

Renee Eskenazi

Wartime Experience: Concentration Camp Survivor

Born the 31st of August 1926, in Paris (12th, Arrondissement to Salvator ESKENAZI and Fortunee HIKIM, his wife.

One sister, Victorine GALLIOT, born ESKENAZI

One brother, Joseph Alain ESKENAZI.

My family came to France in the 1920'2 from Constantinople, Turkey. My father at the age of 12 years and my mother at 16 years. My paternal grandmother had four sons and was the widow of Abraham EZKENAZI. My maternal grandmother had four children, 2 boys and 2 girls and was a widow of Joseph HIKIM.

We lived in the 11 Arrondissement, the quarter for Sephardic Jews. We had very close family ties and a life without any problems. My father worked in textiles and my mother had a little workshop making lingerie. At school my sister and I were totally integrated in the French culture. Our parents spoke to us only in French, and it was only when we had family evenings that the Ladino language was used.

During the war we lived through the exodus of June 1940. The year 1941 saw us obliged to wear the yellow star. At school I was not kept apart, I had all kinds of friends whereas the members of my family experienced prejudice. My father, who had a lingerie-making workshop, was forbidden to access it. We moved in 1941, and my father left to hide himself in the city of Nantes,

The restrictions revolted me, and the Germans had many collaborators in our county. Massive arrests left families in disarray. My uncles were sent to Drancy, the antechamber of death where they were starved, between August and November when they were deported from there.

Tomorrow will be whose turn? My father came to see us episodically and tried to be responsible for us. His turn came at the end of 1942. He was sent to Drancy then to Auschwitz by convoy Number 40.

My brother came into the world in 1943 and went into hiding in April 1944 with some good people whom we neither knew their name or address. Two months later it was my turn to be arrested at my parent's home along with my mother and my sister. Drancy—Auschwitz, the 4th of July 1944. It was an infernal shock, deafening, getting out of the railroad car. My grandmother climbed into the truck for the "Final Solution". The sky in flames, the acrid smell that thickens in your throat, it is the beginning of hell. I am lucid and I am lucky not to be

separated from my mother and sister, “good for work”, Tattooing in the first place. I will never be able to forget the heart-breaking separation of families at the arrival.

I suffered the climatic events of the plains of Upper Silesia, the dog days, the thirst, the violent winds, the snow, and the clay. In this countryside even a crow is entitled to be accepted. Why did I never know the springtime? My 18th springtime was spent in the mud, pushing wagons that always derailed with their load, and we had the right to receive a round of beatings. In this arena the Kapos showed themselves to be sometimes generous. Facing famine, vermin, confusion, fear, a bulwark, dignity, fortified by solidarity and my thirst of life helped me.

In October 1944 I was separated from my mother and sister. Three weeks later I found my mother for a final goodbye. I was leaving, in a cattle car, for Flossenburg, to the auto factory-Union.

In April 1945, with the approach of our English liberators, a new cattle car took us to the ghetto of Theresienstadt. Finally, May 8 1945, Asiatic Russians crossed the camp, and the Red Army would liberate us. I returned the 1st of June to Lyon, the 6th to Paris where I hoped to find my sister Victorine. An emotional and painful reunion. We knew that we no longer had parents, but I was to find my little 2-year-old brother, a little child whom I didn't know. We taught him to know his parents through some pictures. We lived then at 10 rue Parmentier at Montreuil sous Bois with two other deportees, also orphans.

In 1951 I had a little girl Joelle Eskenazi; in 1954 I had a son, Christian Eskenazi. I was a Managing Director in the fashion industry with my companion. He died on January 29, 1977. I have 5 grandchildren and one great grandson.

Later I became active in the organization Friends of the Deported of Auschwitz, and I found warmth with those that had shared the same fate. I bear witness in Paris and the surrounding areas. Also at Auschwitz, with groups of young and the families of deportees searching for their past, without hate, without forgetting, eyes turned toward the future.

Des dossiers du Mémorial de la Shoah–Paris

Renée ESKENAZI

née le 31/08/1926 à PARIS 12ème de Salvator ESKENAZI et Fortunée HIKIM (TURQUIE).

Enfant de déportés : Salvator convoi n° 40 du 04/11/1942 et Fortunée convoi n° 76 du 30/06/1944.

Déportée le 30/06/1944 par convoi n° 76 depuis DRANCY direction AUSCHWITZ.

Mes parents sont venus en France dans les années 1920 en provenance de CONSTANTINOPLE. Vie à PARIS dans le quartier des « sépharades ». 1941, port de l'étoile jaune, interdiction pour mon père de travailler. Par conséquent il part se cacher à NANTES. Mais il sera arrêté fin 1942, expédié à DRANCY puis à AUSCHWITZ par le convoi n° 40 du 04/11/1942. Ma mère, ma sœur, ma grand-mère et moi arriverons le 04/07/1944 à AUSCHWITZ. Ma grand-mère montera directement dans le camion pour être gazée. Nous autres, bonnes pour le travail, seront tatouées et effectuerons de durs travaux. En octobre 1944 j'ai connu le REVIER de BIRKENAU : j'avais les pieds brûlés. Séparée de ma mère, je la retrouve 3 semaines plus tard pour un ultime adieu. Ma sœur était partie à BERGEN-BELSEN. Avril 1945, je suis conduite au ghetto de THERESIENSTADT. 08/05/1945 libérée par l'ARMEE ROUGE. Retour à PARIS le 06/06/1945 où je retrouve ma sœur. Nous n'avons plus de parents. Mais plus tard la rencontre d'un compagnon. J'ai 2 enfants. J'ai milité à l'AMICALE DES DEPORTES D'AUSCHWITZ où j'ai retrouvé la chaleur de ceux qui ont partagé le même sort. Je fais des témoignages à PARIS, en province, et aussi à AUSCHWITZ avec des groupes de jeunes et des familles de déportés.