



My Story

Suzanne Rappaport-Ripton



My Story
Suzanne Rappaport-Ripton



These are Suzanne's words. This is her story.

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).

www.ajrmystory.org.uk www.ajr.org.uk

Suzanne Rappaport-Ripton spoke to AJR volunteer Tom Zulke to share her story. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Muireann Grealy, Shelley Hyams, Alix Lee, and to Dr Tracy Craggs of the HSFA for their help in the production of this book. The photographs of historical significance in this book have been reproduced courtesy of the Holocaust Centre North Archive.

This book was produced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Portrait photography by Paul Grant

©The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) October 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licencing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).

First published October 2022

Designed by Berenice Smith, MA

Produced by Naomi Kaye

Printed in Great Britain by BookPrintingUK

The authors, editor and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce any copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

My Story

Suzanne Rappaport-Ripton

“I survived as a result of the risks people took in hiding me, for which I will always be grateful.”



Contents

06	Part 1 From a happy beginning to a harsh life	37	More unhappiness in Newcastle
07	My happy early years	39	I move to London
09	Introducing my family	41	Marriage, a baby and a new struggle
11	Our home in Paris	48	Leeds, the bailiffs and divorce
15	August 1942 – when my life changed	06	Part 2 Searching for my missing loved ones
17	Saying goodbye to those who loved me	52	Reunited with Madame Collomb
18	Safety in Mondoubleau	54	The search begins
21	A beautiful place, but a harsh existence	57	My parents' and grandparents' fate
25	Hardship in Auvergne	60	Madame Collomb – Righteous Among The Nations
27	I had to grow up overnight	69	Looking back on my struggle
29	Loneliness became a way of life		
33	The war ends – but no one tells us!		

Part 1

From a happy beginning to a harsh life

My happy early years



My mother and father holding me as a baby, 1936

I WAS BORN Berthe Suzanne Rappaport on 23 July 1936. I became known as Suzanne in my later life. My mother must have been rather Bohemian, naming me after the French female artist, Berthe Morisot.

I was an only child and lived with my mother and father at 58 Rue de Belleville in the northeast of Paris. I loved living in Paris as a little girl. I would spend happy times with my mother walking along the boulevards, looking at the pretty hats in the millinery shops. We had many Jewish shops in Paris and would visit the bakery to buy our bread. Rows of bagels, threaded through string, hung from the ceiling above our heads along the length of the shop. I was often treated to my favourite little cake, a beautiful madeleine. I have snapshots in my mind of chewing the end of a baguette on our way home.

I have fond memories of crossing the bridges over the River Seine and visiting the beautiful Buttes Chaumont Park nearby on a Saturday morning, where marionettes would perform and I would play by the little bronze statue of a mother bird feeding her baby. My mother would help me on to the carousel ride, which I remember as being huge as a timid four-year-old girl clinging tightly on to the wooden horse whilst waving a magic wand.



My home: 58 Rue de Belleville, Paris

My parents would often take me to the theatre or a bistro for dinner. I would feel very sophisticated drinking my grenadine and lemonade.

When I look back on my early childhood, I have sweet memories and the sound of laughter and piano music fill my mind. My clothes were always beautifully made and my hair was braided with rags to form perfect ringlets. It was a lovely life. ■

Introducing my family



Me at about four years old,
with my parents

MY MOTHER WAS born Millie Novograd (née Spodik) in Russia. She suffered from another kind of persecution as a young woman and fled with her parents and sister, Mary, to England to escape the pogroms. She arrived in Newcastle and soon learned to speak English alongside her native Yiddish and Russian.

She was forced to marry young and was later unable to divorce as it was seen as a scandal in the mid-1930s. Her parents had relatives in Paris with whom they often communicated by telegram. So, when she was about 30 years old, it was decided that she would move to Paris, leaving her awful marriage behind.

Shortly after arriving in Paris, she was introduced to my father. This time it was love and they married in a civil ceremony. She found a job as a garment finisher and I came along a short while later. Occasionally, when I was very young, she would take me to visit her parents in Newcastle, although I have no memories of these trips.

My father, Josek, was born in Warsaw, Poland. He was descended from a learned family of scribes. His father was Polish and his mother was Russian. He moved to Paris as a young man. He came from a family of several brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles. He worked alongside his brother-in-law Jacques Bernaud (who was married to his sister, Lonia) in a large apartment, and he made a good living as a tailor.

My father's parents lived a short distance from us. I remember the route we would walk. The little things I would see around us on our way to visit them at their apartment in Rue des Couronnes are burned into my memory. I called my grandmother Rosa, *Bubie*, which is Yiddish. My grandpa Moszek was a funny man with a very long, white beard. I knew him as *Zeida*. When I gave him a peck on his cheek I could smell tobacco, which was such a strange smell for me as a little girl.

My father's brother, Uncle Mendel Rappaport, and his wife Marie lived with their daughter, Annette, just around the corner from us. We would do everything together and I would often visit them and play with Annette, who was a couple of years older than me. I remember my fascination with the little trinkets they had displayed around their apartment. I loved holding the big seashell up to my ear and listening to the sounds of the sea. ■

“ I remember my fascination with the little trinkets they had displayed around their apartment. I loved holding the big seashell up to my ear and listening to the sounds of the sea. ”

Our home in Paris

WE LIVED ON the third floor. The block of flats we lived in had four small apartments on each floor with a wooden spiral staircase leading upstairs. Our apartment sat at the top of the stairwell on the left, whilst our neighbour Madame Collomb's apartment was positioned to the right of the stairs.

Madame Yvonne Collomb was a widow who lived with her father and daughter, Paula, who was a similar age to me. We would spend hours playing together in her apartment and my mother would take care of Paula in our home when Madame Collomb went to work. We had a lovely time together. Madame Collomb was a kind lady: when she made a dress for Paula she would make one for me too.

Ours was a happy home. My parents took good care of me and I had such fun playing games with them. I thought my father was a magician. We would sit together at the dining table and he would make a coin disappear before my eyes. He would tell me to ask my mother if she had it in the kitchen, which she always did, and every time I was astounded.

Our apartment was decorated with flowered wallpaper. I remember staring at the reflections of the beautiful patterns it made on the window shutters. I slept in a little cot in the bedroom I shared with my parents. Although we only had one bedroom we were lucky enough to have our own bathroom. I remember being in bed with chicken pox and covered in spots. My father came into the bedroom to see me when he came home from work at lunchtime. He started pulling funny faces to make me laugh and I could smell the sardines he had eaten for his lunch.

We were not an observant Jewish family. We did not attend the synagogue and my parents did not say any prayers, nor did I ever see the lighting of the Friday night candles. My mother prepared for Shabbat by visiting the fish shop in Belleville every Friday morning. Eating carp was the Polish-Jewish tradition of my father's family. She carried a big bowl of water to collect the live carp and then would bring it home, sitting the bowl on a chair in our kitchen until it was time to kill and cook it. Ever the curious child I was, I would often stick my finger in its mouth to see if it had any teeth and it would suck it up like a Hoover. I feel bad about that now, knowing the poor thing didn't have long left and I tormented it further.



Madame Collomb



Me and my curls, 1942

The only time I witnessed anything remotely religious was when my mother took me to a very religious wedding where the men and women were separated and all I remember was the bride bobbing up and down on a chair and thinking that was very funny.

My parents bought me a puppy to keep me occupied in our apartment. However, he didn't last long as my father became very frustrated with his crying and barking through the night. My mother made a little bed for him with her cardigan inside a cardboard box but it didn't help. Then one day, they told me they had to give him another home.

I used to speak Yiddish with my parents, alongside Russian and Polish, and a little German and Italian. I could have become a linguist had life been different. I enjoyed pre-school for the short time I was there, especially the arts and crafts. I remember the smell of the varnish filling the classroom as I made polka dots on the paper with paint and brushes. I have wonderful memories of life as a four-year-old. I was a happy child, but slowly my life changed.

My parents had an opportunity to leave Paris before the Nazi occupation as my grandmother sent a message to my mother asking her to flee to England with me and my father. My father refused to go because he didn't speak English. He was a very proud man and said: 'I wouldn't be able to make a living. I won't be able to provide for my family. I'm staying here where I can work.' He was happy in Paris and made a good living.

Towards the end of 1940, when I was just four years old, our lives changed. As Jewish Parisians we were ordered to register our names and address at the police station.

My favourite treats from the bakery suddenly stopped and food became scarce. If we had a tin of sardines to share we were lucky. A curfew prevented us from leaving our apartment in the evening. German soldiers filled the Parisian streets below. I was permanently kept indoors. I started to hear noises that I hadn't heard before – the incessant shouting of the Police. It was hideously scary. As I understand it now, France was under Nazi occupation.

By May 1942, we were required to sew a yellow Star of David on our outer garments that had to be worn at all times. I would look out of the window and see German propaganda filling the sky as though it was snowing paper. We didn't have cellars in our Parisian apartments so we had to run into the Metro station when we heard the air-raid sirens and we couldn't leave until we heard the siren again to give us the all-clear.

I wasn't aware at the time, but looking back I realise that my parents anticipated what lay ahead. Over time my belongings started to disappear. Pieces of furniture and my toys all vanished including my beautiful doll who would say 'Mama' and 'Papa' when I pulled the string on her back. No trace of the existence of a little girl was left for anyone to see. I wasn't the sort of child who nagged for my toys or asked questions: I just let things be.

My parents expected the worst. They had obviously discussed and rehearsed a plan with our neighbour to protect me. My belongings had slowly been transferred over to Madame Collomb's apartment. ■

August 1942 – when my life changed

I REMEMBER IT was the month after I turned six in 1942. It was a normal summer's day. The sky was blue, the pigeons were cooing and my grandmother was visiting us. It was hot and I was standing by the window with my father who was sitting on a chair looking down the street. Suddenly he said: 'They're here!'

He quickly locked both the inner hall door and our front door and we all immediately went to hide in the bedroom. My mother pushed me under the bed and I watched her feet pace up and down the little rug that lay beside me. She was frantic. I remember clumps of her hair falling to the floor as she pulled them from her head.

I heard the increasing sound of heavy boots on the wooden spiral staircase, followed by: BANG, BANG, BANG! We didn't answer the door; we stayed where we were. All of sudden the door began to shake with the sound of an axe. They forced their way in, breaking both doors down in the process. They were shouting: '*Raus! Raus!*' ('Out! Out!'), ushering us into the living room. There were three of them: one French policeman, one Gestapo and one SS officer. I remember the SS man had shiny buttons on his uniform and the lightning flash badge on his collar. I started to cry. They pointed to my parents: 'You and you, pack a bag!' and pointing to me: 'And you, shut up! You're giving me a headache.' They turned to my grandmother and said: 'We'll be back for you, old lady.'

My mother fainted and I saw her fall to the floor. I remember my father mouthing to me as he was packing his bag: 'Remember, I love you.'

During this commotion, our next door neighbour, Madame Collomb, burst in. Horrified, she asked: 'What is my child doing in this apartment? How did this happen?' She grabbed me by the hand and marched me out of my apartment. I don't know why I didn't resist her. I did not argue with her. Something stopped me from saying a word. If I had, the police would have realised I was being rescued and we would all have been shot on the spot.

I left before my parents were taken away. Without realising it at the time, I had walked away from my mother and father and my home for the very last time. I never saw my parents again.

By some miracle Madame Collomb got away with it. Once inside her apartment she pushed me underneath a large dining table that was covered with a floor-length chenille tablecloth. I couldn't see a thing from under the table, just blackness. I had a little bed made up beneath the table.

The next day I heard a loud knock at the front door. It was the Gestapo. It became clear that Madame Collomb was also hiding the old lady who lived across the hall from us, in a cupboard, and they had come to take her away. They asked if she knew where the old lady was. She replied: 'Hmm. You have a horrible job, haven't you?' They turned around and left. When it was safe, the little old lady fell to the ground and kissed Madame Collomb's feet. I had no idea of that lady being in the apartment with us. She had been ushered in by Madame Collomb before I arrived.

I had to remain very quiet under the tablecloth so Madame Collomb's father and her daughter Paula would not discover me. Although they all lived together, they were unaware that I was hiding in their apartment. Madame Collomb had suspected the Gestapo would be arriving any day, so she had sent her father and daughter out of the apartment on errands to keep them out of the way. She continued with this each day to ensure they didn't notice me under the table. When they weren't around I was given dusters to slide under my feet so the apartments below would not hear my footsteps when I visited the bathroom.

I was so lonely. I had constant nightmares. I was full of guilt, asking myself why they did not take me instead. I was a totally lost child. I just did not stop crying after that harrowing day in August. In one breath I had lost everything! ■

Saying goodbye to those who loved me

A FEW WEEKS passed. I had spent all my days and nights in darkness, shielded by Madame Collomb's tablecloth. From the moment she took my hand and led me away from my parents I was unable to speak. It was out of shock, but also in fear that my little voice might be heard.

It was only a matter of time before the Germans would return to arrest me. Madame Collomb felt that her apartment was unsafe. She had to move me on.

One evening, she insisted that we visited my grandparents at their apartment. She ushered me out from under her table, and told me to be quick and quiet. Whilst we walked the short distance in the darkness she hid the yellow Star of David on my coat.

Once we arrived, I asked my *Bubie* when my parents would be returning. She tried to console me by telling me: 'Soon'. She took a little jar off her shelf and offered me a small piece of cane sugar but I didn't want it and remember looking out the window. I didn't know I would be heading straight to the train station and our goodbyes to each other would actually be for the final time. The Germans came for my grandparents the following year, during the *Rafle* (final roundup).

I later learned that soon after, a letter arrived addressed to me at Madame Collomb's apartment. It was from the police under the Directorate of Jewish Affairs. I don't know why it was sent to a six-year-old but I can only assume they intended to arrest me along with the thousands of other Jewish Parisian children who were deported to concentration camps whilst I was on the run. ■



The envelope addressed to me from the police under the Directorate of Jewish Affairs.

Safety in Mondoubleau

MADAME COLLOMB HAD family connections in the countryside and had planned to seek out a safe place amongst them for me to hide. We spent some time together at various places she had found for us to stay until we reached Mondoubleau, an area of the Loir-et-Cher in central France.

I was taken to the family Geshe who were not welcoming at all. I was very mistreated in my short stay there. I spent so much of my time sitting on the floor playing in the ashes that I called myself Cendrion (Cinderella). On one occasion I was very lucky I didn't lose an eye when Monsieur Geshe hit me across the face with his belt. I was soon kicked out and sent to another family, the Guillins, who didn't really want me either. Monsieur and Madame Guillin lived with their daughters, Paulette and Claudine. They were not cruel but they were not over-kind. They were peasants and had a harsh attitude towards life. They focussed on their daily tasks and expected everyone around them, including me, to do the same. There were no hugs or bedtime stories. Suddenly I went from a little girl with pavements under my feet to mud on my feet. Looking back, I lived like a little dog. If I didn't follow the rules I was punished.

We had to live in a self-sufficient way due to wartime. You couldn't just go to the shops. Groceries were purchased only once a year or exchanges were made in return for something needed. The Guillins would exchange one of their chickens for salt or sugar when we were running low. The dairy farmer who lived three doors up from us would wheel over a big churn and fill a long-handled jug with milk, charging whatever she wanted.

There were always chores to do. I was given the task of gathering snails which had to be soaked for a long time before we could eat them. My other job was to pick off all the Colorado beetles from the potatoes.

Once I carried out my tasks I was allowed to do as I wished. I was given a strange outhouse to sleep in with the chickens. I learned that chickens actually have conversations amongst themselves. It was very sweet. There is nothing more miserable than a chicken in the rain. It was hilarious watching them flapping and shaking the water off. I did, however, catch lice from them!

When I first arrived, the village was obviously deemed safe enough for me to attend school so I would go occasionally with Paulette. I would chat to the person sitting at the desk next to me in the classroom, but I wasn't happy there because I didn't really know what I was doing, never having been to school before.

The headmaster owned a *dinde* (turkey) who would chase after us in the school yard and pin us up against the fence. On April Fool's Day (*poisson d'Avril*) 1943, the villagers pinned fish on to people's backs, as was the tradition. I was very embarrassed to learn that someone had pinned one on me. I was relieved that I only had to go to school a small handful of times before it became too risky for me to attend. The village began swarming with German soldiers. It turned out that a German army headquarters had been set up nearby.

Paulette continued at school but I was told to stay in the cellar. It smelt terribly of damp and was dark and cold. I remember the big hook hanging from the back door which Mr Guillin used for the animals he had caught whilst out shooting. I would watch him skin and gut them and built up good knowledge of how to do this myself.

Mr Guillin took care of their small garden and he showed me how to become green-fingered. He grew his own tobacco leaves and I learned how to pick them. They looked like huge spinach leaves. I would thread a needle through the thick stem and string them up to dry. I rolled them and cut them up, as though they were cabbage. Once they were ready I made little cigarettes for him to smoke. These things were certainly not jobs for children but there were no toys so I kept myself busy. ■

O.P.E.J

Département DE LOIR et CHER 14 jours en voyage

SURVEILLANCE Mme. MOUNIER

REPONDANT : Mr. DEVAUX

SF	718	Mme. ROUSSEL à VINEUIL	ROSENBLUME MAURICE	700.
			JELEN MARCEL	300.
	196	Mme. TARDIF à MOREE	ZALIWSCA NELLY	500.
	527		TEPECHT LEA et GORGETTE	900. 700.
			TAUMAN LUCIEN	630.
	351	Mme. COUDRAY APEZOU	SATZ JACQUELINE	700.
	233	Mme. BRUCHET	FRANE MONIQUE	700.
		MAISON DE REDRESSERENT à La MOTTE BEUFRONT	VICTOR BARANICA	
		Mme. GESHE Rue Creuse <i>Mondoubleau</i>		
		<u>MONDOUBLON</u>	<u>RAFFAËL BERTHE</u>	<u>600.</u>
	330	Mme. CRINIER La belle étoile, commune de LUNAY	-ROSENBERG GERARD	600.
	352	Mme Vve. HENNAUL-BOUCHERON NOUEN Commune Fuselier	KUPERFARÉ REGINE WOLF Françoise	500.
	556	Mme. VENDRELY à SAMBIN	Cousins ZAUER, FANNY et ALBERT	1200.
	630	Mme. SOURIAU à FONTAINE	Cousin WODKA CHARLOTTE	600.
	727	Mme. CRUCHET à FONTAINE PEZOU	DALIEZ MICHEL	700.
PF	765	Mme. MATTEAU CHARON à PEZOU	CREMER SARAH	
VV	386	Mme. BOUCHER LA CHAUSSÉE le Lecote par Huissieu S/ Cosson	HERSKOWITZ ANNETTE et ODETTE	
T/	687	Mme GABIN à CHAUMONT S/TARONNES LA FAISANDERIE	ELEN MARCEL ROSENBLUM MARCEL	
		Mme. ROUSSEL à VINEUIL	NADELAJTS LUCIEN et REGINE	
BI/	103	Mme. RAPHAËL chez Mme. LUCAS MONDOUBLON	RWEINB BELLA et SIMON	
VII/	666	Mme. BOIS à BOUSAY par DROUET	RUSSECHEN TYGIER ANITA	
T/	III	Mme. COUDRAY (sa Fille) à CHICHERAY par PEZOU	NESTEL JEAN BERNARD	
S/1	36	Mme. FAIX à ASNIERES par ONZAIN	OSTRA SZEWER-SUZANNE EWER SUZANNE	
	938	Mme. GUILLONNEAU PONT DE BRAY		

ARCHIVES DU CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION
JUIVE CONTEMPORAINE
17, rue Geoffroy L'Asnier - 75004 PARIS
Tél. 01 42 77 44 72 - Fax 01 53 01 17 49

Mention de la source obligatoire pour toute utilisation

DOCUMENT : FONDS WIZO

0153011734.

3.

5.

The list of children hidden in the Loire Valley shows where the children were sent and how much it cost to send each child into hiding. My name and residence in Mondoubleau is highlighted in red. There's a handwritten amendment by my name because it was intended for me to be sent to a house of correction but somehow instead I was sent to the Geshe family.

A beautiful place, but a harsh existence

NOBODY KNEW WHAT I had experienced in my short years nor understood what I was going through. I coped by hiding amongst the pumpkins in the overrun walled garden listening to the sound of aeroplanes and, at times, spotting parachutes gliding across the sky. I spent a lot of my time looking at the nature around me.

It was a fascinating place. There was a gorgeous linden, a few alpine trees and many chestnut and horse chestnut trees. I enjoyed snacking on the chestnuts from the trees. I remember walking along the path where the river ran and it was so beautiful. When I looked up I would see red squirrels. They gave me a lot of pleasure. I would see dragonflies and frogs by the water and even spotted my first heron. There really was everything that nature has to offer. This is where I focussed my mind. I had no one in my life: it was just me, but I never concentrated on what I didn't have. I concentrated on what I did have. I would take great joy in the colour, form and reflection of the nature around me.

There was a huge tower at the top of the Mount in the old village. It leaned to the side slightly and I thought it looked quite unsightly. I would say: '*C'est comme une crotte*' ('It looks like dung'). The nice thing about it, though, was when the wind blew in the mornings I could hear the rooks crowing. I found their sound rather comforting.

I would often visit the washhouse by the river, but had to stop this once the German soldiers settled nearby. This was a funny little building with large rocks covering the floor. The river was clean and flowing: perfect for washing clothes. We would soak them first and then, with a heavy rock, would rub them clean. The wet clothes would then be left across the rocks to dry.

If we were lucky, Monsieur Guillin would catch frogs by the river. He had to work quickly to catch them in a bucket and seal them with a lid as otherwise the slippery little devils would jump out. Later that evening they would be cooked in a pot in our kitchen. Sometimes, for a treat, Mr Guillin managed to catch a few little fish that would be fried up with some butter for dinner. They were delicious.

One thing I didn't learn was how to swim. Nobody taught me. One day, when we were near the river, I spotted a lady with a baby who may have been in hiding. All of a sudden, someone shouted over to us:

'Jump!' I said: 'Where? Here, in the water?' The shouting continued with: 'Get in the water!' I shouted back: 'I can't swim!' Suddenly, there was an enormous explosion.

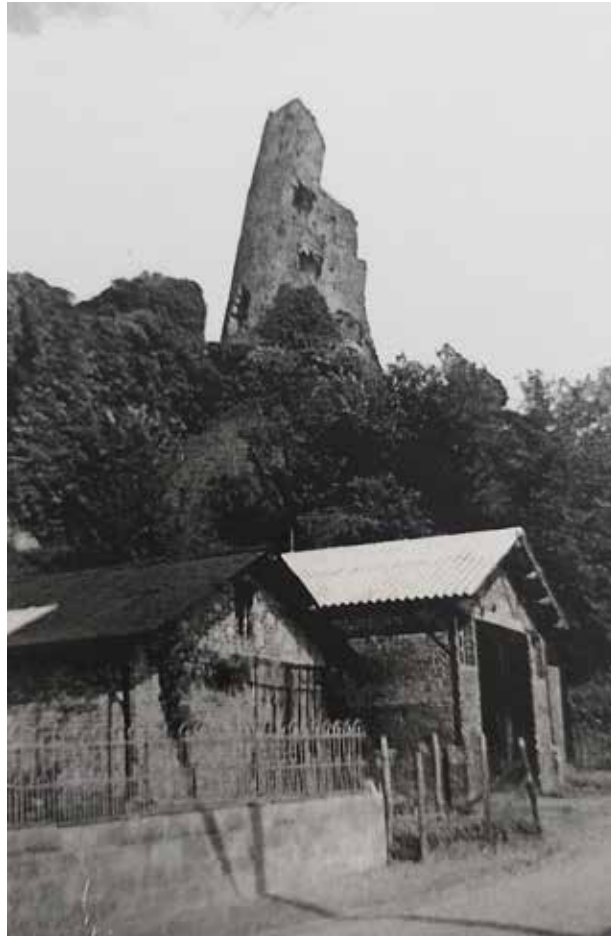
The river was close to fields and a railway line. And that was where the *Maquis* (rural guerrilla band of French resistance fighters) was working on blowing up the German ammunition trains. This one went out with a massive bang. Had I not jumped into the river I would not be here today. Something would have definitely hit me. I came out spluttering and coughing, having swallowed a lot of water. I was in a terrible state for about a week afterwards. The woman that was in hiding lost her baby in the explosion. That was absolutely terrible, and a huge event in my life.

There was one little girl in the village I remember who was very occasionally allowed to come in and play with me, and I really liked her. We played pretend games in the garden with little stones and pebbles. We used the mud to make pies and cakes like typical children. I don't know her name because, strangely, she never told me it! I knew that she didn't attend school either but she wasn't in hiding. She was an albino and had no eyelashes, no hair or eyebrows. She would wear a little cap to keep her bald head warm. She was shy just like me and people would make fun of her. I would look at her and think she was nice inside and I still have that attitude now: I always see a person for who they are inside.

If I ever came across little bits of paper, it was as though I had found gold. I really loved doodling and writing on them. One day whilst playing with my friend I discovered a cupboard full of paper during a game of hide and seek. I decided to take some as I thought the Guillins could spare it. I folded it carefully and hid it under my clothes. When I came out of the cupboard bulging with paper, I was asked: 'What have you got there?' I was punished and made to feel so shameful. I had to walk through the village with a sign on my back saying 'Thief'. I have never forgotten that. I was innocent in my mind, I wasn't stealing anything that may have been valuable to them. That is a nasty memory I have of Mondoubleau.

I stayed in Mondoubleau for about 18 months. I had a very unusual experience there. I was never referred to by my name, so I forgot what it was! It may have been safer not to use my name considering I was in hiding but I wasn't even given a pet or nickname. I was never addressed personally throughout my whole stay. And I never celebrated my birthday so I had no idea how old I was.

In 1944, Madame Guillin wrote to Madame Collomb informing her that there was no room for me to stay at their house any longer and I must leave as soon as possible. She said in her letter that I was defiant and I did not care about the punishment I received for my poor behaviour. This was somewhat true as I felt I had to stand up for myself and maybe this came across as arrogant. I was merely trying to survive in this new world I had found myself in. ■



The Mount in the old village of Mondoubleau



Mondouhan 9.

Chère Madame

J'ai bien reçu votre mandat hier et je vous remercie.
Je regrette de vous mettre en embarras pour
Berthe mais si ne puis pas la garder, je
n'ai plus d'autres pensionnaires, je ne puis pas
m'attacher à la maison pour un enfant.

D'autre part pour ce qui s'est passé je pense
cela pour de l'enfantillage, mais la morale lui
a été faite, vous savez, mais tout lui est égal,
Je vous prie d'agréer l'expression de mes
meilleurs sentiments

Guillin.

Letter written by Madame Guillin to Madame Collomb informing her that she could no longer look after me.

Hardship in Auvergne

IN THE WINTER of 1944, two men arrived discreetly in Mondoubleau to collect me. It had been decided that it was time for me to hide in a different location. Looking back, these men were probably priests. Not one word was exchanged between us throughout our whole journey together. The travelling seemed endless. It was uncomfortable and freezing cold on the trains. We took an alternative route to Auvergne, which was dangerous. We travelled over ravines, up steep inclines and at times pieces of the track were missing.

Meanwhile, back in Mondoubleau, Paulette had arrived home from school that day and asked where I was. Her mother replied: 'Two men have taken her away.' Paulette assumed from this statement that I had been abducted, never to be seen again, not that these men had actually led me to safety. This was never clarified and she didn't learn of my fate until 30 years later.

The priests dropped me at a farmhouse in what felt like the middle of nowhere. This very small village was called Lasparos Lapeyrugue, set in the mountainous region of Auvergne, about 370 kilometres south of Mondoubleau. I was introduced to a lady, Madame Tilleux, who was in her late 30s but looked much older. She lived there alone and always dressed in black. The ladies of Auvergne all wore a traditional kind of headdress. Madame Tilleux ensured that hers was as black as the rest of her clothing. This made me believe that she was a widow. Her husband must have died during the war.

When I first arrived at her farm I would often sit down and cry, but it didn't do any good. Madame Tilleux insisted I call her 'Maman Tilleux' and believed there was no time for the nonsense of feelings. I remember telling her that I could now *souffler* (breathe) after having been hidden away for so long up until then.

She never asked me how I was feeling or explained what had happened to me. I had so many unanswered questions. I didn't know what war meant. I didn't know what happened to my parents. At that time I didn't even know that I would never see them again. I had no idea that I would never return to live with them both in our apartment in Paris.

The farmhouse was made up of one large room. It had a big fireplace on the outside wall with seats on the inside where we sat in front of the simmering cauldron, inside the inglenook which kept us snug during the very cold months of winter. The bed was monstrously huge! Heavy curtains hung all the way round and kept the light out. It was cosy, although I often chose to sleep in the barn with the goats and their kids. They were very friendly and I enjoyed their warmth and would snuggle up against them.

I would sit in the darkness and let my mind wander, using my imagination. I slept well until the early morning crow of the cockerel woke me up. When I first arrived it was winter and it felt like we were in permanent darkness for months. The working day was short as it was impossible to work in the fields without any light. We spent most of our time sitting by the simmering cauldron. In the summer, though, I went to bed with the sun and awoke with the sun.

Although I didn't go to school in Auvergne, Maman Tilleux taught me how to write. In the evening, she would use a tallow as a firelighter for our little lamp and would sit me down to teach me my letters. There were no books so I couldn't learn to read stories. When I arrived it was around the time of Christmas and she would sing the French song about a little Christmas tree and we would enjoy hazelnuts together. She told me that *Père Noël* (Saint Nicholas) was on his way so I needed to hang up my stocking. I found it quite exciting.

In the winter it was so cold that my hands turned blue. They were cracked, bleeding and sore. I started to grow out of my clothes and my feet were in a terrible condition as hard labour had caused my shoes to wear out and I would rely on bare feet to get around. Occasionally, when there was heavy snow, Maman Tilleux would lend me *sabots* (Dutch clogs). They were very painful to walk in with an open back and would fill up with snow. ■

I had to grow up overnight

I LEARNED TO be self-sufficient; it felt as though I grew up overnight. It was a hard life being a farmer. I was expected to pull the turnips out of the ground and pick the corn cobs at four o'clock in the morning. I would chop them up and feed them to the animals who were always fed before us. Whatever we ate were the leftovers after feeding the animals.

As delicious as the chestnuts and apples were, there were only so many that we could eat. When the one pig we owned was killed, it was shared with the people from the village and in return when others killed a pig we would receive a piece of their meat. Maman Tilleux used almost every part of its body, even down to the blood, and the rest would be sent off to a butcher in the village who would produce sausages. Small pieces of meat would be preserved in any salt we had available. The little bits of bone and meat and few leftover vegetable scraps were boiled up during the winter months in a big, black cauldron that hung over the fire and this would simmer for days.

Maman Tilleux worked as hard as any man and expected me to do likewise, so I did. There was no running water, just a big rain barrel. The sunshine made the collected water feel warmer and I would swish my face in it, although I never washed my hair. It was my job to fill the buckets up from the barrel and carry them back to the farmhouse.

When the corn sheaf in the field was dry and ready for Maman Tilleux to beat, I would help to gather it up and carry it to the farmhouse, ready to be sent off for grinding in the village. My feet would bleed from the sharp edges, which were very painful. Once the corn had been returned to us as flour, I watched every stage and took a great interest in watching Maman Tilleux use it to create our delicious bread.

She used a large animal trough to knead the flour, water and yeast together. It was my job to collect the wood for the beehive oven we kept outside. It would burn for hours to ensure it had reached the optimum temperature to bake the bread. Maman Tilleux would work very hard kneading the bread and shaped it into two *pain paysan* (country loaves). She used a big flat lollipop-shaped stick to manoeuvre the bread into the hot oven and would remove it with one quick flick. She would tap on the bottom of

the loaf to check its readiness. If it needed a little longer she would slide the bread back into the oven and repeat the process. It was stored in the kitchen and would be our food for the next few weeks.

After having milked the cow I would pour the liquid into our curds and whey machine. I had to churn the butter for hours and hours – that was hard work. A little salt would be added for flavour and we would collect up the curd and hang it for days in a muslin cloth. The cheese wasn't wonderful, it often had little maggots inside, which I would overlook and just eat it anyway as I had no one to tell me otherwise.

When it was time for me to go into the fields and work, Maman Tilleux would add a piece of the bread into one pocket of my apron and a piece of our homemade cheese into the other. I would nibble on it through the day.

Maman Tilleux was aware that people would gossip if they spotted me, suspicious of who I was. She decided it would be a good idea for me to go to church with her occasionally so that I would integrate into the local area. I didn't look Jewish, with my fair hair and blue eyes. I was told to speak to nobody when we were at church, even if someone spoke to me. I was given a rosary that I had to hold in my right hand and my prayer book in my left hand. I would occasionally attend the little school that belonged to the church. I was expected to tie my own hair up and clean our shoes before we set off. It took us a while to walk the three miles to the church in the nearest town, Aurillac. ■

Loneliness became a way of life

I GREW USED to living alone and became a real daydreamer. I still carry the images of the beauty of the outdoors in Auvergne in my heart. It was so gorgeous and untouched. In the springtime I would lie on my back in the fields and watch the clouds of blossom float by. I knew where to find the sweetest nectar and would crawl under the hedgerows where the violets grew. I discovered that the white ones have a little tail at the end of the flower which is where the nectar is stored. These were the sweets of my childhood.

Summertime was hot and I would find real enjoyment in my adventures. I learned where to find wild strawberries and hazelnuts in the forest and foraged for mushrooms. I understood bees and knew where to find their honey. I spent countless hours lying on my tummy under a hedge watching them go about their business. I thought it was wonderful when they left blobs of wild honey for me.

I was quite a fearless little girl. I had nobody watching over me to offer advice and keep me safe from the dangers that nature can bring. So when I came across very big viper and adder snakes basking in the sunshine, I didn't know that if I clapped my hands they would have slithered away. I would stand frozen and think: 'Should I walk, or is it safer to stay put?' It was terrible when one of our cows was bitten.

“ I was quite a fearless little girl. I had nobody watching over me to offer advice and keep me safe from the dangers that nature can bring. ”

Lasparros Lopezfrague
Le mardi 2 mai

Chère Madame Collomb.

J'ai reçu votre petite lettre qui me fait grand plaisir du 24 pirié 1945. Moi en ce moment je vais toujours à l'école avec mes petits camarade Jermamde et Jackie votre petit gendre comme vous le dite il y a quelque temps j'ai vu Madame Stedonnie épouse Maïntonan.

Il ne fait plus froid je me plais toujours bien à Lasparros chez maman Bidoux. Susset en me gâte beaucoup et Madeleine me rend meurtre nous fait bien tout rire. Je vais toujours garde avec Jackie et ma grande et ma Jermamde.

Il y a un mignon petit aigle et la petite chevette et la petite trobis et il y a la petite chère avec bientôt ses petit chaireau. aussi personne ne ne souffle je les fait tout de seule. Je serai bien contente de revoir ma chère petite maman et mon cher petit papa Malgrès que je me plais bien à chez maman Bidoux et aussi je me plais bien à l'école.

My handwritten letter to Madame Collomb

enfin chère Madame Collomb je vais vous quitter en vous embrassant de tout mon petit cœur.

Berthe

Chère Madame Collomb maman Bidoux vous
sera en même temps que moi.

votre petite Berthe qui vous aime

archives départementales
rue Paul Doumer
sur le plan au 29

I had no company, apart from Maman Tilleux and the animals. There were a few occasions when young evacuees would visit the farmhouse. Jackie from Riols came to stay for a month during the summer holidays. Fernande was a teenager from Marseille, who was evacuated to the countryside during the war. She was the only person who ever asked me why I was crying. She put her arm around me and it felt wonderful. She became my best friend. Both Fernande and Jackie eventually went back home and I never heard from them again.

The goats became my friends and I took great pleasure in spending time in the fields with them, making sure they didn't wander off. On one occasion, my little goat climbed and climbed too high up a mountain and couldn't get down again. He stood at the top bleating at me and I tried to coax him down, which was no use and he continued to bleat. I started to climb up the rocks, which were more like slates with edges like knives. I finally reached the top, grabbed him and then tried to scramble down. I suddenly slipped and cut my foot open. Back at the house Maman Tilleux asked me what I had done. There were no doctors so she did the best she could for me but it became infected and every time she changed the dressing she would aggravate it and the infection would start again. You can't imagine the pain! It was just awful and I still have a scar today. I learned to be a little more careful after that.

We had a cow, a pig and some chickens. Our lamb would follow me everywhere because I gave him lots of love and attention. The cow, however, wasn't making much milk so a neighbour brought over his bull to sort this out and I was left alone and in charge of him. I was given orders to take a long stick with a nail on the end and prick him between his horns if he did anything he shouldn't. If I wanted him to walk I was told I must prick him on his backside.

When I was told to take him back home he refused to move. I prodded him with the stick once again and this time he turned around and gave me a very angry look. After one more prod, he turned and started charging at me. I didn't know I could run that fast. I screamed and screamed and I ran like the wind and all I could see ahead of me was nothing. I thought: 'This is it, I'm dead! This is the day I die.' The neighbour's dog rushed towards the bull and jumped on him, catching hold of his muzzle. He bit down on the most tender part of the bull's face. It stopped him running after me but he almost killed the little dog. I must have fainted because I was laid out on the ground and the next thing I knew,

Maman Tilleux was running towards me. This, along with nearly drowning back in Mondoubleau, were my scariest moments.

On 3 March 1945, just before the end of the war, I used my newly acquired writing skills in a letter to Madame Collomb. My writing was very French in style, sweeping upwards softly and leaning to the right. I wrote:

Dear Madame Collomb,

I have received your lovely letter which filled me with joy this February 24th, 1945. These days I am going to school with my friends Fernande and Jackie “your little son-in-law” as you say. A little while ago I saw Madame Sidonnie and now it’s not cold anymore and still enjoy it at Lasparos at Maman Tilleux’s. Also I am being very spoilt and Mademoiselle Fernande makes us all laugh a lot. I am still being taken care of by Jackie and my great friend, Fernande, a sweet little lamb and a baby goat and a little sheep and soon the goat will have baby goats. Nobody gives me any cues, I do it all by myself. I will be very happy to see my dear little Mum and my dear little Daddy even though I do like it here at Maman Tilleux’s and at school. Finally, dear Madame Collomb, I will leave you now and kiss you with all my heart.

Berthe

Dear Madame Collomb, Maman Tilleux is writing you at the same time.

Your little Berthe, who loves you ■

The war ends – but no one tells us!

BY 5 MAY 1945 war was over, but with no access to a radio or newspapers the message didn't reach us for a very long time. When Maman Tilleux finally learned we were no longer under Nazi occupation she said: 'You know you can go in the fields? Go wherever you like!' This was quite unheard of as, although the south of France wasn't completely occupied during the war, it was never regarded as safe, especially because the Germans had based their headquarters in Aurillac, the next town from where we were. There was now no restriction on where I could wander.

But I felt no excitement or celebration hearing that the war was over. All I would say was: 'I want to see my mummy and daddy.' I began to hold out hope that I would soon see them again after hearing of a boy who had also been hidden during the war years and had later been reunited with his parents. But when my parents didn't come to find me, all I could think was: 'Why did this happen to me?' Nobody explained anything and, as always, I didn't ask. I had learnt not to ask anybody anything.

After the war was over, Maman Tilleux requested to adopt me. This was obviously why she had asked me to call her 'Maman' rather than Madame. I don't really know why she was so insistent on keeping me - maybe I was an asset to the farm as I was well behaved and a reliable worker.

Maman Tilleux applied to the French court in Aurillac, but Madame Collomb refused to allow the adoption. An enquiry was opened and she and Maman Tilleux became huge enemies. The Courts tried to initiate measures for Madame Collomb to have contact with me, but nothing was established and I had no contact with her for two years. Maman Tilleux no longer allowed me to keep in touch through writing and Madame Collomb was forbidden to visit me. This was awful. I imagine Maman Tilleux thought I was very ungrateful after all she had done for me. Our relationship became very strained as a result.



Left to right: My cousin Annette, me, not known, Claudine Guillin



Annette (right) and me within the confines of the Guillins' walled garden in Mondoubleau. The next time we saw each other was the night before I left for Auvergne when she came to stay overnight and we shared a bed at the Guillins' house.

I wasn't aware at the time of a letter that arrived in 1947 from the Red Cross. It said that someone was on their way to collect me and would return me to Paris. I didn't have many possessions to pack up and in an instant I was gone. Maman Tilleux must have been left thinking 'Now what?' and the local villagers must have wondered what happened to me too.

In Paris I was reunited with my father's brother, Uncle Mendel, and my cousin, Annette. I was astounded to learn that they had spent the war in hiding together in Mondoubleau — the very same village as me! They had both managed to escape Paris after Annette's mother, Aunt Marie, was arrested there in 1942 and never seen again.

Looking back now, I can remember one day in the village when I had been playing with a couple of little girls and all of a sudden Annette came along and joined us. We spent a short time together but she soon left. I remember how much I wanted her to stay, but, as usual, I never asked any questions about where she was going or if I would see her again.

In Paris in 1947, I desperately wanted to stay with Annette and my uncle. They were my family and I had been very close to them before the war, but my mother's parents who lived in Newcastle were my next of kin and they wanted me in England. My feelings were denied and I felt rejected. I remember

crying and asking: 'Why can't I stay here?' In retrospect, I can see it would have been a difficult task for Uncle Mendel to have had the sole responsibility for two young girls.

I was then handed over to a lovely young lady who escorted me on my journey to England. I only knew her by her nickname, Nini. She had worked for the French Resistance and, although the war had ended two years previously, she somehow got me out of Paris by masquerading as a Red Cross worker. I never learned the reason for this.

I would love to have had the opportunity to meet her in later life and ask her all the unanswered questions about our journey together. My lasting memory of the crossing on the ship was of people distributing bowls to everyone. I wasn't sick but everyone else was. I arrived in England in February 1947. ■

“ I only knew her by her nickname, Nini. She had worked for the French Resistance and, although the war had ended two years previously, she somehow escorted me out of Paris masquerading as a Red Cross worker. ”

More unhappiness in Newcastle

I HAVE NO idea why my grandparents insisted I move to Newcastle to live with them. I had no recollection of the times I visited them as a baby with my mother. We had no relationship. I didn't even know what they looked like. The real war started for me in 1948, when I was 12 years old. My arrival in Newcastle was the beginning of my hell. I had nothing; I had no knowledge of the language, I had no parents and I had no possessions.

There was no way of conversing with my grandparents: they still maintained their native Russian and my grandmother spoke English with a strong accent which I found hilarious. The only way of communicating with them was through the little broken Yiddish that I recalled from life with my parents.

The language barrier was not the only problem I faced. I struggled with my new life. My grandparents forbade me to keep in touch with anyone from my past. They ruled that I was never to discuss what I had experienced during the war.

I understand now that they too had been affected after losing their daughter, and it was clear that they had no idea of how to deal with my trauma. They thought the best way of dealing with it was to brush it under the carpet and that is why I did not speak about it: I suppressed my feelings.

The people around me were family but they did not show me the love I remember receiving from the family I knew when I was a very young girl in Paris. I never really settled into life in Newcastle. Everything was different to what I had known growing up.

Although my parents followed some Jewish traditions, I first experienced the lighting of the Shabbat candles and the blessing of the bread on Friday nights at my grandparents' house in Newcastle. They were not religious though: my grandpa, who was a tailor, would work during the week and on Saturdays he would take me to the cinema. The first film I saw was *The Wizard of Oz*. Afterwards we would go home and he would sit me down to listen to the radio, which helped me learn English. I would see children playing outside in the streets and would ask if I could join them, but he insisted I stayed inside to practise my writing skills.

My mother's sister, Mary, treated me badly and her husband was a cunning man. Soon after I arrived he abused me and continued to do so for four years. I tried to tell someone outside of the family what was happening but they just said: 'We can't help you because we aren't your legal guardian.' I knew if I told anyone in the family I would be accused of lying, so I told no one. I felt so ashamed. I pushed it all aside and just carried on.

I had a nice little Jewish circle of friends who lived in my area. They were made up of Joe Block, Jeffrey and Marjorie. One day Joe arrived to collect me to visit a friend in Gosforth. My Auntie Mary answered the door and told him to wait until I finished all the cleaning. I remember when Doctor Pinkie Roberts visited us. He commented on our new floor lino. My grandmother replied that it was not new: Berthe had just cleaned it.

My first boyfriend was Philip, who loved cars and would drive from Whitley Bay to have dinner with me. He soon left for the army and I didn't see him again, although I know he later became a racing driver at Silverstone.

When I was 17 my grandfather passed away and my grandmother and I had to move into Auntie Mary's house. This aunt of mine resented looking after my grandmother and really disliked me. She would chase after me with a knife and say: 'You should have died with the rest of them! What are you doing here?' I thought to myself: 'There is no place for me here.' ■

I move to London

MY BEST FRIEND Bernice was an air hostess, living in London. She encouraged me to join her down south in a flat she was renting from a lovely lady called Mrs Best, on Brookash Road in Shepherd's Bush.

The only problem was that I was unable to find a job as the Home Office had kept my visa on my arrival to England, preventing me from working. However Mrs Best let me stay rent free for 13 weeks, until I eventually started to make some money.

Bernice introduced me to a young man called Harry. He was a bit of a rough diamond, and we built up a working relationship. He had an idea and asked me if I would help him. Harry's girlfriend had a large kitchen and we would spend most evenings at hers. We would cook a stew for dinner and, after we had eaten and cleared up, we would turn our hand to his business venture. He would cook up a mixture of soap in a pan on the stove and, once cooled and sliced, I would wrap it up in little pieces of greaseproof paper. We would work together to sell it at Shepherd's Bush Market the following day. He convinced me to take on the role of a fake customer; I would hover around his little stall, pretending to be a prospective buyer. This encouraged passers-by to stop and buy the soap. There were some really horrible people in the crowds and I could have got into bad company. Thankfully, after a while, I managed to impress the management at Selfridges department store with my French accent. I still didn't have my visa but they were satisfied with just my national insurance number and I was offered a job in their perfumery department.

I still keep in touch with the friends from my past. Bernice married and moved to Australia. Joe still lives in Newcastle and I class him as a good friend.

I had not kept in touch with any family in Newcastle, but often thought about my grandmother. I decided to write to Mrs Thompson who lived in the cellar of 7 Wentworth Place – we lived at the top of the house. I asked her to give my grandma a message from me so she would know that I was safe and well and working. I sent her my best and hoped she was well but I did not include my address as I wanted to keep my distance from them all since I had been treated so badly by my auntie and her husband.

Life was difficult in England. I had no way of holding on to the special people I had a strong connection with from my life back in France. Madame Collomb was the only person who knew anything about me and was the link between me and my dear parents.

In my desperation to fit into English life, I focused on my language and soon all knowledge of French, my mother tongue, disappeared. This was the reason, together with the distance and restrictions placed on me by my grandparents, why I never had a chance to have a heartfelt conversation with Madame Collomb. This made me so sad. ■

“Life was difficult in England. I had no way of holding on to the special people I had a strong connection with from my life back in France.”

Marriage, a baby and a new struggle

I HAD ALREADY met my future husband, David Ripton, back in Newcastle when I was 16. He had been holidaying in Newcastle with his parents when they encouraged him to visit a particular dance hall, but he decided on a different hall instead; this was the dance hall I frequented and that is where we met.

He approached me and introduced himself. He spoke with an accent and told me he was from Winnipeg, Canada. He was a handsome, respectable-looking young man, who was a year older than me. He was a flight navigator in the Royal Air Force, posted in Kingston upon Thames.

He said he would visit me, but I never told him where I lived. I mistakenly told him where I worked and he would wait outside for me. My colleagues would tip me off and I would leave by the back door instead. He found out my address and would often ring the bell. I wanted to run out of the back door if he ever visited. I didn't put my finger on it at first but I found he had a strange aura; he never looked me in the eye.

He suddenly became desperately ill with peritonitis. One day, his parents arrived at my grandmother's house. They said that he had been continually asking to see me and insisted that I went with them to visit him at the RAF hospital in Kingston upon Thames. When we arrived he was unconscious. I felt very sorry for him as he was in a bad way. The whole day was rather strange as I had not met his parents before. His father, who was a special policeman, didn't even offer me his hand to shake when he dropped me home. His mother was very straight-faced: there were no niceties.

I had moved to London by the time his health improved. When he grew stronger he visited me at Mrs Best's house. I would make a small meal for us on the little grill which I had on the landing. On one occasion he said he had something to tell me. He said: 'I'm not really Canadian.' I looked at him sideways and asked: 'Why did you pretend?' He never gave me a proper answer. There were many missing pieces, but I overlooked this as there was another side of his character that was endearing and charming. He rarely asked me about myself, but he did learn that I was alone after arriving from Paris, without parents. He told me he didn't like who he was or where he came from. It was then that

I noticed his softer side and I continued with the relationship. When I was 18 and a half he eventually offered to take me to visit his parents on the police estate where they lived in Kent.

I fell pregnant at 19 years old so we decided to get married. His parents didn't like me and were not happy about our situation.

David took me to a strange little setup under Paddington railway station. He forced me into a small building and told me to say I did not know who the father of my baby was. It didn't occur to me to ask questions. I just did what I was told. I spun a story to the man standing behind the desk. After interviewing both me and then David, the man said: 'You don't belong here. This is a home for unmarried mothers and I'm not taking you!'

After this plan failed, David took me back to his parents in Kent. His mother said I should give the baby up for adoption. I overheard his mother tell him: 'You're not to get married. You're to take her away from here and we are not to see you and her again. You are to not come back with her.'

David and I eventually decided to marry at the Wandsworth Registry Office on 14 October 1957. The girls from the office where I worked found out the time and all turned up, which was lovely.

After the ceremony we had a cup of tea and a sandwich back at his parents' house and they gave us a present of an iron! It was not a happy day.

“ At first we didn't talk about our childhoods: we perceived ourselves as ordinary, and it wasn't the main subject for us. Of all the people I have known who have suffered in the Holocaust, Eva is the most down-to-earth. She is a wonderful person. ”

David and I moved into a rented house which the RAF paid for in rural Lincolnshire, close to his RAF base. It was a pre-fabricated house, built in a field next to a factory. The scenery was very flat and boring, although I did enjoy it whenever a cow passed by my kitchen window.

David became very demanding. He expected everything to be so perfect. His uniform had to be ironed perfectly crisp and straight.

As time went on things did not improve. He would arrive home in the evening with friends and expected me to serve them all a big meal.

On Saturday 22 February 1958 it was thick with snow outside. Our baby was due any minute, but David insisted we watch the Van Gogh film at the cinema. Later that night I was in bed when my waters broke. David ran next door to use their phone to call an ambulance. I told David to stay at home and went alone to the hospital. I have memories of the ambulance battling its way through the snow.

I spent my labour alone in a side room of the hospital, while David had apparently been invited into our neighbour's for Sunday lunch. He was so full that he fell asleep and didn't visit me and our son Jeremy until the Tuesday.

Married life was not what I thought it would be. I did not have a depressive personality but I really struggled as a married woman. I had no one to rely on. My morale was so low and I couldn't cope. I would spend the whole day alone. David would arrive home from work for his dinner and then leave again for the rest of the evening.

My usual jobs were cleaning, cooking and washing clothes, which took up most of the day. I would wash all our clothes by hand and then leave them to soak in a boiler. After hanging them out in all weathers, I collected them up, where I often found the nappies had become like hard pieces of cardboard.

After 12 months in Lincolnshire, we moved to Oxford. I decided I wanted to work for my own sanity but also because I needed the money, and I found a job in a gown shop.

I was always the type of person to rush around. I ran everywhere and never had an appetite. I began to lose weight. I explained my problem to the doctor who handed me a prescription for some pills. I continued to lose weight and became very frail at six stone. I never mentioned this to David, probably because he would not have understood. He showed me no compassion and would tell me to keep busy if I had a problem.

Moving to Cyprus in 1962 did not improve my marriage, but a year later my second son, Paul, was born. The new environment made me happy. We had a lovely landlady and I felt a part of a community. I made friends who I would spend time with and we still all keep in touch today.

I started to feel tired all the time. The doctor prescribed me an amphetamine which I became addicted to and after a while I couldn't function at all. I was admitted to hospital for three weeks and weaned off the drugs. My angst continued over the years and I never received what I really needed, counselling. It was years after we met that I shared my past with David. His response was: 'Why are you bothering me now?'

I slowly started to feel better about myself. My appetite returned when I stopped smoking and I began to put weight on, but nobody noticed the change in my appearance. I refused to cry in front of David and would act the clown in front of him and the boys, and would always make them laugh.

When we returned to England, we had to stay with David's parents at first as accommodation had not yet been arranged for us. Although it wasn't so easy for me it was nice for the children to spend time with their grandparents, which they loved.

In the summer of 1966, we were moved to an RAF base in Norfolk. I remember it being very warm. Our house was not too far from the raspberry fields and I earned some money picking fruit in the fields whilst Paul, who was three years old at this time, slept in the shade. I loved spending time in the fresh air.

We were always on the move during David's time in the Royal Air Force. When he found a salesman position, selling fire hydrant equipment, we moved even more often. From Norfolk, we moved to



My boys: Jeremy (left) and Paul, 1967

Kent and then on to Bournemouth and I was never consulted about where we would live. We rented a beautiful flat in the most expensive road in Poole, Dorset.

David had a very high opinion of himself. He had to have the very best of everything: suit, briefcase and car. He lived on an overdraft and I started to become anxious about our financial situation. His boss took him on holiday to Rome for a week as a prize for doing so well with his sales. In the meantime, I had gone shopping for heater oil and started to chat with the sales assistant. I asked her if she knew of any flats to rent in the area, in the hope we could downsize. She said she actually owned a little cottage in Bruton, Somerset, and wanted to sell it. She offered to take me for a viewing and we drove the half-hour journey on the following Wednesday. It was a two-up, one-down. The bath was in the kitchen, that was covered with a wooden top and the toilet was outside. There was room for the children and it had a big garden, with the asking price of £320. I thought it was better to buy rather than rent and asked her to hang onto it for a month, which she agreed.



Jeremy (left) and Paul

When David returned from his holiday, his boss invited us both out for dinner. It was very rare for me to ever be included. His boss enquired about what I had been doing when they were in Rome. This was when David heard about the cottage for the first time. His manager said that buying the cottage would not be a problem and said: 'David, go see my solicitor in the morning, this is his address.' David had to be a proper man at this point. He was in debt already. This was the first time I felt like an adult and I wanted to take care of the mess we were in, in my way.

I had no accounting experience, not even a cheque book, and suggested David discussed it with his father, who agreed to lend us the money. I later learned that he never repaid his father for this loan. When the deal was done he left me to organise the house move alone.

I loved our new house. There was a farm at the end of our large garden which had a little stream and the children would spend hours playing outside. I created a new life for them and I made friends in the village. I had a good choice of babysitters from the boys and girls who attended the local schools, which made it easy for me to work with a friend, Peggy, at her father's B&B serving drinks during bowling matches.

My mental health problems got worse. Jeremy was about 10 and I would send both boys to their grandparents for the weekends. I know they felt deserted but I was unable to cope. I would have friends come to visit but they did not really understand what I was going through.

In 1968, David was invited to meet a new boss of Nu-Swift (a fire-extinguisher company) and was offered a job in Yorkshire. The house we were offered in Sowerby Bridge, Halifax, was absolutely awful. I really did not want the children living there. I should have put my foot down, but the company promised to move us into new accommodation soon after, so I agreed to move.

David ended up spending most of his time an hour and a half away in Morecambe. He had a great time living by the sea in his managerial job. I, on the other hand, was left in that awful house with the children and was never offered a new place to live after all. In those days women were expected to follow their husbands and I did what I thought was the right thing at the time. ■

Leeds, the bailiffs and divorce

DAVID WAS ALWAYS searching for a better job opportunity. His job started to fail so he found a position with an overseas investment company in Leeds and did well building up commission. I did not know at the time that he was not paying the mortgage on the cottage we still owned. He ended up selling it to Peggy's father from the village B&B for less than we paid for it, without telling me.

It was about 1969 or 1970 when I found a job at a boutique, *Sophisticante*, in Halifax. One day, David was at work and I was at home when there was a knock at my door. The bailiffs were standing in front of me, asking me if I had children. They told me that I had to vacate the house immediately and only take just enough belongings for myself and the children.

I rang my friends Joyce and Don, who lived in Headingley, Leeds, in a panic. Joyce drove to collect us, including our kittens, back to her house. I did not contact David.

Eventually, I plucked up the courage to contact David and tell him that I had had enough. I was going to work full-time and was looking for a place to live. He came to Leeds and took the children to stay in Kent with his parents. I found a job at a gown shop, Cyril Livingstone, in the town centre.

During my lunch hours I looked for somewhere to rent and found a little ground-floor bedsit on Lidgett Lane. It was one big room but I was happy to have my own space.

I wrote to Leeds city council asking for help as a working mother of two children. The housing association came to visit me and I was found to be eligible for social housing. I accepted the third flat they showed me on the Queenshill Estate in Moortown. It had a little balcony, a lounge and three bedrooms. David refused to give me a divorce and would come to see me when I was working, pleading with me that he didn't want to be on his own. He would say: 'I think we should give it another try, I want us to be together.' I was thinking of the children's needs and agreed to try again. He moved in with me and the children and we all settled into our new flat together.

David's maternal grandmother had just died and considering his father had passed away some time before, I invited his mother to stay with us for a while. Over the years I wrote many letters to David's parents telling them how badly he was treating me but I never posted them. I suppose it was the



I met my lifelong friends Margaret and Douglas in Cyprus, 1961. They have always stood by me and I appreciate their friendship. Douglas passed away a couple of years ago but my friendship with Margaret continues.

safest way of releasing my feelings at the time. It seems that during her time with us she must have noticed how he acted towards me and could see that I was a good person; I never lowered my standards, despite my mistreatment over the years. One day she was sat looking out of the window and said: 'I am so sorry, Sue. I didn't know how badly David treated you. If it was me, I would never have married him.'

Looking back I am so grateful to have had my friends, Joyce and Don, rescue me. I had no Jewish connections until I moved to Leeds, where there was a vibrant community enabling me to re-connect to my roots.

In 1976 I had endured enough: 19 years after we married, I decided to divorce David.

I spent years blaming myself for all the misfortune I experienced in life. I carried this burden around with me and it was eating me up inside. I felt like something was sitting on my chest and I couldn't breathe properly. No one helped me so I tried to help myself. I was always too inhibited to express how I really felt and, as a result, learned to be a very private person. I realised that I couldn't contain the anger inside me any longer. I began to write all my thoughts down. I would draw black, angry pictures with eyes. I would scrawl for days and days and then tear it all up. It was cathartic and it felt safe to deal with my inner turmoil like this.

When I was 45 I started to forgive myself. One morning, I woke up and realised that it was not my fault. ■



Me in 1976

Part 2

Searching for my missing loved ones

Reunited with Madame Collomb

IN 1969 MY son, Jeremy, who was 18 at the time, decided to visit Madame Collomb in Paris. He wanted to show his gratitude to her for helping me. He met her with a bouquet of flowers and remembers this being very well received by her.

The following year, in 1970, I arranged a visit to Madame Collomb myself. It took me 22 years after leaving France to finally return to Paris. This meeting was very emotional for me.

She handed me a shoe box to keep and it didn't become clear what it was until I returned to England. She had saved this box for 27 years and held on to the hope that we would reconnect one day. When I finally built up the courage to open it, it became clear that this wonderful lady had kept every shred of correspondence relating to myself and my parents. Every little note, letter, list and sheaf of paper saved was in that shoe box. The box that sat in front of me was offering me the opportunity to make sense of what had happened to me and my family.

I learned that my parents had been financially secure and had conjured up a plan with Madame Collomb, offering money in exchange for keeping me safe. She, however, kept me safe for no other reason than out of pure kindness. She never made a profit or took advantage of my parents' assets and saved the balance sheet of the costs which proved her honesty.

When I left Paris in 1947, Madame Collomb had packed up the French francs she had left over from the fund my parents had given her, along with a diamond ring and other jewellery. This was, however, somehow stolen from me on my journey to England.

In 1970, holding that shoe box, I realised that I had never been offered the opportunity to look back and face my past until that moment. Slowly, history started to unravel and I could finally build up a true picture of my past. ■

4000 = 7.43
 2000 = 3.71
 2000 = 3.71
 4000 = 7.43
 1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

1000 = 1.85
 500 = 0.93
 4000 = 7.43

Madame Collomb kept the scrap of paper she used to balance the float of money my parents gave her to pay for any costs incurred to ensure my safety.

The search begins

THE CONTENTS of the shoe box helped me to piece my childhood together and I started to search for my family. The addresses Madame Collomb had noted in the box helped me to trace my journey and pick up the threads of who was alive so I could try to re-connect with them. At that time there were four people left.

Uncle Mendel was about to retire from his successful tailoring business. Annette was well educated and met a fellow Holocaust survivor, Lazare. He owned a fur coat shop in Paris and had built up a good clientele. They had a daughter, Babette (Elizabeth), and a son, Philippe.

I never saw my father's sister Lonia or her husband Jacques Bernaud again after the war, but I found out that they had a son, Armand. They had another son, Simon, who was hidden throughout the war and had since died. I once met with my father's brother, Charles, and his wife, Pauline. It was a miracle that they both survived Auschwitz. They moved to Menton and lived on the border of Italy and the South of France. They both suffered with Alzheimer's in later life. They had two sons. George worked at The Pasteur Institute in Paris and Armand was an artist and lived in Roquebrune.

I never met my father's brother, Nataniel, who was known as Natan Rappaport. He stayed in Poland when my father left for Paris and then fled to Russia when Poland was invaded. He was able to work as an artist for some time until he was forced to work as a manual labourer during the war. He returned to study art in Warsaw after the war and emigrated to Israel, where he became a renowned sculptor. He dedicated most of his work to the Holocaust; they were works of deep sorrow. He was so highly regarded that Picasso apparently visited him. He sculpted the famous bronze monument *Scrolls of Fire* which was inaugurated in Jerusalem in 1971. He moved to Israel, then Paris and then onto America, where he died in 1987.

I kept searching for information. In the late 1990s, I noticed an article in an American magazine brought back by my friend Lyla who had just returned from New York. Until then I felt alone in my childhood experiences, but this article showed me that there must have been others out there as there were lawsuits beginning against the French Railway *SNCF* by pensioners who had been deported

by them as children. I wrote to the lawyer cited in the article who helped me to try to claim compensation, but I wasn't as successful as survivors who were living in America.

It was around this time that I had been speaking to a friend, Linda Grosier, about my past and feeling alone in having lived through a different childhood to others. She offered to post notices in local newspapers asking if there were others in the Leeds area who had been brought over from Nazi Europe. Quite a few people came forward and we created a social group called 'Continental Friends'.



The scenery on my return trip to Auvergne, circa 2016

It was around 2016 when I felt I wanted to re-visit Auvergne. Jeremy drove us all the way. We didn't see anyone and didn't go as far as the farmhouse as the path leading to it was too remote. Everything was just as I remembered it. It was springtime and the fields and hedges were full of wild flowers; there were cowslips everywhere. That was my highlight. It was magnificent.

In 2018, I discovered that *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), the French humanitarian organisation which assisted Jewish refugee children from France and other Western European countries, still existed. I contacted them to see if there was any more information I could find out about my past. Soon after, my friend, Dr Tracy Craggs, who works for the Holocaust Survivors' Friendship Association (HSFA) and the Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre in Huddersfield, accompanied me on a trip to Paris, where I collected a whole file from OSE that explained many missing pieces of my past.

It was during this visit that I met with my long-lost cousin Annette and her son Philippe. I learned that Annette's family had actually offered to share the responsibility for my care and education had I stayed in Paris. ■

SURVIVORS OF THE
S H O A H
VISUAL HISTORY FOUNDATION

16 July 1997

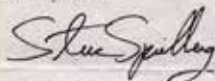
Dear Ms. Ripton,

In sharing your personal testimony as a survivor of the Holocaust, you have granted future generations the opportunity to experience a personal connection with history.

Your interview will be carefully preserved as an important part of the most comprehensive library of testimonies ever collected. Far into the future, people will be able to see a face, hear a voice, and observe a life, so that they may listen and learn, and always remember.

Thank you for your invaluable contribution, your strength, and your generosity of spirit.

All my best,



Steven Spielberg
Chairman

MAIN OFFICE · POST OFFICE BOX 3168 · LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90078-3168 · PHONE 818.777-7802 FAX 818.733-0312

I received a letter of thanks from Steven Spielberg after my interview in 1997 by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation.

My parents' and grandparents' fate

I LIVED MUCH of my life unaware of what happened to my parents. In 2006, I felt ready to find out and decided to contact the International Tracing Service. I learned that after I saw my parents for the last time in 1942, they were initially interned in Drancy transit camp, located in a northeastern suburb of Paris, before they were both transported to Auschwitz on 24 August. My mother was gassed upon arrival.

For over two years, my father was a prisoner in one of the largest Auschwitz sub-camps, Jawiszowice where he was forced to work in a coal mine. On 10 June 1943, he somehow managed to write to Madame Collomb at her address, 58 Rue de Belleville, and the postcard miraculously made it out of the camp. It read:

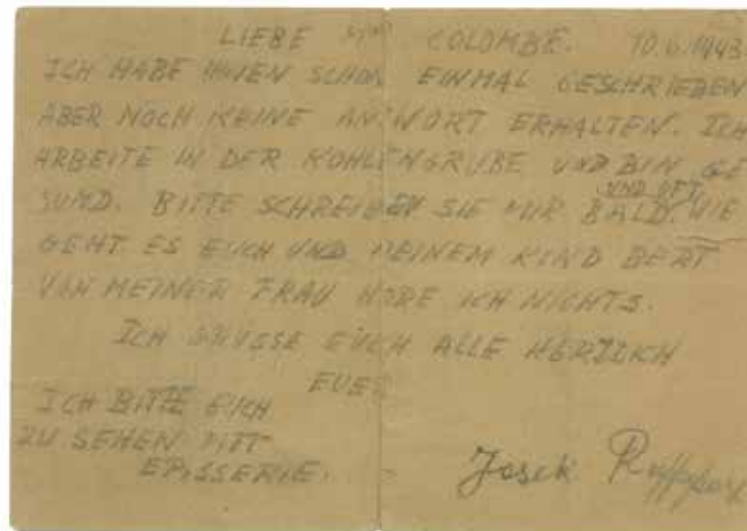
'Dear Madame Collomb, I have written to you once but have not yet received an answer. I work in the coal mine and I am healthy. Please write to me soon and often. How are you and my child, Bert? I have heard nothing from my wife. I send greetings to you all. I would like you to send me some food. Ever, Josek'

On 28 October 1944, he was transported to Stutthof concentration camp where prisoners were forced to work in an airfield. A few weeks later, on 17 November 1944, he endured an evacuation march and died soon after reaching Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. If he had only lived just a few more months, he would have been liberated by the Russians.

When the SS men turned to my grandmother in my parents' apartment on *that* day, they had threatened to return for her, something which they did one year later. My grandmother perished in Auschwitz. It appears that my grandfather was too weak to survive the internment camp at Drancy and died soon after they were arrested. ■



The envelope to my father's postcard was addressed from the Auschwitz sub-camp Jawiszowice, to Madame Collomb on 10 June 1943.



I donated the original copy of my father's postcard to The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It was extraordinary that it made it out of the camp.

Madame Collomb – Righteous Among The Nations

MADAME YVONNE COLLOMB was an incredible, strong and determined woman. She was lovely inside and out and helped me to see the good in human nature. Without her selflessness I wouldn't be here today. She risked her own life for me. She followed through with the agreement that she had made with my parents to keep me safe, and she carried this out in the face of danger, with a great deal of precision and care. The courage and fearlessness she demonstrated had a lasting effect on me.

I just had to pick up the pieces and move forward with my life. Nobody offered advice on the best route to take, it was all guesswork for me. My parents brought me up beautifully until I was six years old, but I just don't know how I managed not to fall apart when Madame Collomb took over. To me, that's a mystery. I do not know what made me so strong. I have shaken off so much hardship. People have told me that they don't believe my story as it sounds so far-fetched, but everything that happened to me is backed up with documentation to prove it, thanks to Madame Collomb's shoe box.

Madame Collomb died quite young, she wasn't even 60. I never managed to really get to know her, but to me she was the perfect example of how to behave. She didn't give me anything physical, but her strength, selflessness and compassion set the standard for me in life. It gave me a backbone. '*Colombe*' means 'dove' in French and I have called her my 'lovely dove' all these years.



Invitation from the Mayor of Ivry-sur-Seine to the Yad Vashem ceremony on 29 May 2006 where a representative of the Israeli Embassy in France presented the medal honouring Madame Collomb posthumously to her daughter.



On my trip to Paris in 2006. It was wonderful to meet my cousin Armand for the first time.



When I visited Paulette in 2006, she gave me the doll I had played with when I was in hiding in her family home. I donated my dolly to Beth Shalom, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Newark.



I re-visited the wash house on my trip to Mondoubleau.

In 2006 BBC journalist Barbara Bader and her husband, Paul, accompanied me on my sentimental journey retracing my past in Paris to film BBC Two's *The Hidden Children*. I was filmed meeting with her daughter Madame Paul (Paula) Baronett and we visited the flat where I lived with my parents.

I had spent quite some time in communication with Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Israel, working to provide Madame Yvonne Collomb with an honour for her bravery. After significant proof of her altruistic actions, Madame Collomb was honoured as a non-Jewish person who risked her life to save Jews. This honour is officially known as: 'Righteous Among The Nations'. During my visit to Paris

Timewatch: The Hidden Children
 BBC2 9pm Friday 27th April



They were hidden from the Nazis to save their lives. Now from all over the world they return to their secret hiding places to tell heart-breaking, hair-raising stories of survival.



Timewatch: The Hidden Children
 BBC2 9pm Friday 27th April




Sienna, Rachel, Peter and Suzanne are alive today because they were hidden from the Nazis. Told in their own words, these are the hair-raising stories of young children who were taken in by individuals and organisations determined that even as all their parents were killed, they should live. The risks were very great - for the children and for those who helped them, some of whom were tortured or killed.

As these survivors return to the places in the French countryside where they were hidden 65 years ago, powerful emotions are released. The events they recall are things few adults have faced - yet these were children between six and fifteen years old. What happened cost them their childhood, and shaped the rest of their lives.

Produced and Directed by Jon Hacker
 Associate Producer Florence Galliard
 Executive Producers Barbara Govan and Paul Bader
 Timewatch Editor John Farren

in 2006, delegates of the French committee for Yad Vashem arrived and held a special service in Paula's local town hall of Ivry-sur-Seine to honour Madame Collomb. I stood beside Madame Collomb's children and grandchildren when they were presented with a medal and certificate on her behalf, of which they were very proud. I named my youngest son Paul to connect my past with my life today. I could never repay Madame Collomb's family for her kindness, but I wanted to offer them something special to show my utmost appreciation and decided on some beautiful gifts made from Italian glass.

Over the years, Paulette from Mondoubleau and my cousin Annette had stayed in touch. Paulette had asked her for my address and we re-connected. We couldn't really communicate very well as she couldn't speak English and I didn't know any French. I arranged to visit her after my trip to Paris. She lives in a very nice part of the Loire Valley and we went for a wonderful meal with her lovely family. She said she missed me when I left Mondoubleau. She presented me with my doll that I played with when I lived with her. I couldn't ask her anything about what happened to me because she didn't know, so all we had were childish memories. She certainly remembered the winter when the army tanks were in Mondoubleau. They struggled to reach the top of the hill, slipping and sliding in the ice. Since my trip back there we have kept in touch and tell each other that we love each other. She's a wonderful person. ■



Our reunion in 2018. My cousin Annette and her son Dr Philippe Etlinger, who is a cardiologist in Paris.



I found a postcard in a shop on my return trip. This captured my memories of Mondoubleau perfectly. Artist unknown.



I was one of six Holocaust survivors interviewed for the animated series *Children of the Holocaust* which was commissioned by the BBC and produced by Fettle Animation. Here I am with the producer, Kath Shackleton, and the animator Ryan Jones at the BAFTAs along with an interviewer, May 2015.



In 2018, on signing the receipt of all the documents OSE handed over to me. It was at this moment I felt I my identity returned. I was Miss Nobody becoming Miss Somebody.

OSE

O EUVRE DE **S**ECOURS AUX **E**NFANTS

Direction Générale : 62 RUE SPONTINI
 PARIS (XVI^e)

Téléphone :
 PASSY 99-88
 - 18-76
 - 14-93

Adresse Télégraphique :
 OSENFANTS-PARIS

le 23 Janvier 1946

SERVICE FINANCIER

R E Ç U

Nous certifions avoir reçu ce jour de Madame COLLOMB, une somme de :

II.600 Frs (onze mille six cents Francs)

ainsi que les objets suivants :

- 1 chevalière en or
- 1 bague en or
- 1 petite bague et 1 petite pierre également en or
- 1 montre-bracelet en or.

appartenant à Melle Berthe RAPPOPPORT.

nous lui en donnons décharge par la présente.

[Signature] *E. Masour*

This letter confirms the small amount of money and jewellery belonging to my parents that OSE handed back to me before I left for England.



Along with documents, there were photos in OSE's file. This was just one of them; Nini (middle), the young lady who escorted me on my journey to England. Here she is surrounded by some of the children she rescued.



Nini in later life. I was saddened to learn that she had passed away before I could meet her again.



I hold the Smith family very dear to me. Stephen's (pictured with me) parents founded Beth Shalom, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Newark, which I consider my spiritual home. They understood me and as soon as I was introduced to them in the 1990s, it felt like I was coming home to my family.



Dr Tracy Craggs (left) of the Holocaust Survivors Friendship Association has been a great support to me over the years and joined me on my trip back to Paris in 2018.



I was invited to a reception at St James's Palace for Holocaust Memorial Day in 2005.

68



The official photographer at St James's Palace sent me the photo (right) with this cover note.



This photo was taken by the official photographer during the reception at St James's Palace, 2005.

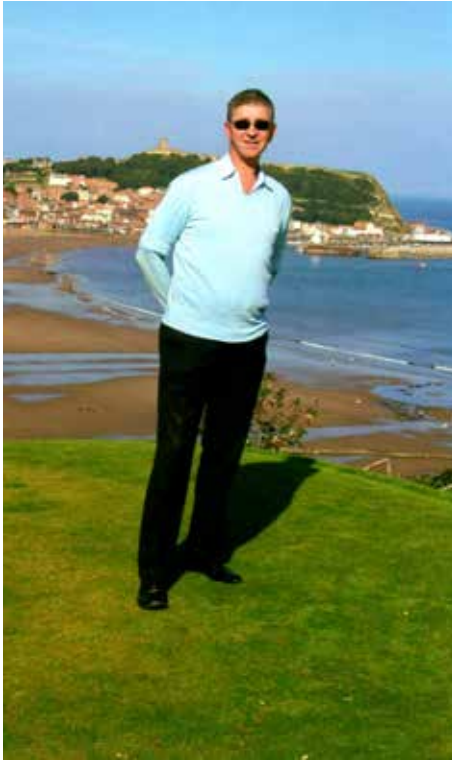
Looking back on my struggle

I HAVE NEVER been able to write down my childhood experiences. I have been unable to find the words to describe my past. My memories are short film clips and images in my mind, just minor illustrations, no words. Like the time my thumb became jammed in a train door, which somebody closed on me. That was a terrible experience and it plays like a little film in my mind.

My past has shaped who I am. It has taken me a lifetime to find out what happened to my family and understand what happened to me. As a child I only had contact with very strong women so I, too, grew up determined and strong. Nature played an important role in my younger years and I still have those clear images that surrounded me every day in my childhood. Because of this I love to soak up the beauty of nature whenever I have the opportunity today.

Animals also played a big part in my early life and this made me sensitive and compassionate. Although I'm not a scientist, in my imagination I would have liked to have been a doctor or a vet. I have always liked taking care of people and animals.

I lived a life that taught me a lot about survival. I never had anybody by my side in my formative years to offer guidance, support or care. I learned everything through trial and error and gained a lot of common sense from it. I survived as a result of the risks people took in hiding me for which I will always be grateful. ■



Jeremy



Left to right: My grandson Jonathan, me, Paul, my great-grandson Oliver, my daughter-in-law Patricia, my granddaughters Sophie and Sarah.



This book is dedicated to my mother and father as a thank you for giving me my life. (Photo of the rose bush in memory of my parents in the memorial gardens of Beth Shalom, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Newark)



About the AJR

Founded in 1941 by Jewish refugees from Central Europe, The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) is the national charity representing and supporting Holocaust refugees and survivors living in Great Britain. Primarily delivering social, welfare and care services, the AJR has a nationwide network of regional groups offering members a unique opportunity to socialise in their local area. Members receive support from volunteers and can obtain advice and assistance on welfare rights as well as on Holocaust reparations.

The AJR is committed to the education of future generations about the Holocaust and is now the UK's largest benefactor of education and memorialisation programmes and projects which promote teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

About 70,000 refugees, including approximately 10,000 children on the *Kindertransport*, arrived in Great Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930s. The AJR extends membership to anyone who fled a Nazi-occupied country as a Jewish refugee or who arrived in Great Britain as a Holocaust survivor. We also welcome the descendants and spouses of the refugees as members.



**“I survived as a result
of the risks people
took in hiding me,
for which I will
always be grateful.”**

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk