

## Rachel Jedinak

### Wartime Experience: Hidden

My parents Abram and Chana Psankiewicz came from Warsaw, Poland. They emigrated to France in the 1920s. and met and married in Paris. Two daughters were born: my sister, Louise, in 1929, and me April 30, 1934. We lived in the 20th 'arrondissement', a neighborhood where many immigrants lived. From this time, I have kept blurred images, and happy memories of a beloved childhood.

Then came the declaration of war in 1939. My father joined the army (21st regiment of foreign volunteers) to defend France, the families, and values of the country. During the Exodus from Paris, my mother, my sister and I left in a truck, with my uncle, aunt and cousins. (All of them were deported later on.) I remember a bombardment during our flight. The adults were screaming: "The Italians are shooting at us". We could see the pilots pinpointing the civilians. They were flying so low that we could see their leather helmets. This vision is still with me. The Germans finally "caught up" with us as we fled. Then, without any plans we returned to Paris.

My father was discharged from the army. We spent a few months together. We were home again. On the 14th of May 1941, summoned for paper verification, that famous "green" paper, my father ended up being arrested and sent to the Beaune-La-Rolande camp, where he spent 13 months. We obtained the authorization once to go visit him. He was deported to Auschwitz, on the 27th of June 1942, in the convoy #5 and never returned.

My mother, my sister, and I managed to survive with difficulty. On the 16th of July 1942, was the roundup of Jews at the Vel d'Hiv. The day before, my mother having heard rumors about it, had hidden us, my sister and I, at the paternal grandparents who lived very close by. She probably had heard that on that day, old people would not be taken.

At dawn, we heard a strong knock at our grandparents' door. Two policemen, one in a uniform, and the other one in plain clothes gave us the order to follow them to join our mother. On the way, they told us: "You can thank the concierge, she is the one who told us where you were." Then the three of us were taken to an assembly point, at "la Bellevilloise", rue Boyer, in the 20th arrondissement. There were many of us, all squeezed together. My mother, who only had one thought in mind, wanted to see us flee... She kept telling the other women: "No, we are not leaving to work in Germany. One can't work with small children." At that point, a neighbor came close to my mother and told her: "Lea, my adolescent daughter has just left through an emergency exit." My mother ordered us to do the same, and to return to our grandparents. I didn't want to do it, I was 8 years old, I held on to her skirt. My mother slapped us to force us to react. At that moment, I did not realize that it was an act of love and of despair for her...

In tears, we ran back to our grandparents. When the two of us arrived at the front door, we saw the two policemen. They looked away as if to not see us.

My mother was sent to Drancy where she stayed for 13 days before she was deported to Auschwitz in the convoy # 12 on the 29th of July 1942. She never returned. We went twice to Drancy to try to see her. Some people lent us magnifying glasses to see her from far away, behind the barbed wires.

For a few months, life got organized, with difficulty. Six of us shared one small room without running water (with us was our uncle and aunt, whose children had been deported). I went back to school, in the 20th arrondissement, in the Fall of 1942, trying, at times, to hide the yellow star sewn on my clothes. Sometimes children made fun of me. In times of danger, the headmistress would gather the 4 or 5 little Jewish girls who had come to school, and she would have the housekeeper take them to the school cellar. I pay tribute to her courage as many Jewish children had already been either deported or hidden.

On the 11th of February 1943, even the old people were picked up. The policemen took my grandmother, my sister, and I to the Police headquarter, Place Gambetta, in the 20th arrondissement, leaving our handicapped grandfather alone. He died soon after. Luckily, my uncle and aunt, who were hidden with us, had not spent that night with us.

We were piled up in the basement of the police station. We were the only two children among frightened old people. I was cold, I had chicken pox. My big sister told me: "we are going to jump behind the policeman when the trap door opens." We barged into the main room of the police headquarters. People had been arrested in the night. They said angry words against the police: "they are attacking children, it is shameless." Upon this, the police seemed embarrassed, and ended up by saying to us: "get out of here." Our grandmother was released a couple of hours later... but we could not stay in the area, it was too dangerous. First, we went and stayed in a center of the UGIF, General Union of French Jews. But another uncle and aunt felt that we were not safe in that place and got us out of there. I then lived separated from my sister in precarious conditions. I stayed in different families for short periods of time, Catholic, Jewish ones. The fear of being picked up was constant. Adults kept talking about it.

A few months before liberation, I was given a false ID card. I was now called Rolande Sanier. A month before liberation, I was taken by a cousin to a nanny at Château-Renault, where I was unhappy, sometimes poorly treated. I have repressed my nanny's name. My sister was also taken to this small town, but as a "maid" to good people, Mr. et Mrs. Proust.

At Chateau-Renault, I could not confide in anyone. I became introverted. My cousin's nanny, noticing how distressed I was, pulled me away from this woman and took me to her sister and brother-in-law: Mr. et Mrs. Saillard, who had two daughters who calmed me down and were affectionate with me.

When liberation took place, we returned to Paris in a truck full of apples and found our apartment again, locked and empty. What a shock. The lamps had been torn from the ceiling, we had to use an oil lamp to see. There was no more furniture, or anything that could remind us of our parents. Fortunately, the children of our uncle and aunt brought us bags of groceries,

as times were hard. Finally, war was at an end. Joy was everywhere in the streets. Few survivors arrived at the Hotel Lutecia. I went there with my sister, holding pictures of our parents, but it was in vain. I hoped for a long time to see my parents again. But one had to finally face reality I would never see them again.

Then, my sister got married. I was 14 years old. I was sent to one of my father's cousins in Belgium. I stayed there for a few months. Then, I joined my sister and brother-in-law in Israel, in 1949, for 4 months, and together we finally got back to Paris. Again, it was a time of wandering. I had a difficult and confused adolescence. I was again going from one family to the other. I started working at 14, doing small jobs to pay for my food. At 16 and a half, I lived alone in a small room without running water, without any comfort, being entirely responsible for myself. First, I did sewing in a clothing manufacture, then I was a saleswoman. I married a man whose parents had also been deported. My daughter was born. I finally had a family of my own. But unfortunately, I was widowed at 41. I had a life of hard work, but also so much happiness, shared tenderness and satisfaction with my daughter, son-in-law, and two grandsons. It is my revenge.

I regret not to have been able to continue my studies, but as an adult, I have had the opportunity for many years to take evening classes in different fields, which has allowed me to be more structured, and to try to make up intellectually for what I lacked emotionally.

It is in 1978, thanks to the "Memorial de la Déportation" of Serge Klarsfeld, that I learned my family and my parents' fate : dates of the convoys, destinations, and death. It is only from then that I could start to mourn, or at least partly. Almost all my family and the entire Warsaw family was exterminated.

In 1994, when I retired, I became secretary of the association "Mémoire Juive de Paris". The picture exhibits that we organized in city halls on the theme " L'immigration Juive et Son Intégration Dans la Nation de 1880 à 1948", and our book "Images de la Mémoire Juive" still serve as learning examples.

Then, in 1997, the Tlemcen committee of the 20th arrondissement was created to place commemorative plaques in the schools, in memory of Jewish children who died in the camps. I became a member right away, since the school, rue Tlemcen, had been my elementary school, and so many children from there had been exterminated. Many teachers are very supportive, and do a remarkable job of research, and of educating the children.

We then formed the committee Joseph Migneret "Juste Parmi les Nations" in the 4th arrondissement, with the same objective : to place commemorative plaques in schools where so many children had gone and had been deprived of their future only because they had been Jewish. It is being done everywhere in Paris today, in the suburbs, and in the Provinces of France. We give testimonies to all children and to adolescents. We explain how our lives so abruptly changed during this horrific time. Our motto after the war was : Never again. But unfortunately, atrocities continue in the world, men, women, and children are being killed.

I also give testimonies to junior high and high school students. Talking to young people, giving all these testimonies allows me to make them aware of the dangers of racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, intolerance in general, which can lead to the worst atrocities if we are not careful. Let us all be watchful. This drives me to do this, and I will continue doing it as long as I possibly can. The drawings and the letters I receive from the children and the adolescents comfort me and make me want to continue doing these activities.

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

Rachel JEDINAK

Enfant Cachée

née PSANKIEWICZ née le 20/04/1934 à PARIS 12ème de Abram PSANKIEWICZ et Chana Gitla ZYTO émigrés de POLOGNE, arrivés en France en 1920.

Enfant de déportés et enfant cachée père, convoi 5 du 27/6/42, mère convoi 12 du 29/7/42 pour AUSCHWITZ

Nous vivons dans le 20ème arrondissement de PARIS. En 1939 mon père s'engage dans l'armée française. Nous quittons PARIS, en route sommes bombardés par des avions italiens. Retour à PARIS. 1941 : mon père démobilisé, est arrêté et conduit au camp de BEAUNE-LA-ROLANDE. Après 13 mois de détention il est déporté à AUSCHWITZ (convoi n°5 du 27/6/1942). Il ne reviendra pas. 16/07/42 : arrêtés par des policiers français, sommes conduits à LA BELLEVILLOISE, centre de rassemblement, d'où je m'enfuis avec ma sœur. Ma mère, conduite à DRANCY, sera déportée à AUSCHWITZ (convoi n° 12 du 29/07/1942). Sans retour. 1942 : scolarité rue de Tlemcen où la directrice cachera les enfants juifs dans les caves de l'école. 11/02/1943 : rafle des vieillards, nous sommes conduites avec ma grand-mère au Commissariat place Gambetta et sommes relâchées. Séjour rue Lamarck géré par l'UGIF puis diverses caches en France sous l'identité de Rolande SANIER. Libération, retour à PARIS. Adolescence difficile, mariage avec un fils de déportés. En 1978, j'apprends enfin le sort de mes parents et de ma famille tous décimés dans cette guerre. Depuis 1994, je suis secrétaire à l'association « LA MEMOIR JUIVE DE PARIS ». J'organise des expositions et je témoigne.