

## **Henri (Hirsh) Borlant**

Brother of Leon Borlant and Odette Borlant - photographed both separately and together

Wartime Experience: Concentration Camp Survivor

I was Born on 5th of June 1927 in Paris 10th arrondissement, son of Aaron Borlant and Rachel Besnoz. My father was the son of Hersch Borlant and Guittel Krovatska. My mother was the eldest daughter of Hersch Beznos and Sarah Grenitz. My father came from Nove-Mayatchika next to Odessa. My mother came from Kechiniev in Bessarabia.

### **Brothers and sisters:**

Léon born 1917 in Paris

Denise born 1921 died in deportation.

Bernard born 1925 died in deportation.

Roger born 1929 in Paris

Odette born 1931 in Paris

Jeanette born 1932 in Paris – died Dec 2,1935

France born 1934 in Paris

Madeleine born 1936 in Paris

Raymonde born 1939 St. Lambert du Lattsy (Maine et Loire).

Ours was the life of a very large immigrant family with many difficulties to supply their needs. Their desire to be assimilated was very great, therefore they gave their children French Christian names. The practice of religion was virtually absent from our home and we didn't eat kosher food. Nevertheless, the boys were circumcised and celebrated their Bar-mitzvahs. That is the case for Léon and Bernard. Our maternal grandparents practiced the religion and ate kosher food.

It was a happy life. Our parents worked at home and therefore were always present. My mother took care of the household and also helped my father in his tailoring work that he did at home. The children went to a secular primary school. The War threatened and we left Paris at the end of August 1939. The whole family was sent to a village inside the department called Maine et Loire next to Angers, where we settled down to await the end of the war.

We lived there by adapting ourselves to that new country life. The environment was very Catholic, and we went to the Catholic religious school. My father worked at home for a tailor next to the village. My brother Bernard was employed and lived in a farm with the farmers in the neighborhood. My brother Léon who served as a soldier in the Fighting French army was captured by the Germans in May 1940. One year later he was discharged, as he was the eldest child of a big family. He stayed in Paris and very quickly became involved with the Resistance Movement.

My mother's parents were in Paris and were deported to Auschwitz in 1943 where they perished. My mother also had three sisters: Fanny, Blanche, and Pauline. Fanny, a member of the Resistance Movement and a Communist, lived in Belgium. She was arrested, tortured and interned in Ravensbrück (Germany). She then was transferred to Auschwitz where she perished. Blanche and her husband Georges joined the Resistance Movement first in France, then in London with General de Gaulle.

On 15th of July 1942 the German soldiers came to our home. They arrested all those who were aged between 15 and 50 years. That meant my mother aged 42, my sister Denise aged 21, my brother Bernard and myself aged 15. We were imprisoned in the next town called Angers (Maine et Loire). Two days later my mother was taken back home and my father arrested instead. He joined us in Angers where we stayed five days, the men separated from the women. We left Angers on the 20th of July in a train in cattle trucks directly to Auschwitz. We were 824 Jews, of whom 390 were women. Of this group there were only 14 survivors in 1945, all men. None of the women survived. Two or three months after our arrest the Germans decided to arrest my mother and the 5 small children left with her. Alerted by a French policeman, they were able to escape and to hide until the end of the war.

I was deported to Auschwitz, Birkenau and was transferred from there to Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Ohrdruff. I escaped from the concentration camp Ohrdruff on April 31 1945 with a Polish Jew named Henry Ehrenberg while the camp was being evacuated. The following day, the American soldiers penetrated the town of Ohrdruff where we had been hidden. We led the American soldiers to discover the camp. They immediately informed the Allied headquarters. Several days later, Generals Eisenhower, Patton and Bradley accompanied by many press correspondents, filmmakers and photographers arrived. They let the whole world know about the first discovery of the mass of dead bodies in open common graves. The dead, spread out in the yard, had been executed because they were ill or dying of exhaustion and could not walk anymore or stand up by themselves.

Back in Paris in April 1945 I found my mother and my brothers and sisters. My father, my brother Bernard and my sister Denise did not come back. They died in Auschwitz in 1942 a few months after arriving.

Our sadness is tremendous. My mother was a widow and had to raise 6 children. The youngest Raymonde was only 5 1/2 years old and I would soon be 18. But we were happy to be together again, which gave us some energy. I decided to start studying first in public school to gain my baccalaureate, with the motivation to undertake medical studies to be a doctor. This was bound to present considerable difficulties due to my advanced age. No public school in Paris wanted to integrate me with 11- to 12-year-old boys whose level was so much higher than mine.

Three years later I finally obtained my " baccalaureate ". I entered the University of Science in Paris to gain the first diploma, which was the passport to medical study. In 1948 I started coughing and spitting blood and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. I spent three months in a

hospital and then was sent back to Germany to a sanitarium for French students in the Occupied French zone.

In spite of another interruption due to the relapse of this illness in 1952-1953, I finished my studies and opened a medical office in 1958 in Paris where I practiced as a surgeon for 25 years. In 1960 I married Hella Holst who was born in Leipzig, Germany in 1940. Leipzig was in Eastern Germany after the war. When she was 10 years old, she and her family secretly fled the Eastern zone to escape the domination of communism. She was 17 when she discovered the crimes of the Nazis and the Holocaust, and she then decided to leave Germany.

We have three girls: Danièle born on 10th of March 1961, Catherine born on 23rd of May 1962, and Valentine born on 19th of October 1977, all three in Paris. Danièle lives with Pierre they have two boys and live in Annecy (Savoie). Catherine is married to an American. They have a boy and a girl and live in Portland, Oregon, where William works. Valentine lives in Paris.

I also have an older daughter who lives in Alsace. She is married to a surgeon. They have 3 children, 1 boy and 2 girls. They are part of our family.

Since 1992 I have worked for the transmission of the memory of the SHOAH. I am frequently invited by public schools, high schools, and universities to attend conferences and debates about the Shoah. I also take part in gathering interviews of survivors of the Holocaust extermination camps. I direct films of witness interviews. I have been interviewed by many radio, press and television journalists, by historians and university researchers on many different matters concerning the Holocaust.

I worked as a technical adviser to a filmmaker named Gilles Chevalier, whose film is called "Sans Oublier les Enfants," and I took part in the creation of a CD relating the deportation from France to Germany during the war. I took responsibility of the part relating the deportation of the French Jews and in general of the Shoah of Europe. I am a member of the history commission of the Amicale d'Auschwitz and one of the administrators of the Foundation of the Memory of Deportation in France.

---

### **Des dossiers du Mémorial de la Shoah-Paris**

Henri BORLANT

Hirsh(dit Henri) BORLANT né le 05/06/1927 à PARIS 10ème de Aaron BORLANT et Rachel BEZNOS (RUSSIE)

Déporté par convoi n°8 du 20/07/1942 d'ANGERS vers AUSCHWITZ avec son père, sa sœur Denise et son frère Bernard qui mourront en déportation.

Vie de famille nombreuse dont les parents émigrés ont un ardent désir de s'intégrer en France en donnant à leurs enfants des prénoms français. Les enfants fréquentent l'école laïque. 1939, nous quittons PARIS pour le Maine et Loire, près d'ANGERS. Là, nous étudions dans une école religieuse catholique. Le 15/07/1942, les Allemands arrêtent ma mère, ma sœur Denise, mon frère Bernard et moi. Nous sommes emprisonnés à ANGERS. 2 jours plus tard ma mère est libérée, mais mon père arrêté à son tour vient nous rejoindre. Nous partons le 20/07/1942 directement pour AUSCHWITZ. Dans le wagon à bestiaux nous sommes 824 juifs. Seuls 14 survivront. Le 03/04/1945 je m'évade du camp d'OHRDRUF avec Henry EZENBERG. Le lendemain les soldats américains pénètrent dans OHRDRUF où nous nous étions cachés. Nous faisons découvrir aux Américains le camp d'OHRDRUF. Le 12/04/1945 les généraux EISENOWER, PATTON et BRADLEY, accompagnés de nombreux photographes, cinéastes et correspondants de guerre, feront connaître au monde entier les premiers charniers. Retour à PARIS, j'ai 18 ans et je veux commencer des études secondaires pour devenir médecin. 1ère étape, j'obtiens mon baccalauréat 3 ans plus tard, mais je suis atteint de la tuberculose. Hospitalisation plus sanatorium en Allemagne, en zone d'occupation française. Plus tard je termine mes études et m'installe à PARIS 11ème où j'exercerai la médecine pendant 25 ans. Maintenant je fais des conférences dans les Ets scolaires sur la shoah, puis je recueille des témoignages de survivants des camps d'extermination.