

**IMPORTANT**

**This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees**

**Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.**

**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive**

**AJR**

**Winston House, 2 Dollis Park**

**London N3 1HF**

**[ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk](mailto:ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk)**

**Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform**

**[ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk](mailto:ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk)**

**Interview Transcript Title Page**

<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
<b>Ref. no:</b>	177

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Simons
<b>Forename:</b>	Judith
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	30 June 1938
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Paris, France

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	16 June 2016
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	2 hours 25 minutes



## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV177  
**NAME:** Judith Simons  
**DATE:** 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2016  
**LOCATION:** London, UK  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*Today is the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Judith Simons. My name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.*

*What is your name please?*

Judith Simons

*And your maiden name?*

Kohn. Kohn.

*And where were you born?*

In Paris.

*And when were you born?*

30<sup>th</sup> June, 1938.

*Mrs Simons thank you very much... for allowing us to interview you for the Refugee Voices project.*

Yes.

*Can you tell me please about your family background?*

Yes. My... both my parents were born in France. They both come from families in Alsace. Although my father was born in Paris, my mother was born in Alsace. Both from Orthodox families. ...But not the type of Orthodox that we see today. It was more like... like it was in Germany, you know, the – the Community of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch . So, they were not very learned. There was no sense of having a yeshiva, or seminaries, but they were known in Alsace as very Orthodox people. Both my great-grandfather who actually was a contemporary of... Samson Raphael Hirsch [1808-1888 German Orthodox rabbi]. And... he fought against the Reform movement in a place called Colmar, which is very famous to us. And his name was Shlomo [Salomon] Wolf Klein. And I have also got three grandchildren called Shlomo Wolf Klein. Shlomo Wolf, Shlomo Zeev. And...that was on my father's side, from the family Klein. And from my mother's side there were... my grandfather was a tailor. My great-grandfather had a grocery shop, and he used to go from village to village to sell his wares. And... what else can I tell you? That was the background.

*Yes, and in Alsace, also both sides?*

My grandmother was born in Colmar, but she lost her father very young, and she went to live in Frankfurt with her older sister. And then she married... in Paris. A rabbi from Hungary. So, I've got some Hungarian blood somewhere along the line as well. And then... she lived in Paris all her life.

**[0:03:31]**

*Yeah. And since they came from Alsace, did they speak – what language? Did they speak German?*

They spoke both German and French. But... remember, Alsace was part of Germany from 1870 till the First World War. So, my mother's schooling was in German.

*Right.*

And when she became secretary in a school after the war, she always did the account in German, 'cause she'd been taught as a child. So that's the- that's the remnant. But the Jews preferred France to Germany.

*Yes?*

*Oui.*

*The Jews preferred France to Germany?*

Definitely. Definitely. Even in the First World War they hated the Germans.

*Why? What did they say?*

They... France was much more liberal, more easy-going than German people.

*They had more freedom?*

I'm not quite sure what the feeling was, but they felt very - very strongly that they were French. Although they had lost their French citizenship from 1870 to... the end of the First World War. But... they celebrated when - when Alsace became French again.

*And did they speak Yiddish as well?*

No.

*No.*

They spoke- there were some – some sort of Yiddish in their German speaking.

*Right.*

**[0:05:17]**

But it wasn't proper Yiddish that they had in Poland.

*No.*

It was more a German Yiddish.

*Aha?*

But even their German wasn't... higher German. It was more, what shall I say, you know, like... Scotland and England, or something like that.

*Yeah. But by the time you came along they were in Paris?*

By the time I came it was French. French.

*Yeah. And do you know, how did your parents meet?*

Well, the shidduch. ...A cousin of my father... suggested a shidduch to my grandparents. They weren't too happy. She was the only daughter and six sons – no - five sons. And they knew she would have to go to live in Paris, which wasn't very to their liking. But with a good boy, why not? So, they met and... that's how they met in Mulhouse.

*In Mulhouse. And they got married in Mulhouse?*

They got married in Mulhouse.

*In which year did they get married?*

1928.

*And then from Mulhouse, they...?*

Then they moved to Paris!

*Yeah. And what was your father's profession?*

He was a- he worked in a bank. He was *charge d'affaires* in a bank. He used to look after the, I can't think of the name. You know when you go to the stock exchange and...?

*The shares?*

The shares. Yeah – yes. And he was quite important. It was a Jewish bank. The Dreyfus Bank it was. And he worked there till he was arrested.

*And for you, just to stay a little bit pre-war. And what was it like for your mother to move to Paris? Did she ever talk about it?*

She writes about it in her book. She made lots of friends and... she sounded quite happy. She was very busy. She had [inaudible]. And... Yes, she was very ...involved in the women's side of the Community. We were in the Orthodox, we were in Paris in the Rabbi Munk Community. You know, Lady J's [Lady Amélie Jakobovits] father. And... Yes, she was, she seemed to- In the beginning obviously she missed her family. But she was quite involved with the family very much.

**[0:08:12]**

*And where- which area? Where did they live? Where did they...?*

We lived... They lived first in the ...Montmartre part of Paris. And then they moved to be nearer the shul in Paris 9, Rue de Maubeuge. And we stayed there until I was born. When they were in Maubeuge I think my- in the Rue de Maubeuge I think my older sister was also born there. And then when war was declared we moved out of Paris.

*But they settled in that area.*

Yes.

*And was it a Jewish area? Was it a mixed area?*

It was a Jewish area. But it wasn't a Pletzl like the Pletzl. It was more like Golders Green, if you see what I mean. And... all around the Community of Rabbi Munk the people lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> *Arondissement*.

*So, was it a big Community?*

Big, as in... To me, the shul when I was a young kid, the shul seemed to be very big. But when I came back, when, before my mother went to Israel, I went to shul with her. It was so small I couldn't believe it! You know? Excuse me...

*Yes, we were talking about the Munk synagogue.*

Yes. So, how many people, I'm trying to think. Maybe 100. But I haven't got any memories of before the war. Now, after the war was a different story altogether.

*We'll come to that; we'll come to that.*

We'll come to that, yes.

*Were your parents quite well off?*

Yes, yes. I would say yes.

*And who lived with them in the flat?*

Only his- my mother and us five children... when I came.

*When you- were you the youngest?*



Yes.

*Yes. And who were your siblings, please? Their names?*

There was Jacques, Danièle, Philippe, Françoise, Judith. I'm the only one who has a Jewish name; I'm not quite sure why.

*Yes, so they wanted to be- your parents wanted to be French?*

**[0:10:44]**

Oh, yes, oh, yes. Very much so. Very much so.

*They felt- They felt French?*

Yeah.

*Yeah. Right, so what happened- let's move now... Which year were you born please? You told us...*

Was I?

*In which year?*

1938, I was born.

*Yes.*

And in, at that time things were already looking pretty bad. And... my father, *alav ha'shalom*, was involved with the refugees. Very involved in the refugees who'd come from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia, and... who had settled in a place called Chelles, which recently I saw a map of France with Chelles [Eastern suburb of Paris] written there. That's where Jewish refugees had found a place to stay. And he always helped them, gave them

money, lent them money. Tried to get them papers to go to America, or England. They were terrified. It was after the Anschluss, after Austria. So, they were terrified, and it was at the time when Hitler was already talking about taking over ...Czechoslovakia. And... the sad thing was that the parents came, and left their children in Czechoslovakia, with their grandparents. They wanted to settle down, find a job, find papers to then move on. And ... presumably you know the story as well. And... they were desperate for their children to come over. So, they asked my father to do something about it. And the only thing they could think of is that my mother would go with her passport, and four children on the passport, would go to Bratislava, pick up four children, bring them to their parents and go back, backwards and forwards. Didn't quite work out that way. But she did go to Bratislava. And she took four children, but they didn't speak a word of French. And they had to cross Austria which was in German hands, and there were all the Nazis. It was a nightmare journey, literally, because the children weren't allowed to talk. And one was called Jacques, the other one Danièle, the other one Philippe, the other one Françoise. Not a word of ...French. And Germany wasn't like it is today, obviously; it took them forty-eight hours I think... till she got to Strasbourg. And when she got to Strasbourg, her father came, no her uncle came to fetch her at the station, she collapsed because it was too much of a strain. So, her parents made my father ...swear that he wouldn't send her again; it was too much. So, four children were saved, and then the war came.

**[0:14:27]**

*But that's a wonderful thing that your mother managed to get four children across the border!*

Yes, yes. It was.

*When was that exactly?*

Nineteen...must have been. I think I was already born, so it must have been 1930...end of '38, presumably, something like that. It was after the Anschluss; I'm not quite sure of the date...

*So, she had a very young child, i.e., you?*

No, I... Yes. Yes – yes.

*So, it's a very courageous thing to do!*

It was. But then she was a brave woman. I have to say that. You know when she went on Aliya in... when she was seventy-five, around the early '80s. She had no children in Israel so she went on her own. You know, and she made friends. She was- she was a brave woman. And she brought us up really, I mean, you know...

*What were- do you know who the names were of the four children she saved?*

Two were... Schotten, Schotten. And two were... Felsenbruck. What happened to them, they went to America with their parents. And ...and when the war broke out, Mr Felzenbruck wrote to my father, to tell him to come over with his family. But my father refused. He didn't want to leave the people he was helping and... he didn't want to move. He didn't want to- he was very, very involved in saving - trying to help. He used to, when we were in Vichy, which is south of France, he used to visit the camps. This I know from my mother obviously, and from her book. He used to visit two camps. They camp of Gurs and the camp of... I can't remember the name now.

*The other one was Rivesaltes?*

Rivesaltes – Rivesaltes, yes. And he used to help people; he used to go once a week. It was quite a schlep, quite a long way. Once a week bring them food, give them money, try to restore their confidence, try to help them. He helped giving them money, trying to get them to go to Switzerland. He was very involved in trying to save people. See, the thing is, one has to understand that he was French. He'd been born in France. And policy against the Jews was, at the beginning at least till 1943, it was against the foreign Jews and the German Jews and the Hungarian Jews and whatever. So, these were the people he was trying to help. He could, because he was French!

**[0:17:47]**

Yes.

French passport.

*Yes, so he could go to Gurs and to Rivesaultes?*

That's right. That's right. Without any problem. Without being arrested.

*And he probably had also the German. Did he speak German?*

He had German...

*So, he could speak...?*

He didn't speak German.

*He didn't?*

He didn't speak German. But he helped the German people. In fact, he helped a family Oppenheimer from Germany, who came from Germany, from Leipzig. A father, mother and four daughters. And the oldest daughter married my uncle after the war; straight, straight after the war. But he helped as much as he could. So that was, you know, quite a brave feat.

*Yeah- Yeah. Right so let's go back to...*

Let's go back, yes.

*...To when war broke out.*

Yes.

*What happened to you?*

War broke out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 1939. And... all men between twenty and fifty – I don't know exactly what age - had to enrol in the Army. And my father did, and my uncles and everybody. And he sent my mother to Brittany, because they were afraid that the Germans would bomb as they had done in Warsaw and other places. So... he thought we would be safer there. He was...demobilised...is that the correct word?

*Yes – yes.*

And around November, I think. And then... in, when France fell, in May, he moved with his bank to Vichy, which was in the Free Zone. And in the meantime, we were in Brittany. Obviously very little news; we were in a small village in Brittany. And... my mother had very little news about what was happening. At least about what was happening with the Jewish people in Paris and so on.

*Where in Brittany? Where was it? Do you remember? Where were you in Brittany?*

Le Querrien. I know it from my mother's memoir because I translated it into English, so it's stuck in my mind. A small village.

*And how did she manage? She had enough money to...?*

She had enough money, yes. Yes. Remember my father was very rich and must have sent her some money - presumably. And I can't remember my mother mentioning much about money, I have to say.

**[0:20:46]**

*Yes.*

So...basically we stayed there, and then when France was... gave up, there was the Armistice. And then my father wrote to my mother she should try and make her way to Vichy. It wasn't simple. The railways were disrupted. Bombed. Trains were- had no windows in the middle of the winter. No, was it in the middle of the winter? I'm not sure, but whatever it is, it wasn't a pleasant journey. But we went to Paris. And then she tried to get an *Ausweis*

[ID] which means a permission to join her husband who was in the south of France in Vichy. So, you had long, long queues of people who were trying to get to the Free Zone. And she was staying with my grandparents, her parents. No, sorry. She was staying with her mother-in-law. My grandfather, her husband, had died, very early on. Her children were very small when – when he passed away. She had a very hard life. They all had a very hard- they had to go to work very early, you know, that sort of thing. So, she was staying with her. And she saw the long queue for hours and hours and hours. She had to [inaudible] she couldn't do it. So, she decided to go to the place nearest to the line of demarcation. Which she did, which was I think Moulin, if I'm not mistaken, where the queues weren't so long. And there she managed to get an *Ausweis* [ID]. And she moved to Vichy! And we remained in Vichy for about a year, till ... '41. Yes.

*For people who don't know, tell us a little bit. Where's Vichy, exactly... in terms of French geography?*

What shall I say, it's south of France, but not near- not very near Spain. It's more in the middle of France. Vichy's a very famous place.

*It's a spa.*

A spa yes. And a lot of Jews were in Vichy. And then the French government of Petain, with Pierre Laval, decided to join the Nazi movement and make laws against the Jews. And so, it wasn't tenable anymore; couldn't stay there, so we moved back in Lyon. We must have moved back in Lyon 'round about October, 1941. That makes sense. Must be, yes. Something like that.

**[0:24:02]**

*And the time when your father you said he went to Gurs and Rivesaltes. Was that, was from Vichy?*

From Vichy and then from Lyon as well.

*He continued?*

He continued, yes.

*Because again, that was quite far from there.*

And then he managed to secure a beautiful flat in Lyon. ...He managed to get a beautiful flat. I still remember the balcony all along the flat. Fifth floor. And... we lived there, and in 1942 were the, my first memories. What I told you is written in the book. Remember my brother's Bar Mitzvah. My oldest brother, Jacques. The Community was quite big then, and he invited them all to this flat. And I must have done something very naughty, because my mother, who was a, the strict parent, sent me to my bedroom, and said I wouldn't have any afters. And I was crying in my bed. And I remember my father coming in with the afters.

*With what?*

With the afters, in my bedroom.

*Food? With food?*

What?

*Food, yeah?*

Food, yeah! The afters, you know. After – the dessert. That's what I remember. That's my first and last memory I have to say, of my father.

*Of – of your father...*

Yes...yes.

*And of Lyon.*

And of Lyon. Although we carried on in Lyon for...my brother's Bar Mitzvah was one of the *sidras* of this year. I think it was *balak* if I'm not mistaken. And then we carried on in Lyon.

And... as I said, my husband – my father – was all over the place to try and help especially the refugees.

*Was he involved in any formal – with an organisation, or...?*

**[0:26:17]**

He was involved with the OSE.

*Yeah?*

Yeah.

*Tell us a little bit about the OSE.*

*Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants* was a Jewish organisation, to help the children during the war to try and find places for them. There was something called *la soupe populaire*, which is where people could get a meal – one meal a day for nothing. And a lot of people who worked there in the *soupe populaire*...in English it's called...?

*A soup kitchen?*

That's right, a soup kitchen. Yes. And... he was also involved there to try and help... poor people. A lot of them were caught, and a lot of them were arrested. And then they all decided, the Nazis decided, but I think it was the French *Milice* decided to empty out the Gurs... what do you call it? Not concentration camp. Whatever it's called.

*Yes. Detention camp.*

Detention camp. And they took the parents. And they decided they would take the parents first, and the children afterwards. So they took the parents. And the children were sent to a convent in Lyon. And they would come for them at a later date. And the... Cardinal of Lyon, by the name of Cardinal Gerlier, notified the Jewish community. He had one hundred Jewish



children, and he wanted the Jewish Community to take them out and keep them in their own families. ...And my father was also involved with this. And he took two children. Two boys.

*From...?*

From Gurs. From- I think they were from Hungary. Their name were Fürst. Oskar and Manfred. And they came to us. And I- I still remember a terrific time together playing around. It was just- They were happy in our family, you know, they made friends with my brothers and sister.

*And how old were you by then?*

By then I was- '40...Well it was the beginning of '43 so I was what? Four-and-a-half.

*Yeah.*

And then... they started the laws against the French Jews. And in February 1943, my father had a...a septic fever. And he had to have it lanced in... He couldn't go to an ordinary doctor nor hospital because he was Jewish. With a name like Kohn, Samuel Kohn, you couldn't make it more Jewish. So, we had- there was a...a... small surgery for Jews in the Rue Sainte-Catherine, which was very famous. So, he went to this Sainte-Catherine. And there was a *rafle* [a raid] ... how do you say it in English? *Rafle*... You know they took all the Jews who were in the Rue Sainte-Catherine, including my father. And that's when he was arrested. We know, we know...we knew almost straight away, because my uncle, my mother's younger brother came to us and told my mother that there had been a *rafle* in Rue Sainte-Catherine. And he wanted to know whether my father was there. She said, "Yes, he went because of his septic fever!" So, he said, "Well, he's probably arrested as well." And the next thing we knew, he sent letters from Drancy. ...Drancy is near Paris. And... he told my mother that he was in Drancy, that he was fine, he needed- he was a very, very heavy smoker. And he needed tobacco. And she got it. And he needed... other things. And he needed a *primus* it's called, you know, to heat your food with.

**[0:31:11]**

*A thermos? A thermos flask?*

No, no. With, with... You know I can't talk French and English at the same time. Doesn't go. Like a little stove that you put paraffin in.

*Yes?*

If she could get him- send him some food if possible. But he was OK. He wrote quite a few letters. Some of them she put in- we put in the book. And he soon became Head of the block where he was interned. And the story goes, presumably it's a true story because after the war they wanted to make a film of it. Some people in that block wanted to dig a tunnel underneath, to try and escape. And they were found in the last minute. And my father was taken to Auschwitz. That's the last thing we heard from him was, that ...he had with him a friend, who jumped out of the train, and was saved, but my father didn't want to jump. And he was afraid for the other people. You know, you never know what they... SNCF or whoever it was. [inaudible], if he realised that people respected him, he didn't want to take a chance. So, he managed to escape. He was, he was...he harmed his leg, and a farmer found him, and took him in till after the war. And that's how we know what happened to my father. After the war, he went- his name was Felix Goldschmidt who also had a home for children in Versailles... he's a- for older children. I think Elie Wiesel was there. And... he met my sister, and he said, "When I see you, I always think, why didn't he jump?" You know, that sort of thing. But... That's how it was.

*So...*

So, we were in Lyon. And when we heard about it there was a rabbi by the name of André Chouraqui. I'm not sure if he was a rabbi or not, sorry, I'm not sure if he was a rabbi or not, but he was a...a very good friend of my father. André Chouraqui. And eventually after the war he went to Israel, and I think he was in the Knesset something in the...Knesset. And... he told my mother, there is a room for a little place for her near Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. She must go straight away. Mustn't wait. So, she packed and went lock, stock and barrel - with seven children, remember. One of them remained with us. The other one was too old. He was very unhappy. Once we moved, he didn't know what had happened to his parents. And, you know, it was traumatic for them. So, she sent him - there was a home for children in Le

Chambon itself. So, she went him there and he carried on his schooling until after the war. And then he went straight to Israel. And she kept in touch with him and the younger boy as well. They both went to Israel after the war. Ok, so that's... We got to Le Flachet?

**[0:35:06]**

*Can we just stop for one second?*

*Yes. We were talking about. I wanted to talk a little bit more about Lyon, and what your memories are from Lyon.*

Yes. Lyon... We had... We had tenants, because we had a very big flat. So, there was a man who came once with his two daughters. Older man. The women were already middle aged, not married. Can you hear? ...Not married. And they stayed with us. And they were absolutely impossible. They complained about everything. Complained about the food. Complained about... and one day they decided...they were not French. I think they must have been German or something. And they decided they would go to the *soupe populaire*. And my mother said they shouldn't go- it was too dangerous. But they were determined. They didn't like my mother's food. And let me tell you, mother was a very good cook. And... And she wanted to get rid of them. She was already scared and you know and she..., they were complaining all the time. After all she had another seven kids to look after as well. So, when the father came to visit them, I'm not quite sure of the circumstances, but when he came to visit them, she tried to convince him to find another place for them. And he said, "Why should I? They are very comfortable here." And that's how it was until my father was arrested, then they had to leave because everybody had to vacate the apartment. What I still remember we - The children played pranks on them and they weren't happy. You know, that sort of thing. Threw a bag of potatoes from the balcony inside their room, that sort of thing, you know, when the window was opened. But what else?

*So, all in all for you, Lyon was...was a happy time? Did your parents shield you from the outside?*

Lyon was...Yeah...yes. Yeah. I don't remember anything. Yeah, I remember my grandfather passed away. He had Parkinson. And what I remember he died in 1942. And I remember we

came to visit him. And my mother insisted I have to go and give him a kiss. And I was terrified. He was trembling all the time.

**[0:38:14]**

*And, where was he?*

He was also- they were all in Lyon, my grandmother, my grandfather. This is why my grandmother, when my grandfather died, soon afterwards my father was arrested, and she came with us to La Flachere.

*And how did they manage in terms of kashrut and all this with the...did they manage that at all?*

Well, Kosher meat were out of question. So, we had *milchig*.

*So, you didn't touch the meat?*

No. Milk, we had non-supervised milk.

*There was a war!*

We had... there was- one of the main rabbinical authorities in France, Rabbi Ernest Weil allowed us to have goat cheese. So, we had plenty of this. And a lot of vegetables - when they were available. And fruits. And... that was it! That was it. Fish. Fish.

*So throughout – just to be clear. So, throughout the war...*

Throughout the war, kashrut was ...was not, not readily available.

*No, of course not, but were- there was no exemption made even for children. Did not eat meat?*

No. No. No, we all had fish.

*You managed it? You managed?*

Yeah! When we were in - in La Flachet in that little village, we had plenty of dairy products. But goat cheese, milk as much as we wanted. And then we had a lot of fruits and vegetables. And we ate what was called rutabaga [swede], and *topinambour* [*Jerusalem artichoke*]...

*What is that?*

...which was pigs – pigs' vegetables. Given to pigs. Now later on I asked my brother when he started writing, when they started writing the book, I said, "What's the English for rutabaga?" He told me, "It's rutabaga." Same word. *Topinambour* is what they call 'Jerusalem artichokes'. And that was pigs' food in those days. Now it is apparently something that is very healthy for people who suffer from diabetes. So that was our staple diet the whole of the time we were in La Flachet.

**[0:41:08]**

*But before La Flachet, in Lyon, did you keep Shabbat?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We carried on.

*You carried on?*

We carried on.

*And you said then there were some anti-Semitic laws.*

Yes.

*Do you- were you personally affected? Do you remember?*

No – No. Not even- did we go to school? Well, I was too young. I know my brother went to school in Lyon. And then the Headmaster called my father to tell him that he had been

commanded to... dismiss the Jews - any Jewish children and teachers, whatever it is. So, with a name like Samuel Kohn, again, he had to dismiss my brother. My brother was a very, very clever boy. Very good student, and he was very unhappy. So, he suggested a teacher for my mother who should come and teach my brother, which is what they did.

*So, they had private teachers?*

Yes. That's for the secular studies.

*Yes.*

For the Jewish studies we had... somebody called Marc Breuer who was the grandson or the son of... the Rabbi Breuer from Washington Heights. And he was living in Lyon with us. And he came and taught my brother his siddur and he taught my other siblings whatever they needed to know. And as far as I was concerned, my mother taught me to read Hebrew. And that was that!

*Yeah. So which day was your father arrested please?*

I can't remember. Sometime in February.

*And if he hadn't been at that place?*

We would have had to move, that's for sure. Because now the laws against the Jews, the French Jews were tightening. The *soupe populaire* [soup kitchen] was closed down. People had to run away. Some people were arrested. So yes, we would have had to run away, come what may.

**[0:43:36]**

*Yes, but you said your father was arrested, and then your mother received a letter...?*

From the Nazi office, to the effect that she should prepare clothes and she was going to join her husband. And... Whether people told her not to listen, or whether she worked it out

herself, I'm not sure. But she left, as soon as she heard that there was a place for her, so she left.

*And who signed that? You said it was...?*

I think it was Klaus Barbie. As a matter of fact, after the war – long after the war there was a trial of Klaus Barbie in Lyon, and she was asked to give – to testify. She didn't want to.

*She didn't want to. Why not?*

I don't know. That would bring back too many bad memories, I think.

*She didn't want to talk about it.*

By that time, she wasn't talking much about it, so...

*Yes, so she. And Barbie was in charge of...*

Of the question– '*La Question Juive*'.

*Yeah...yeah. Good, so now we are- do you remember at all the journey from Lyon to...?*

No, I don't remember it. But she writes in her book it was a hard, long journey.

*How far was it from Lyon where you went?*

It's near Clermont-Ferrand. ...I don't know. Maybe 150 miles. That's a long, that's 200. No, maybe less; I'm thinking of miles and kilometres. Maybe 150 kilometres.

*Yes?*

It's in the Massif Central. It's in Haute Saône. That means. I think it's near Saint-Etienne; it was very near to Saint-Etienne. Was a long, long journey. When you look at the... I don't know if you have ever seen the video of Pierre Sauvage. Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. The video

is called... '*Les Armes de L'Esprit*' – 'The Weapons of the Spirit'. And he put all his money into that film. And he re-traces the journey from Lyon to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, and it is a long journey. Very long journey.

**[0:46:20]**

*And it was you, your siblings...*

And those two boys. And my mother, my grandmother and my mother. Yeah.

*And you managed somehow to get there?*

We managed to get there. Don't ask me how.

*And what was there waiting for you? Where did you go?*

We went to the address that was given to my mother called- a little village called La Flachet. She must have got to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. And from there she found a taxi maybe? I don't know. It was about four kilometres, which is, what, about two miles from Le Chambon. How we got there I don't remember. And we got there. And the owner of the farm was there waiting for us, and gave us the - the top floor of his farm. No running water. There was a...actually we have a picture in one of the books. Like a fountain outside where you used to come and get the water.

*A well?*

A well- it wasn't a well. It was more like a - a trough for animals. And ...and yeah. I don't know how she managed.

*And did the owner know that you were a Jewish family?*

He knew that we were a Jewish family. Now one thing you have to understand is that generally, the Catholics were very anti-Semitic - generally. But. In the 1600s there was a war between the Catholics and the Protestants. Les Huguenots. And a lot of them, a lot of them



fled to that part of France. So that part of France was very Protestant or what do you call them...?

**[0:48:21]**

*Yeah, Protestants.*

Protestants. And they were very pro-Jewish. Possibly because they remember themselves what it was like. I mean, they remember- They don't remember, but...

*So, he was a Protestant the farmer?*

Yeah. Yeah. And the church in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was a Protestant church. A temple, more.

*So, you, as the children, you were not- were you told to not say you're Jewish?*

No, no we were not told anything of the sort.

*So, you didn't change your names?*

No, we didn't change our names. We kept *Shabbos*. We kept whatever kashrut, as much as we could. And people knew we were Jewish. But all these little villages were hiding Jews. We weren't the only ones. We were the only ones in that particular part.

*Did you meet other Jewish families, or children, or...?*

Yes, I, my uncle, he was actually at that time in Limoges. That was my oldest... my mother's oldest brother. *Oncle Robert*. He came to visit us once. He was a *shochet*. She came with his special knife and he *shochetet* for us a chicken which was a cock and it was absolutely disgusting, so we never had it.

*So, you had meat! That was the time when you had meat!*

That once, and we didn't even eat it. And ... and the... The family Oppenheimer... The father was arrested in Lyon. And one of his daughters, Miriam, was arrested in Lyon. And they went to Auschwitz. The father died in Auschwitz, but the mother - sister came back. And the other went and were also hiding not too far from where we were. My uncle - my youngest uncle, Jacques, he was much younger than my mother. When he was born, she was already fourteen, so she really looked after him specially my grandmother wasn't so well. And he often came to see us. And he was staying I think for some time he was staying with us and he used to teach *Kodesh*, Jewish studies, to my siblings. And he met my aunt...in the other village. And that's how they got engaged. And they got married straight after the war.

*So, what was your routine in the...?*

**[0:51:17]**

Well, we went to school

*So, tell us a little bit about that, please.*

That was an interesting- The- the Headmaster of the school was a man called Monsieur Manevald. Not Jewish. It was one classroom. And all four of us, that means - and Oskar - that means, me, how old was I? Four, five? My sister, my brother, my other sister and Oskar. So, five of us were in that classroom. We had kindergarten, first year, second year, third year fourth year. There weren't that many children there. It was all the village, but they didn't have any children, so, I don't know how, again: How could he teach all these different ages?

*And it was in that village?*

And it was a little bit out of the village. Recently - I say recently, must have been - in the 90s, early 90s, my sister and I decided to have a... a pilgrimage to it, so we went. And the funniest thing was, we got there. Of course, the ...the house looked much, much smaller than it was when I was a little girl. And then we walked to the school. And... [sound adjustment] We walked. There aren't many people left there; people have moved to the big city. But I was the only one who remembered the school! My sister said, "Look, it's over there!" I said, "No,

that's not it. Look. Look." I knew exactly where it was. And I was the youngest, and I still remembered it. [laughs]

*And what is there today?*

It was closed. It was ...abandoned. Really abandoned.

*And did you meet anyone in the village who remembered you?*

No... no. No.

*But why did you- was it important for you to go there?*

We wanted to have a look what it was like. We wanted to see the... We met there the son of the owner who remembered us, yes, but he didn't live there. He lived in Le Chambon or he lived somewhere else, but he came on weekends. And he remembered Oskar. He was a blond little boy. He was different to us. He remembered very vividly.

*And did you pay rent to the farmer?*

Must have done. Must have done. Never spoke about money with my mother, I have to say.

**[0:53:53]**

*No, I tell you why I wonder: Did he ever get recognition, the farmer who hid you, I mean who...?*

Well, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon yes. They are in, they have, the story is written in Yad Vashem.

*Yes?*

Individuals, possibly yes, but not our farmer. We were very scared because he was often drunk.

*Aha...*

And we were a bit scared that he would give up...give us...give our name to the *milice* [militia] or the French police and so on. But he never did.

*And I wonder also whether your mother and grandmother felt vulnerable as women? I mean they were two women, with a lot of children.*

Yes – yes.

*Did they- I don't know whether it comes across in your mother's book, whether they felt more vulnerable?*

No. It doesn't come in the book at all. Life carried on. This was my mother's motif-leitmotif all the time – 'Life carries on'. And my brother, my oldest brother went to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon because he was already in high school. So, he went every day quatre, four kilometres there, four kilometres back. The summer it's fine, but when winter comes and it was the winter of '43 to '44, it was a very harsh winter. And he... fell, and got covered over with snow. And fortunately, a farmer saw this mountain of snow and he saved him, but... he wouldn't have survived. So... But 'life carries on'. That was what [crosstalk].

*But again, your brother also went... not hiding his name or...*

No, no, no, no.

*In school they were registered with their real names?*

In school! Remember, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was very pro-Jewish. They saved a lot of people by simply keeping an ear open. If somebody- And they did come to look for Jews. They knew. And as soon as they knew that they were coming, they went and took all the Jews and hid them in a forest or wherever it was. They were very good to us. That's why they got their names in such an important name in Yad Vashem.

*In Yad Vashem. And do you remember was there a plan for you, in case the Nazis would come?*

Yeah, for each one of us, my mother had made little rucksacks. And they were there in the cupboard. And ready, with some bit of food and clothes.

*In case you had to run away.*

In case we had to run away.

*But you didn't have to?*

No.

*You never used that rucksack?*

No...no.

**[0:56:48]**

*So, did you have, as - as children, you had interaction in the school, with the farmer...*

We went to the school.

*Any other interaction you had with the villagers, or...?*

No – no. With the farmers, yes. They gave us milk, they gave us eggs, they gave us cheese goat. Cheese, goat.

*Goat cheese?*

Goat cheese.

*But you couldn't eat the other cheese from the...?*

No, no. Because it's got non-kosher animal...

*Yeah, they make it with...*

Calf...calf...liver or something. It was totally treif.

*You couldn't eat the other cheese?*

No other cheese.

*But goat cheese was...*

Goat cheese was OK. [half-laughs] So the rabbi said. ...That was important for us, what he...

*Yes, but you had plenty of food. You didn't- you don't remember...*

We didn't starve. We didn't- we were never hungry. She baked bread. She made cakes. She made tarte- delicious tarts. I still- You know these blueberries which are sold today? They've got no taste! I still remember and I'm still looking for that taste. I can't find it. It was very the place was full of these little bushes and we were given pots, and we had to go and pick them up and bring them back home.

*So again, as a child, it was a ...positive experience.*

Positive!

*It was beautiful- you were in a beautiful place.*

Absolutely! Absolutely.

*And fear, was there any fear? Do you remember?*

I remember the... what do you call it? The people who...can't think of the word, who were trying to ...fight the Germans in France. What is that?

*La Resistance.*

*La Resistance.* They bombed. They really bombed places around us. And we heard it. And one night we heard a terrific noise. I was scared. And my mother came into the room and said, "Don't worry. It's just thunder!" I believed her. Nothing to worry about.

**[0:59:11]**

*So, she protected you from...?*

Yeah, yeah. Very much so. Very much so.

*So, in total you stayed there for how long?*

From February '43 to August '44. It was a very harsh winter. We were very cold. We used to have to go and collect pine...

*Cones?*

Cones. And that's what we burnt for fuel, and for cooking. But she managed! I don't know.

*And at that time was she, was there any contact to the outside world? Did she- did they know?*

Yes, my brother- my oldest brother had- or maybe it was our neighbour, the downstairs neighbour, he had a radio. '*Les Francais parlent aux Francais*'. It was very famous from de Gaulle, in England, to France. And I still remember the day the...of the debarkment, was it the landing, June 1944. Wasn't it? Yes.

*The D-Day.*

D-Day. He came into the room and said, "*Charriez!! Ils sont débarqués! Ils sont débarqués!*" I didn't know what he was talking about, but my older siblings knew exactly what it was. So, he understood from the message that was sent, that the debarkment, the landing had taken place. That I remember so very well. He was very aware; had a huge map, and he used to pin on the wall wherever the Germans were, wherever the French were, wherever the Allies were. He was well aware.

*So, do you think the experience was different for your older siblings than for you?*

**[1:01:07]**

Probably. Possibly. Possibly. My- The one above me, my older sister Françoise. I don't know if she had a worse experience than me. But certainly, my oldest brother was very aware. He was very close to his father. In fact, my grandmother told my mother – this was before my father was arrested – "Be careful, he's too close to his father. If there's something happening, he'll be finished. He'll be devastated." And he was. For him it was very hard. But...

*He overcame it.*

He overcame it, yes. Yes.

*Yes. So, you didn't feel the separation that much...*

No, no. No.

*...because you were small.*

No, we knew he was away. We knew that he was- when he was in Drancy, we received some post. How the post came, I have no idea. But he actually wasn't aware that we'd left Lyon. That much I know from one of his letters. But- we knew where he was. After, when he left Drancy, we didn't know anymore.

*Yes.*



But we knew about Auschwitz by then, so presumably, yes.

*So, what happened then when it, that part of France became...*

Free?

*Free, yes.*

I remember standing on the road when the Americans went through. Was...They actually went through, not far from our village. Lorry, after lorry of Americans. And they were waving and chewing, and...whatever it is. And I still remember they threw us sweets and chewing gum. I had no idea about chewing gum. It was like these tablets, you know, wrapped up in some silver foil or paper, whatever it was. And I had no idea what to do with it, so my sister, was my older sister told me what to do with it. But that was a relief for my mother and for my older siblings. And even for us, I have to add that in the summer, when we arrived it was winter. But in the summer, I had to go without shoes, because we didn't know- I had to save my shoes for the winter. So, I went to school without shoes. That I remember, walking in the fields, where the corn had been cut, it was quite painful on the feet. I got used to it.

**[1:03:55]**

*You kept the shoes for the winter...*

Yes.

*So, your mother said, in the summer you can go without shoes?*

That's right.

*For everyone? For all your siblings?*

No, only for me. I'm not sure why! [laughs] Maybe the others didn't want; I quite enjoyed going barefoot.

*Yeah. But you remember the Americans coming?*

I remember the Americans very, very vividly. Lorries, after lorries, after lorries. It was just unbelievable.

*And were there celebrations? Do you remember? What was the mood? Were people...?*

Well, the mood, was, as far as we were concerned, OK, we are going back to Lyon. That was my mother's ...first thing. As soon as Lyon was freed from the German, she decided to move to Lyon.

*Yeah.*

So we went. We took a train. That journey I remember was... long and you had to change train because the railway was bombed by the Resistance. Trains were very, very unreliable. And she got somebody with a lorry who lived in a place called Tence who moved our stuff and who moved us. And he gave us shelter in his house, overnight. And he knew that we were Jewish. He even bought a new ...cutlery and crockery in order to give us something to eat. Whether it was hospitality or whether it was guilty conscience, I don't know. But we stayed there overnight and he gave us lunch without chicken and without non-kosher stuff. And the next day we moved on to Lyon. And my mother found a little flat near to Lyon in a place called Villeurbanne. And we were there for ...we got there I think for the [???*Yomim Tovim*]. I think we were there for the Rosh Hashanah -Yom Kippur we were already there.

*In '44?*

**[1:06:16]**

'44. And then we stayed there. And we all went to school. The schools re-opened; Lyon wasn't bombed. It wasn't destroyed like in England. It was- still the school was running, so we went to school - I went to school. And then the war ended in May, in May '45. She had a friend, a doctor, who asked her to take on the job of social ...help. You know nowadays in order to be a social whatever it is, you need to study for three years, or whatever. But they needed because they had a lot of refugees, and a lot of people coming back in such poverty.

She writes a little bit about it; it was heart-breaking to see these people. She had a bicycle, or she bought- No, she had a bicycle. And she used to go around and help people. And in 1945, she was offered a job in...to take care of a home in Villejuif that was near Paris, so we moved to Paris. And we stayed there for three years.

*And at what point did you find out what had happened to your father?*

[pauses] I can't remember. We didn't find out straight away. We didn't find out straight away. But Rabbi Munk received a visit of a- of a survivor, who told Rabbi Munk that he remembered seeing my father going into the gas chamber, and he remembered the date. Now, I have to say, I'm very dubious about it. Did they keep dates in Auschwitz? English or Hebrew dates? I don't know. He went and told Rabbi Munk so Rabbi Munk contacted my mother who was at that time in Villejuif. And he told him she should go and see this man, because he has a message for her. And this man told my mother two messages, actually. The first one was... she should make sure that the children keep into the right path. And the second one was, she should go to Israel as soon as possible. An interesting reaction really, because he must have realised that Europe was not...not a solution. So, then she discussed it. And then he told her of course the date of my father's death. So, she went back to Rabbi Munk and she discussed the message with him. Rabbi Munk was her mentor, after the war, particularly.

**[1:09:33]**

*How did he survive, Rabbi Munk?*

Rabbi Munk, he- they went to Switzerland. Lady J writes about it in- in her- in her book.

*Autobiography?*

Hmm?

*Autobiography?*

Yes, it's not an autobiography; it's a biography written by...

*Ah, yes.*

...you know, Lady J. Anyway...

*Sorry to- is this Munk related to here? Because there is this Munk synagogue...?*

Cousins, cousins. They were cousins. Yes. Both called Elie Munk.

*Aha...*

But our Rabbi Munk, Elie Munk who became famous afterwards, he wrote many, many books. Also, he wrote Jewish books.

*Were they both originally from Germany?*

Yes – yes.

*Where was your Rabbi Munk from?*

Germany as well, yeah, yeah, yeah. He was rabbi, as a young rabbi married, he was in Ansbach. I believe Lady J was born in Ansbach. Three of the children of Lady J were born in Ansbach. And then... after 1933, my father was instrumental in bringing him over from Ansbach, and he became the rabbi in our shul.

*I see, so your father helped him, this Rabbi Munk to...?*

Yes. To move over to Paris.

*While his cousin...*

His cousin, I don't know. I don't know. No, I can't tell you. I only know that they were cousins.

*Sorry, yes, you were talking about...*

So, my father, my mother went to Rabbi Munk. And she discussed the date of *yahrzeit*. And Rabbi Munk said, "If that's the date," he said, "you better keep it. It's not necessarily that, but you keep that date." And she doesn't write anything about going to Israel. I don't think Rabbi Munk was very keen on it. At that time, it was before the Independence. Remember 1948 was the Independence; we're talking of 1946. And he, I don't know. It never came about.

**[1:11:53]**

*It's interesting the date of the yahrzeit...*

Yeah?

*Because the rabbis must have given a date for the other people who didn't.*

No, most people who don't know, they either keep *Tish'a B'Av*...

*Yes...*

...or *Asara B'Tevet* ...or ...I don't know, maybe a date when their near and dear were arrested. I have no idea. But generally, for the people who don't know, it's Yom Kippur, *Asara B'Tevet* or *Tish'a B'Av*. But we kept that...

*That date. What was the date?*

24<sup>th</sup> of...I've got it written in my *Siddur*...

*It doesn't matter, don't worry...*

24<sup>th</sup> of *Tevet*, I think it is. Yeah, 24<sup>th</sup> of *Tevet*.

*So, it was the Jewish date?*

Yes. I've got my doubts but...

*So, what did Rabbi Munk advise your mother to do?*

Regarding? OK. He advised my mother to send my brother to Yeshiva. Both my brothers. My brother Jacques was invited by the Felsenbrucks, these people who my mother had saved. They paid for his journey. He went to America and he went to Yeshiva in America. He was the same age as Rabbi Munk's son, so they went together. He stayed in Yeshiva for two years. My younger brother went to Aix-les-Bains, which is in France. And he remained in Aix-les-Bains...for I don't know, until he got married. And he was doing, he was studying law in Aix-les-Bains, because my mother would not let him go without a – a degree of some sort. And then when he got married, he went to Bnei Brak. And he stayed in Bnei Brak until one of the great rabbis of Bnei Brak sent him to Strasbourg to look after the Sephardim who'd just come over. That was in the early...in the early 60s. So, he moved to Strasbourg, and then he moved to Marseilles. So that's my brother – my second brother.

*Where was your brother? In Marseilles?*

In Marseilles.

*Was he a rabbi in Marseilles?*

Yes – yes. He opened a kollel, he opened the yeshiva. He opened the seminary. He revived the Jewish Community in Marseilles.

*And, mainly Sephardim who came...?*

Mostly Sephardim.

*Yeah. Who came from North Africa.*

From Morocco and Algeria.

*What was his name? What is his name?*

**[1:14:39]**

Philippe Kohn.

*Philippe Kohn.*

They wrote a book about him. I show you afterwards.

*Yeah.*

So that's...he's called *Rav* Philippe Kohn, believe it or not. He was called; unfortunately, he passed away. ...And my brother Jacques when he came back from America, he started law as well, and he became a judge. A *Procureur*. So... he was- his last post was in Dijon, and then he retired and then he moved to Israel. So that's....

*And what happened to the child you were taking care of?*

Both of them... went to Israel with the Aliyat Hanoar....

*The Youth Aliya.*

Yeah. And... they... went to a kibbutz, kibbutz I think it was. No, the older one, Manfred, went straight to the Army. The younger one was in a kibbutz, I think.

*Were they related? Were they siblings?*

They were brothers, yes, yes, yes.

*They were siblings. And what happened to their parents?*

They died in Auschwitz. They... We kept contact with them. And I remember once when I was in Yerushalaim. I went to visit my mother. And he came, the older one. And he said to us the worst day of his life was when he was- when he had finished the Army. He was standing

in the road; he was in Galilee, I think. Didn't know where to go! He had to relations. Nothing. So, he went into a kibbutz. A frum kibbutz, I think Sde Eliayhu or something like that. And he remained religious. The younger one didn't stay religious, but...that's life.

*But so, they felt, were they grateful to you, or...?*

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, very much so. Very much so. Also, one of the children who my mother saved from Bratislava, she moved to Yesodot. Yesodot is - is Moshav, not very far from Yerushalaim. I suppose today you would call it a haredi moshav?

*Yes?*

Very frum, very frum. She got married. I think she had nine children. And very recently, about two years ago, she passed away. And my two sisters who actually live in Yerushalaim now, decided to go and make a visit of *menachem ovel*. And of course, the men and the ladies were separated. The men with long *peyes*, long beards, you know.

*Yes?*

And...ladies with little hats, big hats or whatever. They were sitting shiva, and somehow it got back to the men that my sisters were there. So, one man came, and he said, looked at them and he said, "Who is Francoise? Who is Danièle?"

**[1:18:07]**

So, they said, "I'm Francoise", and, "I'm Danièle". So, he said, "Well you should know I'm called 'Francois'", because of ... in memory of what happened. They called him Francois. ...Funny to see a man with a long beard...

*Called Francois. [both laugh]*

Called Francois.

*And did their parents survive? Did their parents...?*



Yes... yes – yes! Because my mother took them to their parents who were in Chelles, right?

*Yes.*

Yes, they went to America. But one of the boys, Schotten lived in England. But I don't know, he had no – *kesher* - no link with the Jewish Community at all. I think he was living in Muswell Hill. So, when I was still in Stamford Hill my mother came once to see me, and she wanted to go and see or tell him she was around. And he came to see my mother.

*One of those- that's one of those four children...*

One of those four children.

*...she saved.*

Probably the- Maybe the oldest one, I'm not sure.

*So, tell us a little bit about your mother's work, in 1945, in that children's home. And also, did you live there? Did you all live together?*

Yes, four of us. My brother went to America. But Philippe, Danièle, Françoise and I were there. We are on that picture of the children's home. Danièle was more like a mother figure. Philippe was in Aix-les-Bains. Françoise and I were in the home.

*And what do you remember of that home?*

**[1:19:57]**

Happy memories. I think she was the most wonderful woman. I really do! She describes in her book the first Shabbat they did. This book had been – sorry - This home had been established by the... Can we stop a second?

*Yes, we can.*

This home had been established during the war for the children who'd lost their parents. And it was established by a committee called the 'COSOR' [*Comite des Oeuvres Sociales des Organisations de la Resistance*]. COSOR. I don't know what it stands for. But then, at the end of the war, the *Vaad Hatzala* from America, wanted to take over these homes, because these were Jewish children! So that's why my mother was ...asked to take over the home. There were lots of homes around Paris. There was Versailles, there was Taverny. There was... can't think of the names. Three or four, we used to visit. We used to go there. We went to Versailles a few of times. We went to Taverny. And I still remember the first Shabbat. Because these homes were run by non-Jews, never seen a Shabbat. They had to *kasher* the whole kitchen. And she wanted the whole Shabbat to be really something special. So, the cook was a really nice man – Monsieur Sabati – I still remember his name. And he made it really special for the children. And then we davened, and we sang '*Shalom Aleichem*'. It was a day of Shalom, must have been August or September. So yeah, was a huge park, and we sang and we danced around in the kitchen. I remember that Shabbat. Something special.

*And what was the background of the kids? Where did they come from?*

I don't know. I don't really know. Some of them were adopted when the home closed. Some of them were adopted by American people so they moved to America. But they had no family. Some of them didn't even know where they came from!

*Yeah.*

They had no idea; they spoke French, but...

*Yeah. They survived in hiding?*

Yes, or with goyim, with non-Jews. And very recently there was an article in the *Hamodia* about a guy who came from America to... He came after the war. He was sent by the *Vaad Hatzala* in America to look and see what could be done with these homes. And he had friends who had no children. And he came, when he came back a couple of years later, to see how the homes were faring, and if they needed anything special, he saw this little girl in a

home who had no parents, nobody. And he decided to take her back to America and maybe she could be adopted by these people. And she did. And a lot of these children were adopted by the, by American couples. Unfortunately, 1948, the home had to close because 1948 Israel came into being, and all the money that had been channelled to Europe was then channelled to Israel. So... there was no way they could keep these homes going. So those who had family went back to father, mother - some families didn't even want them. So, they were sent to non-Jewish homes. A lot of these orphans were lost, basically to Judaism. And... that was quite traumatic for my mother, I have to say.

**[1:24:19]**

*The closing?*

But...these were the events...

*She must have been very close to them.*

She was very close to them. She was very close. They used to call her 'Tata Moulou'. 'Tata'-aunt. And 'Moulou' was my father's name. So, she was known as 'Tata Moulou'. I remember Lady J used to call her Tata Moulou, and her siblings as well. That was her name.

*Why was your father- how did that name come about, Moulou?*

Moulou. Muli, Shmuli. Shmuel. [laughs]

*Aha. And your mother kept it, that Moulou?*

That Moulou. Yeah.

*So, she was known...?*

She was known as Tata Moulou. I remember Madame Munk, the wife of Rabbi Munk used to call her Tata Moulou. But she was known as Tata Moulou after the war.

*And what was it like for you as a child, to have a mother who was so involved with so many other children? Was there any feeling...?*

I don't have any- I don't remember. Maybe I was a bit jealous at times I wanted my mother, maybe. But I don't really remember being unhappy. You know. I went to school with the children. The whole school went to shul, to school together in a non-Jewish school. So, she had to explain to the Headmistress - I'll move my leg - she had to explain to the Headmistress that we wouldn't be coming on the Sabbath, cause in those days we went to shul, to school on Shabbos. So first she wasn't too happy about it, but eventually she agreed with it. And... so we went to school. And I went with my friends. And I had my friends at home as well. You know. I don't know- I don't think I was. I probably was a bit jealous and wanting my mother's attention at times when she was really busy you know, with other things. But you learn to live with it.

*Yes. And you were part of a communal lifestyle.*

I was a part of the- of the kids!

*Yes, so you ate together...?*

That's right. Yeah.

*And you spent ...days together.*

And we played together; had lots of fun.

**[1:26:33]**

*Yeah. Yes.*

Yes.

*Do you remember some of the names of your friends?*

I remember one: Annie Rosner... who moved to Israel. And she went to stay Eliyahu. So, she remained. There was also one called Regine. Regine Noach was a friend of my sister. The other ones I don't remember. My brother also had a friend called Gabriel, a boy. Albert. It comes back.

Yes.

But...yeah.

*Shall we take a break for you?*

Yes, please. I need to walk a bit. [sound break]

*Yes, so we were talking about that home in Villejuif, run by your mother.*

Yes.

*Anything else you would like to add from that time ... which we haven't discussed?*

Can't think of anything.

*No, so when it was about to close, you said your mother was upset. What...*

Yes.

*What were her options, or...?*

**[1:27:37]**

There was one of the... one of the people from *Agudath Israel* was working in Paris. Asked her not to close the home, but he would come and he was going to England. He would come back with some money to help her to provide finances for her. And she waited and he never came back. So, at the end of the day, she had to close down. There was no money any more. And the owner of the home, because it was a rented home, wanted it back. That was a

difficult period for my mother because she didn't know where to go. There was in- it was like a home. And there was...at the end it was a big park – a huge, big park. And at the entrance to the – giving on to the road - there was a probably was the quarters servant...the quarters servant, quarters for the servants, or maybe the gardener, I'm not quite sure. But she went to live there with the children. And she stayed there for three months. And the owner was desperate to get rid of her. So, she cut off the water, she cut off the electricity. And we lived like that for about three months until she eventually found a little flat near to the...sorry, near to the Gare du Nord. Small flat, two rooms, for ...And my brother was still in America. And my other brother was in Aix-les-Bains. So... two rooms and a kitchen. Toilet was outside. On the fourth or fifth floor; I think it was fourth floor. Wasn't very nice but... And when my brother came back from America, he- she made a bed for him in the entrance. And that's how we lived for about two years. And then she found a much bigger – bigger flat, which was much more suitable.

*Because it was difficult ...financially.*

Absolutely!

*Did she have any...?*

At the beginning she had to go on the dole. And that was also difficult, because in those days, in order to receive the money from the dole, you had to present yourself every morning. And you took whatever job they offered you. And you had to queue, and every morning you had to go. But somebody ...asked her to look after a musical instrument shop. So, she did that for a few months. And then the lady she was working as a social worker in Lyon, asked her to join her group in Paris, which she did ...for a few months, until she was offered a job in the École Yabné. There she was a secretary in the École Yabné. So, there she remained until she moved to Israel.

*So, she was a secretary in the École Yabné from what, 1940...?*

1950...1950, yeah.

*And she didn't consider at that point to go to Israel or America or elsewhere?*

No, no...no.

*And who was- she was working and was your grandmother still with you or who would take care of...?*

**[1:31:33]**

No, my grandmother died in 1946 or '47. She wasn't with us anymore. She was with one of her sons, one of my uncles, and she passed away there.

*So how did your mother manage to- because you were still quite small...?*

Yeah, but we were in that room. So, she went to *levayah* [funeral] and she came back. She sat *shiva* in...in Villejuif.

*Yes, but still in 1950 you were only...*

How old was I? Twelve years.

*Twelve, yeah. But were you quite independent?*

Yes, yes, I think we were taught to be independent. Yeah.

*So, what sort of school? How did you continue your schooling in Villejuif?*

When Villejuif closed it was in 1948, so then... they opened this École Yabné in 1948. And... all three girls went there. My brother came back and he went to university. And my other brother stayed in Aix-les-Bains. So, yes, three - three girls in École Yabné. Yeah.

*And was it- École Yabné, was it a mixed school?*

Yeah.

*A mixed Jewish school?*

Mixed Jewish school. There was no sex- it wasn't a girls' school no.

*Yes.*

Not in those days.

*Yes. And was it run by...?*

It was run... by the Community. Chief Rabbi of France, Rabbi Kaplan was very involved. And the Headmaster was a man by the name of Monsieur [Adolphe] Crémieux. I don't know if you've ever heard of the very famous *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle*?

*Yes, I have.*

A relation of his – nephew. He wasn't frum, but he was very... understanding of the problem of the frum children. Remember we were all... without over the Holocaust. And obviously most of us, who joined our school, were... Orthodox. A lot of children from Poland and Hungary, and, you know, Romania. And... the *Jekkes*... didn't send their children there. They sent their children to non-Jewish schools. And- They didn't believe in Jewish schools.

*They were more assimilated?*

I wouldn't even say that. They were part of the shul of Rabbi Munk. But, I'm not sure why, but they didn't want to send them to it- It was new! You know a new school you never know. There were- I mean all the Jews- all the *Jekkes* in Paris were very keen on their children having a good...secular education.

*Yes.*

OK. So... but then later on, slowly but surely, they did.

**[1:34:48]**



*Mn-hnn. So, at the beginning it was children...?*

In the beginning it was children- mainly children from Poland and Lithuania, and... You know, people with one parent family and some had two parents. But they were all basically looking at going to America. They didn't want to stay in France... many of them. And then the Sephardim came. And when the Sephardim came, then the Judaism began to be revived more... you know, than before. And they all joined the school, so...

*Do you remember the Sephardim coming? When did they...?*

Oh, yes, in the late 50s isn't it? Yes, yes, yes.

*So, it was quite different. At the beginning it was Holocaust survivors...*

That's right.

*And then...*

And then it changed.

*Do you have any memories in terms of the other children as survivors? Was there an atmosphere? What was the atmosphere like?*

I don't know. We didn't speak about it. We enjoyed life. I can't remember. I certainly didn't speak about it. And I was- When my father was taken, I was too young to speak about it.

*Did your mother...?*

And as I said, my mother had instilled in us this '*joie de vivre*', you know, which was very important. And...we didn't speak about it.

*She wasn't bitter?*

She wasn't bitter or she never showed bitterness.

*And she didn't talk about...?*

She talked about my father, from before the war, yes, and told us stories about him. But nothing else. No. Nothing about...

*How about in terms of religion? You then kept kashrut and...continued?*

We kept everything. We continued and we kept everything...

**[1:36:49]**

*And did the- I mean the most obvious question: Did the experiences of the war change for your mother, or yourself, your sense of belief or religion, or...?*

No, no...No. We never asked questions such as, "Well, why did God do that to us?" Never ever. You know, you could take two different... attitude. You think of Elie Wiesel, you know. Well, he left *yiddishkeit*. He left Judaism. You can understand it. We understood it. We accepted it. But we felt that we have to carry on Judaism. Because my mother definitely. You know, it was important, despite Hitler, to carry on Judaism. And she was right. At the end of the day, if everybody'd given up, there would be no more Judaism.

*Yeah, so you...?*

So, we followed in her footpath and we became frumer than her. But that's another issue!

[laughing]

*You did? The children?*

Yes.

*Why is that? Why do you think?*

...My brothers went to yeshiva. We went to Sem. So, it was obvious that we were going to carry on and... go on and...

*And how come that that was, that you went to Sem and that, which is the seminary...?*

That was Rabbi Munk.

*Aha...*

That's all Rabbi Munk. He told my mother- that's an interesting story in itself! Danièle, my sister Danièle, won a prize - a drawing prize. She made a *mizrach*. And she won the prize and the prize was going to the camp in England. And she met, and for the first time, she heard about Gateshead Sem. And she wanted to join! So, my mother asked Rabbi Munk. And Rabbi Munk said, "If that's what she wants, send her." No way. So, she sent her. That was in 1951, I think. And... her brothers, her five brothers who had survived the war, told her she's mad. She has to learn. She just left school. She finished school. She should learn something, otherwise who knows what's going to be? You can't send your daughter to Sem. It wasn't heard of! Yet. And... she said, "No, that's what she wants; she'll be happy." And my oldest uncle was very, quite annoyed with her for having done it. But eventually, all his daughters went to Gateshead Sem. And all of them, all his, all my mother's siblings sent their children to Gateshead Sem! It wasn't known. So, she started off, and they all followed suit!

**[1:40:00]**

*Because at that time they believed that a woman should- to have some vocation or skill.*

That's right. Because of the situation with my mother! She had no vocation. She got married from home, to build her own home. ...So that's a- that in itself is a story.

*Yeah.*

But yeah, that's how it ...went.

*And your sister then, you said, got married to somebody who...?*

My sister- Both my sisters got married to boys who'd been to Gateshead Yeshiva. My oldest sister Danièle, got married to a French boy who came from Alsace, who was hidden during the war. And the families knew each other from before the war already. My grandfather was working with - as a tailor - employed by his grandfather. Just to ...show you they knew each other. Schlammé. And she married him, and they first lived...he was a rabbi in Mulhouse. And then they asked him to open a Sem in- near Paris in Yerres. Which he did for a few years. And then he moved back and was a rabbi in a shul in Paris. And then, eventually, when my sister- My sister was working for many years as a teacher in École Yabné. And when she retired, went to Israel. My sister Françoise married a young man... who had been hidden by Christians during the war. And at the end of the war, they wanted to adopt him. He was a good boy but...and he was quite happy, and they educated him in the Christian religion. And there was a man who was a friend of the family by the name of Monsieur Lebel who was looking for him and he found him. And he took him away. He said to his adopted parents, "I'm taking him away for the holidays. I'll bring him back. I'm a friend of his father's." Whatever. So, they agreed. And he went to a children's' home. Orphanage in Aix-les-Bains, which was run by my uncle and his wife. And then...he never went back. At the beginning he was very, very unhappy. He wanted- He wanted to go back. But of course, they wouldn't let him. And then the home closed. And the children in the home went on Aliya. But obviously they couldn't take him. So, he went in the yeshiva there- there was a yeshiva already established. And he had a cross above his bed, and he used to say his prayers every night. And eventually he walked on, and he went to Gateshead Yeshiva and he learnt well and was very well known in Gateshead Yeshiva for his diligence. And he went back and he started a business of selling clothes. And he married my sister!

*And where did they settle?*

In Paris. Eventually – must be about ten years ago, maybe - they moved to Israel as well. So, that's it.

**[1:43:37]**

*And did he stay in touch with his...?*

I'm sorry?

*His French people? Did he stay in touch with them?*

French people?

*The French people who wanted to adopt him.*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, yes, he was in touch with them. Every time they went on holiday while he was still living in Paris, he used to go visit them in Brittany. And... he came- they came for his wedding. For my sister's wedding, basically, to Paris. And they were always in touch. And when he had children, he sent them photos and... Oh, yes. They kept in touch.

*So, they were not hostile? They were not upset? They understood.*

They were not upset. I think they did understand. Eventually they had two childrens of their own, but they have no connection with them. The only one they have connection with, was with my brother-in-law. He kept the connection.

*Yeah...yeah... So, when you went to Sem in Gateshead, you sister was already there?*

My sister was already married.

*Aha, so she'd come back?*

She'd come back, yes. And... I wasn't a very good pupil... Whether it is...because I was lazy or impossible, or whatever it is. But Rabbi Munk again said to my mother, she sent me to Gateshead. But by then Gateshead was already much more known – Gateshead Sem. So, I went in 1954. And I stayed for three years till 1957.

*And did you have any English when you came here, to Gateshead?*

No, very little. Very little.

*So, what was it like? What were your impressions arriving ... from France?*

It was ...bleak. I arrived at six o'clock in the morning. It was still at the time when they had these coals - mines. It smelt, and was grey and... you know your underwear were all black and.... the houses were black. It wasn't very nice. But I had a good friend there. A lot of— again, many girls who had lost parents. In my class I had a girl who had lost — who came from Holland — who'd lost both her parents. And then I had two girls, two French girls whom I knew from before, who'd lost their father. So, you know, I made friends and I enjoyed myself. I wasn't a very good pupil but Rabbi Miller... didn't mind. It seems he didn't mind.

**[1:46:22]**

*And at that point what were your ambitions? What did you think you wanted to do?*

I didn't know. But by the third year, I had been teaching in...Sunderland, and in Gosforth, and in South Shields where there were Communities there. I had been teaching there and I presumably, without even thinking about it, I decided I was going back home, and I would — and I would teach.

*Did you enjoy teaching?*

Sometimes. Sometimes yes, sometimes no, depending. And high school - Ècole Yabné — I did just for one year... was difficult. Primary school was much easier.

*And what was your favourite thing you were teaching? What's your favourite...?*

Chumash.

*Chumash?*

Jewish history. And when I got married, I carried on teaching Jewish studies again. First in Lubavitch. I was there for ten years, and then in Hasmonean for thirty-one years. So, I was one of the pillars of the- holding the wall of the school.

*Yes...yes. Yes. Was it important for you to continue teaching?*

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

*So, tell us a little bit. When you came back, when did you meet your- how did you meet your husband? Was it a shidduch?*

How did I...?

*How did you meet your husband?*

It was a shidduch. I had a friend in London and I went and I stayed with her. And she...she made a, knew my husband. Her husband was a good friend of my husband, and I was a friend of hers from Gateshead. So, she made a shidduch. And that was that! [laughs]

**[1:48:15]**

*And what did your mother say? Was she happy that you were moving to England, or...?*

My mother? ...In a way I had a bit of a guilty conscience because she was alone now. But my two sisters lived in Paris. One of them lived quite a long way, and the other one, Danièle, lived quite near her. And I think she was alone in the flat, but she had my two sisters. So, yeah, I think...she took everything in her stride, you know.

*Yes. And then... you came to England.*

And then I came and lived in England. We lived in Stamford Hill. My husband went every day to Queen Mary College.

*What was his profession, please?*

Mathematics. And he became- he was a lecturer and then he became a Senior Lecturer. And then he became a Reader, and then he... retired. And when he retired, he carried on writing papers for the Mathematical Gazette till about three, four years ago.

*And his name please?*

Stuart – Doctor Stuart Simons.

*And he was a mathematician? He was in the department of...*

That's right. That's right.

*And what was his background? Was he from London?*

**[1:49:37]**

His parents belonged to the Federation. They were strong supporters of the shul in Tottenham which belonged to the Federation. And they were in the furniture business. His father...His father was born in England; his mother was born in England. But his grandparents came from Russia – from Russia, I think. And they were in the business of furniture. And his father died- I never knew his father. He father died a year before we got married. His mother lived till...I think she died the year my son was Bar Mitzvah, which would be... '76. '76. 1976, yes.

*And did you have similar views on how frum or how [sound obscured]?*

*Yes. Did you have similar views, or...*

We must have done, I mean! [laughs] Yes, we did. My husband never went to yeshiva but he was very keen on learning. He used to learn with Rabbi Miller's brother. Leon Miller. I don't know if you've heard of him at all. And then he had, he learnt with somebody called Mr Carmel, who became Rabbi Carmel when he moved to Israel. Yeah, he was keen on learning.

*And which synagogue did you join?*

A Shtiebel. A Shtiebel in Stamford Hill... which had people with similar ideas!

*Yeah. And what sort of identity did you want to transmit to your children?*



To tell you the truth, there was no question. My daughters went to Jewish schools. My son and my daughters went to Jewish schools. My oldest daughter went to Lubavitch in Stamford Hill, and then at the age of sixteen she went to Sem. My son went to Lubavitch for primary school and then he went to Hasmonean. And my daughter- my second daughter went to Lubavitch and then went to Hasmonean. So, it just...somehow fitted in. And then at the age of sixteen both my daughters did some- a couple of A-Levels and then they went to Gateshead. And my son went to Yeshiva in Gateshead and then he went to Yeshiva Ner Yisroel.

**[1:52:33]**

*And where is he now?*

Now he lives around the corner. He's a Dayan in the Beth Din.

*Yes, and you daughters are also in England?*

And both my daughters live in Gateshead.

*And they have...*

And they have...

*...many children? Yes?*

Yeah, they have a lot of ...children, grandchildren. Yeah. All following the same direction. Thank God.

*Yeah. What was it like to come as a French – a French person to England? Or did you feel this was a...?*

I had a lot of friends in Gateshead, don't forget. So, I wasn't completely lost. I had French friends and English friends from when I was in Gateshead. So, the Community in Stamford

Hill was a close community. Not as it is today. And you know I seem to have fitted in without any problems.

*Yeah. You didn't find it difficult?*

No, no. No.

*Well, I guess in terms of Judaism, it's similar.*

Also, not because everything was in place!

*Yeah. Yeah. Did you talk about your experiences to your children, or...?*

To my children, yes. To my children, yes. And to my students, yes. Yes. I always spoke about- and in Hasmonian in particular when we had Yom HaShoah or in Tish'a B'Av. I always spoke about my experience, and my parents' experience during the war. Yes.

*And how do you think your experiences affected you? Do you think they affected you in your later life?*

I think more about it now than I used to when I was younger. It makes sense. You know when I was in Gateshead, I don't know, we never spoke about it.

No...

It didn't come into... our conversation. ...Later on, when my children went, it was more normal to speak about it. And yes, I spoke to my children. And they read my mother's book because they spoke French. And...Yes. My grandchildren- is a different story.

**[1:55:10]**

*So, what- are they interested, your grandchildren?*

As they get older, some of them are. It's a different generation.

*Yeah.*

It's too far away for them, I think.

*Yeah.*

But I know that some of my grandchildren have asked questions. But not all of them.

*Yes, and do you- tell us a little bit about your mother's book. At what point did she decide to write down her memoirs?*

Well, when she was in Israel, and she wasn't working anymore. So actually, it was we, the children who said she should really write it down. It is important for her children and her grandchildren. And she did. And it took her quite a long time, I would say about seven, eight years maybe until it came out. But, yeah- And she passed it on to my brother who was very good at French. So, he put it in good French and then they published it. A year after her death it came out. But it was more... a will from us, for her to write, that it shouldn't be forgotten. And especially, to know what sort of Grandmother they had.

*Yeah. Yeah. For you, what is the most important aspect of your war experience, if you think about it? Is it the story of...?*

*Simchat l'chaim.* The joy of ...what do you call translate it. *La Joie de Vivre! La Joie de Vivre!* This is what remains in my mind. I think the most important thing is to realise that... you don't pass on to your children the traumatic experience, because it's traumatic for you. But if you pass it on to your children, then your children will also feel traumatised especially if they... So, I think that's the most important – Most important thing is to inculcate in your children a *Joie de Vivre*.

*Despite all the experiences.*

Despite all the experiences.

*Or, even in your case, you even during the war your mother managed to keep that joie de vivre somehow.*

Keep that going, yeah.

*Under, for her, very difficult circumstances.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*Is there anything else we haven't talked about that is important? I might ask. How did you manage to combine teaching and having children and...?*

**[1:58:00]**

Well, my husband being a Lecturer, and he did research, but the research he did was at home. It was theoretical physics; he didn't need – didn't need anything but his brains. So, he used to babysit and look after the children when I went to school. But I didn't- I didn't work full time. I only worked part time. I only started working full time when all three of them were fully integrated in the school wherever they went. Then I worked full time.

*And how did your husband manage being at a university, and also Orthodox? Was that a problem?*

No problem. Never a problem. He never wore a kippah. Was always bare-headed. And...I don't know if you're aware, but wearing a kippah in the place of work, or even in the street, came after the Six-Day War. Possibly because it was- we were proud to be Jewish. Whatever the reason...

*Before that?*

Before that people didn't wear kippah in the street.

*And what do you think? What is...? Do you have a...?*

No, I don't. Difficult to say. Seeing what's happening today, I think one ought to be a bit more careful, but that's my own gut feeling. Wear a cap or something but...

*Would you call yourself a survivor? How do you see yourself?*

I've always wondered. Am I a survivor?

*Are you a survivor?*

[Judith laughs] OK...

*What do you think?*

Put it that way: What do you call a survivor? Do you call a survivor somebody who's been to a concentration camp? To ...To Auschwitz, whatever, and survived? Or do you call a survivor someone who had to go into hiding, and whose father passed away, was taken, went to Auschwitz, never came back? I don't know.

**[2:00:17]**

*I don't know, but you don't, for example, you don't go to the Holocaust Survivor's Centre?*

No.

*No.*

I've got no need for it. I don't even know- it's in Hendon, isn't it?

*Yes. But you are a member of the AJR.*

Yes.

*And how come? How...?*

OK. I get a pension from France, and a pension from Germany. Pension from France I get every month. Pension from Germany I get every three months. Now the, the one from France, is not a great deal. Every month I get about, in terms of pounds about £400 a month. I need a paper, every year, to prove that I'm alive. So...first I went to the police. But then ...I had received a second one from Germany. And then I also have a pension, because I taught in France for three years. I also have to fill up a paper. So, I felt awkward going to the police three times a year. [laughs] So I decided for a Jewish pension, I had to go to AJR. That's why I became a member. I didn't think it was right to go and not to become a member. That is the only reason, really.

*Yes. And do you think ...it was easy or more difficult for the Orthodox, let's say, Orthodox survivors post-war, or the children, do you think that religion made it easier? Do you see what I mean?*

I think so. I think so. It gave them an anchor. I think it was more important to be religious, in the sense that ...what's left if there is no, no Judaism? What would be left of these people? My father, funnily enough, had seven siblings. There were seven children. My grandfather died when the youngest was two. So, my father was about four, five. And my grandmother, with no – no widow's pension or anything like that. It was a very hard time. And I have to admit that most of them left *Yiddishkeit*. My father was the only one who actually remained frum.

*What happened to the others? Did they stay in France or did they...?*

**[2:03:07]**

They lived in France. I think three of them never got married. ...They lived together in a flat and never got married. One- one of them, one sister of my father ...died with all her family during the war. They lived in Paris, and her husband, my father's brother-in-law, was arrested by the Germans. And again, the same story. They sent her a letter to say she should prepare to come and join him. And although people told her not to, but she didn't want to. She believed that they were going somewhere in the east, and they would find a new life. And they had I think three or four children. I'm not sure. One of them married and had no children at all. And one of them married, had three children, and one of them came back to Judaism. That

was thanks to my mother. So, he lives in Israel, has got four children who are very - very frum, etc, etc. So...I feel sorry, really for the people who've got no religion to ...well, now, they're getting less and less, but it's still very sad.

*Yeah. And where would you consider your home today?*

England. England. I mean, listen, I'm seventy-eight. I got married when I was twenty-two, so... you know. In any case I wouldn't want to go to Paris now.

*No. Do you ever go to France?*

I used to when my sisters and my mother lived there, when my children met them. But not since then. Yeah, I went- I've got still one niece in Paris. And one of her daughters got married so I went for the wedding.

**[2:05:09]**

*And in terms of your own identity, how would you...?*

I feel much more- although I've got a French accent, I feel more British than French, that's for sure.

*Yeah. And did you have any bad experiences here in Britain at all as a French woman?*

No.

*Did you experience anti-Semitism or...?*

No, I really haven't.

*Anything, is there anything else you'd like to mention? Maybe that today your husband lives in a care home?*

In a Jewish- in care. In Sage. No. Sad, but that's life. What can you do?

*Yeah. ...Yeah. And your grandchildren, do they live close by or...?*

Yeah, well my son lives in, not far from here, and he's got four, five children married already. And three of them live in Manchester. One lives in Edgware. And... one lives in Israel. Just recently married.

*So, if you have a family celebration, where - where do you go to?*

Family celebration, unfortunately Yom Tov I usually go to Gateshead, to my daughters. But Shabbos I'm usually with my son.

*Right. That's nice. So, you have two daughters in Gateshead?*

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

*And they live in Gateshead?*

They live in Gateshead. And they've got married children. One of them married a Trepp, which I believe is a relation of yours somewhere along the line.

*Yep, yes.*

And another one married a boy from Manchester. And a son married a girl from Manchester. And the others are either in Manchester or in Israel. And she's got one married daughter in Gateshead.

**[2:07:05]**

*And are you at all worried about the current climate here in England? Are you worried about being Jewish in England?*

No. I'm not worried. But I'm not complacent. What I mean by that is that we need to learn from history. And history has taught us that anti-Semitism is there whatever we do, whatever



we do to try and - and stop it, it won't stop just because the government says so. And we need to be aware of it. But I'm not going to run away. If I was in Paris it would be a different story altogether. But here in England I feel very – I feel secure. But for how long, I don't know.

*Yeah, you feel the French Jews today...*

French Jews today, they are leaving by the droves. A lot of them are coming here. And most of them are going to Israel. But it's hard for them in Israel as well. It's not a paradise.

*Do you have any message for anyone who might watch this interview, based on your experiences?*

Messages... Don't let the Holocaust traumatise you. If you have family who went through the Holocaust, don't let it make you unhappy. But be aware that anti-Semitism is not going to stop despite the Holocaust. When the Holocaust was over, we thought, obviously nobody's going to be anti-Semite anymore. And we've been proved wrong. And therefore, don't be frightened, but don't be complacent. Simchat l'Chaim. Very important.

*Yeah, the joy of life.*

Absolutely. *La joie de vivre*. I think you say it in English as well.

*That sounds very good to me. Mrs Simons, thank you very, very much for the interview. We are now going to look at some of your photographs, yes?*

Right. Yes, please.

**[End of interview]**

**[2:09:34]**

**[2:09:55]**

**[Start of photographs]**

My grandparents, Samuel, Henri, Elchonon and Clemence. My mother's parents.

*And their surname?*

Samuel. [Taken] definitely before war. Possibly in the late 30s. Not sure.

My grandmother, surrounded by her three sons, my father on the left. My two uncles next to him. It was taken before the war, but not very long before the war. 1938 maybe.

My my parents' engagement. Late '27. 1927, in Mulhouse.

My parents' wedding. May, 1927 – '28. May, 1928. Was actually Lag B'Omer

That's us, the five children. Jacques, Philippe, Danièle, Françoise and the baby is me. And on holiday in Berck *au plage*, in summer, 1939.

Us five children, from left to right, Philippe, Danièle, me, Françoise, Jacques, in Vichy, in 1941.

This is a picture of us in Le Flachet. From the top, is my mother on the left and my grandmother, *grandmaman*, as she was called. And then us six children, from left to right, Philippe, Oscar, ...Françoise, me- Judith, Danièle, and Jacques. In 1944, presumably.

*And is that in front of the house where you stayed?*

And that is in front of the house where we were staying, yes. ...At the back, I think.

*Thank you.*

**[2:12:57]**

Oscar, second on the left, was one of the two boys that my father took in in Lyon, when the Nazis wanted to deport the children from the camp of Gurs. And he stayed with us till after the war. He was then reunited with his brother, and they both went to Israel with the *Aliya Hanoa*.

*Youth Aliya. The Youth Aliya.*

Youth Aliya.

My brother Jacques, leaning over the well, where we drew our water for all use, in the garden outside the house in Le Flachet, 1944 probably.

This is in front of Villejuif. On this photo are the children who were rescued by the OSE, and went to live in this orphanage, which my mother took over, in 1945, after the war. On the back row, you can see third on the left, my mother, and fifth on the left, is my sister Danièle. And third from the right, sorry, second from the right is my brother Philippe. I am on the left, on the last ...row of- on the last children's' row. Second from the left. Francoise, you can't see her. And that's it. 1947.

*And you wanted to tell us something about Lyon?*

Yes. I wanted to mention that after the war, when we moved to Lyon, in...when the refugees or the survivors came back by train from the east, and they came ...every now and then we heard that a train was coming. So, we went to the station to see if we could ...see- receive my father. It took us a few months to realise that he wasn't going to come back.

*Thank you.*

**[2:15:59]**

My mother, with her five children, at the time of Philippe's Bar Mitzvah, December, 1947. On the left is Philippe, and next to him is at the back, Danièle, and then Jacques, and in front Francoise, and my mother and then, me. I was then nine years old.

A picture of Rabbi Munk in ...probably 1947-'48. ... In Paris. In Paris, yes.

My mother in École Yabné. Behind her desk in her office, in probably in the 50s.

This is the cover of the book which my mother wrote about her memoirs of family before, during, and after the war. The picture is of her family tree. You can see the branches with the five children, with their families. And the top says, '*Nous, Les Rescapés*'... '*We the Survivors*', written by Marguerite Kohn. It was published in 1993.

Two letters from Moulou to Marguerite, written on toilet paper. "Drancy, 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 1943. I'm full of trust and until now this has supported me well. True to say that I have great hopes, and whatever happens I will join up with you one day. The only sad thought I have is that I am causing you so much suffering and I'm asking you to forgive me. And when I think of what a terrible catastrophe it would have been if you had come with me to the clinic, and I wanted you to. I thank God... [pauses due to emotion] I thank God [pause] sorry. I thank God that the fate that befell...me, I thank God for the fate that befell me. I have full trust in you and your judgement, and your wisdom. Keep the children with you. Sacrifice nothing for their studies and their welfare. Teach them to be happy. This evening is Friday night, and I can visualise you around the table singing the *Mizmor*. This vision soothes my plight. The days are very long, and the night even longer. But I spend my time thinking about you and the children, and our good life together. Also, I think of your Mum. Give her all the support she needs. Tell her that I laugh, am happy, and I do not cry. Let me have news from everyone, in particular your brothers. Don't let yourself become depressed. On the contrary, become a symbol of courage and of self-mastery and this will give me the comfort which I will need if I have to follow those who went towards the east. And I will do so confident that I will come back. I have to stop for a while, to think of all that I would have liked to write to you, but I haven't got the courage to write. I would like to ask you to do everything possible to keep open the *soupe populaire*...kitchen..."

**[2:20:30]**

*Soup kitchen?*

Soup kitchen. "And...And to ensure the sending of food parcels to the helpless people languishing in the camps. I know that these parcels are the best moment of the day, but alas, very few receive them. My dearest, kiss your mother, brothers and the whole family for me. Big hug and kisses from me for Jacques, Danièle, Philippe, Françoise and Judith, as well as

Oscar and Manfred. As for you my dearest, I hug and kiss you with all my heart. Affectionately, your Moulou. Don't forget to write to me about the children."

Can I add something?

I just wanted to add that it's clear from this letter, that he wasn't aware that we had run away from Lyon. It's important he speaks about...[coughs] what was going on there.

OK. Next.

"Drancy, the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1943. My Darling, the morale is good. Days and weeks follow each other without problems. The doctor is giving me injections which are very painful, but are good for me. I'm happy to see that the children are well and continue their studies diligently. I did recognise the kids on the photo. You're not writing if Jeanne is with you. I think I recognise your mother sitting at the table, but I'm not sure. But I notice that Juju (that's me) still sucks her thumb. Thank you so much for the news of my relations in Paris. Ask Louis to send me photos from his family. I am digressing here to ask you to send me shoelaces with your next letter. Give thanks from me to all my friends who are showing their friendship to you, and tell them that I won't forget. Give me all the details. Now I'm going to write to you- to write about myself. I'm sitting on a stool at a small table writing my letter, while my good friend is sitting with me having his meal. We share our small cell. Behind me is a bunk bed. I sleep on the bottom bed. On the floor above us is another friend. He is twenty-two years old, and his wife is expecting a baby any time. Tomorrow I'm starting a new job. Deputy to the man in charge of our bloc, Raoul. It will keep me occupied. My daily timetable: I'm up at seven, have my coffee, wash myself with cold water, of course. At eight-thirty we have a roll-call. After that I have to go to different services and every two days I go to the infirmary for my injections. I'm back in my room at eleven-thirty, prepare my lunch. Thanks to your camping gas I make a soup for myself. After lunch I have a rest and at fourteen, I join with my many acquaintances. And we talk of the past, the present, and especially the future. At eleven, - sorry - at ten o'clock I'm in bed. I have to interrupt this letter to do my dishwashing, and make myself a mug of tea. I now have to stop writing. Your optimism makes me feel happier. You're my star, and I rely to lean on you. You're probably right in what you write, and I must wait patiently. A hug and kisses to all, and to you, all my love, Your Moulou"

[2:24:42]

*Mrs Simons, thank you very, very much for sharing your life history with us and for sharing your photos and documents.*

Thank you, thank you very much.

*So, we wanted to look at one more photo, which is this one.*

Yes...

*What is it please?*

It's a family tree, actually. It's my daughter who has done it for our fiftieth anniversary – wedding anniversary.

*And, where are you?*

We are on top my husband and I. And my oldest daughter married to Hammond. My son, married to Miriam Zucker. And my youngest daughter married to Danny Sinason with their children and their grandchildren.

*So quite a large family.*

Indeed. Eleven. The Hammonds have eleven children, the Simons have got ten, and the Sinasons have got eight.

*Wonderful. Thank you again for sharing this with us.*

Thank you.

[End of photographs]

[2:25:57]

