed with him for several years. He had a daughter, he had a son who was an airman and he was an Alsatian. He was a gendarme, and at that time he wore leather gaiters over shoes like the gendarmes had. And in them, he would slip letters that he brought to the internees of the Pithiviers camp. I remember that very well. And we stayed there for many years until the round-ups at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, as we were practically going home...

Hélène: And so you went there all week...?

Arlette: Oh no, no, we lived with them, we boarded with them.

Hélène: You were going to school at that time?

Arlette: Yes yes, we went to school in Pithiviers. We even went to church, we went to mass because they were Alsatians who were churchgoers and we lived like all the people of Pithiviers.

Hélène: You didn't say that you were Jewish?

Arlette: Not at all... I learned the Latin mass, I can even still sing the Salve Regina. I know the Latin mass very well because we used to go to catechism, we used to go to church with them. Besides, at the end of the mass, there was this little piece of brioche that they called the blessed bread, it smelled good, so all the way through, before I ate it, I could smell it, all the way, I would say to myself, "How good that smells!" But this Alsatian woman was very resourceful, she made good food. I think that if she took us in, it was for money - my mother paid, and certainly handsomely - because it topped up their income. I don't think a gendarme made that much money. But in their house, I must admit that we were fine. We were very good. All through the war, I didn't suffer from starvation. Not at all, not at all. The whole war.

Hélène: And do you remember your mother, how were things at that time? Where did she go to see your father?

Arlette: Yes, she came to see us occasionally and then for a whole summer, we even spent a whole summer all four of us together because the men were taken to do the harvest. I mean the harvest of the crops. There

were no men, they were all taken to the army, prisoners, STO²², forced labor, so they needed manpower to do the harvest and they had taken the internees from the Pithiviers camp.



Prisoners of the Pithiviers camp working in a farm nearby with four gendarmes guarding them

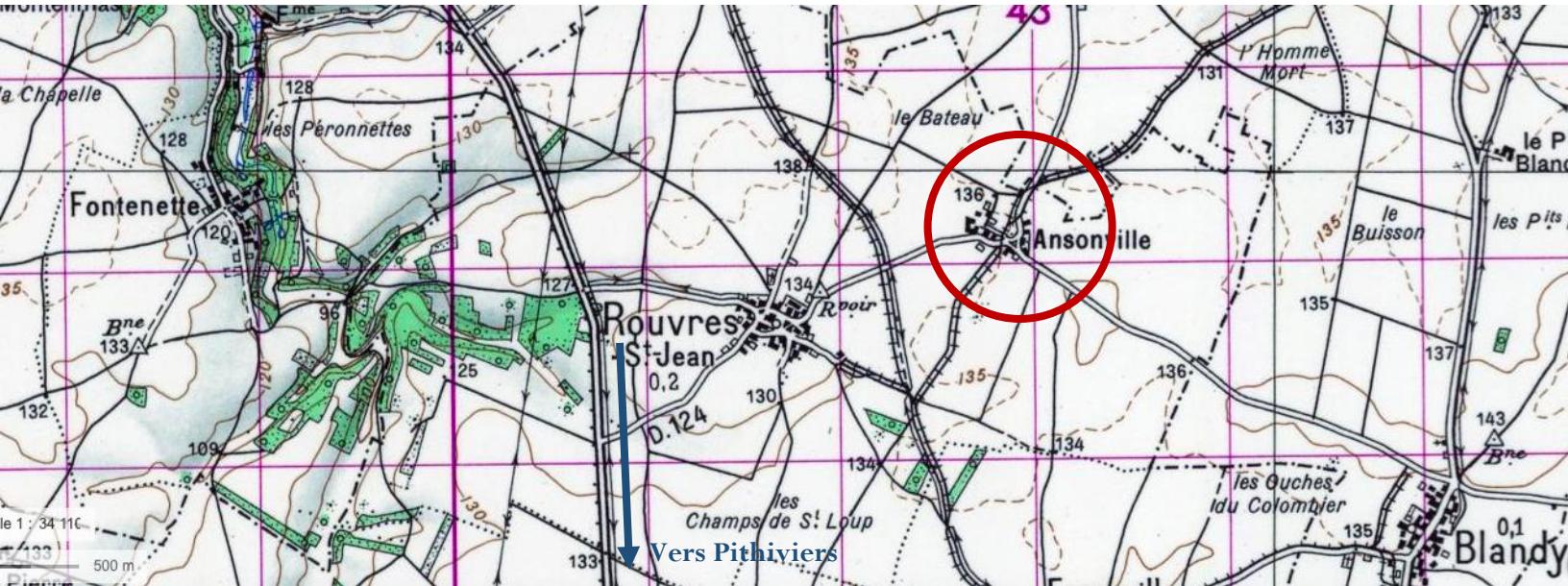
Source: [Cercil](#)

And we found ourselves in a farm²³. And we were housed in a barn with my mother, my sister and my father. And we lived a whole summer in this farm, in this barn, and I can still see - there was no electricity - my mother making candles for lighting with grease and putting in a wick that had a hard time holding onto a flame. We were incredibly happy because, for a child, even if they - for my mother who came from the bourgeoisie- missed everything, there it was... for the children, it is fabulous to live like that in the open air. So for me, it was a vacation, I was very happy. And my mother used to say to my father at that time, "You know Avroum, look, we are out. Come on! We are going to escape, we are going to the free zone!" Because there was the free zone, and then my father, always naive who believed in good: "I'm fine

²² The STO (Service du Travail Obligatoire) had not yet been instituted. The law obliging all young men between the ages of 21 and 23 to go and work in Germany, except those who already had a job in France, dates from February 16, 1943. Source: [Fondation de la Résistance](#)

²³ Abraham and 3 other internees worked at the Ansonville farm, in the commune of Rouvres-Saint-Jean, located about 20 kms north of Pithiviers. Source: communication with Nathalie Grenon from the [Cercil Museum](#) (Jan. 2019)

here, look, we are not harmed, I can see you, I can see the children. I will finish the war here. It's not worth it because, if I run away, it's you who will suffer. So, I'm fine like this." I think it's a shame he didn't listen to my mom, I think the aftermath would not have been so tragic.

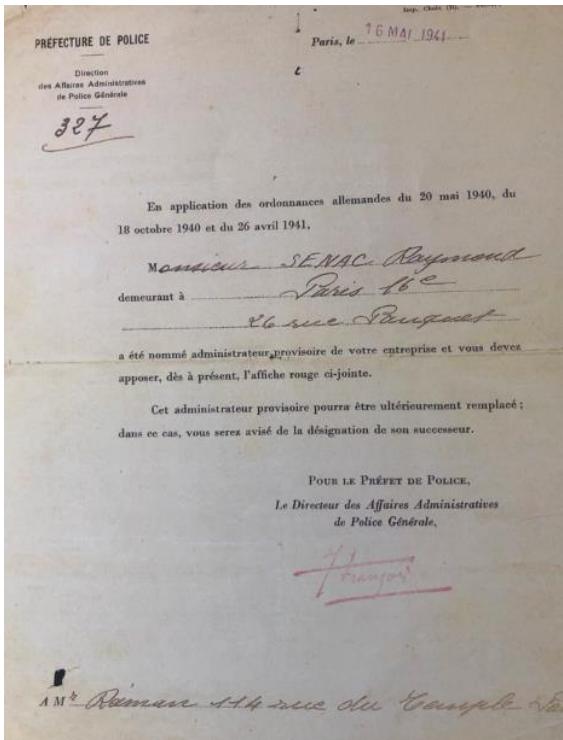


Hélène: Your mother, while you were in Pithiviers, boarding, she was commuting, she was working in Paris, did you have any idea where? She was not next to you?

Arlette: Not at all. No, I don't have too much of an idea. When we were in Pithiviers, I think she must have been working, organizing herself in Paris where... because afterwards I found acts of requisition for my father's workshop. So I know that she had given part of my father's workshop, a part of the workshop that was very significant to the French, who had promised to free my father if she gave this workshop.²⁴

²⁴ "On October 18, the second German ordinance dealt for the first time with "economic Aryanization". It defined the "Jewish enterprises" for which an inventory was to be drawn up and to which "a commissioner-administrator may be appointed, to whom the provisions of the ordinance concerning business management of May 20, 1940 shall apply" (V.O.B.I.F. of October 20, 1940).

The purpose of this order was specified in the "Instructions for the Managing Commissioners of Jewish Enterprises" issued on November 12, 1940 by the economic section of the German administrative staff: "the Managing Commissioners of Jewish enterprises have first and foremost the task of definitively eliminating Jewish influence in the French economy", while ensuring the continuation of these enterprises. The Germans, unable to apply these measures without the assistance of the French administration, turned to the General Delegation of the French Government in the occupied territories, which charged the Prefect of Police in Paris and the Prefects in the provinces with the task of taking a census of Jewish businesses and placing them under provisional administration (Circular letters addressed to the Prefects by General de La Laurencie, General Delegate of the French Government in the occupied territories. Paris, October 27 and December 15, 1940)." Source: [EHRI project](#)



M. Chocquet, 9, rue du 4-Septembre, à
Paris, pour les entreprises suivantes:
Austerlitz, 8, boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, à
Paris (pour prendre effet à la date du
42 juin 1941);
Reiman, 114, rue du Temple, à Paris (pour
prendre effet à la date du 13 août 1941).

Requisition of the Reimann's company – one dated May 16, 1941
1941 and the other July, 1941. Source: M. Testyler et [Retronews](#)

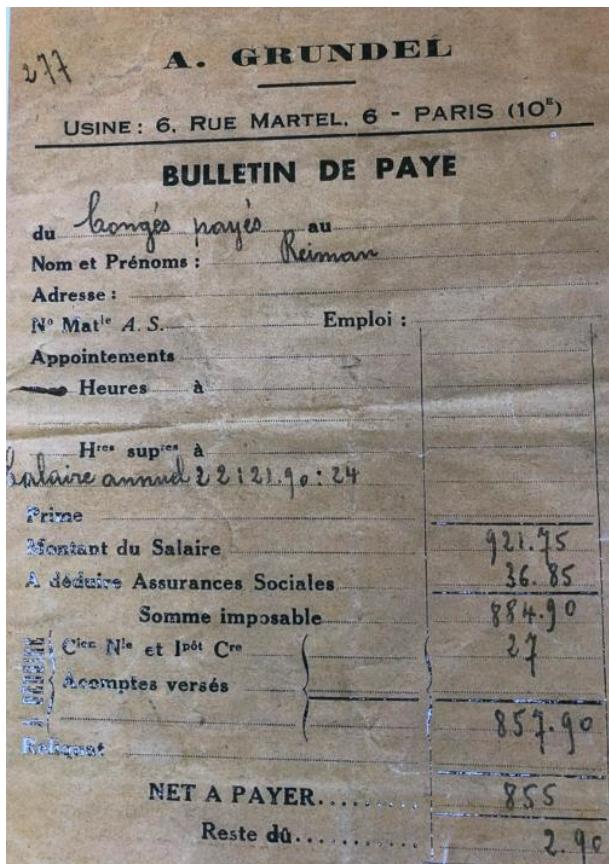
And it was a furrier's shop where they made little vests from rabbit fur for the Germans who were at the Front, you know the Russian Front. It was a requisition. It is what was called the "useful Jews" because we were useful to the Germans and to the French via the Germans. And I think she had to take care of that, that that's what she did.



Source: [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

Madeleine: "If you turn over machines and start working, we'll get your husband out of the Pithiviers camp to work too." My mother, who was doing anything to be able to free my father, started to give machines - it was a company

in Paris, called the Grundel company²⁵, located at 6 rue Martel - so my mother gave machines and, of course, when the Vel' d'Hiv' round-up came, my father had still not been released. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))



Malka's pay slip working for the Germans under the status of « useful Jew »

Source: M. Testyler

Par ordonnance en date du 25 janvier 1946, le président du tribunal civil de la Seine a placé sous séquestre les biens, droits et intérêts appartenant à Grundel (Alfred), 6, rue Martel, à Paris (en vertu de l'ordonnance gouvernementale du 18 octobre 1944) et a nommé l'administration de l'enregistrement, des domaines et du timbre, prise en la personne du directeur du département de la Seine pour remplir les fonctions d'administrateur séquestre.

Post-war seizure of the Grundel company by the French government

Source: [Retronews](#)

²⁵ The French High Court of Justice condemned Grundel in 1946 for having participated in the activities of the Vichy Régime

Hélène: And your father, do you have any memories of Pithiviers, or of the farm, what he was like? What he said, did he talk to you?

Arlette: My father never mentioned suffering or pain. He was a cheerful, peaceful, quiet man. He was not a rebel, he was not exuberant I don't have the impression of having seen an exuberant man. A very peaceful, very quiet man, but he talked to us. No, I think he was trying to cover it up, he never talked to us about that, no.

Hélène: Did you feel that he had something to fear?

Arlette: I think he must have been fearing something but he didn't want to share it with us. But he wasn't someone who wanted to share his fear, especially with two little girls. No, I don't think he wanted to convey his fear to us. He had, I think, faith in France. For him I think that was it, he had faith in this France where he had come as a young man because he came in '25, '27, I don't know, in those years, he must have been about 20 years old. He had a very great faith. He thought that it would pass, it was a moment to get through. And yes, that's what it is.



Customized wooden pen holder made in Pithiviers and offered by Abraham to Arlette (Madeleine has one too). Source: A. Testyler

Hélène: And do you remember the people who were around you on the farm, were there others...?

Arlette: No, I don't remember at all. At all, at all.

Hélène: Do you have any memories of children who ...?

Arlette: At that time, no. I have memories of later but not at that time. Not at all.

Hélène: And you returned to Paris at that time... in '42, you think?

Arlette: Yes, we went back to Paris. By what chance we returned to Paris, I don't know. I don't really know how we returned to Paris, but we ended up in Paris. The proof is that we were in Paris when the roundup of the Vélodrome d'Hiver in July 1942 took place. Then, unfortunately, we were in Paris.

Madeleine: At the time, the summer vacations were in July. So, in July, my mother asked that we come to Paris to see her. So, we left Pithiviers to go to Paris and, at the time of the Vel' d'Hiv' round-up, we were in Paris. Normally, we should have been at this foster home in Pithiviers. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))

Hélène: In the same apartment or... ?

Arlette: In the same apartment, yes, yes. In the apartment where we were, where we lived and where we found ourselves in July '42. This, on the other hand, I have a very very precise memory of the round-up of the Velodrome d'Hiver.

Hélène: Do you remember wearing the star...?

Arlette: Oh yes, I remember wearing the yellow star when they were issued to us. And then my mother, manic or coquettish, she was with her friend who lived across the street²⁶, her husband had also been in

²⁶ Pauline (Perla) Pint lived with her daughter Lili at 117 rue du Temple. Her husband, Samuel (Szmul) Pint (born June 30, 1909 in Grójec, Poland) was a tailor. He was a volunteer at the Barcarès camp as Abraham. He was arrested during the Green Ticket round-up and deported to Auschwitz on June 25, 1942 in the same convoy no. 4 as Abraham. He did not come back either. Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

Pithiviers, and she had fun lining them with yellow satin so that it looked nice. And there were several women in the neighborhood, in the street, they had decided to hem these yellow stars, to put them on us and we walked down the street very proud with these yellow stars and we even took pictures. We went back home. I believe that it was the photographer who was called Jérôme. There was a photographer on the boulevards not far from the Rex. And we took pictures with the yellow stars and they weren't even sewn on at that time, they were just pinned on like that. I must have a picture where you see my mom, my sister and me. And we were quite proud, she didn't want us to feel lessened by this yellow star, I remember that very well.



Lili, Arlette and Madeleine (June 1942)

Source: A. Testyler



Samuel Pint in Barcarès.

Hélène: So it was never something that you felt ashamed of compared to others?

Arlette: Afterwards yes, but at the time, no. Not at the time. Not at the time. For me, I took it almost as a game, like at school, they gave us, you know, sometimes a medal because I was a well-behaved child. It was something like that in my mind. A distinguishing mark but not demeaning like they had planned, not in my eyes as a little girl. No. Maybe for my sister it was more demeaning because she's sixteen months older and she may have felt differently but I didn't feel that way.



Arlette, Madeleine and Malka (June 1942)

Source: A. Testyler

Hélène: At school either?

Arlette: No, no.

Hélène: The children didn't say anything.

Arlette: I don't know, I don't remember going to school in Paris with this yellow star and when we were in Pithiviers or afterwards, I never wore the yellow star, never. I never wore the yellow star afterwards.

Hélène: Thank you.

TAPE 2

Hélène: So we're going to talk about '42, July '42. How did it all happen, did you feel ...?

Arlette: July '42 happened because I had had ... I had been protected until now. July '42 came as a blow, because they arrived at 3:00 am. And they weren't Germans, right. Everything I'm going to tell you happened with French policemen.

Chaque israélite (homme et femme) à arrêter fait l'objet d'une fiche. Ces fiches sont classées par arrondissement et par ordre alphabétique.

Vous constituerez des équipes d'arrestation. Chaque équipe sera composée d'un gardien en tenue et d'un gardien en civil ou d'un inspecteur des Renseignements Généraux ou de la Police Judiciaire.

Chaque équipe devra recevoir plusieurs fiches. A cet effet, l'ensemble des fiches d'un arrondissement ou d'une circonscription sera remis par ma Direction ce jour à 21 heures.

Les équipes chargées des arrestations devront procéder avec le plus de rapidité possible, sans paroles inutiles et sans commentaires. En outre, au moment de l'arrestation, le bien-fondé ou le mal-fondé de celle-ci, n'a pas à être discuté. C'est vous qui serez responsables des arrestations et examinerez les cas litigieux, qui devront vous être signalés.

Vous instituerez, dans chacun de vos arrondissements ou circonscriptions, un ou plusieurs "Centres primaires de rassemblement", que vous ferez garder. C'est dans ce ou ces centres que seront examinés par vous les cas douteux. Si vous ne pouvez trancher la question, les intéressés suivront momentanément le sort des autres.

Des autobus, dont le nombre est indiqué plus loin, seront mis à votre disposition.

Lorsque vous aurez un contingent suffisant pour remplir un autobus, vous dirigerez :

a) sur le Camp de Drancy les individus ou familles n'ayant pas d'enfant de moins de 16 ans

b) sur le Vélodrome d'Hiver : les autres.

Confidential instructions about the round-up given to the policemen on July 13, 1942²⁷

Source: [Mémorial de la Shoah](#)

²⁷ Circulars from the Prefecture of Police concerning the Vel D'Hiv round-up, 1942

They came around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, they rang the doorbell and I remember mom opened the door and the first thing they said was, "We're coming to get your husband." And my mom had to blurt out a curse word and tell them, "But you already took him." They knew for a fact, they knew very well that he was gone already, and she had even received a letter "gone to an unknown destination," she was distraught, she said, "But, he's already gone and even to an unknown destination." And they, without losing their cool, start to tell her: "So it's you and your children." And then I saw a fury come out. My sister was still asleep and she grabbed a chair, anything she could find, and she threw it at their heads and said, "You'll never get me. I'm not going."²⁸ Obviously, it was some kind of revolt, obviously it failed. They arrested us all the same and they said, "Well, you take some small things and then you follow us." She was furious, she was revolted, she tried to fight, she ... I think she almost got dragged away actually, because she really didn't want to leave. And she was crying, she was begging. Then there was nothing to be done really, they were uncompromising. They were French policemen, there were buses downstairs waiting. There were four Jewish families in the building, I think. Each family had two children, and they took the whole building. On the other hand, across the street, there was a friend of my mother's that I told you about, her husband was also in Pithiviers with my father, so they had bonded²⁹.



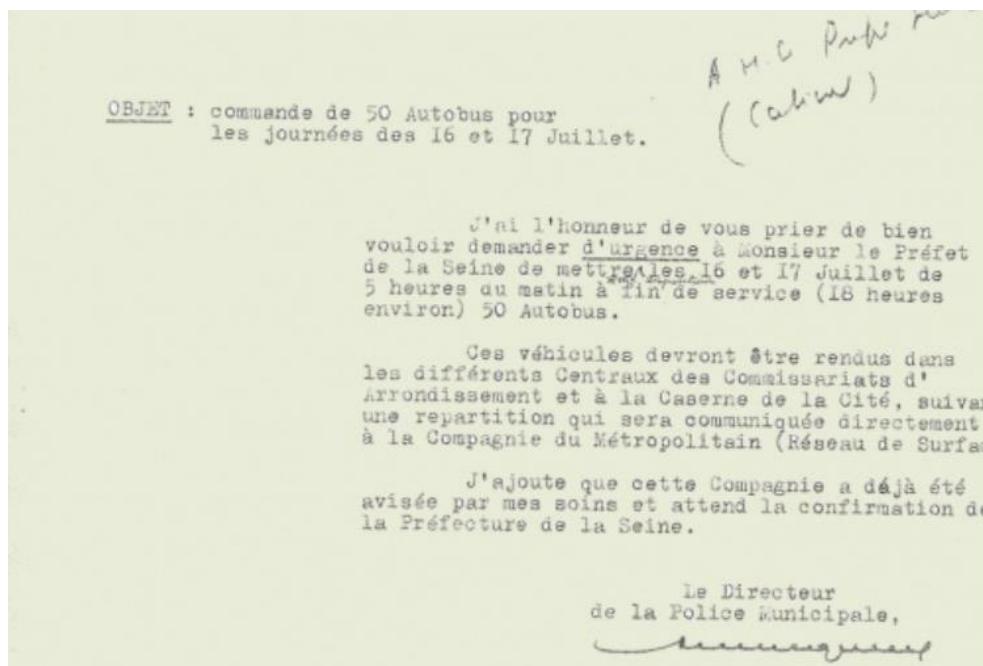
Pauline Pint

Source: M. Testyler

²⁸ In her book, Arlette explains that Malka showed her papers attesting that she was a "useful Jew" since she worked as a seamstress at the Grundel factory, serving the German army, at 9 rue Martel. Pauline Pint also worked there. Accordingly, both of them had an Ausweis (German identity card).

²⁹ Pauline Pint

And she also had a little girl who I think was a year and a half younger than me. And her too, the gendarmes arrived, the policemen arrived, and made the same scene. And she, she found herself a little petrified and she described the same scenario as my mother. And one of the policemen said to her, "Go get some bread and milk!" Four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, she looks at them and then he says, "Yes yes yes, go fetch some bread!" And when a policeman tells you that well what do you do? You go. And as he was leaving, he said to her, "And you take the little one!" She only had a little girl, she takes her little girl and she goes down the street. And the moment she found herself in the street - she told us afterwards - she said to herself, "He just saved my life." She hid in a doorway, she saw the buses leave, she may have seen us get on those buses that had been requisitioned. But her, one of the gendarmes, one of the policemen saved her life. Instead, they put us in those buses and we left for the Vélodrome d'Hiver.

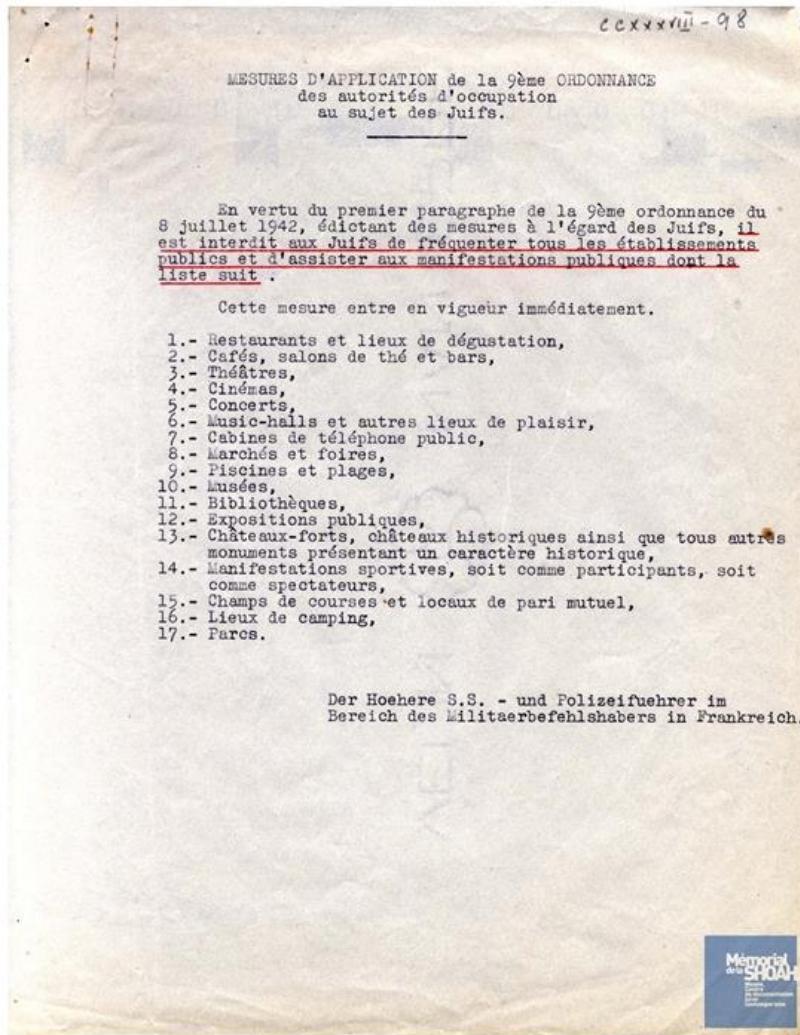


Request for 50 buses in preparation for the round-up (dated July 13, 1942)

Source: [Les sanglots longs des violons](#)

Madeleine: In June 42, my mother received a notice that my father had been deported to an unknown destination. The camp in Pithiviers (and Beaune-la-Rolande) was completely emptied. There was no one left but we didn't know at the time why. "Unknown destination". So we assumed that it was perhaps for work. It didn't occur to us at all that it could be under such circumstances. (...) There was a knock on the door. Six o'clock in the morning. "French police! We've come to get your husband. We're coming to get your husband." My mother says, "My husband hasn't been here for a long time." "Then it's you and your children! You have half an hour to pack." My mother was a strong-

willed woman : she picked up the furniture, she threw it out the window. She was screaming in the building: "We didn't do anything! We didn't do anything!" She was not trying to resist. She was trying to protest. She didn't understand what was happening to her. And my mother, at the time, had done something that she was not supposed to do. But she did it, and that's why I'm here today, testifying: we had the telephone - it was a very privileged thing at the time. Very few people had telephones. The Jews were not supposed to have telephones or radios or anything... and my mother kept the telephone³⁰. So, she called the [Grundel] factory and screamed, "You did absolutely nothing for my husband! You promised to do something for us. Do something for me and my children! " And we were taken to the Vel' d'Hiv' by bus equipped with platforms. I remember very well because we stood on the platform. ([Qualita](#))



Source: Mémorial de la Shoah

30 Antisemitic article about Jews using the phone to after their curfew to continue their management of the black market
Le Matin, July 7, 1942, Source: Retronews

Madeleine: Prior to going to the Vel' d'Hiv', we were parked in a certain place. According to my information, I don't know if it was the Carreau du Temple³¹ or the Japy gymnasium. It was in one of the two places. So afterwards, buses came to get us. And then we arrived at the Vélodrome d'Hiver. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))



Carreau du Temple
Source: [Carreau du Temple](#)

I didn't know what a winter velodrome was. We arrived there in that Velodrome d'Hiver.



Vélodrome d'Hiver (1936)
Source: [Paris projet ou vandalisme](#)

³¹ Covered market located at 4 Rue Eugène Spuller which is less than 500 m away du 114 rue du Temple

Ah, it was something terrible! These women, these children. There were no men. The only men there were boys who were already fifteen years old. All the others were women and children. The oldest were maybe fifteen years old because the other men had already been arrested like my father. And then that was horrifying. We arrived in this Velodrome d'Hiver, the women crammed together.



Victims of the round-up arriving to the Vélodrome d'Hiver

Source: [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

There were pregnant women, there were women who had babies, there were others who were sick. And everyone was crowded in. I, as a little girl, found myself there, I didn't understand, I felt like I was running around like a zombie. There were children running around everywhere because the Vélodrome d'Hiver is made of steps where people sat as spectators and then there was this bicycle path.



Inside the velodrome

Source: [Gallica](#)

And I remember seeing this bicycle path full of blood, because there were young women, young girls who had their periods - for an eight year old child, we don't know what menstruation is. We were already less informed than we are now. Now, children know. But back then we didn't know what it was - there were women who had knitting needles and were aborting themselves, hoping that they would be released. There were I apologize. There was blood everywhere. Everywhere. I couldn't go to the bathroom without seeing blood. That was terrible. I thought, "How can people bleed so much? How can women have so much blood? Why are they bleeding? Where is it coming from?" And I remember going to my mom and she said,

"We have to go [to the bathroom] here, honey. We can't do it any other way." So there was cotton, there were sponges, there was a lot of stuff that was full of blood. And then there were the little boys. After walking with a little neighbor, who was in the same building, his name was Lazare Schenbaum³² - but he was older, he must have been 13 or 14 - then I think he wanted to get out of the Winter Velodrome.



Lazar
Source: M. Testyler

³² The name is spelled here as in Arlette's book. However, the spelling Szajnbuk is found in the Klarsfeld memorial. Lazare Schenbaum was born on April 10, 1931 in Paris. He was deported on August 21, 1942 to Auschwitz in convoy no. 22, which left from Drancy, with his younger sister Régine (born November 4, 1938). Their father, Majer (born May 8, 1906), was Polish, while their mother, Henia (born Zebrocka on December 6, 1901), was from Minsk (Belarus). Majer was deported from Pithiviers on July 17, 1942 by convoy 6, while Henia left Beaune-la-Rolande on August 7, 1942 by convoy 16. None of them came back. Source: [Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France](#)



Source: M. Testyler

And he approached a policeman who was guarding the place, and asked, "Let me out." And there was nothing he could do. But I know there were a few who got out like that, but very, very few. It was a handful.

8 12	{ 1	Szajnbuk	Mayr	1906	Varsouï	Tolouan	u mari	ebeniste	P. 16 ^{me}
	{ 2	so	Hevia	1901	o	o	u	lemon	sau
	{ 3	so	Lajare	1931	1	Scie	c	les	.

The Szajnbuk family listed at 114 rue du Temple in the 1936 census. A daughter, Régine, was born two years later.

Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (D2M8 550 – Sainte-Avoye- vue 243/245)

That Velodrome d'Hiver was hell, the dirt, the crowdedness... We stayed there I think for 3 or 4 days. I don't even remember, but it felt like a century. It was a horror. There were women who were trying to get the children to sleep. But I can only see blood. For me, the Winter Velodrome is synonymous with stone and blood and women either having abortions or crying babies. It was terrible.

*Madeleine: We were one of the very first [buses] to arrive at the Vel' d'Hiv'. The Vel' d'Hiv' was not quite full. There were already some rumor. And then, my mother tried as best she could to find a place to settle us. We found a small corner and she installed us there. And my mother was taken sick to the Vel' d'Hiv'. And she was brought to the middle of the bicycle paths. She was on a stretcher and she asked for medicine, morphine. And I remember the word morphine very well because I didn't know it was a medicine. Morphine to me was the word "mort"(death). She asked for morphine but then, in the end, it didn't do any good to have herself called in sick. And my mother heard rumors at the Vel' d'Hiv that the first convoys were going to be sent to Pithiviers. My mother automatically wanted to go to Pithiviers because she knew that we had a connection with the guard there. And the first ones to leave the Vel' d'Hiv' were us actually. ([Fréquence](#)
[Tel Aviv](#))*

Arlette: Afterwards, we left. We knew that we would probably go to the internment camps that the men had left a few months earlier. I think it was in May or June that they emptied the French camps of Drancy, Pithiviers, Beaune-la-Rolande. And the men unfortunately went to Auschwitz-Birkenau, because that's where I learned that my father ended up. So we were taken out of the Velodrome d'Hiver and taken to the train station.

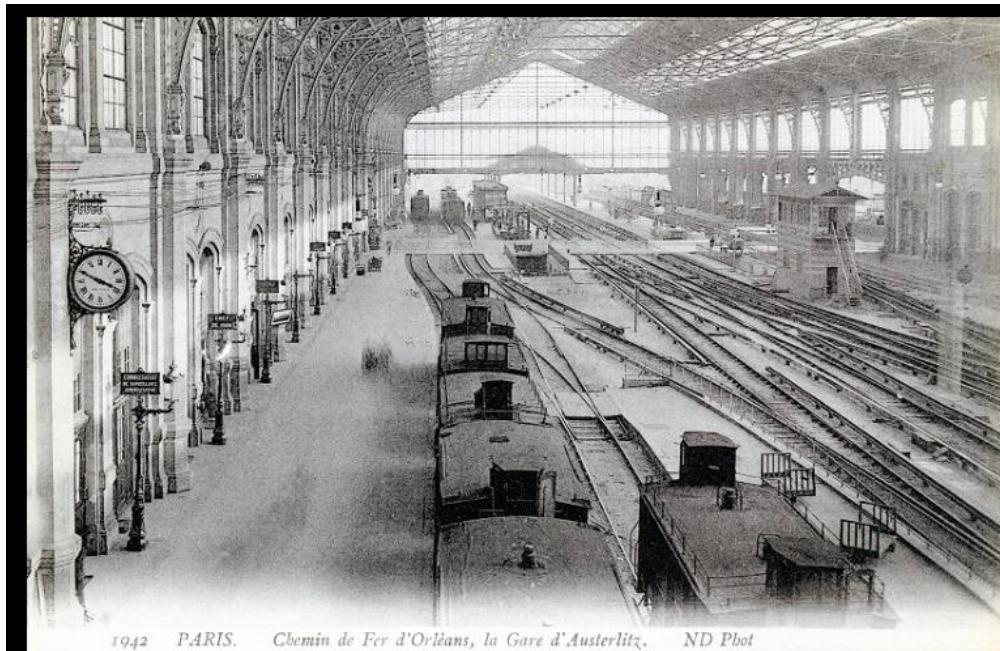
Madeleine: And we arrived at the Austerlitz station with a tiny bar of Menier chocolate - I remember it very well - and a can of sardines. And we were locked up in the cattle car. ([Qualita](#))



Advertisement for the Menier's chocolate bars (1930s)

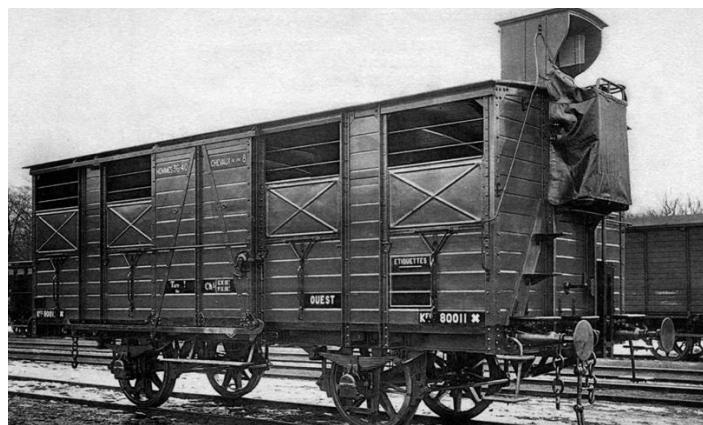
Source: [Menier mania](#)

Arlette: And they put us in front of these cattle cars that were there, lined up. And we were on the platform. And I remember very well, before getting into the cattle cars, they put milk containers on the platform of the station, to distribute milk. And then, I think, a small can of sardines. Well, something like that, I don't remember very well. Obviously, all these mothers who were there, each one of them wanted to protect their child. Such is a mother. Her child first, her child first. And then my mother, I remember very well, started saying, "No, we're not going to show them that we're savages! We're going to proceed in order. We'll give [the milk] to the little ones first, the youngest ones. And then we'll give to the older ones." And that's what happened. And my sister was one of the fairly older ones, the middle ones, since she was already about ten years old, and I remember she came to Mommy and she said, "I would like more mommy." And my mom told her, "No, it's not your turn yet."



Source: [Connaissance du Rail](#)

Arlette: So when we got there, afterwards, we got into these cattle cars, which they closed us in. It was very hot. It was July, it was very very very hot. And then the little vent this big, with these kind of bars. How can a five year old, a two year old, a six year old be able to reach the air, it's not possible! So they had made a rule, I don't know if it was mom or the others, saying: "We will take the youngest children and, in turn, allow them to breathe in front of this vent. Beaune-la-Rolande was nearby, but it took a long time for us to get there, to start moving, for them to get the authorization. There must have been priority convoys too, well, God only knows. We were there waiting in the heat. And that's what happened. So we were able to be a little bit organized in those cattle cars because the kids were being held... I can clearly see myself being held, being made to breathe in front of that vent, I mean in rotation. And then the train started.



Cattle car with the regulatory inscription « 40 men – 8 horses »

Source: [Cercle Historique du Rail Français](#)

My mother, who was a woman of courage, as I told you, certainly wanted to send a letter to someone, a French Christian, in Paris, saying: "I gave some..." or about the workshop or to get someone out, I don't know. She wanted to communicate something. She thought, I'll write a letter. There was no envelope but she found a piece of paper and then she wrote her little note. And then throwing it on the railroad tracks and being sure it would arrive? She wasn't sure. And I can still see her taking a bill, some money, wrapping it in this little letter that she had written. She must have thought, "It's going to come undone. I'm going to throw it away, it's going to fall out and it's all going to be scattered." I was wearing pigtails, I was blonde, and she took some hair from my pigtails, and with the hair from my pigtails, she tied the letter and the bill and threw it on the railroad tracks. Well, it is known that the railway workers were part of the resistance. Well, this letter arrived in Paris, as you can see. It arrived. I don't know what it contained - a message that my mother wanted to pass on - but it arrived. That's fantastic because, thinking that maybe the Germans could have found it, maybe one of the collaborators could have found it - because France was like that - well nope, it must have fallen into the hands of railway workers and they must have sent it to Paris.



Example of a letter thrown out of train. This one was written by [Jean Blumenfeld](#) and is dated July 6, 1942
 Source: [Déportés Politiques à Auschwitz](#)

Hélène: Did your mother tell you that it had arrived?

Arlette: Oh yes, yes. In fact, she was very happy and she saw, afterwards, the people³³ to whom it was supposed to reach. This letter arrived.

³³ Probably Victor et Léa Bidault, their neighbors who were jewelers, about whom Arlette talks in her (p.176)

Hélène: And you don't know the contents of the letter?

Arlette: No, not at all. Not at all. And we arrived in this camp. It was in July, the weather was nice, it was hot. My mother hoped that we would arrive at Pithiviers where my father was, thinking, "I know the gendarme and all that," but unfortunately, we were directed to Beaune-la-Rolande. It was a camp that we didn't know³⁴.

Madeleine: We drove past Pithiviers and did not stop. My mother wept, of course.

"We are not in Pithiviers!" We didn't know where we were being taken. And they brought us to Beaune-la-Rolande. We arrived at Beaune-la-Rolande. The first convoy, the first train that arrived at Beaune-la-Rolande. There was no one there. The camp was empty. ([Qualita](#))



Camp of Beaune-la-Rolande 1941-1942

Sources : [Archives du Loiret](#)

Arlette: And when we arrived there, as the weather was good, we realized that the men... they had already organized themselves because they had lived in this camp for several years, so they had even... I remember

³⁴ For a precise description of the operations of the Beaune-la-Rolande camp, read [the report](#) by André Jean-Faure from his inspection on November 27, 1941.

very well, in front of the barrack, I remember that they had planted flowers. There were little flowers growing. They were very organized. There was even a theater in Beaune-la-Rolande. And we arrived in this camp, and we the children, we took it a little bit like a summer camp. But, for the adults, it was very, very hard because there were issues with the beds, you know the bunks where we slept, it was not clean.

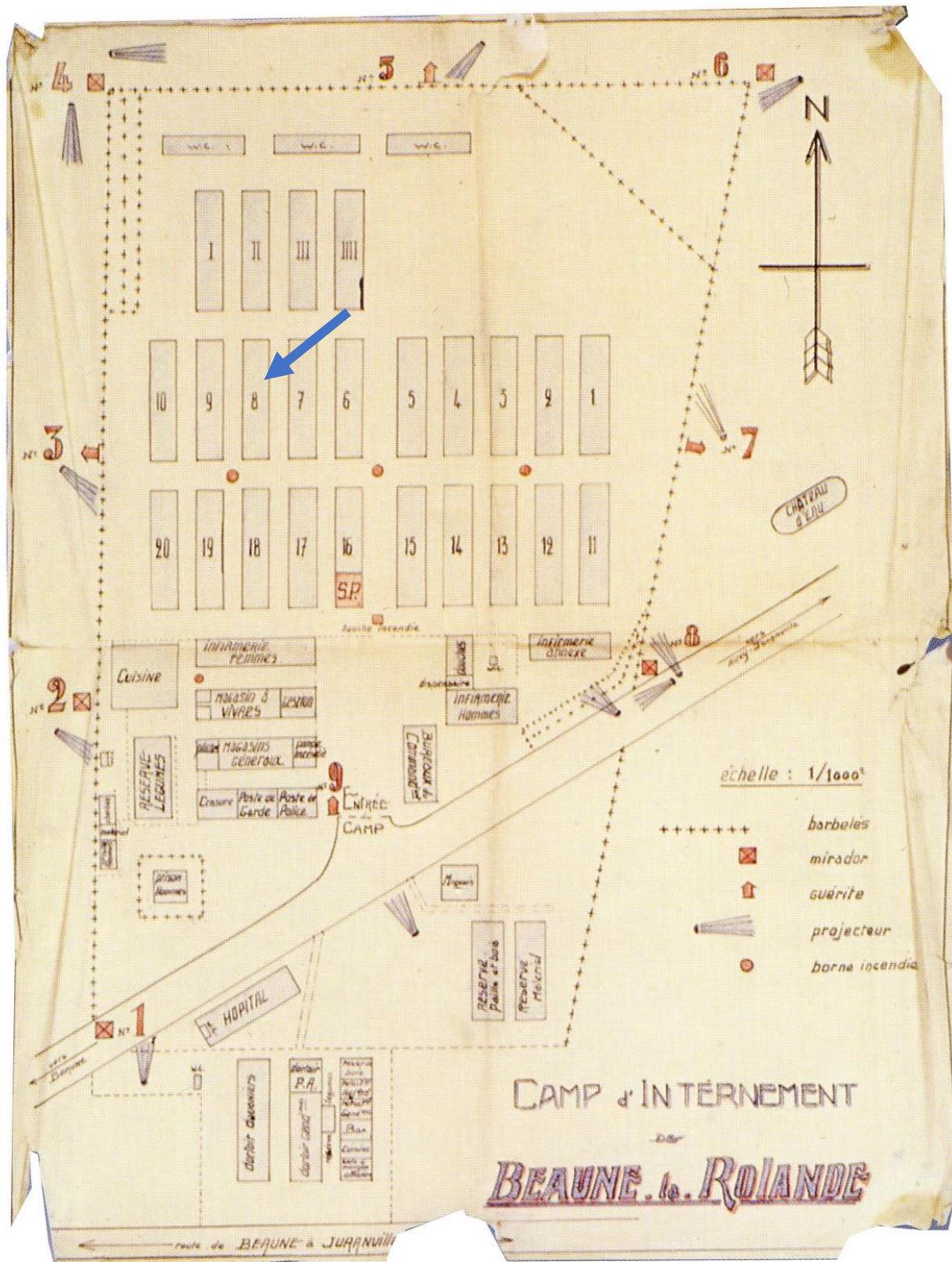


Bunk beds in Beaune-la-Rolande³⁵

Source: [Cercil](#)

We had just left the Vélodrome d'Hiver where there had been this overcrowded situation, it was dirty. I remember an anecdote. When we arrived, my mother said: "I have to wash my children. It's not possible, we can't stay like this, we have to wash the kids!" There is no hot water so what did she do? She took four bricks that were in the camp, she took a basin of water, and then she said: "I will heat it up, and then we will wash their hair. There's lice, there's everything, we have to wash the hair, we have to wash the kids." And then there was a cop, a gendarme, who was guarding the camp, who came by and asked her what she was doing. She said, "I'm heating water, I'm going to wash the children." And then, with his boot, what did he do? Whack, he kicked the basin in the air. Well, that didn't discourage my mother, she did it twice, she did it three times and then, when he came back, he said: "She's too stubborn, let her wash her kids!" And she washed us.

³⁵ Propaganda photograph, intended for the general inspection of the camps: showing beds spaced out, well arranged and equipped with blankets, it aims to feed the Vichy propaganda claiming that the Jews "accommodated" in the camps are well treated (winter 1941-1942) Source: [Cercil](#)



Malka and her daughters occupied barrack 8

Source: [Archives du Loiret](#)

Madeleine: And childhood is always the same: we started playing hide-and-seek in all the empty barracks.

There were beds everywhere: beds on top of each other, three levels. And we were assigned this infamous barrack number 8 with three beds for 6 people. So there was my mother, the mother of this little neighbor³⁶, this little boy Lazard with whom I shared a bed. Lazard's mother slept with his little sister and my mother slept with my sister. So we had three beds for six people. And that's very, very, very important for me to point out because we lived maybe a week, 10 days, together (...) And, we played. There was even a theater next to our barrack that the men had set up with a piano. Next to the latrines, there was a small garden with tomatoes, and various vegetables. And of course, we children immediately massacred this thing that the men had certainly made with great care. There was very little time between the time the men left and the women and children arrived. And my mother, who had begun to organize a little bit what was going on inside the cattle car, as soon as we arrived at Beaune-la-Rolande, was appointed to work in the kitchen. So she worked in the kitchen, which allowed us to have a slightly more substantial meal than the others. The bowl included beans, beans and bouillon cube. We lived there for a while. Always the same, frolicking, having fun. Of course, the lice were starting to appear. The women were fighting for a basin to be able to wash the children's heads. (...) ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))

Madeleine: As children, you can't say that we were aware of the danger. We were aware of the adventure. We were running around the camp. We went from one barrack to the next. We climbed into the bunk beds. It was a bit of an adventure. And when I say it, it sounds totally weird but it was a little bit like that, because a child is not aware of the danger. ([Qualita](#))

Arlette: So that was in Beaune-la-Rolande. And we didn't stay long in Beaune-la-Rolande, because my mother had to go back... she went back, I think, to the offices, to the administration. And, then, she could speak a little German. And as she had given my father's workshop as a collateral, hoping that he would be released, she said: "If it didn't get him out, it's going to get me and my children out, it must help. It can't be that way!" And she came back, one day in the hut, saying, "I'm going to get out of the camp." And she went to find a neighbor who lived with us, from the same building, and who was also in Beaune-la-Rolande, so the mother of this boy, Lazare, and she had a little three-year-old girl and she begged her: "Give me your daughter, give me your children!" To others, "Give them to me! They are children! Since I'm going out." And this woman who was a little sick, I think, she was hemiplegic, I remember, she was a little paralyzed in the face, she said, "If I keep the little one who is three years old, they won't do anything to me. Let me have her."

³⁶ Hénia Szajnbuk and her daughter Régine

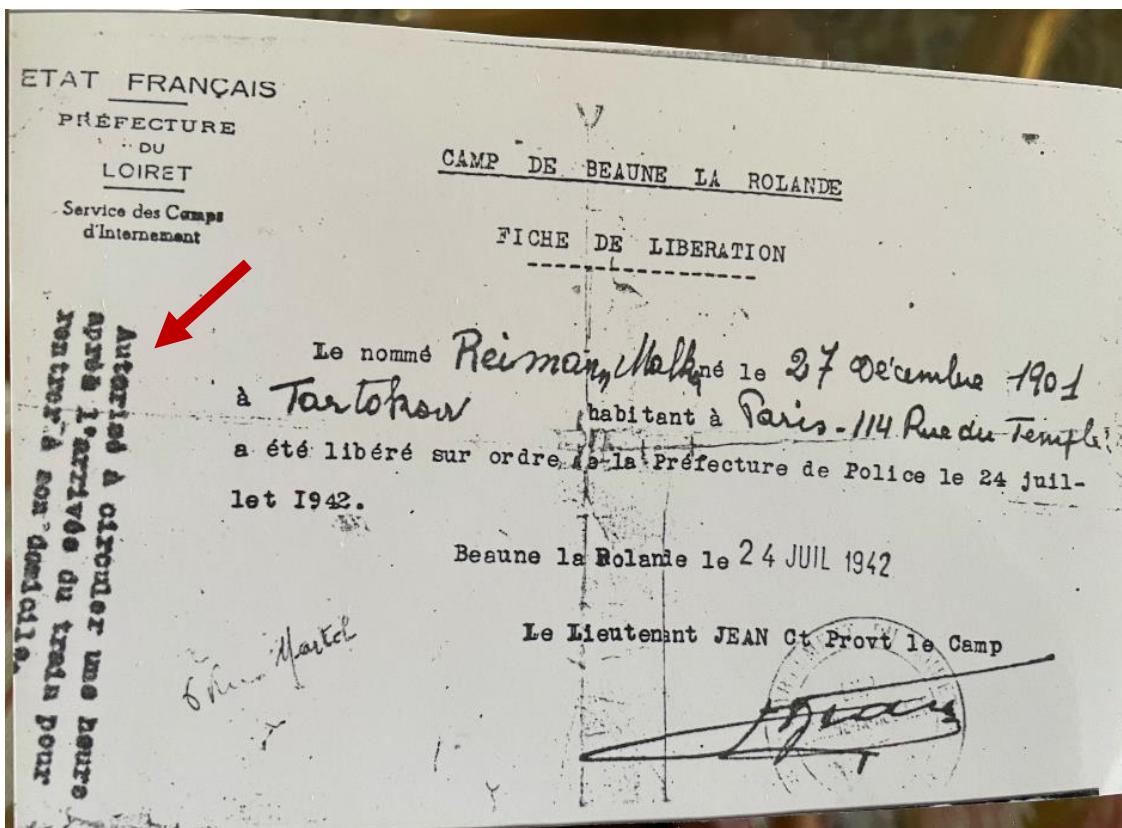


Régine Szajnbuk

Source: M. Testyler

And my mother said, "No, give her to me, I'll save her." Since she was already sure that she was going to get out. And they didn't want to. You know, for a mother to separate from her children, it was terrible. It's a shame because the little one, she would have been, I think, right here, alive. She was beautiful. She was a beautiful baby, a very beautiful baby. She was all blonde. With big blue eyes. My goodness! What had she done? Why so many children, why? Why so many innocent people? Yes, one wonders why, what had they done, all those little children? What were they guilty of?

Madeleine: And after a week, I imagine, a letter arrived from this factory that was supposed to get my father out of the camp, saying that they needed my mother to work in the factory. And we were released. And at the time of the release, my mother asked this lady, who was with us, to entrust us at least with the little girl, who was three and a half years old. And this lady said, "No, we were told that the children under 6 years were not kept and that the parents would be released with the children." So she didn't give this child to my mother and this lady was deported before the children. The children were separated from the parents and then they were sent to Drancy and they never came back. They could have been saved. ([Qualita](#))



Release form from the camp and authorization to circulate after the curfew (8pm for the Jews)

Source: M. Testyler

Arlette: Well, we were lucky, we got out, we went back to Paris³⁷. And after that, my mother must have seen that it was too dangerous and she said, "We can't stay there anymore". Even though she was what we called useful for the Germans, she was very, very afraid. And the Germans sealed the house - [as they did for all] closed apartments - but she wanted to retrieve ... I think, she returned twice, three times, to retrieve what she had hidden. And we ended up in ...

Hélène: You remember where you were when you went to Paris. Did you go back to the apartment yourself?

Arlette: No, we didn't go back to the apartment, I remember, we didn't go back to the apartment.³⁸

³⁷ In her book, Arlette gives more details on their release and the events of their return to Paris (pp. 112-113, pp.116-117, pp.12-121)

³⁸ Arlette and Madeleine's testimonies contradict each other. It is likely that Arlette is confusing this with their return to Paris in 1944 when they were not able to get their apartment back right away as it was occupied by another family.

Madeleine: We arrived at the Austerlitz station, probably an hour after the curfew, and we had been given permission to circulate in Paris. The apartment was already sealed³⁹. So, the seals were broken. When we arrived in Paris, after this infamous curfew, my mother continued to work a little for the Germans. She had to justify her release. She sent us again in foster care, but not to Pithiviers because that fellow was afraid to keep us. But later on, we did return to Pithiviers. And this time, we were in foster care in Vendôme, in the Loir-et-Cher. I think that it was the O.S.E. that connected us with these families. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))

Arlette: No, no, we left directly. I think that Mom had found a network that had been... Look, I only found out about it now because the documents have just arrived from America. And it was a network that was operated by the dispensary on rue Amelot⁴⁰. Before the war, there was a dispensary on rue Amelot that was in charge of sending children on vacation, for those who were not privileged, because not everyone went on vacation like they do now, to camps or things like that, so they placed children with French families, and the school camp paid these French families in these farms and that allowed the children of Paris to get some fresh air. And these people were already hiding children. The social workers⁴¹ had placed children in these families and the authorities, if some people asked questions, were told: "Well, they are little Parisians. They don't have much to eat in Paris, so we place them in farms, in families" but they didn't know that they were Jewish children. So my mother must have heard about this network, and we arrived in a... they⁴² were in small Sologne villages, in Pezou. And we arrived at the home of one of the sisters, and all these families, since they knew each other - they were cousins, little cousins, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law - lived in Vendôme. And we arrived in Vendôme in a family⁴³ like that which looked after children, which had children. Well, at that time, I thought she was already a mature woman, and I now know that she was only 25 or 27 years old and she had children after the war. Well, it's true that my mother paid her to look after us, but they were good people because they risked their lives.

³⁹ Under the name of Operation Furniture, Alfred Rosenberg organized the looting of Jewish property for the benefit of German administrations in the occupied regions of the East. Starting in early 1942, the Einsatzstab systematically looted apartments left empty by their Jewish occupants. The seals were first placed on the apartments. Source: [Le pillage des appartements et son indemnisation](#)

⁴⁰ The Comité de la rue Amelot was an organization that fought for the welfare of the Jewish people during the Occupation. The Committee provided supplies and even false identity cards. Before the war, this organization sent French youth to live in the countryside during the summer (as a kind of summer camp), and during the war, they worked to hide Jewish children in the countryside. Source: [Yivo Archives](#)

⁴¹ For more information, listen to the testimony of [Micheline Bellair-Cahen](#), social worker and member of the Amelot committee.

⁴² By "them", Arlette is probably referring to Lili Pint and the other children with whom the little neighbor had been sent into hiding.

⁴³ Jean et Jeanne Philippeau, who lived at 76 rue de la Marre. Beginning in the summer of 1942, Lili Pint had been hidden, thanks to this same organization, in the village of Pezou at the home of Marcel and Andrée Papon. Marcel Papon was the brother of Jeanne Philippeau. The Philippeaus also hosted Paulette Jakobowicz who lived at 116-118 rue du Temple and André Fickam.



Source: Google Map

Every day they risked their lives to hide Jewish children. And she also had a nephew⁴⁴ of her own, and I must admit that at her house, we were treated very well because she didn't make any difference. There was her nephew, there was us, my sister and me. And then there was my mother too⁴⁵. But if we did something stupid - and God knows what we put her through! We did some of the tricks that kids do, because she would go to the food store on her bike so that we could have some... we would eat butter, cream, we had eggs. She would say to us: "Well, the dishes of yesterday, you will do it. I'll put the key on top of a beam and when you come back from school, you do the dishes." And then we would push the key. And when she came back, we would say, "We didn't find the key." Well there was a slap to one, there was a slap to the other and to her nephew. We were all in the same boat and it was very very very pleasant. This man was paralyzed in one leg. He worked in a factory, there was a factory in Vendôme, a clog factory⁴⁶. This man, he was paralyzed in one leg and he went to work on his bicycle. He had a bicycle that had just one wheel⁴⁷ that went on and off. He had a garden. He grew everything in that garden: he grew salads, asparagus, and strawberries. He would give me a lot of strawberries, things like that. To this day, it's my favorite fruit. And he introduced me to nature. I used to spend hours with him in this garden and we went back there, not so long ago, I thought it was big, but it is very small. Then there was a well in the middle. There was no running water, so we drew water from the well. And then, in the summer when the weather was nice, we would heat the water and take a bath outside, it was a sheltered childhood for me again.

⁴⁴ Jacquot

⁴⁵ Madeleine explained "My mother came to join us a few weeks after working for the Germans because she didn't want to work for them. It was only to be able to get my father out and when she realized that there was nothing to do, she came to join us in Vendôme." (Fréquence Tel Aviv)

⁴⁶ The Bourdon factory.

⁴⁷ The bicycle probably had only one pedal (not wheel) that Jean operated with his working leg. (p.149)



The Philippeaus surrounded by Lili Pint, Arlette and Madeleine, Paulette Jakobowicz, André (Dédé) Fickam, their niece Mireille Papon and their nephews Jacques (Jacquot) et Claude⁴⁸. Photograph annotated by Madeleine.

I think that for my mother, it must have been much more stressful, because at that time we lived undocumented. We went to school without identification, so there must have been some complicity, because in those villages, in order to go to school and not be registered, something must have been done. In addition, we lived not far from the FeldKommandantur. There were Germans coming by all the time⁴⁹. I remember my mother shaking because I was very blond, I was very small. Then there was always a German who passed by, who took me in his arms, who made me jump in the air, who said "A little Mädchen like that," he had left in his village. If he had known that it was a Jewish Mädchen that he had in his arms... There was even one who brought me a doll one day when he came back from Germany after a

⁴⁸ The two brothers Jacques and Claude were the sons of Jeanne Philippeau's and Marcel Papon's sister.

⁴⁹ In her book, Arlette tells us that the Philippeaus' house was located just in front of the brothel "Chez Madame Raymonde" that the Germans liked to visit at 63-65 rue de la Marre (p.136 and p.139)

leave. So, he didn't know that there were Jewish children, so that, in spite of what Hitler said, the characteristics are just a lot of nonsense, because when you're a child, whether you're blond or dark-haired... I was very blond, it's true, my sister was very dark-haired, but they had them in front of them every day. And we lived like that for years, until the liberation, with my mother, without legal papers.



At the Papons' in Fontaine

(from left to right, Mireille Papon, Madeleine, Arlette, André Fickam, Lili Pint, Paulette Jakobowicz, Claude Papon)

Source: A. Testyler

Madeleine: My name was still Madeleine. Instead of being called Reimann - with two N's - I was called Reiman - AN. In Vendôme, I went to [the church], I went to the patronage, I wore a cross. You had to play the game at least.

(Fréquence Tel Aviv)

So I went to school one day yes, one day no. I went to church always, with my little cross. And I went to catechism. I knew all the prayers from A to Z. I can recite them in French and Latin to this day. I continued to draw, to paint. Always, always. (Qualita)

Hélène: I want to ask you, your father, [...] you knew in '42 that he was gone but it was something that seemed clear or... Your mother talked about it?

Arlette: That is to say that my mother, during the war, did not talk about it. We knew because she had received this paper "Gone to an unknown destination."

Hélène: You knew that he had left Pithiviers, that's all.

Arlette: Yes, that's right. That's right, because we were there afterwards. We knew that the women had taken the camps and then there were... And it was when we arrived at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, during the Vélodrome d'Hiver, that we started hearing about this pitchipoï, saying "We're going to go to pitchipoï." And all the kids were talking about going to pitchipoï. But, we didn't realize that pitchipoï was nothing. So, when we talked about it after the war, we said "It's true that they said they were going to pitchipoï!" And I would say to myself, "It's true that they said they were going to pitchipoï. But pitchipoï was Auschwitz, it was Birkenau, we didn't know. But my mother thought that my father would come back. She was sure that he would come back. That's why, I think, she held on. She was very brave. She was very strong. During all that time she was very strong. She was an excellent cook. In Vendôme, life went on. In the countryside, life went on. There were communions, there were things like that, and then like many Jewish mothers, she was a very good cook. She made Challah. For the non-Jews, it was brioche. So for communions, "We'll ask the Alsatian woman" - because she was called the Alsatian woman; she had an accent anyway, she passed for an Alsatian woman - "We'll ask the Alsatian woman. She will make the cakes for the communions. And my mother made cakes. She was a good seamstress too. She had to be good with her hands. And we lived like that until the end of the war, hidden, without proper ID. It must have been hard for her, but I personally didn't suffer. I liked that life in the countryside, that life of... We went to school half the time because the number of teachers was low. So one week or one day, it was the boys, one week it was the girls, or vice versa, so we only went to school for half days. We had rabbits in this house where we lived. So she would send us to bring grass to the rabbits. So we would spend the whole afternoon collecting grass when in ten minutes we could have collected a bag of grass. We spent days there. We'd go to the vineyards and gorge ourselves on unripe grapes. It could give colic, but it didn't matter. I can't say I was unhappy in those days. The only hellish things I remember were the winter velodrome and the aftermath of the war, while for

others, it was really not the same. I admit that I was perhaps more oblivious, perhaps too young, I don't know. Or very protected, at least, that's for sure!

Hélène: It's rather very protected by your mother who really had to ...

Arlette: By my mother and by those around me, because the families who hid us, don't forget, must have risked a lot. It's true that they were paid, but they still took risks. Money doesn't pay for freedom and the risk they were taking, I think. Or they were reckless, I don't know if these families were reckless but many of them were aware. Recently, we went to pay a tribute in these villages. Besides, we didn't know... because when we met at communions, we saw a child, we saw another child, but we didn't know that he was Jewish and they didn't know that we were Jewish. And then, at the Liberation, the Americans took all these documents from all these villages, and took them to the United States to classify them. And it was only after 50 years that they sent all the documents back to France. And it was from there that we began to know that we were, I don't know, many hidden children. So at first, we thought there were two or three or four or five of us, then there was one who started to say -because there was a young boy who was hidden, well now he's an adult, and his wife works for the Jewish radio now in France, then who said - "I think Yoselé's wife (because my brother-in-law⁵⁰ does the Yiddish broadcast on the Jewish radio) she was also hidden." And it snowballed, and that's how we were able to know and see that we were hidden, that there were lots of children who were there.

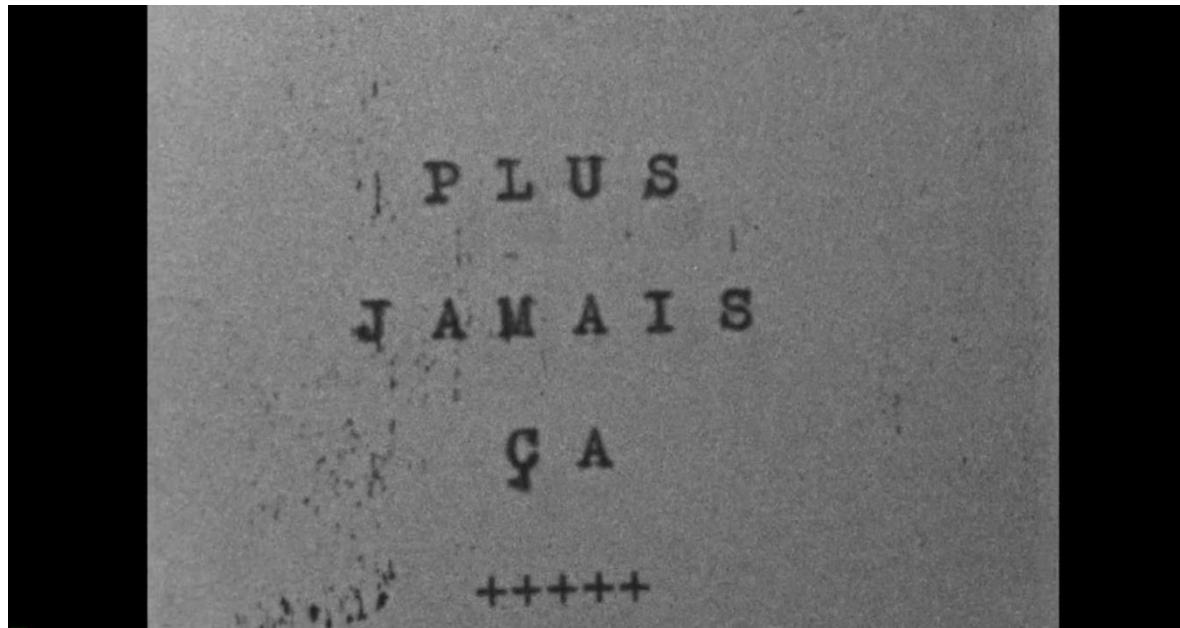
Tape 3

Hélène: So, now we are at the end of the war, can you tell us how all this...?

Arlette: How did we live during the end of the war? We were liberated by the Americans. We were heavily bombed⁵¹ because in Vendôme, I don't know, there were railroad lines, we lived near the railroad lines.

⁵⁰ We later learn that the two Reimann sisters, Madeleine and Arlette, married two brothers Yossélé (Joseph) and Szlamek (Charles) Testyler.

⁵¹ Plus jamais ça starting at 6:00



Click on the screen to watch the home movie of an inhabitant of Vendôme showing the town at the Liberation in 1944⁵²

Source: [Clicic](#)

It was a town where we were lucky enough to have mushroom groves, you know those caves where the mushrooms grow.



Mushroom grove near Vendôme

Source: [Bien plus qu'une place](#)

⁵² "I just saw the film about Vendôme and there is a plaque for a man named Bedu who was killed in Vendôme in August 1944. I remember being at the elementary school - they called it communal school at the time - with his daughter, whose name was Arlette Bedu, who was in my class I think. And I remember the first day of school: everyone was around her because she had just lost her father. She was dressed in a blue and white checkered apron, and I remember that little girl very well." (voice message sent by Madeleine on June 2, 2022)

And we lived in them during the major bombings when the city was bombed - we were afraid of the V2s, the V1s, all that - and we lived in these mushroom groves. And my mother was always very, very afraid, so she had a sort of big bed built, I remember very well, I was under the impression that it was at least 5 meters long, I don't know why. It was made of wood, very basic boards, and she had installed that and there were a lot of families and we lived in those mushroom caves. And it was a lot of fun, always a lot of fun because Vendôme is a beautiful town, very historic. And there was this castle, and we were under the castle because these mushroom caves were there.



Ruins of the castle in Vendôme
Source: [Vendôme Tourisme](#)

And so we were liberated by the Americans⁵³. I remember when the Americans arrived well with their chewing gum, their sam-sam gum⁵⁴, their chocolate, we didn't know what it was. Oh yes, it was wonderful!

⁵³ Plus jamais ça starting at 12:37

"I remember marching in the streets. Now I can't see the film in slow motion, but I'm sure I participated in an identical parade through the streets of Vendôme after the Liberation." (ibid.)

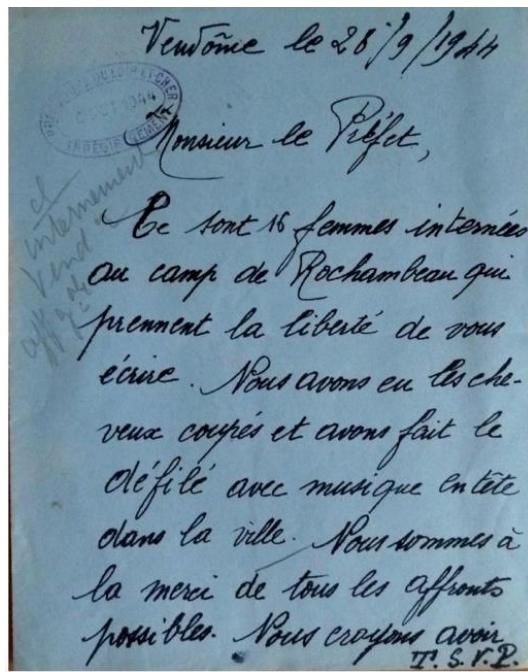
⁵⁴ Is it how the children pronounced "chewing-gum"?



August 13, 1944

Source: [La Nouvelle République](#)

It's true that there were girls who had certainly slept with Germans or things like that, so they were shaved. I was terribly impressed by that⁵⁵.



Petition signed by 16 women shorn during the wild purge in Vendôme (ACDL 1375 W 140)

Source: [Histoire 41](#)

⁵⁵ Plus jamais ça starting at 18:50

"Of course, the shaved women not only I saw them marching but I saw how their heads were shaved back then." (ibid.)

So the French, the so-called FFI, there may have been some who weren't quite FFI, there may have been FFI, there were Resistance fighters, the real ones, the not so real ones, you know, and then they shaved the heads of these poor unfortunate girls because you could say that they were unfortunate girls, because I think that if they were prostitutes or if they slept with Germans, it wasn't so much to snitch or collaborate, not in those areas, it wasn't at this level, they weren't spies, it wasn't that. And they paraded in the streets like that, in trucks, with their heads shaved.⁵⁶



Source: [Histoire par l'Image](#)

So afterwards, it was the fashion of the big turbans⁵⁷. That's how the fashion for turbans came about, because the girls wanted to hide their baldness. And then, there were only a few Germans who were still in the city, who had surrendered. And there was the Loir which ran through the town and was always very dirty as all rivers are. The Resistance fighters found nothing better than to make these Germans and collaborators go down into this river and clean all the sewers with shovels and all that, and we, the children, went to see these so-called collaborators, these Germans. It was still a tale, a continuity of play, it was not dramatic. In my mind, it was still not dramatic, not even to see them, I did not look at them as enemies

⁵⁶ To learn more about the *femmes-tondues* of this time period, visit these sites: <http://histoire-image.org/fr/etudes/tondues-liberation>; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44668336>

⁵⁷ 1942 film on how to make a glamorous turban: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ymzUYtbKD8>

because for me, they had not done anything bad to me at that time. I was convinced that Daddy would come back. There was no way he wasn't coming back, you know. My mother was there, my sister was there.



Turban created by Parisian designers in the 1940s

Source: [Digital Archives](#)

Hélène: But your mother didn't tell you anything, she didn't tell you anything?

Arlette: Well, my mother was crying, my mother was waiting, my mother was someone who was crying, who was waiting for her childhood sweetheart to come back. That's what she was waiting for. And then, when the bombing stopped, we stayed, us, a little bit. I think that she returned to Paris and, every day, she went to the Gare de l'Est, to wait for the convoys that arrived with the deportees and for her husband who was not returning. And then for her, it was not her husband but her love who was not coming back. This childhood love that was not coming back. When I think that I have been living with my husband for almost 40 years, more than 40 years, I have this happiness, I have this luck and she didn't have ... how many? she didn't have 10 years to live with him. This childhood love that she was waiting for all her life. They were two children who loved each other, and they were from the same village. They were even second cousins, he was her god, he was her love, he brought her from Poland to shower her with gifts. She was showered with gifts, furs, jewelry. She had everything but too briefly, it was not ... she was waiting. And then ... then the winter of '45. So, during July, the liberation in '44, it was like a kind of little whirlwind. I saw my mother waiting, hoping, and then my father not coming back.

Madeleine: My mother went to the Hotel Lutetia every day. She cried, she came back and Dad was still not there. ([Qualita](#))



Relatives of deportees in search of information in front of the Lutetia in spring 1945

Source: [cnrd](#)

Hélène: Did you stay in Vendôme?

Madeleine: At the Liberation, my mother sent us directly to Pithiviers because the apartment, which was my parents' apartment, was occupied. So we couldn't go back to that apartment. (...) We returned to Pithiviers. This time not to church but still to the family where this man⁵⁸ had been arrested after the war. Of course, because he worked in the camp! And my mother testified that he had saved Jewish children and even other Jews who were hidden in Pithiviers.

([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))

Arlette: We had stayed in Vendôme and we had also been sent back. We had two apartments that had been requisitioned by the French. So we had nowhere to live. We had two large apartments, one where my father's workshop was on the fifth floor, and we lived on the third floor. The apartments were big since we even had bathrooms before the war, things like that. So it was big. But the apartments had been

⁵⁸ Emile Schiffmacher

requisitioned. The time it took to get at least one of the apartments back, she left us in Vendôme⁵⁹. And then we lived in the 14th district until she got it back⁶⁰. But all I saw her doing was waiting for Papa, waiting for Papa, hoping that he would come back. And then, I remember, one day she came back and she was crying and I said, "Why are you crying?" She said, "I saw someone who saw Papa." And she had to tell me that it was in Auschwitz. And in my little girl's head, it didn't mean anything to me, as a little girl. "And then I heard that he was sick and had typhus." Typhus was a strange disease, it must have been very serious, in my mind. "And he had typhus and then, since then, no news." And so, that's all we knew about him. And we waited for the latest news, the last transports. She still hoped until one day someone must have said to her, "I think he went to the gas chamber after he had typhus fever. He only got out of the Revier⁶¹ to go to the gas chamber."

Madeleine: I waited for maybe two years. I was sure that [my father] would come back. I even had dreams. I even had a very, very specific dream that he was in a village near La Roche-Posay. I still remember that address. I don't know if this village exists, but in my dream, it was in a small wood near La Roche-Posay and he was hidden there. I must say that I was a little girl for whom, like many little girls, my dad was the most handsome. And I was very much in love with my daddy. He was the most handsome. ([Qualita](#))



Source: M. Testyler

⁵⁹ The sisters' testimonies differ on this point

⁶⁰ The exact address of this apartment was 14 rue Pernety, located in the 14th arrondissement

⁶¹ Name given to the concentration camp infirmary

Madeleine: I have something very, very rare, because many people say "My father (or my husband) died in Auschwitz", without really having a trace. I went to Auschwitz to see what I could find and I found a trace that my father died in 1942 -November if I remember correctly, in November 42 - in the Revier, that is, in the hospital, from typhus, I suppose. That he was working in the Kanada, that is, unloading the wagons. So I asked, "How come I have a death certificate?" I was told that until '42, you could still get death certificates. After 42-43, when the Hungarians arrived, they stopped issuing death certificates because the crematoria were working at full capacity and they were no longer recording. And I have this certificate. And I made a big, big, big picture on which I put all the documents, in a collage, with different things so that I could have a memento of what had happened. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))



Untitled (2,50 m x 1,60 m)

Then we felt that my mother had something in her that broke. It was over. No reason to live. It was over. And she got sick. She used to cry. She cried day and night. She got sick, she hurt... her head... One day she fell off the train. They brought her back to us and her head was in agony. We brought her back from the

hospital, and she was crying: "You have to give me opium. Give me something, I can't anymore!" Really, she was doing very badly. We took her to the hospital and I wanted her to fight, I remember my sister said to her at the hospital, "But mom, we're here. We're here." And my mom said to her, "I'm leaving you with enough." It's true that there was money, it's true that there was the means. "Me, I need... I want to see Papa again."



Source: [Shoah Foundation](#)

And it must have been really hard for my sister, too, to hear a mother say, "I'm giving up," when she had been fighting the whole time. All the time. She was a really brave woman. She was strong. And she said, "No, I want to see Papa again, I want to see Papa again." And she died with only that in mind, wanting to see her husband, her love that she had not been able to continue. What is ten years, not even ten, in a woman's life? It's nothing. And she let herself die. And she died in January '46. So, you see, from July '45 to January '46, it's really waiting until the end and then saying to yourself, "Well, my little childhood love, it's over." I admit that on the day of the funeral, I still see myself at the cemetery in Bagneux, in front of her grave, and when they lowered her down, I was unhappy, for sure, but I blamed her. Why did she abandon me, why did she leave me when she had been there all along? Why leave us here? That was my first feeling. And for a long time, I admit, a long time, years, I understood but I was very angry at her for leaving us. Very, very angry. Yes, that was the only thing I could blame Maman for, my feeling abandoned, being alone like that. I said to myself, "It's not normal that she abandoned us." And, that's what happened. And then, whereas everything I have told you, the period of war should have been hard, it was still a privileged time for me

because I had my mother, I had my sister - eating? I wasn't a big eater, I didn't suffer from anything, I was fine, I discovered nature, I discovered beautiful things - it was a descent into hell, into horror, because we didn't really have a family. There was a so-called brother-in-law of my mother who had come, her sister's husband who had come back from I don't know where. And then they took everything, everyone helped themselves to what we had. And we had nothing left. Not only did we have no father, no mother, but all the possessions , everything they left behind, everyone helped themselves to them.

Le sept Janvier mil neuf cent quarante-six, vingt-trois heures cinquante, est décédée en son domicile
114 rue du Temple, Malka ZOLKWER, née à Tartakow(Pologne), le vingt-sept Décembre mil neuf cent un,
fourresse, fille de Jula ZOLKWER et de Keila LAM, époux décédés.- Epouse de Abraham REIMANN.- Dressé
le huit Janvier mil neuf cent quarante-six, treize heures cinquante, sur la déclaration de Adolphe
WECHSLER, quarante-quatre ans, fourreurs, 9 rue Charlot, qui, lecture faite, a signé avec Nous, Robert
PINION, Adjoint au Maire du Troisième arrondissement de Paris./.

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Zolkwer
f^e Reimann

Malka's death certificate⁶²
Source: [Archives de Paris](#) (3D168 - vue 2/31)

And we were there all alone, both of us left to ourselves. It was very hard. And then I said to myself, this is not possible. How could it be? And then in my mind, now I realize it, I was running around like a zombie because I had no connections, so I was hanging on to my sister. We don't have a big age gap . She is only 16 months older than me. She was more mature than me. But for me, she was the pillar, the only thing I had left. And then, all of a sudden, they separated me from her. Because, well, it's true that there was one part... we were given guardians, substitute guardians, all of that, I'd rather not even talk about it because everyone took everything. And one of the guardians said, "Well, the little one, we're going to put her in a

⁶² On January 7, 1946, 11:50 p.m., died at her home 114 rue du Temple, Malka Zolkwer, born in Tartakow (Poland), December 27, 1901, furrier, daughter of Jula Zolkwer and Keila Lam, deceased husband. Wife of Abraham Reimann. Drawn up on January 8, 1946, 1:50 p.m., on the Declaration of Adolphe Wechsler, 44 years old, furrier, 9 rue Charlet, who reading done, signed with us, Robert Pinion, deputy mayor of the IIIrd arrondissement of Paris.

boarding school." And then the older one? I didn't know what my sister was doing apart from that. So they put me in a boarding school so that I could finish school in the Sarthe⁶³.

Madeleine: Our guardian was a distant cousin who didn't care much for us after all. And who told me one day, at twelve and a half years old, "You have to work." He asked me what I wanted to do and, as I was always with a pencil in hand, the least I thought I could do was either be an artist or a photographer. So I decided to ask him and said, "I want to be a photographer!" "But there's no way! It's not a profession! You'll be a furrier like your parents. You'll work in the fur industry. " And he puts me on the machine. ([Qualita](#))

Hélène: And you, you were 13-14 years old?

Arlette: No, I was not 14 years old yet. It was in '45, in '46. In '46, I was 13. I was about to turn 13. So I was put in boarding school. And then, my old self returned for a few months, a little at peace again because I was back in an environment with children, so a little sheltered , but there was something that I was missing. Certainly I must have been very disturbed because I remember then that I started to pee everywhere again. There was something wrong. That, I've never told anyone that. And that was the first time that... One day I got up and I had wet my bed. I was ashamed. Shame. It was a terrible thing. I think since I was 2, 3 years old, I had to be clean. Then, all of a sudden, something emotional must have happened. School vacations came, I went back to Paris and then I saw my sister who was there. And then she was working. I said to her, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm working because we have to make a living..." I said, "That's not possible. How is that possible? I want to continue my studies" and then I saw my sister working, I said, "I'm not going back to school." And then I stayed with her and I said, "No, I'm not going back." So, we were in the apartment that my mom was able to get back, one of the apartments. The utilities, the rent, all that, we didn't have any money, we didn't care. And the two of us lived there.

Hélène: Alone?

Arlette: Alone. How did we not go astray? How did we make it? I assure you, I don't know how. We really had to have good personalities or we had to have... But really, I don't know how. How two fourteen year

⁶³ Unlike many children in the same situation, Arlette was not placed in a children's home under the auspices of the O.S.E. She remembers being the only Jewish child in this boarding school.

olds, two girls living all alone in that apartment. And then we were proud of ourselves because, I remember, there was this friend⁶⁴ who lived ... of my mother's, who was across the street, who was very nice, she was the only one who reached out to us, because I remember, one year after mom's death, it was actually the anniversary. I didn't know when it was shiva, shloshim, yortsayt, you know the day of the anniversary, the year... she, she knew though. She came one day and then she said just like that, "Come on girls, we're going together, I'm taking you to the cemetery." She took us to the cemetery. It was the anniversary of Maman's death but she didn't want it to be dramatic, "We'll go to the movies." And she took us to the Rex, I still remember seeing Dumbo the Elephant. So, if it wasn't for that woman, who came but didn't say, "Oh poor girls," or bring us food. Not in the least. Sometimes she would say, she would come, she would say, "I've prepared too much, let's have a dinner party, girls, let's eat together." And we wanted to be proud, so we wanted to invite her too.

FILMS ETRANGERS DOUBLES	
Club des Vedettes.	Chercheurs d'or.
California	Dame de Shanghai.
Cinémonde	Dame de Shanghai.
Eldorado	L'Avent. v. d. l. mer.
Français	Cape et poignard.
Gaumont-Palace	Dumbo.
Les Images	Cape et poignard.
Le Lynx	L'Avent. v. d. l. mer.
Max-Linder	San Antonio.
Midi-Mingit Poiss.	Joe Palook.
Moulin-Rouge	San Antonio.
New-York	Deux bons copains.
Palace	Fatalité.
Paramount	L'Avent. v. d. l. mer.
Radio-Ciné Montparnasse	Capitaine Fury.
Régent Casimartin	Rebecca
Rex	Dumbo.
Ritz	Raisins de la colère.
Royal-Haus, (Mél.)	Raisins de la colère.
Studio Parnasse ...	Lpl.bell.ann.d.n.vie.
Studio Rivoli	Charge fantastique.

L'Intransigeant (January 7, 1948)

Source: [Retronews](#)



The Rex – Soldatenkino during the German Occupation

Source: [Archives de Paris](#)

But there was no butter. From time to time, we had a little bit of margarine. So she would always say, "It's funny at your house, how come the butter at your house is a little salty? It has a funny taste". We would tell her that it was because it was salted butter that was brought from the country. We didn't tell her that it was only margarine. Oh, I remember once we went to see friends of my parents⁶⁵ who were furniture dealers in

⁶⁴ Pauline Pint

⁶⁵ The Schussman family

Montparnasse. So , we got to Montparnasse, and it was a family that had four girls. They had money. The parents were there. And we were eating . Then we looked at the potatoes. We hadn't seen potatoes for ages with my sister. And they must have noticed it and they offered us dinner I think, and we said, "No, we want to go home." Because still, we were proud. They must have realized that we suffered from a scarcity of everything and she said, "Here, take some potatoes." Well, it was rationed. "Take some potatoes." And I can see myself with my sister, we took the potatoes, we go down to the metro station, and from Montparnasse to République , it's far, and we were changing at Invalides, we thought,"How are we going to cook these potatoes so we don't lose a drop? Do we fry them? But no, it's going to shrink. We don't have any oil. Do we make them this way...?" We said, "We're going to make a soup, we're going to make a yushke." Do you know what a yushke is? It's a soup, and it's called poor people's soup. It's the soup of the poor in Poland, by the way, that is made with potatoes and a little flour. So, we said to ourselves, "We'll have the potatoes, we'll have the soup and we'll have the vegetables." And we made... the flavor of this yushke, you have no idea [how good it was] Two children, 13 and 14 years old...

Hélène: And that your mother had taught you how to make, otherwise...

Arlette: Yes, I think so... Well, we had good cooking foundations because nowadays, we cook without really having learned it. I think it's an innate gift. My mother, she was a wonderful cook. Everybody said, "Your mother is a cordon bleu chef." To this day people who knew her say, "Your mother? An unrivaled cook. Knowing how to entertain like your mother did, she was unmatched." So, the apple does not fall far from the tree . I think that, if she cooked well, that's why my sister and I cook well too. Ah those potatoes! We had nothing ! We had nothing. That, you see, for me, was worse than the war. I didn't have my mother, I only had my sister, we lacked everything, we had nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing. And then there wasn't really anyone to say, to see, to wonder, but what are these two girls doing? What do they live on? How do they live? Really that was very, very hard. I think everyone should have their share. I didn't get my share during the war, I got it afterwards. Yes, that was the hardest time until my sister met her husband. My sister had a veneration for my father. Her father, her daddy , that was something... I will tell you a little story. When she was a little girl, I think she used to kiss all the men, all the boys, stuff like that. And when the war came, she was called "all the Mensch" because you know, in Yiddish "all the Mensch" means "everybody" because she kissed everybody. And one day she rebelled and she said, "I'm not going to kiss anybody anymore until Daddy comes back from deportation." And that's how it was. My sister never kissed

an old or young man. That was it. And after the Liberation, when she had to work, one day she came back completely excited. I said to her, "What's wrong with you?" She says, "You'll never guess." "What's the matter with you?" I said. "You won't guess." I said, "What won't I guess? " "I saw Papa, I saw Papa, I saw Papa." I say, "What Papa?" She says, "There is a young man in front of me: it's Papa, it's Papa, it's Papa." And it's true that my brother-in-law looks like my father. And she was at that time not quite 17 years old. And at 17, they got married. So from that point on, let's say that life started to change a little bit. She felt more secure to start with, there was now a household because he had come to work -he was in the fur business ; e we had the apartment - so he started by creating a workshop in my parents' apartment. I lived with them. It was already a more normal life. And then, well, this brother... Well, my sister's husband had a brother younger than him by three years who used to come to the house, who was all alone because they had just returned from deportation⁶⁶. My husband was deported at the age of... on his 14th birthday. And then, it so happened that he introduced us to his brother who would come and take the little sister out. And then the little sister would have to come home at midnight because she was very small, she was too young. But the little brother was not discouraged, he would take her out, I would do sports, I would go... I was in a youth movement.

Hélène: Jewish?

Arlette: Jewish. Yes, yes. So, that, the youth movements, that was a blessing for us, these youth movements, because as we were left to ourselves, it was the youth movements of rue de Paradis, the U.J.R.E⁶⁷., communists, socialists, whereas my parents were not at all. But they took care of us.

Hélène: After the war.

Arlette: After the war. Immediately after the war. And it was the only vacation I took, they were the only people who took care of us. We used to go on Sundays to these homes on rue de Paradis and we got together, we were considered Mensch. We were somebody when we were nothing to the others. For the

⁶⁶ To hear the testimonies of Joseph (Yossélé) Testyler and Charles (Szlamek) Testyler

⁶⁷ The U.J.R.E stands for "The Jewish Union for the Resistance and Mutual Aid" and was an organization that offered protection to Jewish communities. Find more information about the U.J.R.E and its history here: <https://www.canal-u.tv/chaines/cerimes/nous-continuons; https://ujre.fr/>

second degree cousins, we were nothing, we were just a burden. Because the second degree cousins had written to their families - we had family in New York, we had family in Argentina - saying, "There are two little orphans here. Well, the parents used to have some means," and things like that. We're going to change subject quickly because the only answers they got back were, "There's no future in the United States. Better they stay in Europe." You see, so let's change subject . And in these Jewish homes, we were valued, we played sports. I found myself as belonging to my community when I returned because I could forget all those anxieties I had about not being supported, assisted.



Source: [L'enfant et la Shoah](#)

Madeleine: I was still in school at the time and there was a lady who was Jewish and had a daughter -I think she was in my sister's class- and she saw these two orphaned girls and she asked us at that time, "What are you doing for break?" "We don't do anything for break." And she told us, "I'll take care of you." And she signed us up at 14 Paradise Street. And I must say that if I have, I can say, "turned out well" in my life, it is thanks to this organization that took Jewish children under its wing, that sent us to summer camp, that organized meetings in the evenings, that took us to the theater, that made us speak Yiddish. It was our family. ([Qualita](#))



Click on the screen to watch a 1946 documentary about the mission of the UJRE⁶⁸

Source: [Canal U](#)

Madeleine: Every weekend, there were events, brigades. They didn't call us kids. We were called the Youth. We were well indoctrinated, since I used to sell l'Humanité and l'Avant-Garde in front of the subway station. But it was an extraordinary family and I still thank them to this day. ([Fréquence Tel Aviv](#))

Madeleine: I think if I am what I am, I owe it to them. They were my family for a long, long time. I didn't have any money at all back then as my guardian didn't pay for us at all. And we went on vacation x number of times with this organization without ever paying. It was a children's haven. Very few children had either a mom or a dad. The one who had one of them was already exceptional. So it was a whole group of girls who were practically like sisters. We warmed

⁶⁸ About the summer camps and children assistance watch the film starting at 53:00

up to each other. There was an extraordinary atmosphere. An atmosphere that also encouraged us to cultivate and sing in Yiddish. And I think that if I didn't hang out in the streets at that time, it was all thanks to them. It was a communist organization that published the newspaper La Presse Nouvelle, which was located at 14 Paradis Street. Really, this organization was extraordinary. The only small flaw was that it was perhaps too politicized and we were all frankly little would-be Communists. But it was a political ideal at the time. That was simply an ideal. But for the kids, I think it was a blessing. (Voice message sent by Madeleine, June 2, 2022)



Photograph annotated by Madeleine

Arlette: I think that I have needed pretty much all my life, now I realize it, to be protected. And that's what my husband does now too. I think he's someone who protected me when my sister got married and he protects me even now. He's protected me my whole life, actually. And I think I found in him, not only a brother-in-law, the brother of a brother-in-law but the best that could happen to me. When I met him, I

was 15 years old, 15-16 years old. I was about to turn 16. I knew nothing about life, I was very vulnerable. And then he made me realize that I should be patient, that life goes on, that there are good things. He used to take me out, bring me to the movies. He even took me dancing in the afternoon. Afterwards he would take me back to my sister's house. Every Saturday, he was there. He was there all the time. And of course, one thing led to another, and if he needed to find a home, he found one. I needed to find a shoulder to lean on, someone to listen to me, and he was there. And he is always there. That was important.



Arlette and Charles Testyler on their wedding day (July 5, 1952) surrounded by Madeleine et Joseph Testyler
Source: A. Testyler

Apart from that, thanks to this period during which Jewish people took care of children who were alone, we had some very pleasant moments, yes, they really took care of us. I think that it was not completely disinterested because they spoke to us about politics, a little indoctrination but that did not matter because we were already in these youth movements. They were youth movements. We were respected. We sold L'Humanité, Vaillant, these type of newspapers. Afterwards we changed, because we realized that Zionism

also had its values. But they were sure values... they knew how to protect us, at least from being homeless . That was very important. Many children like us found themselves in these youth movements. They were good youth movements. It was clean, it was wholesome, it was good, it was very good, yes, yes.

Hélène: You were mostly doing sports?

Arlette: Sports. Yes, yes. Some sports, some walks.

Hélène: And school. You, you... That was over, right?

Arlette: It was over. Oh yes, it was over.

Hélène: Then it was immediate integration into the workplace?

Arlette: Oh yes, it was an integration into the workforce right away. In fact, when we got married, I think I felt the need to study, I loved school. That's why I'm a perpetual, eternal student. If there are conferences, I go. As an auditor, I go to the Sorbonne. I study the men who govern us, politics, the European economy. Everything interests me, I need to study, I need to know. Lectures in English. It's a void I must have felt. And so as soon as there is a possibility to register for courses, I go. And my husband by the way wanted this, even when we got married, he said, "You should go back to school." We were struggling financially , it was necessary to work. I couldn't leave him [work alone]. But it's true that that's what I would have liked to do. It's true. He wanted to , he would have liked to, as well . I mean, you don't always do what you like, what you want. But I do as I get older. Now that I'm an older woman, I can do what I couldn't do when I was younger. Yeah, that was a time that [INAUDIBLE] us. So my husband and I supported each other. We got married. I have a daughter that I'm very proud of, that gives me a lot of satisfaction. Yes...

Hélène: Who was educated, which is important.

Arlette: I lost a son unfortunately after her. She received an education , yes. I hope she feels successful in her life. She gave us... she gave birth to three beautiful little boys. The three Musketeers. That's a beautiful thing. And the grandchildren, especially the eldest, feel concerned about this time period. The second one

also wants to go to Auschwitz but the first one is interested in everything. When we went to give this commemorative plaque in the village where we lived, he came. Every year at the Synagogue de la Victoire, you know, there is a commemoration for the day of the deported. As he is a child, a grandson of a deportee, and he is Bar Mitzvah, this year he was asked to read, you know, the names of the children, from the Klarsfeld book. And he had come spontaneously. And during the whole ceremony I was watching him, he was crying, he was crying, he was crying. I said to myself, "Well, he'll never be able to read." And then when he got up to the lectern, he read the names of the children and I thought at that moment, if my dad could hear it, if my mom could see it. To be lucky enough to have one of the grandsons, his/her great-grandson who went to la Victoire. There were all the celebrities, there were all the members of the government. It was on television. Unfortunately, I would have preferred that he had his great-grandparents or that my daughter had her grandparents. One day, as a little girl leaving school, she also said to me-I don't know if she remembers it-"I don't want you to pick me up." She was going to a small private school because she was two years ahead. "I don't want you to pick me up from school" I asked her, "But why?" She said, "I want to be like everyone else, why can't a grandmother pick me up or a grandfather?" It's hard. And then I say to myself, "My God, I'm happy. My grandchildren have their grandmother, have their grandfather, that's nice." Yes, I'm very happy about that, she did well. Yes, it's a very good thing to have a daughter like that, she gives me a lot of joy. Although it's hard that she left home, the house is empty, but that's life. It's true.

Hélène: Thank you.



Arlette and Charles in 2017⁶⁹

Source: [Actualité Juive](#)

⁶⁹ Charles Testyler died on June 22, 2018