

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SUZANNE GROSS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Janice Booker
Date: August 9, 1983

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SG - Suzanne Gross¹ [interviewee]

JB - Janice Booker [interviewer]

Date: August 19, 1983

Tape one, side one:

JB: Tell me a little bit about where and when you were born, and a little bit of information about your family.

SG: I was born in Paris, France. And we came to the United States in 1948. I came with my father, my mother. I have a sister, who is five years older and stayed in France much longer, because she was married and, you know, having a family.

JB: When were you born?

SG: 1931.

JB: From 1931 until the war, what was your growing up experience like? You lived in a big city, in Paris.

SG: I lived in Paris and the experience was really, you know, growing up in a normal way, but, when you were born in France, from parents, you know, born in Russia, you are not really French. And you always felt it. It's a really, a Catholic country, and you, you're not French. And this was confirmed, you know, in later years.

JB: Your parents were born in Russia. When did they come to France?

SG: Let's see, my mother was about 17, and my father was 21. They came from Belz, you know, the well-known Belz, in Russia. And...

JB: Did they come together, or did they meet in Paris?

SG: No, they came together; they got married, and in fact they were supposed to go to South America, and they got stranded in Amsterdam. And the Jewish organization took compassion and sort of sent them off to Paris. And that's where they landed. You know, and it was a purely accidental that I was born in France.

JB: So they were alone, then, without other members of their family in Paris?

SG: Right. But the Jews in Paris were very social. It was a time, well my parents came in the '20's, let's see, my sister was born in 1925. So I think they came around 1924. Okay? But, to come back to having no family, the support system, from what I remember, was completely social. This was a time when the Jews turned to a kind of socialism. They thought that socialism would be, would welcome Jews. And that was, it was, they would group into cultural and political groups. And I remember that my parents were part of that, and the Jewish community in Paris was really very supportive, you know, people individually. Actually it was very segregated, because the French did not really accept Jews that much. So that the friends were Jewish mostly, and the life was Jewish...

JB: In what way?

¹née Sarah Pertofsky.

SG: It was very nice.

JB: In what way was the life Jewish?

SG: Well let's see. I remember being taken to the Jewish theater to see Maurice Schwartz, you know, and being, as a child, you know, being taken to their *organizatzia*, you know, to watch plays and listen to poets and listen to speeches. And I even remember when there was the Spanish Civil War. There was a young woman on stage, you know, to raise money for the Spanish Civil War. Her head was shaven. And she started to sing all these Spanish songs. And everybody was all worked up about it. And it was very Jewish with neighbors. The neighbors, you know, there were sprinkles of Jewish, but they were not, the Jews then, were not that religious. In my neighborhood, in the 20's, part of Paris which was a blue collar neighborhood, there was one Jewish family that went to synagogue and observed religiously, kosher and all that. Everybody else was more or less not practicing, but the Jewish identity was there thoroughly. There was no question about that.

JB: So the ethnicity was there if not the religious practice.

SG: Completely, yeah, completely. And my parents spoke Jewish in the house, and when people met they spoke Jewish [Yiddish]. I was raised with it. I understand it fluently. I spoke mostly French, but now, later on I, you know, I start to speak Jewish all of a sudden. You know, I understood it. And this is really what saved me during the war years. As far as my identity was concerned, I knew exactly who I was. And since I was raised on stories by Sholem Aleichem, and, I was raised with, am I doing okay?

JB: You're doing terrific.

SG: And I was raised, my mother had a voice like honey, you know, sweet like honey. And she, after a long day's work, her way of communicating with me was to tell me stories and to sing a lot of Jewish songs, folk songs.

JB: What was the economic situation of your family?

SG: Well, it was a constant struggle. The younger my father was, the more ambitious he was, and little by little, you know, life is hard. And my parents had a beauty parlor. They both worked together. And before the crash I heard that my father started a beauty parlor where later on it was a large post office. So he was really ambitious. Later, my husband said that my father could have done anything if he would have had the education. He was extremely bright. My mother, up to this day, writes. She's a writer and she reads her stories. She's 76 years old, and she's a fantastic writer in Yiddish. And she goes from group to group and reads her stories. So that, yes, it was a constant struggle. I saw my parents work very hard and lose everything a few times.

JB: What was your school life like?

SG: That's very interesting. This is where I felt, I still remember to this day my first lesson in geography, that, that I had to learn. I had to learn by heart, and it was that the horizon line is the line that separates the sky from the earth. And I went around jumping on one foot, telling this line to all my neighbors, to my parents, with much pride. The school was a real source of satisfaction for me. It also saved me during the war. And, you knew,

once you were in school, you knew that you were Jewish, that you were not French, and that your parents were *étrangés*, strangers.

JB: How did you know that?

SG: Well, all the children, you know, would talk about their church and their activities and their parents, and your name Pertofsky was not French. And people would keep asking you, "Where did your parents come from?" It was pointed out to you, and you really felt it. You really felt it, because you were in a mi-, complete minority. There were always one or two Jewish children at the most in a classroom. And I remember, I have to tell you that I was very proud to be Jewish, because we always excelled. We always excelled. I don't know for what reason, but we did.

JB: Although you felt different, and you understood that that difference was because of your Jewishness, did you have antisemitic experiences in school?

SG: Well, antisemitic experience, we would hear about anti-Semite, you know, antisemitism, but the blatant antisemitism started with, you know, with the occupied years. You know, the German occupation. That's when it came out, you know, really blatantly.

JB: All right, let's start talking about that. At what point did you begin to understand that something was happening in Germany that was suspicious, detrimental, worrisome? You were very young, but you seem to remember very well.

SG: I was eight years old when the war started, and the first antisemitic experience was in school, when I had to wear the yellow star, which said *Juif*. And I had a few Jewish friends, that the first day, we were supposed to go into school with the yellow star, which was required of Jews, did not go to school. They were afraid. And I decided that I would go in that day with my star, because I was very proud. I was a proud little child.

JB: Let's back track a little to the beginning of the war, until we get to the occupation. And what were your experiences as a child, and as a Jew in Paris at that time? How did, what happened between the point of the rumblings and the wearing of the yellow star?

SG: Right, okay. The first experience that something was going wrong was, we had a neighbor, Monsieur Sandieu. They, you know, this couple had one son, and they had a knitting factory. And they were comparatively to my parents quite well off, okay? And then one day he was called at the police station, and he never came back. And then it happened to a few people in our neighborhood. And then we heard the rumors that the Germans were experimenting with gas trucks, or gas something in the woods. This was what I remember. And we suddenly understood that this is probably what happened to our neighbor, Monsieur Sandieu. That was the first thing we heard. Then, you want to know before, you know, like when it's just started? Then we had to register, which was a great problem.

JB: Only the Jews had to register?

SG: Only the Jews had to register, which was a great problem. Should you register? Should you not register? And you had to register at the police station which was right around the corner from where we lived? We lived at one end of the block, the police station was at the other end of the block. And since you were law abiding, and you didn't know what the consequences would be, I mean, people had to, men, Frenchmen, had to register, you know, for forced labor in Germany. So it was another registration. Who could ever imagine? Who could ever imagine that this was the purpose!? You were law abiding, and you, you know, unfortunately people registered. That was the second bad thing.

JB: What period of time are we talking about?

SG: The period of time to me I can't, you know, I can't really...

JB: Before, was this before or after the occupation?

SG: No, that was after the occupation.

JB: After the occupation.

SG: Everything after the occupation. The Germans are the ones that experimented with gas chamber. It's not the French, although the French helped completely to take the Jews.

JB: At this period of time, what were the relationships with Christian neighbors or Christian children in school? How did they react to the registration and the wearing of the yellow star?

SG: The reaction was just what people are. The ones that didn't like Jews couldn't have cared less, and thought, you know, "It's just another thing that the Germans are requesting." The ones that had human conscience had it then. It was just a problem, and it turned out that later the Jews that did not register were safe, if they could find a hiding place or if they could leave the country.

JB: Is there a lesson in that?

SG: There's a complete lesson, complete lesson. And it's very interesting but I can comment about Günter Grass, the German author, who on the occasion of the commemoration, whatever you want to call it, you know, of Hitler coming into power, was asked to write a, you know, for one of the major newspapers in Germany. And he said that because of the German past, historical past, especially Germans have to learn to rebel and protest on an individual level.

JB: Mmm. What was your life like as a child during that period of time of going to school, having registered, wearing the yellow star? What was your life like, and that of your family?

SG: Well, as I had mentioned, because there are some things that I remember vividly that were major. And, you have to bear with me [weeping]. I cry today; I knew I would. There is no way that the sorrow and, you see, it's very vivid. And it, I have to cry, because I didn't cry then. I went to school that day with the yellow star. And there was a silence, the silence in the school yard where I used to run and play. You know, I was very active there? I was a happy child. And I walked into the yard, you know. And there was a

silence that formed, that started, and a circle that was around me, with a space around me. And all the children were looking at me with the star. I was the only one that had the courage to go in there and say, "Yes, this is what I am. Look, I had a star. So what?" I was always stubborn about my rights. So I felt, "Okay, I have the star. So I have the star. I go in and I'm still the same person." And I was defiant. My defiance, which kept me going during the years, started. And then, the, the silence was interrupted by someone screaming out, "*Sal Juif*." Dirty Jew. And then there was what I, you know, I couldn't analyze anything but probably from children who understand probably a lot of embarrassment. And little by little, you know, the show was over, this, sort of, they were stunned.

JB: You see that children...

SG: And, and this, and they started to play again. Then I went to the director of the school, and I, to tell her about the incident. That I was not, you know, and anyway, what they had called me, that it was just Jewish. And she took me on her lap, and she cried. And she hugged me. And she said, "As far as I'm concerned, you are my little Sarah." This was my name, Sarah. "And, what can I tell you? These are difficult times, but, continue to study well like you did. That's the most important thing. And don't pay attention." That was the first incident. And, you know, it was very [vexing?] to be, to stand there, and be called as a different kind of human being, but to be a human being. And little by little, things happened and got worse. My father's business was closed when they started to take Jews systematically. We thought that the people were going to work cam-, work places. We never imagined that they were going to their deaths. People don't want to face death anyway. Why would they believe that? Why would they believe such an enormous crime? And whoever says that Jews went like sheep, they have absolutely no understanding of the conditions. The Jews would be pick ed up during the night, when they were dazed by sleep. It was usually, you know, three, four o'clock in the morning, when the world was asleep, which they were anyway. And, they were surrounded by French police, and the Gestapo, with dogs and guns. And many times, you know, they didn't want to sep-, families didn't want to separate. Sometimes they, we saw the separations right there and then, with the buses—women together, children together. I saw women handing out their babies through the window. And to say that Jews went like sheep, people just don't understand what a war is. They don't under stand the, you know, the brutality of war. I mean, you're just a, you know, a normal person going about in a normal life. And you don't understand these, the beast, you know, that it could be that.

JB: What happened to your family after your father's business was closed down?

SG: Well, what happened, when it, I remember when it was first, that my parents closed, you know, the Germans closed and they put a sealed wax on the doors. And they would check, if you please, if that sealed wax would be broken. When things started to be bad, my father joined the underground. He went in the country. He was working on farms in order to make a little bit of a living. And after a while he worked with the Jewish

partisans—French Jewish partisans, because they didn't want, the French, the French partisans did not want to go with the, to be with the French Jewish partisans. That's where he was. I was told he was working on the farm. I don't know. Once in a while, when I was home, which was not very often, you know, he would bring some food. My mother was taken in for three months—when they really started to take Jews—by neighbors. Like I said, the ones that had a conscience before, had it. You know, that's the way they were. They hid her. They just hide her in their house. My sister was older, and she was in a children's home for a while. I was sent off and on different places. And if you want to know, I'll tell you.

JB: Yes.

SG: I was sent, first I was sent, there was a secret organizations—the Jewish Scouts—went underground, the French Jewish Boy Scouts [*Eclaireurs Israélites de France*]. You know, Boy Scouts, the Jewish. They went underground. And they had a network to save Jewish children and to place them in French farms. And I did child labor when I was ten years old or even younger. And it really started to get bad. And I remember that I met, I was sent with five, we were a group of five or six children. We didn't know where we were sent. My parents didn't know where we were sent. It turned out in Normandy. And when the train...

JB: Who was responsible for the sending? The Jew-, the Scouts' organization?

SG: Yes, Jewish Scouts. They went underground. We were sent anyway to work on farms and also to be hidden. We didn't know exactly where. But during that train trip, again, the train stopped, and the Gestapo was looking for someone. And we thought for sure, we didn't know, okay, they are looking for us. And as they were looking feverishly in that train, probably for some resistance, French resistance, you know, we thought they were looking for us, that that was the end. And that was the first time I blanked out. You know I really, I fell on my knees. I lost my body weight or whatever, when I, sort of fainted. You know. But there were other things that happened before that. The reason that we were all going in a different direction was that we, of course, noticed that they would take Jews systematically, the ones that were originally born in Russia, or the ones that were originally born in Poland. It was systematic. The last Jews that they took were the French Jews. And we were considered French Jews, my sister and I. We were born in France. And because of that, my parents, who were born in Russia, were not taken right away. But my parents noticed, you know, the pattern. And after my aunt, uncle, and cousin were taken, cousins were taken away, my father said, “You know you don't stay. You know, it's stupid to stay in your apartment. They'll come knocking on the door and take us. Let's run in different directions. If they catch us they'll catch us one at a time, but we're going to run. We're not going to sit.” And that's why we were all separated off and on. And ap-, we were lucky. It saved us. We were just lucky, in the end, that we were not caught while we were running, you know.

JB: How did you find each other again?

SG: Well, with me, it's like, when I was in Normandy, what happened, after a while, it was sort of a remote village. And after a while you had, you know, ration tickets and all that. And there was a stamp, *Juif*, on the ration card. And people would start to ask questions. So, one time when I was in the fields at work, when I came back, someone said that the *gendarme*, the police, came to ask questions about you.

JB: And you were how old at this time?

SG: Ten. So that, right away I sent a letter to my mother, who was in Fra-, in Paris. And immediately there was like a phone call, you know, at the grocery store, that, you know, "Put Sarah back on the train right away." And that's it. So, I understand in this particular place that the Gestapo came to pick me up two weeks later. I was gone. But we were told that some of the children that were part of that trip with me were taken. So they would take us wherever they could.

JB: Tell me about the changing of your name.

SG: Well, I was very active. I used to, you know, my parents worked, so I would play in the street a lot.

JB: Yeah.

SG: Since then I heard the term, "Street Rat". I wasn't exactly a rat, but I certainly, you know, lived in the streets. I loved, you know, playing, playing, playing. And my parents were working, so they always had to call me and look for me like for dinner and lunch, you know. And at one point, my parents had come home. That was at the beginning, you know, the German occupation and all that, and their store was still open—it didn't take too long though to have it closed. And they said, "Okay. We can't call you "Sarah" all the time. It's, you know, and, we're Jewish, so, which name do you want, Suzanne or Simone?" And I think with a, you know, I remember I didn't think and maybe they said Suzanne last or whatever the child picks up. I said, "All right, Suzanne," you know. And then they would call me "Suzanne" I didn't know who they were calling. And I didn't fix the situation. That's why my name was changed.

JB: So that when they called you, if there was anyone listening, the name "Sarah" would not be heard.

SG: Right.

JB: Mmm hmm.

SG: And on one of those farms I was also, I went to a Convent school. That was an experience. That was one of the most painful experiences, among all the experiences, because I felt that I could not reveal my identity. And I felt like I was a liar. And apparently I wasn't a very good liar. And in order to continue, you know, being safe, I had to pretend not being Jewish.

JB: So that going to the Catholic school was a subterfuge. The people in the school were not taking in Jewish children.

SG: No.

JB: I see.

SG: So I really had to completely cover up. And I was absolutely terrified. At the beginning I was getting as much information as possible. And I didn't know the Catechism. And the first time—I had to go to confession—and the first time I went to confession, it's sort of a tragic comedy. I was afraid when I would go into the confessional that I would behave in such a way that it would reveal that I was a phony, a phony Catholic. And I was reading the Catechism. I was trying to get information as much as possible. And then, I had a real problem. I had to tell my sins. And goodness know, I felt like I hadn't done anything. But my only thing was to hide I was a Jew. I was lying. That's a thing, to lie, it's sin to lie. But, yet it wasn't a sin, you know? So I was looking. It was, I don't know what I was doing, but I was looking for an answer. I was tormented by that. To go into the confessional, number one, not to say that I was a Jew. Number two, to lie that I had sinned, because I wasn't a sinner!

JB: And you were about ten, eleven at this time?

SG: Yes. And my parents had raised me with a lot of love, and they would never spank me or anything, you know. And I, I just, I don't think I lied. I didn't sin. I was a child. I didn't sin. So, lo and behold, at the end of the Catechism, they have a list of sins. And I think I read the list, I remember, with great speed, and I'm trying to find like a hungry soul, you know? And I became more and more interested, ahh, I would find something appropriate. And there was a very involved sin, something I had listened to a conversation against the Catholic religion. And to be silent was to take part, to take active part by being silent. How ironical. I thought, "Gees, you know the way things are now, if anyone, you know, that's-

Tape one, side two:

SG: Something against the Catholic religion, or, here I was listening to the Catholic religion, what it was all about. I certainly would be silent. So that's a good sin.

JB: So that's the one you chose.

SG: I did. I wouldn't lie, you know. At least, you know, I would be safe saying something sincere.

JB: Was anyone instructing you among the Jewish Scouts at this time how to behave in all of these circumstances?

SG: Nothing. Nothing. We were just sent out.

JB: Where did you live?

SG: Where did we live?

JB: Before you went to, you lived, did you live in the Convent school?

SG: Yes.

JB: You lived there.

SG: Yeah.

JB: How about when you worked on the farms? Where did you live?

SG: Well I lived on the farm, but you know it was like you were not accepted. At least where I was, I was not accepted. And a few times the conditions were like, you know, being a slave.

JB: Were these private farms, and you were...

SG: Yes.

JB: Sort of hired out to work there as a child?

SG: Yes. Yes. I did child labor. I mean I worked hard? I worked in fields from like, you know, early morning, till the sun would go down.

JB: So you lived on the farm.

SG: Yes.

JB: Wherever you worked.

SG: Also, I remember on one of the places, on Sunday you had to go to church, you know, and I had too many duties to do before I would go to church. And you wore these high shoes because it was muddy, you know, on the farms. When you went to church you were supposed to dress up, you know, and all that. I wasn't given the time to do that. So, you, I couldn't go. I wasn't, it would have been a shameful thing to go with muddy shoes. And here, from coming from a loving home where my parents didn't have much but always very conscious of cleanliness and, you know, dignity about yourself, I would slap on, one time I slapped on black polish on top of the mud. And I ran through the snow to the church, because I was late. And I was in the choral group at church, too, you know, 'cause I had a nice singing voice. And it was a day I'll never forget where it was the holy day. They were, about the virgin Mary. And as I walked in the priest was preaching about, you know, the virgin Mary being as white as the snow. And real quick I said, "Gees, it's

not really white, the snow. I just stepped into it and I put black polish on the mud, you know, on the shoes. What's he talking about?" Then I would sit in church, and I would think, "I wonder what Pa-paw would think about that? I wonder what Ma-maw would think about that?" I always questioned, you know, some of the values of the Catholic Church. It made a Jew, a real Jew out of me.

JB: Were you on these, in these situations alone, or were there other hidden children with you?

SG: No, I was all alone. There was no communication.

JB: So that you had to become incorporated in some way into the life of the family?

SG: Well, this is where, you know, food was never warm to eat. It was like, you know, all the warmth and love, it was gone [weeping]. You were a perfect stranger. And you had to be attuned to what was going on, to who you were dealing with. Early in life I learned that you had to listen, that you had to look where you were, who you were talking to. You had to be gracious no matter what the, you know, no matter what the hardships. You are not what you are. You had no right to be a human being. And I learned very early to survive.

JB: That's why you're here.

SG: Yes, but, I learned later on in life, once in the States, once being free, you know, life is what it is. It's not always kind to you, even under the best conditions. And I had to learn not to survive the hardships of life any more. I wa-, life is not meant to survive, it's meant to live. And that's what I learned. But then, let me tell you, go back. Let me go back. Because the second time that I blanked out, was when we were already, you see, back and forth we would come back to Paris and go somewhere else. And then when the time came where you, there was no place to run, when everybody was scared, where everybody was poor and hungry—that's what happens during a war—it's not something on television. It's very real. So, we made a secret entrance in the beauty parlor, which was boarded up. The secret entrance was under the stairs. The only persons that knew we were there was our *conciierge*. You know, my parents lived in that apartment house, it was many, many years. And she took in a few pieces of furnitures. And my father made like a little house out of, advertisements, cardboard advertisements, inside. And we had a tiny little candle in there. And that's where we lived. We slept there. We did everything human beings, you know, who function, do there. My father got a job at a steel factory through the foreman. There was a very strong network of resistance in the steel factory, because it was German, of course. And he used to be a former client. I understand there were a few Jews in that steel factory, and every week the resistance, you know, workers that worked there would collect money for people like my father, just so we could subsist. My father would leave when it was dark, and he would come back when it was dark. And that's how we lived. And then he befriended an Algerian, who every month, "Shaoush," who was a lonely man. He was the only visitor we had besides the *conciierge* and Shaoush. He would put his life

at stake to change our ration cards each week. And somehow, just pure luck, they didn't ask what Shaoush was doing with those ration cards, strangely enough. And, when they started to take Romanian Jews, my uncle was of Romanian origin, because we were at one end of the block and the police station was at the other end, whenever they took Jews, we were the first ones to know it. We could hear the cries. We could see the buses. That's when, if I was there, or my sister was there, we would run from one hiding place to another, to let people know that they were taking Jews. And when they took Romanian Jews, I ran to, [weeping] we didn't know who they were taking, but I would alert my, you know, my family always, first. And they stayed in their apartment. They didn't hide like we did. So I would run there first to, and then people would leave their place of living and they would hide somewhere. Goodness knows where they would hide. And I got there too late. I was told [weeping] that they had been taken away a few minutes ago, and that's when I blanked out again. I didn't want to live when this would happen. Then, I ran back. It would take them a few hours, and I saw my aunt on a bus. She didn't see me. She was crying. My cousin was 19 years old. They separated them right there and then. Later on my cousin, who was, you know, n____; they had two sons. He was married. His, it was one of those young romances, you know, my cousin. He was married. He had a wife, not really, a common law wife when he was like 18. He fathered a child, you know? Goodness knows she had no idea the child, that she would go through that young woman. You know, she was not raised as a practicing Catholic. She suffered like a Jew. Now he was taken also eventually. During the three months we would hear they took the Jews to Drancy². They were like...big buildings maybe old factories. It was near Paris. And we heard that my cousin George was taken to Drancy. So we would try, just any sign of life, you know? And one Sunday we went to Drancy. It was just so incongruous, you know, all these Jews that were in danger would go on Sunday to see if they could see it, from a distance, they had walls and barbed wires. But, you know, to see a familiar face. You couldn't see. It was too far. And unfortunately, the Sunday that we went to see if we could see George, they painted all the windows blue, so we couldn't even see then. And the Gestapo was like watching, you know, all this. Once in a while we would hear that someone with a stick would write messages in the air, you know, and that the Gestapo got a hold of the person. Anyway, my cousin George came home from Drancy! He had the beginning of cholera. He came home after three months in Drancy! He was there! I guess, by some kind of fate, you know, he wasn't sent to a camp. And he was completely changed, completely changed. He came home like a skeleton. You couldn't recognize him, and he had the beginning of cholera. They had an epidemic of cholera. And little by little he volunteered once in a while—it's like, he was like a dead man, but alive—information. They ate a live, they killed a live dog, you know, to have fun, to eat.

²Drancy was a camp in a large unfinished apartment building.

JB: What happened at the end of the war? How did your family, how were they together? What were they able to resurrect of their lives?

SG: We came back, and we lived in this store, like I told you, off and on. There was no place to run. There was no where to go. This, the story, you know, the life of Anna Frank, is a classic story. We hid, in the store. And then my father worked in that factory. My mother would knit, you know, gloves and things, and the *concierge* would sell them for her. And I would read. It saved me. You know, it saved me.

JB: Where did you get books?

SG: We had books. We just had books in the house. The apartment was upstairs. Once in a while my mother would run upstairs to make something hot, you know? And, I can't tell you, but I had, you know, my little story books. And then one morning we heard voices around four or five o'clock in the morning, right smack in front of the store. And, and it was the police. They were gathering together, because they, the French police, after helping to take the Jews, after helping the Gestapo, became glorified resistance. They joined the underground resistance to liberate, help them liberate Paris from the Germans. You know after they helped so well to take women, children, you know? I mean, they did, nobody quit their job. They were helpful. Let me tell you, one time I went by the police station at the beginning when the st-, when I was wearing the star. And one corner was not sown, you know, it was loose. And the policeman said, "*Va dire a ta mere, il faut coudre ça* (Go tell your mother to sew it.)." That was just business. They helped. The French police helped. The French people helped. You know, they helped the Gestapo. They did a thorough, good job to help take the children. They did a good job. So anyway we heard these voices, and that the Americans, you know, had landed in Normandy, and that the end was near. We couldn't believe it! We, we were hiding together. We were waiting to be discovered. And by then my parents decided if we had any time left to live, we should be together. And that's it. That's why we were together, because we couldn't run any more. You know? And it had its after effect. I mean, we went back into the apartment. The first thing I did was to go outside and build barricades with everybody, to catch every German and collaborator as possible—to catch every guilty person. We just wanted to block them and catch them. That's all. And I saw the women that had collaborated, with their head shaven, you know? I also saw the resistance. They came, the Gestapo collaborator called the Gestapo headquarters, and they came with two tanks at the police station. By then we were watching upstairs in the apartment. They were too busy to take Jews is why they didn't take Jews any more. And we remember them yelling out, you know, "Come out." Supposedly there was a meeting of the police and the resistance. But there was a movie house across the street. That's where they had the meeting, not in the police station. And with the, you know, the, what do you call those...

JB: Megaphones.

SG: Yes, "You come out, otherwise we blow up this police station." And then they turned around, they got the information that the meeting was taking place in the movie

house across the street. And I remember five men came out with their hands up. And they had some of them had the FFI [*Forces Françaises de l'Interieur*]³, you know, tri-color, you know, resistance.

JB: Mmm hmm.

SG: No, no, it's when they searched them. I remember seeing one of these coming out of the pocket, because they wore them while they were trying to catch every German and blow up things. And they shot them. They shot them. All of them.

JB: Did you know immediately after the war that you wanted to leave France?

SG: Well, after the war we were like stunned, you know? I think my father looked gaunt and old. We had orange crates, whatever. You know, we didn't have anything. And it was cold. We had no means to heat the apartment. And there was a knock on the door. And then I, and this towering American soldier came in. And he said, [weeping] "I'm your cousin." And we knew we had family that was alive in this country, and that's why we came. The first thing he did was to take his army jacket, put that on my sister, because she was like blue from cold. And we had loved ones again. And that's why we came. We waited two years. There was a quota. My father had two brothers and a sister here, and my mother had two brothers here. And we, we came here because there was family here. But, you know what? It was very strange. I never...you know, I was very happy to have the family but, out of loyalty, that's where it's a kind of illness to have survived the Holocaust. Out of love for my family that was taken, that their life was snapped away, you know? Out of love to their memory, I soon, I realized years later that I never could give my love to the family here. It was the same thing with friends. The friends that, my playmates—Marguerite, Michelle, that were taken away, my little Jewish playmates—I could not make friends. I didn't want friends. Up to these days, I am very reluctant to make friends. It's an illness to have gone through the Holocaust. And I really understand that, you know? It stays with you. There are flashes that come, every day. And I call them my prayers. I call them my prayers, because when you are busy surviving, and running, you didn't realize what, what was really happening. And you never mourned. You never really, like, any human being, you know, reflected. It's later that you did that. And I think, I swear to you, I think I'm a very wholesome person. You know I work, I have a profession in the arts that I, that is very consuming, that I really enjoy and I do very well. But, this side of me is another side. I am forever mourning. And you know, I don't know what that word means, forget for forgiving. What is that word? I don't want vengeance. I don't think so. I don't want vengeance, because if you live today, and you have that in your heart, it's too destructive. Vengeance is very destructive. But when someone like Klaus Barbie is caught, I'm glad they catch him. And I think that they should not be free. I don't believe in death sentence. I don't believe in anyone dying. And I couldn't care less by now if Klaus Barbie

³FFI - one of the resistance groups which united with other French resistance groups to liberate Paris on August 26, 1944.

lives or dies. He did it already. It's not, if it could bring anybody back to life, you know? That would be, you know, O.K. Go ahead, do anything you want to him. It's not going to do anything. The only thing, it brings up is that this country, the United States, protected a war criminal—used him, and disregarded his crimes. So that when they catch a war criminal, I am *glad*. I'm not glad, but I feel partly justice is continuing. And this has to be done. It has to continue, just throw them in a hole somewhere the rest of their life, because they took other people's lives. So, you know, you're marked. My children tell me, “Mother, you know, we read about being exorcised, you know, like taking, can't this be done for you? Can this be done for you? You're so wonderful, you're so full of life. You have such intelligence. You have such intellect. But this is the darkest side of you. We don't enjoy this in you. Could this be taken care of?” And I tell them it's not possible. First of all, the memory is a responsibility. Life is a responsibility. I have the duty to, to live fully and not waste my life. That's my life today.