

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

IDA FIRESTONE

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Marcia Goldberg
Date: August 2, 2004

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IF - Ida Firestone [interviewee]

MG - Marcia Goldberg [interviewer]

Date: August 2, 2004

Tape one, side one:

MG: Today is August 2, 2004. My name is Marcia Goldberg and I will be interviewing Ida Firestone at her home in Philadelphia. This is tape one, side one. Miss--could tell me your name and spell it for us please?

IF: Yes. My name is Ida, I-D-A, Firestone, F-I-R-E-S-T-O-N-E.

MG: And what was your name at birth?

IF: Ida Hoffman, H-O-F-F-M-A-N-N.

MG: Where were you born?

IF: I was born in Pont-à-Moisson. P...

MG: Would you spell that?

IF: P-O-N-T, dash, A, dash, M-O-I-S-S-O-N in the state of Meurthe-Moselle,
M-U-- M-E-U-R-T-H-E, dash, M-O-S-E-L-L-E.

MG: In what countr ...

IF: In France.

MG: And what large city is that near?

IF: Nancy, N-A-N-C-Y.

MG: When were you born?

IF: I was born February 19, 1929.

MG: So how old are you now?

IF: Seventy-five [75].

MG: What do you remember about your hometown?

IF: Everything.

MG: How would you describe it?

IF: The-- my hometown is a beautiful, beautiful city. It is small. It is very picturesque. We have a main square with arches all around and of course above the arches are apartments, and under the arches are stores, but it is really beautiful. On the main square there is a famous fountain and where people on Sundays walk and of course, we had a boulevard which was very, very nice, beautiful.

MG: Do you remember what the population of the town was?

IF: Yes. When I was there, well, Pont-à-Moisson is divided in two parts, a bridge separates the city. So on our side, we had about 30,000 people.

MG: Of those 30,000...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...approximately how many were Jewish?

IF: Maybe 30.

MG: Thirty [30] families?

IF: No, no...

MG: Oh.

IF: ...thirty [30] persons. We were about eight families.

MG: How were you received in the community?

IF: Well, we were received, but you knew each was a forced received. The antisemitism was then, very great, and we had very few friends who were not Jewish.

MG: What about your parents, did they have friends that were not Jewish?

IF: My parents were loners. They did not have friends. They, they would visit people, but to say that they had close friends, they did not.

MG: Was the town known for any particular industry or business?

IF: Yes. There was a factory. The, it was called La Fonderie, they melt steel and they--I don't know exactly what-- but it was a very well known factory.

MG: Would you say that the town was prosperous?

IF: In a way, yes. It's like every city, there are people that, who are prosperous, others are working people and others are very, very poor.

MG: Is this the town that you grew up in?

IF: Yes.

MG: Can you describe the-- your house...

IF: Yes...

MG: ...or the apartment where you lived?

IF: Well, we had a few apartments. I remember the apartment when I was two years old. It was a very small apartment and as our family grew, my parents moved to different apartments. Up to that apartment, when my brother was born, we moved downstairs. It was a larger apartment and we were there about, I would say, five years. Then we moved to an apartment that was really beautiful. When we entered, we entered into a beautiful garden. It was very pretty. We were there, I would say about five or six years, and then my father found a very large apartment. It was above a bakery. Not the apartment right above the bakery, but the apartment above. In Europe, we say the second floor. Here you would say the third floor. 'Cause in Europe the first floor is not called first floor, it's called *rez de chaussé*, the apartment on the ground.

MG: How would you spell that?

IF: *Rez de chaussé*, R-E-Z-D-E-C-H-A-U-S-S-E.

MG: Let's talk about your family.

IF: Yes.

MG: What was your father's name?

IF: My father's name was Adolphe, A-D-O-L-P-H-E.

MG: And his last name?

IF: Hoffman.

MG: Yes. Where was he born?

IF: He was born in Ghitomir, Russia, G-H-I-T-O-M-I-R.¹

MG: Do you know when he was born?

IF: Yes, of course, October 25, 1890.

MG: And you say he was born in Russia?

IF: Yes.

MG: And what part of Russia was that?

IF: I don't know.

MG: Why-- where did he go from there or how long did he live there before he moved?

IF: Let's see. In 1922, they left Russia, so he was 32 years old.

MG: What did he do in Russia?

IF: In Russia he was going to school. His father was an architect and he used to draw. And when we were little he used to draw birds all the time, and, of course, he was married to my mother. They left Russia together.

MG: When was that?

IF: In 1922.

MG: Do you know why they left?

IF: Yes, because of the Bolsheviks. They were killing the Jewish people, they were murdering people, and my father felt that he did not want to stay in Russia.

MG: Who did he leave with?

IF: With my mother. They were married.

MG: Do you know where they-- or how they met?

IF: Yes, yes, my father was in the army. My mother had contracted typhoid and she was in a hospital, and the soldiers used to go to hospitals to help, and this is how my mother and he met.

MG: So your father was in the Russian military.

IF: Yes.

MG: Do you know what his rank was?

IF: No, no...

MG: Do you know who he...

IF: ...if I would ask my father he would say a Major, or whatever [chuckle], I don't know.

MG: ... when he was in the military...

IF: Yes.

MG: Who was he fighting? Was that during World War I or was it the Revolution?

IF: No, it was after World War I. It was just being in the army.

MG: Did you ever know your father's parents?

¹Possibly Zhitomir 82 miles west of Kiev.

IF: No.

MG: Did they remain in Russia?

IF: They remained in Russia. My grandfather had passed away and my grandmother remained in Russia with her other children. My father had a brother, he had a sister.

MG: Did they leave Russia?

IF: No.

MG: They're...

IF: They remained in Russia, yes.

MG: How much education did your father have?

IF: Well in Europe you go to public school until you are about 11 years old. And then you go to secondary school which is high school, like here, and then you go to college. And I think he, of course, he graduated high school, but he started college when he had to go into the army. So secondary, well secondary is high school, but college I don't think he had much, but my father was a very, very intelligent person. As a child, I did not realize. My father knew all the books by memory from Tolstoy, Pushkin, Dostoyevsky. Also, my father could recite poetry for hours, hours. Of course, it was all in Russian. Yes, he was very smart.

MG: Was Russian the only language he spoke?

IF: No, my father spoke seven languages fluently.

MG: What were they?

IF: Of course Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, German, Yiddish and French.

MG: Was your father religious?

IF: To a certain point. I remember as a little girl, my parents used to change the dishes for Passover and after they stopped. And that was before the war, so I don't know, I don't know why.

MG: Did your father ever speak of any organizations that he belonged to in Russia?

IF: No, he never did.

MG: Was he at all political?

IF: No.

MG: So wh-- you told me why he left Russia...

IF: Yes.

MG: Where did he go?

IF: They went through the woods to Germany. It was the closest place.

MG: Now...

IF: And they landed in Berlin.

MG: ... you say they went through the woods.

IF: Yes.

MG: Then their leaving was illegal?

IF: Exactly. Yes.

MG: They had no papers?

IF: No, none, no.

MG: And why did they go to Berlin?

IF: My father said it was the closest place and he heard that he could get work there, so that's why he went there.

MG: Do you ever, do you remember your father ever talking about Zionism or Israel?

IF: No, no. The only time that he spoke, he said, "I hope they make it, and I hope enough people will go to form a country." That is the only thing he would say.

MG: What was your mother's name?

IF: My mother's name was [unclear] my father would call her Bertha or Bella, so which one was her birth name, I don't know.

MG: Do you know what her maiden name was?

IF: Elkin, E-L-K-I-N.

MG: Where was she born?

IF: In Odessa. She was born December 19, 1893.

MG: Where were her parents from?

IF: From Odessa. Yes. Her mother passed away when she was a little girl.

MG: Did she have siblings?

IF: Yes, she had three brothers and one sister. Two brothers had immigrated to America in the 1918 or something like that, yes, and the others remain in Russia.

MG: Did you ever know your grandmother?

IF: No.

MG: How much education did your mother have?

IF: My mother finished high school and went to the conservatory for piano.

MG: Was she religious?

IF: She was religious in the way that she would not eat *treif*. She only ate kosher meat, but of course, during the war you could not get any.

MG: If you were to describe your mother, what comes to mind?

IF: The most wonderful, the most generous, the most loving person you would ever, ever want to meet.

MG: Did your parents maintain their communication with the families in Russia?

IF: Up until the war, yes. But then when the Germans invaded France, my parents burned all the correspondence that they had had all these years. They had saved all the letters.

MG: Why did they burn them?

IF: They were afraid. You know here is a German, the enemy, coming to France and, what was I going to say is they were afraid. [tape paused]

MG: Okay, Mrs. Firestone...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...what language was spoken at home?

IF: Russian, Yiddish and French.

MG: Did they speak Hebrew at all?

IF: No, no.

MG: How about German?

IF: Yes, but they didn't speak it at home, no.

MG: What did they speak outside the house?

IF: French. If they were with the people who were Jewish, the few people that they knew, they would speak Yiddish.

MG: Can you speak Yiddish?

IF: I can, yes, not, I can speak and I do understand, but not fluently like my parents used to.

MG: What holidays did you celebrate at home?

IF: Passover and Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur.

MG: Now your parents went to Berlin?

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: Why did they leave there to go to France?

IF: Because when they were in Berlin, they were put in, thank G-d, not a concentration camp, but like a camp from-- for all the refugees, all the people that came from Russia, some came from Poland and they were put in that. It was like a, how can I describe, like a ghetto, it was. And then there was not much work to be found in Berlin.

MG: Do you know the year your parents arrived in Berlin?

IF: Yes, 1922.

MG: Now when-- you say they didn't have papers?

IF: Yes.

MG: Were they permitted to stay in Berlin?

IF: Yes, yes, yes...

MG: And they were in this detention camp?

IF: Somewhat, yes, somewhat, yes, and then in 1925 my father was told or heard that there was work in France in the town of Pont-à-Moisson where the factory is. And my father left before my mother to get the job, get work and also to found an apartment. My sister, my oldest sister was a few months old.

MG: Did your mother remain in the camp?

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: Did they ever describe to you what it was like living there?

IF: No, it was just a place where all the refugees, all the people from the-- who did not belong in Germany, who were not German were put in.

MG: So when did your parents leave there?

IF: My father left in '25 and I think four months later, my mother followed.

MG: How many sisters or brothers do you have?

IF: I have, *kein ayin hara* [Yiddish: no evil eye], two sisters and a brother. My parents lost four children, they lost one in Russia, one they were in Estonia for a little while, they lost a child there.

MG: From what?

IF: One from measles, pneumonia, and then the one in Germany was also pneumonia, and one in France. I remember him, because he was born after me. He also had the measles and died from complication.

MG: Your oldest living sibling?

IF: Yes.

MG: Your sister?

IF: Yes.

MG: What is her name?

IF: Rosa, R-O-S-A.

MG: Is she married?

IF: Yes, but she unfortunately is a widow.

MG: What is her last name?

IF: Averbach, A-V-E-R-B-A-C-H.

MG: When was she born?

IF: She was born August 4, 1925.

MG: Where?

IF: In Berlin. She was born in Berlin, yes.

MG: And next?

IF: Next is my sister Eugenie, like the princess Eugenie, E-U-G-E-N-I-E.

MG: And...

IF: She was born in France, in Pont-à-Moisson.

MG: When?

IF: December 11, 1926.

MG: And you were born.

IF: I was after which was February 19, 1929.

MG: And then?

IF: And then the little brother Simon, S-I-M-O-N who unfortunately passed away. He was about 16 months old. He was born, of course, in Pont-à-Moisson and passed away in Pont-à-Moisson.

MG: So you have three, two sisters...

IF: Two sisters, yes, and then my brother who was born March 1, 1934. His name is Arnold Charles, A-R-N-O-L-D Charles, C-H-A-R-L-E-S and thank G-d he's alive.

MG: Did your sisters and brother and you have any education?

IF: Yes.

MG: ...while you were in France?

IF: Yes, yes. We went to college. I did not finish because there was a competition at the conservatory for piano, and music to me is my life. So I stopped going to college and I went to the conservatory, I was accepted, and...

MG: What was your relationship with your siblings?

IF: Like children. We got along and we fought. You know. And because I'm the youngest of the girls, my two sisters felt, you know, they could tell me what to do and what not to do. And I as a child, I resented it and, but the relation was good. And today we are very, very close.

MG: Do they live in Philadelphia?

IF: No, unfortunately. Rosa lives in Silver Springs, Maryland; Genie, we call her Genie, lives in White Plains, New York, and my brother lives in Drexel Hill, yes.

MG: You said they went to college?

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: And what did they do?

IF: Well, we came to America, they did not finish the college. But Genie finished college in the United States.

MG: And your...

IF: ...and I admire her, because she has four children, they were little and she went back to school.

MG: And your brother?

IF: My brother did not go to college but my brother was a very known chef. He's an executive chef, yes. In fact, he owned a restaurant where Le Bec Fin is now on Walnut Street. He had it before, yes.

MG: Now, what about you?

IF: Yes.

MG: When did you start school?

IF: I started school when I was three years old.

MG: What kind of school?

IF: It was really kindergarten. I don't think it was nursery school, because we did, we did things. We learned the alphabet, we learned how to write and we played games, and I remember one. We had a piece of very thick felt and we had a piece of paper on it, and it had a picture of a horse or a duck or-- and we had like an arrow we used to point and we would make holes on the lines and when the-- we would finish, we would have whatever animal we had.

MG: How long did you remain in this school?
IF: Until I was six years old and then I went to public school, to...
MG: What was the name of the public school?
IF: Ecole St. Jean. S-T, dot J-E-A-N.
MG: J-E-A-N?
IF: Yes.
MG: How many grades did you finish before the war?
IF: Oh, well I finished, let me think it was, I was there five years I think, five, and then high school for four years, I was in high school [sounded as though tape paused]
MG: How many grades did the school go to?
IF: The public school or high school?
MG: The public school.
IF: The public school, I think it was four years or five years, I don't remember.
MG: Did you finish?
IF: Yes, oh yes, yes, and then high school, yes.
MG: What was the name of the high school?
IF: Yes, well we went to college. It was called Le College. Why? The school, the girls and boys were separated. The girls went to a École Supérieure and boys went to college, but during the war, the École Supérieure had been bombed. So...
MG: How do you spell that?
IF: École Supérieure? E-C-O-L-E, Superieure, S-U-P-E-R-I-E-U-R-E, and it was bombed so we could not go. So the girls went to the same school as the boys, the guys.
MG: Was that equivalent to high school?
IF: Oh yes, yes.
MG: How many years were you able to attend?
IF: Three, three.
MG: What was your favorite subject?
IF: Mathematics. And I found out that mathematics and music have a lot in common.
MG: How were your teachers?
IF: Some I did not like, because he did not like me, because I was Jewish. And the two teachers that I liked best was my Latin teacher and my German teacher. And unfortunately he, I had him only one year because he got killed. And they were the two teachers. And oh I'm sorry, and an English teacher, Monsieur Very which was very nice.
MG: How do you spell his name?
IF: V-E-R-Y, in fact, my mother and my sister, when in beginning that we had to hide, they stayed there for two days, yes.
MG: The teacher that was killed...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...how was he killed?

IF: By the bombs.

MG: Did you have any religious education?

IF: No.

MG: How about when you were going to school? Did you have to take any religious courses?

IF: No...

MG: ...at all?

IF: No.

MG: You said, you thought that your teachers didn't like you because you were Jewish.

IF: Yes.

MG: What made you think that?

IF: The way she spoke to me and the way she spoke to the other students. Like she was forced to talk to me, and you feel, you know...

MG: Was any...

IF: And you had the experience.

MG: Was anything said to you outright...

IF: No.

MG: ...about your being Jewish?

IF: No, no.

MG: Who were your friends?

IF: I really did not have any, I had acquaintances. There were two, three families who had children about our age and, but because my father was a working man, we were not good enough, you see.

MG: Were these acquaintances Jewish?

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: Did you have any non-Jewish friends or acquaintances?

IF: Not really, no, no. We would see each other in school and sometimes they would come over, not all of them but one at a time. It was rare, but I would not call them friends. I would not. I, I am a loner and I was always.

MG: Was there any antisemitism during-- with your friends in school, or your acquaintances?

IF: Well, one, I thought was I guess my friend or came over and we were playing hopscotch, I was winning and she said, "Oh, you *sal Juive*." *Sal Juive* means you dirty Jew. "You always win," and she again called me *sal Juive*. And I started to cry. And she says to me, "You can not do anything." And we had just started to learn to play piano. So, I was eight years old and I wanted to say to her, "No, I'm playing piano." But she laughed. I went home and I was crying and my father asked me, "What's the

matter?" I told him what happened, and I said I wanted to tell her that I can play piano but she laughed. And my father said to me, "I want to tell you something, you don't have to tell people what you can do. Once they know you, they will know." And I always remembered that.

MG: You started to play the piano?

IF: Yes.

MG: Where did you take lessons?

IF: We went to the teacher. We-- my mother, someone recommended a teacher who was an elderly lady who did not hear well. And who would fall asleep and she would sleep and then she would wake up and she would say Mi, mi, mi, mi, the note Do, Re, Mi, Fa, yeah, so we didn't have her long. Then we had another teacher.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

MG: This is tape one, side two. It is August 2, 2004, this is Marcia Goldberg and I am interviewing Ida Firestone. We were talking about your music...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...lessons...

IF: Yes.

MG: You said we, who?

IF: My two sisters and I.

MG: You all took lessons?

IF: At same time, yes. Not the lessons at the same time, but we started at the same time.

MG: You mentioned...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...a little while back that your mother played the piano?

IF: Yes. My mother went to the conservatory in Odessa, yes, but she didn't finish because she got married and they left.

MG: Did she ever do anything with that?

IF: No, she gave us our first few lessons. Then she was very smart. She said, "Now, you will get someone else because Mom should not teach their children."

MG: So did you take lessons with the second teacher alone?

IF: Yes, not too long. She wore long dresses and beads that you could hear her come to the door because the beads were making noise. [tape paused]-- and we took lessons just for a while. Then we had another teacher who was very, very good, but she told us that we were coming to be past what she knew, so we should get someone else. And my mother asked-- no my sister Genie had a girlfriend who had a teacher and we went to her. She was, I don't know, a so-so good teacher, but she was a wonderful, wonderful person. My sisters had stopped taking lessons, they were not interested, but I continued and this person was a very religious person. She would go to church at five-thirty in the morning. When my father was taken to the concentration camp I told her I could not take lessons anymore because I could not afford it. She said I don't want you to stop with your talent, I am going to continue and I will not charge you, but you have to come at six-thirty in the morning. And I remember when it was dark. I was so scared, but I went because I wanted to learn, yes.

MG: How long were you able to continue your lessons?

IF: Until 1944, when we had to go into hiding, yes.

MG: By that time were you an accomplished pianist?

IF: At that time, not quite really, no, no. It is after the war, when I really got a good teacher. I had two teachers, the professor at the conservatory and then the teacher in my hometown who prepared me for...

MG: How would you describe your childhood before the war?

IF: Well it was a happy-- not happy childhood. I remember as a little girl, I used to wish to have a lot of girls come to our apartment and play and I didn't have that. So that was in a way a little sad for me. But as I became an adult, to be a loner, does not bother me at all.

MG: Did your father go on-- your family, go on vacations?

IF: No, we never did, never.

MG: Other than going to school and your piano lessons...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...what other things did you do after school?

IF: Oh after school, nothing really, we did our homework. Rarely, did we go to the movies. It was really very rare. My father didn't believe in movies. He said it's not for children.

MG: Was there theatre or concerts that you were able to go to?

IF: Well there in Nancy, the city next to Pont-à-Moisson, my mother used to take us to the concert, and to the opera. She loved the opera, and the first opera we saw was *Manon*, yes, I remember...

MG: What was it?

IF: *Manon* was the opera.

MG: Who was the composer? [unclear] did you like to read?

IF: Yes.

MG: ...being alone?

IF: ...always...

MG: What was your favorite book?

IF: ...always. Émile Zola, Émile Zola, yes.

MG: Did you growing up have any-- belong to any organizations?

IF: After the war, I belonged to a Jewish organization, yes, but not before.

MG: Did your sisters...

IF: No.

MG: ...or your mother?

IF: No.

MG: Did you have any idea what you wanted to be when you became an adult?

IF: Yes.

MG: What?

IF: A concert pianist.

MG: Now, let me ask you, what was the earliest memory that you have of Nazism and the period about Hitler?

IF: My parents very rarely talked about it in front of us. And the newspapers did not have much, because we used to get the newspaper every day. But once the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, this is when we really, really learned about the Nazis.

MG: Did you have a radio in your house?

IF: No, my mother did not want a radio because, she said, if one of us wants to practice piano, the other one will have the radio on and no one will practice. And it was very smart of her.

MG: So you really didn't know anything about Hitler's rise to power until they invaded Poland...

IF: In 1939, yes.

MG: Before that time did you have any restrictions placed on you or the family?

IF: Not at all, no.

MG: Did you know anything about the Nuremburg Laws...

IF: Then no, no...

MG: ..and the things that happened?

IF: No, no.

MG: What do you remember when Germany invaded Poland?

IF: Yes.

MG: That...

IF: Oh, that they were killing people and the first ones that were killed were the Jewish people, who were taken away. At that time, we knew of the concentration camps. We did not know of the crematoriums. These came later, you see.

MG: How did you know about the Jews being taken to camps?

IF: I remember there was an article in a newspaper, that said. And then after that we did not have any news at all. They were not allowed to.

MG: When did things start to change for your family?

IF: Well, when we were invaded in 1940.

MG: Do you remember the month?

IF: It was summertime, I think. The-- our lives continued for a while the same as it did before the war, but it was in 1942 that everything changed.

MG: So between '40 and '42?

IF: Ya, we did pretty much as we did before the war.

MG: Were there soldiers in your town?

IF: Oh yes.

MG: I mean German soldiers.

IF: Yes. Oh, yes.

MG: When did that start to occur?

IF: From the time they invaded France. In fact, we lived above the bakery. The bakery was requisitioned every Thursday. The Germans came to bake bread for their army, for their troops, whatever.

MG: Who was in charge of the city or your town?

IF: His name was Hans, and how do I know that? The lady who lived above us, her husband was prisoner of war in Germany and Hans became her boyfriend. And he would visit her. And I was outside, and when he-- he would tap me on the head, say hello and then go.

MG: Do you remember what his rank or position, title was?

IF: He was the head, I don't know. I remember he was very tall, very handsome man, very handsome.

MG: Was there any restrictions placed on any of you or any members of your family?

IF: Starting 1942, yes.

MG: What?

IF: Absolutely. In 1942 laws were enacted that people had to go to City Hall, Jewish people had to go to City Hall and register. And once you registered, you were given stars, that says a Jew, *Juif* in French. That was a first look.

MG: What color were they?

IF: Yellow. Didn't I show it to you? Yellow and the marking was in black. Then men or ladies, Jewish ladies and men, were no longer allowed to work. Children were no longer allowed to go to school. We could not do our grocery shopping before three o'clock in the afternoon and by that time there was nothing left on the shelves. My mother was a very brave lady. She would get up at five o'clock in the morning and stand in line with the other people who were not Jewish and they were very kind to her. They would hide her if they-- a French policeman would pass by or a German soldier, because if they would see her in line wearing the star, she would have been taken away.

MG: Were there rations for the food?

IF: Oh for everyone, oh yes. We had a little booklet given every month, ration, yes.

MG: So did that curtail the amount of food you were able to...

IF: Yes, yes, sure...

MG: What about your father's employment? What happened to that?

IF: My father when he was told that he could no longer work, he said, "*Ich hob sei in bood arein.*"² Do you know what, "I'm going to continue to work," and he did continue, and someone denounced him. And after a while he was taken to the concentration camp. It's not only the work, it's other things that I will tell you.

MG: What, what type of work did he do?

IF: My father was a foreman in a factory.

MG: What kind of factory?

IF: They made steel, they made whatever, and...

MG: So he was a supervisor?

²[Yiddish] I have him in a steamhouse – I don't give a damn.

IF: Yes, yes.
MG: Was there a curfew?
IF: Oh yes.
MG: For you and your sisters?
IF: Oh sure. You could not be outside after seven o'clock in the evening.
MG: Were you going to school at this time?
IF: Yes, we continued to go to school.
MG: The same school?
IF: The same school and now that I am an adult, I realize that my mother, G-d bless her, did not realize the consequences if someone had reported us. We would have been taken to a concentration camp.
MG: You mean you were not allowed to be in school?
IF: We were not allowed.
MG: But the school allowed you?
IF: The school allowed us and no one reported us, and other Jewish children went to school and no one reported them either.
MG: Did you wear your star when you went to school?
IF: No.
MG: When you went out...
IF: Yes.
MG: ...and you wore your star...
IF: Yes.
MG: ...how did you feel walking around?
IF: At first it felt odd. After it didn't bother, didn't bother.
MG: Was there a problem getting food for your house?
IF: No, because we had stoves. There was one stove in the kitchen to cook, and then one stove in our bedroom. My parents did not have any heat during the winter.
MG: Now did the restriction tighten any more?
IF: No, no, not that I know of, no.
MG: Did your...
IF: We didn't go out anyway.
MG: Did your family ever talk about leaving France?
IF: [light chuckle] My father was offered a very good position in South America. And my mother, mother told me, she and my father were talking about it. They were born in Russia, they left Germany, first Estonia, then Germany, Germany to France and they said, how many times can we move, and they decided not to accept it.
MG: Who offered this to your father?
IF: Through the factory. My father was a-- if he spoke French better than he did, he would have gone higher, you know, in his position, but because his French was not very good, but he was a very smart person.

MG: So what changed?

IF: He remained in Pont-à-Moisson.

MG: And what happened to 1942. That changed your situation?

IF: Oh 1942. I was outside and I saw a man in a trench coat and a hat. And I knew he was German walking the apartment building. And after five minutes I said to myself, I wonder where he went? So I went upstairs, we did not have an elevator, and as I was going, climbing the stairs, I could hear my mother cry. My mother was saying, "Please don't kill my husband." Someone had gone to City Hall or to the Gestapo and told them that my father was a Communist. My father was not a Communist. He left because of the Communists. And because they did that, they got extra money and extra food. So the man came and said to my mother that my father was going to be killed that afternoon. My mother was crying, don't kill my husband, we have four children and then she asked me to play piano for the man. I played and he only wanted to hear Strauss's Waltzes. And I was playing, I was crying. And as I'm playing the corner of my house I see my mother get on her knees and kiss the man's shoes begging him not to kill my father.

MG: Was this man a member of your community?

IF: No, no, he was a German, he was part of the German.

MG: Did you ever find out who reported your father?

IF: No, no. I tried after the war, but they did not want to tell me.

MG: So what happened to him?

IF: Then my mother was begging him and begging him. He said, he'll come back. He never came back. But a few months later my father was taken to a concentration camp.

MG: Which one [unclear]?

IF: Drancy which was outside of Paris. Drancy is, was a camp that all the Jewish people were taken from-- were taken to and then from there they were sent to Auschwitz or Buchenwald or Theresienstadt or all the other camps.

MG: How would you spell that?

IF: Drancy, D-R-A-N-C-Y.

MG: And where was it located?

IF: Outside of Paris.

MG: Were you able to communicate with your father?

IF: My father sent us a letter once. First he sent us a postcard, to say I'm fine, that's all he said, and then we got a letter.

MG: So he was in camp and you, your sisters...

IF: We remained...

MG: ...and your mother remained there.

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: How long were you able to stay?

IF: Yes, until 1944, March 2, when we had to run away. And it is a good thing that my father did not belong, did not believe in banks. My brother's mattress was our bank, because if my father had the money he had in a bank, the Germans would have taken it. And my sister, Rosa, dropped out of school and went to work.

MG: What did she do?

IF: She worked in an office, in a factory where my father worked.

MG: And she...

IF: They were going to give her a job.

MG: She was allowed to work?

IF: Yes. She wasn't allowed, she did.

MG: Did you remain in school?

IF: Yes.

MG: Now, why did you decide to leave?

IF: You mean March 2?

MG: Mm, hmm.

IF: Because the Germans came to get us.

MG: Now up until '42...

IF: Yes.

MG: Forty-four ['44]...

IF: Right.

MG: Did anything change, anymore restrictions?

IF: No.

MG: The only thing was that your father had been taken to a camp?

IF: Right.

MG: Right.

IF: Yes. I forgot to mention, before the Germans invaded our city, everyone was leaving, it was like an exodus, and my parents had a friend, a French soldier...

MG: Excuse me, when you say everyone was leaving, was that the non-Jews as well?

IF: People-- the non-Jews, yes, they were afraid of the Germans. And my parents had a friend, who was a French soldier, he was from when you were-- he was born in Russia also, so my parents and he became friends, and he gave it a dispos-, our *disposition á ambulance* for us to leave. And my father said, I will follow you with a bicycle, because in case I need a bicycle I'll have at least the bicycle to travel to something. And we went to the city of Tulle, which was not far from our hometown. And the ambulance stopped there on the main square. And they were bombing and the Germans, you know, were-- and we were afraid because Red Cross was on top on the roof of the ambulance and it's really a target for them...

MG: Won't that keep you safer than...

IF: No, of course not, no. Then in the morning through the window we could see that the driver was not our parent's friend, it was someone else. There was a young lady in the front, but we didn't know who she was until we came out. Early morning, we came out of the ambulance, and people in these push carts and little wagons were leaving. So we followed and we arrived at this small village and the lady who owned the farm was very kind, and I think we were about 15 people. She gave coffee and she gave bread and she gave cheese and we spent two nights there.

MG: What was the name of the town?

IF: I don't remember, I don't know. And when two days later she said to us, you know you should go back home because I was told that the Germans are very nice people and they are very polite, so you shouldn't be afraid of them. So we went back to our hometown and my father was lost. We, he didn't know where we were or-- he said he followed us, but he didn't, and two weeks later he was back home, you know.

MG: And did your life just resume after that?

IF: Yes.

MG: The way it was?

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: Okay, during this time, in '44, though the Germans were there...

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: ...and occupying your city, you had certain restrictions, but your life went on. But how did you feel? Did you, were you frightened all the time? What was the situation?

IF: No. Yes, it was a weight in your heart, a weight on your head, because you had the enemy in your town, and you wondered when they would leave. As a-- well in '42 I was 13 years old. I was not as sophisticated as a 13-year-old of today. Today they know, [light chuckle] they know everything. But of course, we felt-- we didn't feel good and every night we had to put blanket on our windows because we were not allowed to show lights.

MG: Was there much bombing?

IF: Yes. We had bombs, first from the Germans and then from the English and the Americans who wanted to push Germans out.

MG: Was your town...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...ever bombed...

IF: Oh yes.

MG: ...with much destruction?

IF: Oh yes, yes. I will show you a postcard. Did I show you a postcard? A section of the main square of all those arcades and apartments were destroyed. Oh yes.

MG: Did any of them ever hit your home?

IF: Yes. In fact after the war, we couldn't go back, because it had been bombed, yes.

MG: So what happened that precipitated your leaving in '44?

IF: Okay, March 1, 1944, the Dean of our school called me to his office.

MG: What was his name?

IF: Monsieur Strohman, Jean Strohman.

MG: How do you spell it?

IF: S-T-R-O-H-M-A-N, Jean. And he was a very strict, very strict Dean and I thought to myself, what did I do that he's calling me to his office, and I was scared to death. When I walked in he said, "Mademoiselle Hoffman, I want you to go home and tell your mother that tomorrow morning the rest of the Jewish population is going to be taken to concentration camps." I left, I told my mother and my mother said, "Well," she said, "we have very little money left. I don't know who to ask, I don't know who to trust." A few minutes later, my brother who was 10 years old that date, March 1, she took him to friends of theirs who, of course, were not Jewish and asked could they keep him for a few days and they said yes. He was there for nine and a half months. They were wonderful to him, wonderful.

MG: And what was their names?

IF: Hergott and his name was Victor and her name was Cecile.³

MG: How do you spell their last name?

IF: H-E-R-G-O-T-T. Yes. They were wonderful, wonderful people. When she came back, she told my two sisters and me, she said girls. No she didn't say girls, she said "*Kinderlach, woos vet sein, vet sein*," whatever will be, will be. And we went to bed and of course, we didn't sleep. We were talking what camp we were going to go to. We knew we would be separated, and we wondered if we would come back alive. And the Germans always came five o'clock in the morning. They wanted to be sure that people were at home.

MG: Were any other people before this time...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...rounded up, taken away?

IF: Oh yes. Oh sure.

MG: So you knew that this was an ongoing occurrence?

IF: Oh sure, oh sure.

MG: Why do you think...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...your family was spared this until this time?

IF: In 1942 they took all the Jewish people who were not French citizens. All the Jewish people, all of them, didn't make any difference if they were old or if they were

³Victor and Cecile Hergott were awarded the honor of "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem in 1977. (www.yadvashem.org)

young, they were taken. And my parents had become French citizen in 1925, in fact I have the papers, my sister made copies, yes.

MG: So do you think that is what...

IF: Oh absolutely, absolutely.

MG: ...saved them at that time?

IF: Absolutely, and then in 1944, Hitler was losing the war; he wanted to eradicate the entire Jewish population of the earth. Oh sure, they tried, so that's why we were spared until 1944.

MG: So what happened?

IF: Yeah. As I said they always came five o'clock in the morning. Sure enough five o'clock in the morning, there was a knock at our door. And my mother, my two sisters and I, we hugged, we cried, and we said goodbye to each other. When my mother opened the door, it was a lady who owned the bakery. She said, "Hurry. I am going to hide you. The Germans are on the street. They are coming to get you." We ran out with the clothes we had on our back. Behind the apartment building was a courtyard and then the building where they baked the bread. So she took us there. She put my mother and my two sisters in an alcove near the oven. And there wasn't enough room for me. She gave me a white apron. She told me to go down the basement and to, if the Germans come downstairs, to put coal in the buckets, or wood, or whatever, to keep busy. As I got into the basement, two seconds later, I could hear the boots going up and down the apartment and they did not come down the basement. After the war, we learned that the lady who owned the bakery was imprisoned for two weeks. The reason is the Germans asked her if she knew where we were, and she said we went to say goodbye to the Dean of our school, which of course was not true.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

MG: Tape two side one of an interview with Ida Firestone. Today is August 2, 2004. My name is Marcia Goldberg. Mrs. Firestone, we were talking about 1944 when you knew the Germans were going to come for your family.

IF: Yes.

MG: So you talked about, I think we left off with the baker's wife coming to talk that she would hide all of you.

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: You were in the basement...

IF: Yes.

MG: And the soldiers left, or...

IF: It was-- they were in...

MG: Was it...

IF: ...the building, to me it seemed like an eternity, but they were researched everywhere...

MG: Now who were they, were they Gestapo, or ...

IF: Oh yes, oh absolutely, they were the Gestapo, oh yes, yes. And after a while they did not find us, so they left a guard in front of the door. The reason they left the guard is the lady on the bakery when she was asked if she knew where we were, she said we went to say goodbye to the Dean of our school. And they felt we are going to come back so the guard will be there to greet us. When they went to the school, the Dean didn't know where we were and they also arrested him. He was imprisoned for two weeks, but thank G-d they let him go. We did not know where to go. We had very little money left. We divided the money among the four of us, my mother, my two sisters and myself and we had decided-- I communicated with my mother and sisters through the lady who owned the bakery. We decided we would not travel the four of us, it would be too obvious. We would be two by two. My mother was with my middle sister, and my older sister Rosa was with me. My ...

MG: If I can interrupt...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...the bakery...

IF: Yes.

MG: The woman, what was her name?

IF: Her name was Germaine Bour.⁴ Her first name was Germaine, G-E-R-M-A-I-N-E, Bour, B-O-U-R. She really is a saint, really. It's thanks to her that we are alive. And we, we did not know where to go. I had a classmate who came from a small village, I had spent a week's vacation there, but all the people knew that I was Jewish and

⁴Germaine Bour was awarded the honor "Righteous Among the Nations" by YadVashem in 1997.
www.yadvashem.org

I thought maybe my mother and my sister would go there. I felt her parents were, you know, very nice and Monsieur Hergott, who kept my brother, was courageous and brave enough to take them there, but the people did not want to take them in. They were afraid, and you cannot blame them, because if they were found out, they would all been killed, but fortunately my parents found-- my parents, my mother and my sister found another farm. My oldest sister and I, Rosa we decided we would go to Paris. We lived 325 miles from Paris. The reason we decided to go there, my parents had friends. The woman was not Jewish, the husband was. He unfortunately was taken to Auschwitz and never came back. She moved to Paris and opened a café. And sometimes they would send us a letter, we would send them a letter, you know. So Rosa and I decided to go there. We took the train and at that time it took the whole night to travel. We were very, very fortunate that no one came to ask us for papers.

MG: Did you have papers?

IF: Identification cards and ours were stamped "Jew". During the war everyone had one, so we took the train, not the first night. The first night we went to one of her girlfriends. We spent the night there, and the next night we took the train, and I remember, I was so nervous, my sister gave me a candy, an actual candy, and I couldn't breathe. That was March 3, 1944, I never had a hard candy since March 3, 1944. Anyway, so we arrived in Paris, and we went to that lady and we told her what was happening. Could she help us? She said, "No." She said, "I'll put you up in a hotel and then tomorrow morning you come for breakfast. Then you do whatever you want to do." The hotel she put us up was a, was a house of prostitutes. We, of course, did not know. We were afraid to go out. So we stayed in a room and around midnight there's a knock at the door. It's a policeman checking on the girls, and we did not answer and the policeman said, "Girls, I know you are here. The light is on," and so my sister whispers to me and said, "We have to open the door." So we opened the door-- my sister was 19, I was 15, we were holding hands and the policeman looks at us and he says, "What are you doing here?" and we said, "We are Madame Maurice's nieces". He said, "Ah, now I understand." He said, "Alright, close the door and don't open it to anyone." And he left.

MG: What was your friend's name, the one that...

IF: Madame Maurice, actually her name was Schmoulevich.

MG: How do you spell that?

IF: S-C-H-M-O-U-L-E-V-I-C-H, Schmoulevich.

MG: But she went under...

IF: Well her...

MG: But she went under what name?

IF: Her husband's first name was Maurice. So she was called Madame Maurice. She had a daughter who was not a year, two years younger than I. So the next morning we went to her for breakfast. My sister said to her, "You know two years ago

my father was taken to Drancy.” She says, “He was?” My sister said, “Yes,” and she, she, I, I forgot...

MG: Your sister told Madame ...

IF: Oh yes, she told Madame Maurice what was happening...

MG: And that your father...

IF: ...and that my father had been taken to Drancy. So she said, “Oh, is he still there?” I said, “We don’t know.” She says, “Why don’t you go and see if he’s there?” You don’t send two Jewish girls to a concentration camp. But we were so innocent...

MG: Why do you think she...

IF: Because we found out after the war that her husband was hiding, and she’s the one who went to tell them where he was hiding. So this was her way to get rid of us.

MG: So that her husband was hiding...

IF: In a farm, and she’s the one who went to City Hall or the Gestapo to tell them where he was hiding.

MG: Why did she do that?

IF: Why? She, I call her the lady, and...

MG: Excuse me.

IF: Yes.

MG: Her husband was Jewish?

IF: Yes.

MG: Oh okay, so that’s why she...

IF: Right.

MG: Informed on...

IF: Yes, yes. So...

MG: So you left there with your sister...

IF: And we went to Drancy. We went to the camp. The guard asked what we wanted. And we said, “Do you have a Monsieur Hoffman in your camp?” And he looked in a very large dossier and he said, “Yes.” And he said, “Who are you?” And we said, “His daughters.” So on the crank phone he called for my father to come and through the window I saw my father and he was wearing wooden shoes. I ran out, and all the guards pointing their machine guns at me were saying, “Halt, halt.” I did not hear them, my sister told me later. And when my father saw me, he started to cry. He said, “They got you too?” I said, “No, not really. Let’s go to the office.”

MG: Excuse me.

IF: Yes.

MG: The camp...

IF: Yes.

MG: Did that have just men or were there women and children?

IF: Yes, all, women, children, yes, everyone. And we went to the office and he saw my sister. And my sister told him what was happening. He said, "Don't stay here another second, because they are going to keep you." He gave us the name of a lady whose husband and 19-year-old son were in the camp. She was not Jewish. He gave us her name and her address, so we went to her. She was the finest lady you would ever want to meet.

MG: Now where did she live?

IF: In Paris. In Paris. But she was afraid to keep us.

MG: How far was the camp from Paris?

IF: You had to take a train and with the train it was about a half hour.

MG: So you took a train to get to the camp and then you had to take a train to go back...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...and you were never stopped on the train?

IF: No, no. And so we were there about three days, four days, when she said we cannot stay because she's afraid. She gave us a name of another lady. So we went to that lady. And we...

MG: And how far was she from this lady?

IF: We had to take the metro and oh, maybe we traveled 20 minutes, something like that. When we got to that lady, she was also a very nice lady. We knew that she had a telephone in her living room. Now, in 1944 it was very rare for people to have telephone in their house or apartment. And, and, we, she gave us dinner and then she retired to her bedroom and we heard her talk. We could not make out what she was saying but she was talking to someone. My sister said to me, "But she does not have a telephone in her bedroom." I said, "I know." My sister said, "We cannot stay here because she is not all there. She's sometimes can say to people that she's hiding two Jewish girls."

MG: Well who was she speaking to?

IF: We did not know. She had a clandestine radio. She was in contact with England. She was part of the resistance, but we didn't know. So she gave us the name of another lady who lived in Montmartre. We went. You could not get into the apartment. There was clothes on the floor, dirty, dirty, dirty, but we were stuck. So we only stayed there one night.

MG: And how did you get there?

IF: Sub, the metro, the subway. The reason we only stayed there one night is because she was a prostitute. And she said to my sister, "You don't have to worry, you and your sister, I'll get you jobs." My sister said, "Uh-uh." I decided that I would go back home. I told my sister, "I am going back home." She had gotten a job through the first lady and was starting the following week. My sister said, "Where are you going?" I

said, "I don't know, but I don't want to be a burden. You are not making enough money to support two..."

MG: Now who was the first lady? I mean what...

IF: The first lady that my father gave us the name.

MG: Yes.

IF: Her name was Madame Charenton, C-H-A-R-E-N-T-O-N.

MG: What type of work was she going to be doing?

IF: Which one?

MG: Your sister.

IF: The one who said my sister and I shouldn't worry.

MG: No, no your sister.

IF: Oh, in an office, in an office, yes.

MG: Yes. I'm sorry!

IF: But her salary was not enough for two people and I did not want to be a burden. And I took the train that night. I did not have any papers.

MG: You were by yourself?

IF: I was by myself, I was 15. I followed the people and I did not know that only one car of the train was reserved for the French people and the rest of the train for Germans and French people working for the Germans. And the trains in Europe are different than here, they have compartments and then the corridor. So as a compartment got full, I gave my seat to an elderly lady. And I'm walking in the corridor and I didn't have a suitcase because I only had the clothes on my back. And I see the next car is empty and I couldn't understand why is everyone there. So I went to the next car, and I entered the compartment and there was a French man sitting there and I said, "*Bonjour Monsieur*," and he said, "*Bonjour ma petite*." And I sat near the window hiding my face, I did not want him to know that I was Jewish. An hour later a French policeman, a German soldier came to us for papers. So the man showed his papers, and as they are asking me mine. I don't have any, my heart was beating so, I was-- that as they are asking me for my papers, he says that I was his niece. And they went, "Oh!" and left. When they left he said to me, "Are you a Jewish girl?" I said, "Oh no, monsieur." He said, "You can tell me. I just helped you, and I can help you," but he was a total stranger. I would not go to a total stranger and, of course, I denied that I was Jewish. We continued the rest of the trip without speaking to each other. I arrived in my hometown five-thirty in the morning. I did not know where to go. I did not want to go where my brother was because if someone recognized me, would follow me, and everyone would be killed. And I decided not to go through the main street but to go in the back, through the boulevard. And as I did that the people going to work to the factory were going to work and I saw a man. And when he saw me, he went "Ahh!" like that. So I got so scared I started to run. The closest place was my sister Genie had a girlfriend. I rang their doorbell. When the mom came to the door, when she saw me, she said, "Run as fast as

you can, my husband is a collaborator.” So I started to run, where to go? I went to the grocery store that we used to do our shopping, and I asked the man, Mr. Picard, “Can I stay for the day and I will leave tonight?” He said, “Yes.”

MG: How do you spell his name?

IF: P-I-C-A-R-D, Picard. I was there for the day and they went downstairs to work. And as I am upstairs I’m thinking, where am I going to go? And the day that the Dean told me to go home to my mother we would be taken the next day, I saw a van pass by, the man driving was also a baker. He had a bakery on the main square, and he, he was passing our street and I saw through the window sacks of flour but I knew they were not sacks of flour. I knew they were bodies. And I had a very strong feeling they were the four Jewish girls that unfortunately lost their parents in Auschwitz. And I thought if he helped them maybe he could help me.

MG: Who were these four girls?

IF: They were the Jewish family and their parents were not French citizens so they were taken in 1942.

MG: I see, and these girls...

IF: Remained by themselves and they had a lady who lived across the street. She watched over them, she stayed with them, you know. And I thought if he helped those girls, maybe he could help me. I was not sure, but I had that strong feeling. So I asked Mr. Picard to contact him to ask if he could help me. He came over with a sack of flour; he put the sack of flour over me...

MG: With the flour?

IF: No, no, no, empty, and he put me on his shoulder and took me to his van. Where he was taking me, I did not know, but I trusted him.

MG: What was his name?

IF: Louyot, L-O-U- E Grecque-Y-O-T. E Grecque is French, it’s L-O-U-Y-O-T was his name.⁵ And the van was rolling, rolling, rolling and finally it stopped. And he came to take me out of the van, took the sack of flour off me. And as I’m looking it’s a isolated farm, very big farm, and people who working the farm, whenever a car came or a van came, they ran to see what it was. And among the people who do I see, my mother. My sister was there, too, my mother, because Monsieur Louyot was part of the resistance, and he knew that my mother was there. I was so happy, so happy to be with my mother. And people would come from the city to buy eggs, chicken and meat because they could not get that in the city. And one day-- I was there three months, three and a half months-- one day a car came, a couple came and they bought whatever they bought, and everybody went, you know, to see them leave and as they are ready to leave, the farmer’s wife says to me, “You are going with them.” She did not tell me I could not stay. It is 60 years

⁵Lucien Louyot was awarded the honor of “Righteous Among the Nations” by YadVashem in 1991. www.yadvashem.org.

later. I can still see my mother's face. We did not hug. We did not say goodbye. Our eyes spoke. This is our destiny and we cannot do anything about it.

MG: Now did everyone know that you were Jewish, know that your mother, that was your mother?

IF: Yes.

MG: They all did know.

IF: Yes, but they didn't know we were Jewish. They knew that my mother was a cousin of the farmer's wife.

MG: Oh, so...

IF: It wasn't-- she used to call my mother cousin.

MG: So the people who owned this farm...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...were not all Jewish?

IF: No, they were working people there, no.

MG: And...

IF: My mother and sister were the only Jewish people...

MG: What was the name of this woman who kept your mother?

IF: Thouvenain, T-H-O-U-V-E-N-A-I-N.⁶

MG: Now, when they were there, you were there for how many months?

IF: I would say five weeks.

MG: For five weeks.

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: Where did you stay? Did you stay with your mother?

IF: Yes.

MG: Did you have your own room?

IF: [slight pause on the tape] I stayed with my mother. We slept in the same room, in the same bed. It was a very big bed, so the three of us slept together. But I was there not even five weeks, I think three weeks...

MG: What was the other living facilities like? Were-- did you have running water, bath?

IF: Oh yes, oh, oh absolutely, absolutely yes, yes.

MG: And they provided...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...you with your meal?

IF: Yes, yes. And my mother, of course, did housecleaning, my sister worked in the fields, I think when she felt like it, you know [chuckle].

MG: And what did you do?

IF: I helped my mother. I helped cleaning and I also worked in the fields, yes.

⁶Emile and Genevieve Thouvenin were awarded the honor of "Righteous Among the Nations" by YadVashem in 1994. www.yadvashem.org

MG: What kind of work did you do in the fields?

IF: Picked potatoes and carrots and the fruits. Some fruits were apples. It was a very big farm.

MG: What time of the year was this?

IF: That was in May, in May, yes, yes. And I left with those people. They lived in the suburb of Nancy not too far from my hometown. They were very wealthy people. They had a magnificent apartment. It was so, so beautiful. They had three children, two boys and a girl, 17, 15 and the little girl was seven years old. Where I slept was the attic. I had a chair and a blanket. I did not have a bed. There was a cot in the room. It wasn't, you know, it's partitioned, you know, because they did not have a house, they had an apartment. So the apartment downstairs had their cubicle, and they had their cubicle. It was quite big; it was like the dining room, yes. The cot that was, if you would put a finger on the cot, it would collapse, so I did not use it, I would sleep on the, on the blanket. I became their maid.

MG: Did you have a bathroom, or a place to bathe?

IF: No, no, oh downstairs in their apartment, in their apartment, and...

MG: Did you have free access to it?

IF: No, everything was locked. They did not give me any food. With the money I had, I bought rutabagas, potatoes and carrots. I could not buy the other kind of food because I did not have my ration card and I would eat them raw because she would not allow me to use her stove.

MG: Where did you shop for these?

IF: I would go to-- when I went to the grocery store for her, I would. So the first week I was there, she sent me to buy Clorox. Clorox was very difficult to find and they must have had a connection. I walked two hours and on my-- I had eight liters, each hand of Clorox. I would take a few steps and stop a few steps, and stop, and stop. And I'm walking back to their house, a German car stops near me and who comes out, Hans, the one in charge of our hometown. I thought I would die of a heart attack. He says to me, "What are you doing here?" So I looked up at him and I said, "I'm on vacation." Of course he knew. He said, "Where is your mother?" I said, "I don't know", and I did not know. Even so I was with her; they were isolated farms that I didn't know where they were. So he looked at me, looked at me and he said, "*Pass auf*, [German]" means "Watch Out!" and he let me go. When I got back to the people, I told them I would rather not go out. So she said, "You'll do what I tell you to do."

MG: Did they know you were Jewish?

IF: Yes, yes. Then that same first week they sent me to do the grocery shopping and when I entered, the man he's staring at me, staring at me. And when I gave him the list he says to me, "I know your mother." I said, "I'm sorry, I am an orphan." He said, "I know your mother." He describes my family and he says to me, "Your mother and sister are hiding in a farm. Would you like to call them?" I said, "No, I am

an orphan,” but he was very smart. He put the telephone number on a piece of wrapping paper and I memorized it. When I got back to the people I said to myself, should I say something or shouldn’t I? And I decided, no, I’m not going to say anything. As soon as I got to them, I wrote the telephone number down. And I pinned it to my panties because I didn’t want to leave it in case she would look and I didn’t want to lose it. She did not like the way I used to clean, so she would hit me in my face. The first time she hit me. Then she says to me, “Do you have enough?” and very politely I said, “*Oui, Madame.*” So she continued to hit me. The second time she hit me, she said, “Well this time, do you have enough?” So I remember when I said yes, she continued, so I said “*Non, Madame.*” So, of course, she continued to hit me. But I am so proud of myself that I never cried. I would not give her the satisfaction that she was hurting me.

MG: What was the name of these people?

IF: Carabin, yes...

MG: How do you spell it?

IF: C-A-R-A-B-I-N.

MG: I guess you had mixed feelings. On one hand they were protecting you, and on the other they...

IF: Well it’s very odd that you say that. It’s been 60 years, for 58 years I used to despise her with a passion, despise her, every time I thought about her. About two years ago-- you know I think of it quite often, I said to...

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

MG: This is tape two, side two of an interview with Ida Firestone. My name is Marcia Goldberg. You were telling me about your feeling...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...for this woman who owned the farm.

IF: Right, and about two years ago I was thinking about it and I said to myself, you should not despise her. She gave you a roof over your head. What would you do if she were not here? So, not that I love her, but I thank her for giving me a roof over my head for three and a half months, but I don't like her.

MG: How did the children react to you?

IF: They were not allowed to speak to me. One time the little girl asked me a question and I answered her. Well, I got paid for it. She hit me and hit me. Then they were leaving on vacation for two weeks, so they took me to a farm and I was supposed to be there for two weeks. They would pick me up the Sunday when their vacation is over. After five days the people asked me to leave, because people who would come and visit them would ask questions about me. Who am I, and they were afraid. I can't blame them, I can't.

MG: How did they treat you?

IF: They-- like a stranger, you know, a dog. You want to eat? Eat.

MG: Did they, did you work while you were?

IF: Yes, yes, in the field, yes I worked in the field.

MG: Doing what?

IF: Picking potatoes and, you know, cleaning the dirt because sometimes they are roots and you have to take the roots, so that was also my job.

MG: The people who you were with previously...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...who went on vacation...

IF: Yes.

MG: What type of work did you do there?

IF: Cleaning the house.

MG: That was your...

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: And...

IF: And ironing...

MG: Did you...

IF: And I used to mend their stockings, and their socks and stockings.

MG: Did you work all day?

IF: All day.

MG: Did you ever have any free time?

IF: Never, never.

MG: Were you ever able to read a book?

IF: Never.

MG: Let me ask you, when you left...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...were you able to take any clothes with you, other than what you wore?

IF: Oh, no, only had the clothes I had on. In fact, towards maybe three months before we were liberated, the elastic of my panties broke, so I had held them with a string. In fact, well we'll come back to that, when I was the last farm, at night they would play charade and each one would get up and do their shtick and it's my turn, I get up and the string was so broken, my panties fell on the floor. So we were maybe 20, so you know what I did. I picked them up, I rolled them up, put them on my seat and sat on it. What else was I going to do?

MG: Now this was at a different time?

IF: It, well I'll tell you when, yes, yes.

MG: Well getting back to these people...

IF: Yes, yes.

MG: How did the husband treat you?

IF: Never spoke to me. Never, never spoke to me, no, no. So when they dropped me off at that farm, I was there about five days and they asked me to leave. So I walked until I found another farm and I asked them did they need the help to clean the farm or work on it in the field. So one farmer, a lady said, "What are you doing alone?" like that. I said, "I am an orphan and I'm looking for work." So she had pity on me. She said, "Alright, you can come and you'll work in the fields." I was there two days.

MG: Now did they have other people working on the, in the fields?

IF: Yes, yes. Not many, not many, and the second night I'm doing their dishes. They are still sitting at the dining room table, kitchen table, and I hear the husband go, "You know Cherie, if I could find a Jew, we need a new tractor." So I said to myself, "Oh my G-d! I can be their tractor." So I slept in the barn there. I slept with the cows and the horses, and I couldn't sleep so I would count how many times the cows made noise and how many times the horses made noise. So I waited for them to go up and I could hear them snore. I left and I stayed in the woods that night. I was afraid to walk during the night, because I never walked on the road, I walked in the fields. Because I was afraid if I walk on the road, a car can stop or Germans, whatever. I found another farm and I asked if they needed help, and the woman said, "Yes." She says, "We don't pay."

MG: Did you ever get paid by any of...

IF: Never, never. This woman is the first one who said, "We don't pay. You have food and board." Food I had, board in the barn with the cows and the horses. It's Sunday, it's time to go to church. I go to church with them. I copied exactly what they

did. They knelt, I knelt. They prayed from the Bible, I like mumbled. I was, you know, like praying, and it came to cross yourself. I must have did, I must have done something wrong, I don't know what I did. She looked at me and she said, "We'll have to talk." And the rest of the service I said to myself, what could I have done wrong? We walked to church, of course we walked back, and as we are walking back she says to me, "You are not one of us." And I said to her, "Excuse me Madame; I don't understand what you are trying to tell me." She says, "When we get back to the house, we will talk." We got back to the farm, she takes a chair in the kitchen and she says, "You sit and you don't move." She says, "My husband and I are going to change our Sunday clothes to our everyday clothes." So I waited for them to go upstairs and after about a few minutes I left. In the region where I come from, we have a lot of woods. So I went into the woods and this time I stayed two days and two nights. I was afraid to walk. I was afraid of her husband. I was afraid, I don't know why; I always thought he would cut my throat. Why I felt that way, he had very piercing eyes and always mean like and I was afraid.

MG: Weren't you afraid of being in the woods by yourself?

IF: I was petrified. I used to cry all the time and I didn't have food for two days and I picked up the grass and I would suck on the grass. I thought maybe it had something. It had nothing, and after a while I said to myself, why are you eating the grass? The horses and cows go through and they make and so I start...

MG: Were you ready to give up at any time?

IF: Never, never, no, never. Only once in one of the poems but no, I never really, never did.

MG: You said one of the poems...

IF: Yeah.

MG: Did you write poetry?

IF: Yeah, I wrote, I will read it to you.

MG: Did, where did you get the paper and the time?

IF: Oh, oh, at night. I didn't have electricity in the attic but like early morning I would write, and the paper I got, I will show you the paper. When they, when the kids would do their homework, when they would make mistake, they would throw the paper in the trash can, I would pick it up, and one time the mother saw me do it, so I paid for it. She hit me and hit me.

MG: What did you use for a pencil or pen?

IF: Well there was a little piece of pencil, like that, that they threw in the trash can and I took it. And then I needed a-- to make the tip sharper...

MG: A sharpener?

IF: ...a sharpener, a pencil sharpener. I didn't have one, so with my teeth, I, anyway.

MG: Did you write often?

IF: I had written 51 poems. I had given most of them to my sister Rosa. I had kept 11, just these, and she put them in the basement and they became very mildewed and she threw them out.

MG: This was after the war?

IF: After the war, yes.

MG: But you wrote these during the war?

IF: Yeah, yeah, yes. And, so, I stayed in the woods two days. I was afraid that they would look for me. Then I left and I found another farm. It was a lady who was, must have been a widow. She had a son and his name was Gaston, 27 years old, he never spoke. I never heard him speak to the mother either, and never spoke to me and I couldn't care less. But the mom was so good to me, so, so good. She's the only one I told that I was Jewish, I trusted her. My heart told me. She was a very big lady, very big. When I told her, she took me in her arms, she kissed me and said to me, "I will protect you to the end of the world." And I stayed there-- I was about four days. [noise on tape]

MG: What was the women's name, did you ever know?

IF: Never knew, never knew. I knew the son, because the mother would call him my Gaston. So one night I went to bed. I had my own room there. I had a bed, I had an armoire, I had nothing to put in the armoire but I had the mirror in the middle.

MG: Were you able to wash your clothes?

IF: I washed my panties and I didn't have, I had, at that time they wore long slips. Not the half slips like we have today, long, that's what I slept in, you know. That was very rarely washed, very rarely washed. Sometimes we would swim by and I didn't wash, I didn't have a bath. I never had a bath; I always had sponge bath, that's what I had. So, I, I couldn't sleep that night and I was turning and turning and I'm looking in the mirror, and I'm looking down, down and when I look down in the mirror, what do I see? The son is hiding under my bed. So I started to scream, scream and she ran and I couldn't even talk. I was-- she looked and she schlep him and she dragged him, and was kicking him, and punching him, and screaming at him. He never answered. To this day, I don't know if he was able to talk or not, I don't know. And she took him; I don't know where she took him. When she came back, she spent the night with me. She sat on the chair. I sat on the bed and we were talking. In the morning, she said to me, "I hate to tell you that but you can't stay." She said, "I can't be a policeman, 24 hours a day." If I didn't die, then I still remember the way I felt like the world. So I left, and I stayed in the woods that night again, and the next morning I heard church bells ringing and I said to myself, it's Sunday and those people are coming back from vacation, but I...

MG: Was this a two week vacation they went on?

IF: ...but I didn't know where they had taken me. So I said to myself, I have a little bit of money left, what shall I do? Should I continue to do what I am doing, or should I go back to them and maybe they won't want to keep me, take me again. So I

decided to go back. So I took a bus and the farmers were in the bus. It was a rickety bus and they had loaves of bread and sausages and they were eating. I hadn't eaten for two days and I'm watching them eat, and I'm saying to myself how lucky they are. And one lady must have seen me look at them, and she said, "Would you like some?" And I didn't want her to know that I was hungry, so I said, "No thank you." So I got to those people and when I rang the doorbell, she came to the door and she said, "You are glad to be back, aren't you?" I said, "*Oui, Madame*," and I, I was back there. Should I continue, or? So this same routine started again. About three weeks after I'm doing the vacation, I'm doing grocery shopping for them. I'm on the street, and I always walked with my head down because people who came to Nancy were also from my hometown and I did not want to be recognized. And as I'm walking with my head down, I see a woman walk and has a pair of shoes like my sister who was in Paris had. So as I passed a person, I dared turn around. It was my sister, Rosa. She-- the American soldiers had already landed in Normandy and were pushing their way towards Paris, and she wanted to be close to home when she would be liberated.

MG: Did you know what the progress of the war was?

IF: A little bit, a little bit, because I would hear the people talk, yes.

MG: Was there any bombing while you were hiding on these farms?

IF: Yes, but far away, not you know, directly on the farm.

MG: So the danger you felt was more to be caught.

IF: To being caught. That's it, that's it. So I was so glad to-- my sister was working, she was living in a *pensione*. She came to visit me, and the woman said, "I don't want your sister to come here". Okay. So two weeks later, I ran out of money.

MG: Where were you?

IF: With those people.

MG: You went back to them?

IF: I went back with those people. I ran out of money and I said to myself, if I don't have money, I cannot buy my rutabagas, my potatoes and my carrots. I did not want to tell my sister. I did not want to burden her. I did not tell my sister, that the people didn't give me food, and that the woman was hitting me. I didn't want her to, to worry. So I decided, the people went away that afternoon, and I decided I'm going to call that farm and see if it is my mother.

MG: You were willing to take the chance?

IF: Yes, yes. I was desperate.

MG: I called the farm; a lady came to the phone. I said, "*Bonjour, Madame*, excuse me, but is there a lady by the name of Mary," which was my mother's new name, "living on the farm?" She said, "Yeah." She said, "Who is calling?" I couldn't say her daughter. Millions of people are called Mary. I said, "A friend." She said, "Just a moment." Who comes to the phone? My mother. When my mother heard my voice, she screamed and screamed and screamed, and she started to speak to me in Yiddish. She

was saying, “*A leben auf dir, a gezunt auf dir.*” [Yiddish: a life for you, a blessing on you]. The only thing I was telling her, that I was hungry. She says, “Tell me where you are and I’ll send you food. I’ll send you bread,” but I was afraid to give her the address over the phone. And she says, “Don’t worry, we’ll be home soon.” I said, “I will call you back.” I hung up, a few seconds later the telephone rings, I answer, a man, and I knew he was German. “*Mademoiselle Ida?*” and I said, “Yes.” You have to come to the Gestapo. I said, “Alright.” So he gave me the name of this street.

MG: Were you afraid you were going to get into trouble using the telephone?

IF: I know...

MG: ...for people...

IF: Yes, I know. Yes, because I didn’t want to burden my sister, I was taking chances. I’m always like that, even now. Anyway, I, I waited for the people to come home and I told them what happened. She hit me, hit me, hit me, I thought she would never stop. Then she called me *sale Juive* [French: dirty Jew]. She told me to get out. So I left, I’m half way to the Gestapo, when I realize my sister doesn’t know what is happening to me. So I decided to go to her and tell her. I told her, she said, “Don’t go, they don’t know that I am here.” She says, “Stay here the night and tomorrow morning we’ll decide what to do.” I stayed with her the night. Seven o’clock in the morning I’m called on the phone, it’s the Gestapo. I think they found out, they must have called where I was and she gave my sister’s address.

MG: She knew your sister’s address?

IF: Yes.

MG: How did she know?

IF: Because when my sister came to visit me, she asked my sister, where are you staying, and my sister said, “I’m staying at the *Pensione*, rue Saint Dizier,” so she knew.

MG: I’m a little confused. You met your sister on the road?

IF: Yes, in the street.

MG: And she came back with you to the-- you went with her to her [tape paused]. Your sister after you met her on the road...

IF: Yes.

MG: You went back with her?

IF: To where I was staying.

MG: Oh, to where you were staying?

IF: Yes.

MG: Okay.

IF: Yes.

MG: And the woman that you lived with met her?

IF: Yes.

MG: And your sister divulged where she was staying?

IF: Exactly, yes.

MG: So that's how the Gestapo knew two weeks later where you had gone?

IF: No...

MG: [unclear]

IF: No, it's not two weeks later. They called the next day.

MG: After you had left?

IF: When the Gestapo called me that afternoon, right after I spoke to my mother-- the farm.

MG: Okay, but that was two weeks after you had seen your sister on the road?

IF: Yes.

MG: Alright. And then you started to go to toward the Gestapo...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...and you went to your sister's instead?

IF: To tell her.

MG: And she convinced you to not to go?

IF: Right

MG: But to stay with her?

IF: Right.

MG: Okay. Now, you stayed overnight?

IF: Yes, I stayed overnight and seven o'clock in the morning I was called to the phone and it was the Gestapo. And the Gestapo said you have to come or we'll come and get you. I said to my sister, "I am going." My sister insisted on going with me. I said, "No, Why should they get two of us. One is enough." She insisted, and Thank G-d she came. Thank G-d! We went, and we didn't know which building to go to, but one building, they had requisitioned single homes, one street of single homes. So one house had beautiful red flowers in their windows and I said to my sister, "Let's go to this one." We go. The guard asked what we wanted, and I said, "I was asked to come to the Gestapo." He said, "Go wait, you will go to Room 17." I remembered, he said. And Room 17 was a room like my living room and a long table and German soldiers and officers and young ladies, secretaries were all sitting at the table. As I said, my sister was 19, I was 15, we were holding hands. We walk in, we stayed near the door. So the officer in charge in German said, "Mademoiselle, come closer." And I was going too because we understood German. My sister squeezed my hand so I knew not to move. Then in French he said, "Mademoiselle, come closer." So we took a few steps. And he said, "Ah ha, so you are Jewish." And we said, "Oh, no." He said, "You can tell me, nothing will happen to you." And we said, "No we are not." He asked where we came from. We told him a different city. And where are parents? We told him that they were no longer alive. What were we doing in Nancy? My sister said, "I'm working and my sister is going to school," which of course, I was not. And all of a sudden, one of the ladies said, "I know the older one," and we looked. You know when you see a lot of people, you don't see

each face, you see. We looked and she used to be a classmate of my sister. But after the war, we found out that she was a double agent. She worked for the Germans and gave informations to the resistance. So when she said she knew the older one, the officer in charge said, "Oh you do?" She said, "She's my best friend. We go to school together and we go out together and she's the nicest person," she of my sister. And he asked us another question which I don't remember what and he let us go. She came back and she said, "Don't you ever come back," she said to us. So the understanding was that I would call the farm and see if I can go to the farm, but I forgot to ask my sister for money.

MG: Which farm?

IF: Where my mother was?

MG: Okay.

IF: Where, you know. So I had never been at that farm, because my mother was no longer with my sister. She was at a different farm.

MG: Oh, how did you know that she had been moved to another place?

IF: I did not know. It's the telephone number that the grocery man gave me.

MG: So you had no idea that your mother had moved?

IF: No, no.

MG: Okay. Why did they move her? Did you find that out?

IF: They said that the other people wanted to do something also. So I decided, I'm not going to go back to where my sister is, in case someone follows me. In Nancy my parents, not my parents, my father had friends. When my father would go to Nancy to buy halva, that's where we, he would buy it. He would stop at a café where Russian people owned the café. And he was glad to go there, to speak Russian and all that, but they were not Jewish. The son-in-law was a collaborator, and we knew that. But I decided to go there anyway. I felt, I'm getting to the end of my rope. I go in, the daughter, her name I remember was Fernande. When she saw me, she was shocked. So she said, "Oh my G-d, a ghost!"

MG: How would you spell her name?

IF: F-E-R, F-E-R-N-A-N-D-E, and I told her, "Yes, I just came from the Gestapo. I denied I was Jewish and they let me go. But I need some money to make a telephone call. If you are kind enough to lend it to me, I'll give it back to you after the war," which I did. And she took coins and she threw them on the ground and I was happy to, to pick them up. So I went to the railroad station. I called the farm and I didn't say my name. I said, "*Bonjour, Madame*," and she recognized me. She recognized my voice. I said to her, "I have a very bad cold. Can I come to the farm and recuperate? She says, "Of course." And I said, "How can I, can I come to the farm?" She said, "Go to Champigneulles, which was like a two hour walk. Tell them you are a relative, and they will take you. So I went and I told them I was a relative.

MG: Now where was this that you...

IF: In Champigneulles, C-H-A-M-P-I-G-N-E-U-L-L-E.

MG: That was a town?

IF: A town.

MG: Yeah.

IF: A small town, they made beer, they made oat. And, so I went to the brewery to tell the man that I'm a relative, could he take me to the farm. He said, "Oh sure," he said, "But we are not leaving for two days." He said, "Come back in two days, we'll take you." So what I did for two days, like the thieves, I would try apartment buildings. If the door would open I would go in, sit right there, and if I would hear people come from upstairs or come from outside, real quick I would stand up and leave. Sometimes they would lock the door and I couldn't go back in. I was afraid to fall asleep, because I was afraid that if I would sleep, I would not hear people come from upstairs or outside, and they would turn me in. What is a 15-year-old girl doing in a, in a hallway? That's what I did for two days. I didn't have food-- I, two days later I went to the man and he put me in his truck, and we went to the farm. And on the way to the farm, he stopped in my hometown on the main square, and he says to me, "See the movie house? Would you bring the film there?" I told him, "Could I go to the next stop? My ankle hurts," because the Germans were still in my hometown, and I didn't know who the collaborators were.

[Tape two, side two ended.]

Tape three, side one:

MG: This is tape three, side one of an interview with Ida Firestone. Today is August 2, 2004. My name is Marcia Goldberg. Mrs. Firestone, we were talking about your getting a ride to meet your mother where she was working, and the driver wanted you to stop and deliver a tape?

IF: Yes, yes, to the movie house, but I was afraid because the Germans were still in the city, and I didn't know which people in my hometown were collaborators. So I asked him could I go to the next stop, and he said, yes. And about five-thirty that afternoon I was reunited with my mother and about five weeks later, we were liberated by the American soldiers, yes.

MG: So this man took you to the farm?

IF: Yes.

MG: And, do you know this man's name?

IF: No, never knew his name.

MG: Tell me what happened when you arrived at the farm?

IF: When I arrived at the farm, my mother was in the farmhouse near the window. And she knew that I was coming because the farmer's wife had told her that I had called, and she was waiting. And when I got out of the truck, I-- my mother ran outside and I ran into her arms, and we were so happy to be together.

MG: What did she say to you?

IF: She said, "*A leben ayf dir*" [Yiddish: a life for you]. "G-d Bless You!"

MG: Did you break down and cry?

IF: Yes, the two of us, yes.

MG: Was anybody else there with you?

IF: Yes, farmer's wife was there. I met her and the husband.

MG: Yes.

IF: And they had, I don't know if they had three children or two, I knew of two. And I did not know but two weeks ago I realized that I had a picture of their daughter, another girl, and me in my wallet. And I did not know that I had it in my wallet, yes.

MG: What was the name of the farmer?

IF: Gouy, G-O-U-Y.⁷

MG: How many people were they allowing to stay on the farm?

IF: Many, many.

MG: Many Jewish people?

IF: No, not Jewish people. But young men who were part of the resistance, who did not want to work for the Germans, and they were hiding them.

⁷Victor and Marie Fribourg Guoy were awarded the honor of "Righteous Among the Nations" by YadVashem in 2007. www.yadvashem.org.

MG: Did your mother tell you how they treated her?

IF: They were wonderful to her, they were wonderful.

MG: Were they ever recognized...

IF: Yes.

MG: By Yad Vashem?

IF: Oh, they were not and I have to write, because my sister made a very big mistake. The other people were recognized by Yad Vashem, because they were the Righteous- , you know...

MG: The Righteous.

IF: By the Righteous, they by the Righteous Gentile. They were recognized as a Righteous Gentile.

MG: Who was that, which one?

IF: The first where my sisters remained, the first farm.

MG: Oh.

IF: And then the Hergott, the one who kept my brother, Madame Bour was the lady owned the bakery. And my sister said that my mother was with the people, the Gouy, only a few weeks, and I said that couldn't be because I was there three and a half months. So I have to write to Yad Vashem because...

MG: You stayed with your mother for three and a half months at this...

IF: I'm sorry not three and a half months, about five weeks, when we were liberated by the American soldiers, but even if the people hid you one day they deserve to become the Righteous Gentile. I feel they risked their lives, and how wonderful of them.

MG: Did they have families?

IF: Yes, yeah, they have a daughter, a son.

MG: So they risked their children's lives as well?

IF: Abso-, absolutely, absolutely, yes. And the farmer had a cousin, Marcelle, and she was a very odd person. She was very, very thin, very tall, always wore a, a scarf on her head. I never knew if she had hair or not. She always had a cigarette in the corner of her mouth. She bit into the food, she chewed, she swallowed, the cigarette never fell off. I mean it was you know...

MG: So, how long did you stay with your mother?

IF: At the farm, about five weeks. Yes.

MG: And did you work there?

IF: Not really, not much, no.

MG: And they supplied you with food?

IF: Yes, yeah. It was a time that they were picking the grapes, *la récolte des raisins*, yes. So that I helped.

MG: Now...

IF: Yes.

MG: And did you know where your two sisters were?

IF: I knew where my sister Genie was at the farm and I didn't know that it was only one mile away, and I never saw her. I never saw her. And my sister Rosa, I knew that she was still in Nancy, yes.

MG: Okay, so you stayed there for five weeks?

IF: Yes.

MG: Until what happened?

IF: The American soldiers liberated us, and as the Germans were retreating, they were burning farms and killing people. And Monsieur Bour said, "You know what, I'm going to put bales of hay in front of the farm, put it on fire, and they'll think that the farm is burning." That's what he did, but the Germans did not come through the road, they came through the field, and all of the sudden there are two tanks there. And they jumped off the tank, a machine gun in the right hand, a grenade in the left hand and my mother walked in the kitchen and sat down and was taking peas out of their pods. So I followed her. And she said to me, "Run!" I said, "I'm staying with you." She says, "Go and hide." I said, "I'm staying with you." She started to cry and begging me. So what I did, I took a basket. And I crossed the courtyard, huge, it was huge, in front of the two tanks and I went into the barn, and I thought from the barn I would go into the woods. But the woods were too far and I didn't want to walk from the barn to the farm. And behind the farm they had planted cabbages and the leaves were very high. So I thought I could hide there. So I hid under the leaves and someone screamed, it was the farmer's cousin, which I just described, who was hiding already there. She was not Jewish and she was afraid, you know. So that's where I hid until the tanks went away.

MG: And they did go away?

IF: They did go away because the farmer's wife took them in the smoking room where they smoked meat, and she gave them the meat and she gave them the hams and she gave them eggs and chickens and whatever she could give them, so they were happy and they left.

MG: So your mother wasn't touched, she was alright?

IF: No. No, thank G-d!

MG: And how long after that was it until the Americans came in?

IF: Oh about four days, yeah, about four days.

MG: Describe that to me.

IF: When, we had said that the first American that we see, we are going to hug him. But then...

MG: Did you know that the Americans were coming in?

IF: Approaching? Yes, yes.

MG: How did you find that out?

IF: Yes, well the farmer was talking. But first of all, the Americans did not know if we were collaborators or who we were, they didn't want us, any of them. And we heard the tanks and we saw the, the star, you know, and we were there Americans. And

we went like the tank was where the window was. They did not want us closer than where we were painting. And they said, "Stop, stop!" And then they started to talk to us and then they came out of their tanks, and the farmer's wife gave them food.

MG: Were you able to communicate with them?

IF: No, I didn't speak English.

MG: Did anyone of you?

IF: My two sisters had taken English before the war.

MG: Yeah.

IF: But...

MG: Well they weren't with you then, were they?

IF: No, but I said they were able to, I, you know, I, I...

MG: But at that time?

IF: Where I was, no, there was no one. No.

MG: So then what happened?

IF: They left, they did not stay. But they, not open, but they built a camp not too far from the farm because they had soldiers who had been hurt. So it was like a hospital.

MG: Okay, so did your mother and you remain there or...

IF: For a little while. I stayed until March, because from not having food, I was not feeling well.

MG: Okay now, when did you-- until March-- so when did you unite, unite with your mother? What month was that?

IF: With my mother, I think it was about end of October.

MG: 19...

IF: Forty-four ['44], yes.

MG: And then you were liberated?

IF: In December.

MG: In December.

IF: Nineteen forty-four [1944].

MG: Yeah, then you stayed on the farm?

IF: Until March, I did. My mother went home.

MG: Oh, she did.

IF: Yes, with my sister, and the apartment where we had was bombed. So my mother went to the house on the main square. I will show you where and I did not know if my father had survived the camp or not. And about February, about 10 o'clock at night, someone walks in my room, my sister Genie.

MG: This is at the farm?

IF: Yes.

MG: Okay, let me go back a minute.

IF: Yes.

MG: You were liberated in December.
IF: Yes.
MG: And you stayed, your mother went back...
IF: Yes.
MG: ...and you said your apartment had been bombed.
IF: Yes.
MG: So where did she find a house, a residence to stay?
IF: The house that she, my mother rented, was owned by the woman who had, who moved and had the café in Paris, so she rented that house.
MG: Okay, so she lived there and your sister...
IF: Yes.
MG: ...came back with-- which sister was that?
IF: Genie, the one who was a farm a mile away, yes.
MG: But you remained on the farm until March?
IF: Yes.
MG: Why?
IF: Because of a health problem. Yeah, I couldn't eat.
MG: Did they think that you would feel better being there than at home?
IF: Yes, yes, and how did they feel that I would feel better? The first day they gave me one boil egg with a teaspoon of rum, the second day, two eggs, two teaspoons; by the time I had five teaspoons I was a little *farchadat* [Yiddish: confused]. So they, they farmer's wife says, "I don't think that's the way." So they started to make me an omelet and mashed potatoes and I came back.
MG: How much weight had you lost?
IF: I must have lost about 25 pounds, and I was, I was never fat, I was always very thin. Yeah.
MG: Did any of these health problems remain with you over the years?
IF: Some, I think the stomach. I have to be careful what I eat. I don't think when I was young, I could eat anything. Yeah, since I got older, yes.
MG: Did you hear anything about the concentration camps and what was happening to the Jews during this time?
IF: When I came home. I knew of mass killings but I did not know of the crematorium. I didn't.
MG: How did you find out about that?
IF: From the newspaper.
MG: When you came back, what about your sister Rosa?
IF: Rose came back also, but not right away. She, she stayed in Nancy and then came home. But I think she came home about January, I believe.
MG: And what about your brother?

IF: My brother stayed with the Hergott, and when my mother went to get him, they had gotten so attached to him, they didn't want to let him go. And they said to my mother, "You can come and visit him anytime you want." And my mother said, "He is my child."

MG: So he came back?

IF: Of course.

MG: Okay. Tell me about your father's situation.

IF: I did not know if my father had survived or not. So by February my sister Genie comes into my room, I was at the farm. And she has a big smile and she says to me, "You know there is a possibility that our father survived the camp." I said, "Really, how did you know?" She said, "Well, someone told us they had seen him," and as she says that to me, my mother walks in and behind my mother, I see my father. That is how I was reunited with my father.

MG: And what did he say to you or you to him?

IF: Well, we hugged, we hugged, and he didn't say much.

MG: Why do you suppose he was never transferred to another camp?

IF: Because, thank G-d, he spoke seven languages, and when they needed a translator, he was there. I think that's the reason.

MG: How was he treated there?

IF: Well, he worked very hard. And you know, he was given very little food, like all of the people who were incarcerated. And he doesn't, he never talked much about it. The only thing that he said, that when they had the train transport, you know, who came to get the people in Drancy to take them to Auschwitz and the other camps, woman with children would jump out of the second floor. So, that's the only thing that he said.

MG: So how did your lives resume?

IF: Really like before. After the war, my two sisters got jobs with Americans, in their offices. And I stayed home and I, and we came, I came home 1945 and in 1946 I was accepted at the conservatory, and I practiced eight hours every day, and that was my life.

MG: You said that you wrote poetry.

IF: Yes.

MG: During this time.

IF: Yes.

MG: Did you continue?

IF: Not, not really, no.

MG: So most of your poetry was written during the time.

IF: Yes.

MG: Yeah, did they describe your experiences?

IF: Some. [tape paused]

MG: Would you read me one of them that would describe some of your feelings at that time?

IF: Yes, of course.

So young, so alone.
The hours and days are so long.
Most of us are taken *en masse*.
I feel more and more worry,
Alone with my thoughts.
The walls look and observe me.
To speak to them and ask why
I want to scream, cry, not a sound comes out.
My voice is silent.
I must be strong, especially courageous.
To survive, I have to be cautious.
It is so difficult to find a shelter
Above all to make friends.
The future seems so far away.
I am starting to believe in it less and less.
Tomorrow will be another day.
Is it the moment to pray?

IF: And it was the only, the only day that I felt that way.

MG: Did you write any about your feeling when you were in the woods alone?

IF: Let me see [tape paused]

On the road I am walking
Behind the bushes I hide
The sky is so blue, it seems so far away
I look at it thinking of tomorrow
So tall the Poplars seem to me
I feel so small I want to cry
I continue to walk, not knowing where to go
A village I see on the horizon
I hope they won't ask me my name
I will make believe that I am lost
When I will get there, and that's when I will get there
The sun is starting to hide
My hope is to find something to eat.

MG: Did you write these in French?

IF: Yes, I have them right here.

MG: And then you translated them into English?

IF: Yes.

MG: Do you want to read the letter you wrote to your mother?

IF: Yes, yes.

Chère Maman: This afternoon I feel like writing a letter to you. I know I won't be able to send it because I don't know where you are. I have been living with a family for the last two months, father, mother, two boys and a little girl. I don't know how much longer I can stay. I work all day as a maid. Do you remember when you were cleaning, I wanted to help you? You would say to me, you have time to work, housework is for mothers. I also darn their socks and mend their clothes. The lady tells me she likes the way I darn the socks. Other than giving me orders, the family never speaks to me, only when she needs something, or tells me what to do. She does not give me any food and I have to wash the dishes. I am always hungry. I am starting to accept my destiny. I am only 15 years old. I am alone, very much alone. I see your face. I hear you sing Tosca. I remember when I was playing piano, you would stand behind me. You never tired listening to me play. You would always say to me, "Very good." You were so proud of me. For the holidays you would take us to the dressmaker for new clothes. You also bought us new coats. We would take walks on a boulevard. I could continue, but it makes me so sad. Do you know who I think about, my sisters and my brother. Chère Maman, I do not want to hurt you, but I think it would be best that I forget what I had before. I am afraid that we will never see each other again. The country is so big. Oh, the other day I saw Gaston Jean-Pierre. He was visiting the people next door. He was looking at me, but I hid my face. I did not want him to recognize me. Chère Maman, if I'm able to find a piece of paper I will write again.

MG: Did you ever write again?

IF: No, no.

MG: When did you write this?

IF: I wrote that, must have been about September of '44, yeah.

MG: Well, after the war...

IF: Yes.

MG: You all came back.

IF: Yes. [tape paused]

MG: Alright, you all came back; you were all living together.

IF: Yes.

MG: And what did your father do?

IF: My father went back to work in a factory as a foreman.

MG: And why did your family decide to leave France?

IF: When we were liberated by the American soldiers, the first Passover my father invited Jewish soldiers to spend the Passover with us. My mother started to tell them that she had a brother in Cleveland, Ohio and one in Columbus, Ohio, and had nieces and nephews. My father told them that he had a brother and sister in Philadelphia, and of course, he had nephews and nieces. And the soldiers said, "Why don't you emigrate to America? You went through so much and you don't have any family here." We didn't. We were alone. And the soldier remem-- I remember saying to my parents, "Why don't you think about it tonight? I will see you tomorrow." When he came to our house the next day, my parents had made up their mind, that they would emigrate to America.

MG: Just like that?

IF: Just like that, and this is how we started the papers, and all that. It took three years.

MG: Did it?

IF: To come here, yes.

MG: How, what was the reaction of the, your neighbors to you when you returned?

IF: After the war, none, none.

MG: Did they want to know what happened? Did they...

IF: No, no.

MG: ...apologize for anything that happened?

IF: No, nothing, nothing, no. Some were disappointed that we came home.

MG: So how, how did you emigrate? Was it an organization that helped you?

IF: Oh no, we went through the embassy in Paris, and there was correspondence all the time. And then we had to go to Paris before we left, because we had to have medical examination. [tape paused]

MG: So there was no organization like Joint?

IF: No, or the HIAS, no.

MG: What about any individuals, did anyone sponsor you?

IF: My family paid for our trip.

MG: Okay, who was that, and how did you get in touch with them?

IF: Oh, we had lost their address because my parents had burned all their correspondence. So, those two American soldiers wrote to their wives. One happened to be from Philadelphia and the other happened to be from Cleveland, Ohio. Isn't it amazing? And they wrote to their wives, and the wives went to City Hall and that is how they found our family. And our family wrote to us. And my mother's brother who lived in Columbus, Ohio wrote a letter and said, "I don't know if you are really my sister but I hope you are," and he had included seven dollars.

MG: And when did you leave?

IF: We came to America, we arrived September 21. We left September 10. It took 11 days. We went through Canada, Halifax. We went all around.

MG: What was the name of the ship, do you remember?

IF: Of course, the Sobiesky, S-O-B-I-E-S-K-Y.

MG: And what was the year?

IF: 1948.

MG: So who came?

IF: We all came at the same time.

MG: Your mother?

IF: Father, and my two sisters, and my brother and myself.

MG: And who met you when you arrived here?

IF: In New York, my aunt and uncle from Philadelphia, the daughter, the niece from Philadelphia, my cousin from Cleveland, Ohio.

MG: They all met you?

IF: They all came to New York, yes.

MG: Your parents hadn't seen their siblings for so many years, is that true?

IF: It was, let's see, 35, 40 years.

MG: What was the reunion like?

IF: Yes, very nice, very, very nice, yes. And we stayed with my father's sister in Wynnefield for a whole month, six people. I think it was wonderful of her, yes.

MG: And then where did you finally settle?

IF: My aunt found us an apartment in Strawberry Mansion.

MG: And did your father get a job?

IF: Yes, through a friend of my uncle. In Wynnefield. I forgot the name of the company, but they made boxes and then he got a job there.

MG: And what about your mother?

IF: My mother never worked. My mother was a housewife and a house mother.

MG: How did they adjust to living here?

IF: It was difficult, very difficult, yes.

MG: Were they happy that they had moved?

IF: They were happy because they were reunited with their family. But I think they wished they had stayed in France.

MG: How about your sisters, your brother, you?

IF: We had a little difficult time getting used to it.

MG: Where, how did you learn English?

IF: I went to school I think for three lessons, and it was on Lehigh Avenue. It was far from where we lived, and I did not go there at night. So I stopped and my uncle from Philadelphia found me a job as a sales lady, not speaking English. And I'll never forget. a lady came in to buy a slip, and she needed a 36, and I had 34 or 38. And I knew 34 would be too small and I said to her, "Why don't you buy a 38, for the same amount of money you'll have more material." I'll never forget.

MG: Did she appreciate that?

IF: She laughed, she laughed, and I had a dictionary to find the words.

MG: When did you learn about the mass killings? The six million Jews?

IF: Oh, as soon as we got home in Ponte-à-Moisson, right after the war, oh yes.

MG: What did your sisters do?

IF: In America? They found jobs. My sister worked in Philadelphia, my Rosa, for a little while, in a jewelry store, in an office, and my sister Genie worked in the office for Gimbels.

MG: Did they marry?

IF: Yes.

MG: And what about your brother?

IF: My brother finished high school here and then became a famous chef, chef.

MG: And what about you?

IF: Me, when I came to America, not speaking English was very difficult. My uncle

[Tape three, side one ended.]

Tape three, side two:

MG: This is tape three, side two of an interview with Ida Firestone. We were-- you were just telling me about getting a job...

IF: Yes.

MG: ...when you were in, when you were in America.

IF: Right.

MG: As a salesperson.

IF: Yes.

MG: What was your next job?

IF: I worked, I changed jobs to another salesperson job because I was making more money in the other store. And I was really tired of selling because it was not, I had never worked before. And I decided that I would like to work in an office. In a newspaper, I saw an ad for filing clerk, it-- was it Oxford? No, no it was an insurance company-- Oxford, I don't remember, I don't remember, 30 Walnut. And I went and I applied. And it was a huge office where maybe 40 desk people working and Miss Miller was the manager of the floor, and she asked me did I work in an office before. And I must admit that I lied, I said yes, because I felt filing, anyone can do filing work. And she said where did you do the work? I said in France. Whatever she asked me, I said I did it in France. She said one, the person who takes that filing job, if one of our bookkeepers leaves you have to take the job of the bookkeeper over. Do you know how to do bookkeeping? I said, yes. She said where did you do it? I said, in France. I got the job and my *mazel* [Yiddish: luck], three weeks later one of the bookkeeper leaves, and I have to do bookkeeping. But, it was quite an experience, but I did it.

MG: When did you resume teaching piano or playing piano?

IF: Then I was working in all different offices, and I became pregnant.

MG: Okay, let's go back a moment.

IF: Yes.

MG: Where did you meet your husband?

IF: Oh, I met him in Strawberry Mansion where we lived. We arrived there in October and I met him in February of '45.

MG: How did you meet him?

IF: Forty-nine ['49], excuse me. He heard that French ladies, French girls moved into the area, and he asked my brother for the telephone number of the youngest one, and yet he is older than my oldest sister. That's how I met him.

MG: What's his name?

IF: Herman H-E-R-M-A-N.

MG: And where was he born?

IF: He was born in Philadelphia.

MG: Did you share your stories with him?

IF: Not right away, no.

MG: Did you ever share them with other people when you arrived here?

IF: No, no, with family, only a few members of the family. The others did not want to know.

MG: But you did share them with your husband at a later time?

IF: Yes, much later.

MG: So when were you married?

IF: In 1951, in July.

MG: What type of work did your husband do?

IF: He, when I met him he was in the jewelry business, he sold jewelry. But then he went to work for the government and became an analyst.

MG: So how long are you married now?

IF: 53 years.

MG: Are you still in touch with your relatives that...

IF: Yes...

MG: ...the offspring that you ...

IF: Yes and no, I am terrible that way.

MG: Are you still close to your sisters and your brother?

IF: Very, very close, my brother calls me every night. [tape paused]

MG: About your husband, what, you said he worked in the jewelry business?

IF: Yes.

MG: And then?

IF: And then he went to work for the government, for the IRS.

MG: I see. Is he retired now?

IF: Yes. He retired in 1984.

MG: And you have how many children?

IF: We have one. We had one son, Craig, Craig Joseph. He was born November 18, 1953 and he's going to be 51 in November. *Kein ayin hara* [Yiddish: no evil eye].

MG: Is he married?

IF: He's married.

MG: What's his wife's name?

IF: Amy.

MG: And does he have children?

IF: Yes, he has two children. He has a daughter who is going to be 19 next month, and a grandson who's going to be 18 in April.

MG: What are their names?

IF: Amanda and Jacob.

MG: Do they go to school?

IF: Yes, Amanda just finished first year of college.

MG: Where?

IF: At University of Maryland. She is a writer. University of Maryland, I understand, has a University in that University for writers; that's why she chose Maryland.

MG: And your grandson?

IF: And my grandson in September is going to 12th grade and next year he'll go to college.

MG: During the time that you were hidden, did you, were you ever discovered or felt that you were in immediate danger?

IF: I was always in immediate danger. You had to be very careful on what you did and where you went.

MG: Did you think that you would be killed?

IF: I sometimes felt, yes.

MG: Did you ever want to give up?

IF: Only once, that I wanted to give up, yes.

MG: Were any of the people who hid you, or your mother, or your sister, ever paid?

IF: No, never, not one cent. No.

MG: Did you know anyone in your circumstances that was captured?

IF: That were hiding? I don't know. I don't know that.

MG: So when did you start teaching music?

IF: When I, when we moved to Mt. Airy, Craig was, when we moved, he was a year and a half, and I was always very busy with him. But when he was about three and a half years old, he was playing building with blocks and I took advantage to play piano. We did not have an air conditioner, so I had my windows open. A neighbor in the back heard me play, came over and asked me would I give piano lessons to her son and from that my students grew and grew and grew.

MG: How many students do you have now?

IF: Now, I don't have much, because I'm 75 years old and I don't want to work as much as before, yes, so I have 18.

MG: Do you belong to a synagogue?

IF: No.

MG: Did you ever in the United States?

IF: When Craig, yes, when Craig was going through his Bar Mitzvah.

MG: Did your experience ever change the way you felt about being Jewish?

IF: Never, never. I was always proud to be Jewish.

MG: And what about your parents, did they remain Jewish with all of this?

IF: Oh yes, oh yes, yes.

MG: If, did you ever return to your hometown?

IF: Yes.

MG: When?
IF: In 1978.
MG: What was that like?
IF: It was wonderful, and the lady, Madame Bour, who owned the bakery, was still alive, and I saw her.
MG: And she remembered you?
IF: Not right away, her daughter did, yes.
MG: And how did other people that you met react?
IF: Most of the people, of course, we saw Madame Bour and the other people were Jewish people. Only one couple that we went to see, were not Jewish.
MG: If, at this point, have you discussed any of this with your grandchildren, with your son?
IF: Yes, not the entire story but some, yes.
MG: How-- what was their reaction?
IF: None, no reaction at all.
MG: Will you share this tape with them?
IF: Yes.
MG: If you were giving a message to young people today,
IF: Yes.
MG: What would you tell them about the Holocaust, what they could be on guard for?
IF: Are you speaking to Jewish young people or...
MG: Well, I guess any, any young people...
IF: Well, to really listen to what is happening, and if they can be of any help, that should be Jewish children or non-Jewish children, if they can help a human being they should.
MG: Are you involved in any survivor activities?
IF: We, I belong to a group called Child Holocaust Survivors, and we get together. In the beginning it was somewhat a support group, but now we are just getting together. In the beginning, we would try to do things but some people were not interested. What they are interested in is just get together.
MG: Do you speak to any groups?
IF: Yes. I speak to schools, I've spoken to synagogues, oh yes. I'm very busy, yes.
MG: And do you find that there's an interest in this?
IF: Yes, absolutely, yes. When I speak you can hear a pin drop, yes.
MG: Are there other activities that you enjoy doing now, other than your music?
IF: Well, I used to paint. I don't paint now; other activities, not really, to see my children, and my grandchildren.

MG: Do you belong to any organization?

IF: No.

MG: Any Jewish organizations?

IF: No, no.

MG: Is there anything else you would like to add?

IF: No, I think I said a lot. [tape paused] I also, when you asked me about my father's name, Adolph Hoffman, when they lived in Russia, the name was Goffman; G-O-F-F-M-A-N, but when they had to register for something in Germany the man said to my father, "There's no Goffman in Germany. Your name now is Hoffman," and changes the G to an H.

MG: What happened to your parents?

IF: Well, the, my mother passed away in 1964. She, in 1964, and she was 71 years old. My father passed away in nineteen sevent-, no, nine years after, in 1973 he passed away, and he was 84 years old.

MG: Do you still think about what happened to you?

IF: Always, always, yes.

MG: Well, I want to thank you very much for...

IF: Oh, you're welcome.

MG: Thank you for your time.

IF: You're welcome.

MG: And I hope to hear you play one day.

IF: I will. I can play *My Yiddishe Mama* for you today if you want to. It will take two minutes.

[Tape three, side two ended; interview ended.]