Denise Khaitman Schorr Transcript

JUDITH ROSENBAUM: This is an interview of Denise Schorr. The date today is June 14th, 2000. We're at her home in Natick, Massachusetts. And the interview is being conducted by Judith Rosenbaum. And here's the microphone. And it's a strong microphone so it will pick up both you and me. It works pretty well.

DENISE SCHORR: Merci.

JR: So I think the best place to start would be if you just told me a little bit about your childhood.

DS: Well my childhood was a very uncomplicated one, and a very, very happy one, I guess. You know, I was born and brought up in Paris. And I was an only child for about ten years, and then my sister came along. At first I was not too happy, but then I really, of course, loved her. She was my little doll. And so lived in Paris. I was born in Paris in the older section of Paris. And lived in Paris until I came to this -- well I came to this country just before the war. I spent six months with a family in Rochester, New York. My father's -- at my father's sister's home in Rochester, New York. And then her daughter came back with me to Paris [instead here brothers]. And so of course that was quite exciting for me. Now it's so common for a youngster to travel all around the world. It's no big deal. But then I felt like a movie star.

JR: How old were you when you -–

DS: I was in my teens. And it was just wonderful. And so then my cousin came back with me to Paris, and that was another wonderful year. But then there was already a rumor of the war. And as a matter of fact, she had received an order from the American embassy in Paris to go back, but she didn't want to. And she was able to manage to stay

[the year]. And my parents took her back to this country, and they stayed here. They stayed -- yeah, in this country for about a couple of months, but then the war broke out. It was September ’39 -- no ’40, right. No, ’39. Yeah, ’39. And -- yeah, of course. So I sent them a telegram -- a cablegram -- to stay here.

JR: Was your sister here with them as well?

DS: No, I was -- my sister was with me in Paris, yes. And so I said stay. And for me it would have been easier to get -- and my passport was still valid. And for my sister. She’s much younger than I am. And so it would have been -- you know, I’m sure, easy for her to get a visa. But my mother didn’t want to stay here, and she thought she was going to swim, but she’ll go back to France. And then also my father felt very patriotic. My father was born in Russia, and he was the first of the family to leave the home in Russia. And at the age when you think -- at the age of 19, not knowing a word of French. And -- well he had some French, I guess, from (inaudible). But he told me a million times his pillow was wet because he was crying, you know. And then he worked for my grandfather. He wasn’t my grandfather then. But he worked for the man who had come from Poland with his family. And so he worked for that man, and that’s where he met one of the daughters of that man. And that was my mother. She was only 17 -- and so that’s in Paris.

JR: Were your grandparents living in France as well, or did --

DS: Well --

JR: -- were your grandparents elsewhere?

DS: No, no. They were -- the maternal -- maternal grandparents lived in Paris -- yes. As a matter of fact, when I took a group of my students to Paris one time, I took them to the most historical site of Paris -- where I was born. And so I was born in the back of the store -- the shoe store. And then we moved to -- but my parents were living in another

section. At that time, I guess, you didn't go to the hospital, [you -- there -- or], the parents, so you had the baby -- you know -- in the parent's bed or something. And so anyway, my parents came back. Also my father was a French citizen -- naturalized one. And he felt very proud of it. He had to come back to defend his country.

JR: Was your mother born in France?

DS: My mother -- no my mother was born in [Machtero]. I don't know if it's Russia or Lithuania really. But she was a baby when she came to France. She was not really born in France, but she was a baby, and she was... you know, I mean that was -- loved the culture and everything French. She never knew what had gone on or what was there.

JR: And your paternal grandparents remained in Russia.

DS: Yes, I never knew them. And that was my biggest sorrow. One of my biggest sorrow. I have a picture of the older sister of my father, who apparently was a brain. She was the genius of the family. And she pushed my father to leave because he was going to be taken by the Russian Army and from this story you know that that was a lifetime commitment and no life at all. And then [aunt] had a horrible, horrible life. And she apparently, from what I'm told, she was the smartest of all of them. But my father was the first one to leave home. And why did he want to go to Paris? Because he was very attached to his mother, and he felt that going to Europe, he doesn't have to cross an ocean, going to France. And he was always hoping that he would go back to Russia to see his mother, and never did. And so anyway, so he married my mother, who was barely a teenager. And they live in Paris. I was born there. And we were in Paris all the time, until -- well we used to go away on vacation, things like that. But until the -- until the German occupation. Until you know, we left Paris -- we left Paris, let's see -- I think three days, yeah, the Germans came in on June 13th, I think, in Paris. And we were -- and you know, we were reluctant to leave, because they invaded Poland and Belgium and Czechoslovakia, you know, but France -- and Belgium was very close. France never.

Well we know -- if we had known -- well we knew. We knew that Paris -- I'm talking about Paris, because that's where they were, that's where we lived -- was infested with the Fifth Column. You know about the Fifth Column. I mean, it was infested. And they knew everything. All the activities all through France and everything. And for years we were so naïve. And when we left Paris in a truck that we rented with shoes from the main store, because we felt we didn't know where we were going to go and where to eat, hopefully -- and so we felt oh well, they won't come to Paris. I mean Paris, they will not come. But we left just in the nick of time. And then we left with a truck loaded with shoes, because that was the only way of survival. And the reason we went through that town in the central part of France -- do you know France at all?

JR: No, not really. I went there as a child, but not since then.

DS: Yeah, and -- well, we went to the center of France -- (inaudible) Central. And why did we go there? Because the French we were traveling with had a -- what do you call it? -- a barn. Just a barn. There was no running water, no toilet. And we left 13 people. My father then had a Citroën car. It was like a station wagon, about. So we were 13 in that car.

JR: So it was you and your parents and your sister?

DS: My parents, my sister, my grandmother, my mother's mother, my mother's younger sister, a girl we called our cousin -- she was not really related, but we brought up -- we were brought up together, and her father was my father's right hand man. And so he had come from Poland. And her mother had just died. And so my father went to get her, because her father was in the French Army, and she was with us. And my mother's younger brother. So, oh, it was very full car. And then we had that truck. [We was following her] or we're following the truck [full with Jews]. That was our only way of survival for three months. That time we stayed [in Cors]. But I came back to Paris before, because you know, being young and foolish and ignoring any of the danger I had,

but we knew -- I knew how bad it was going to be. So I went back to France -- I mean to Paris -- and already -- and I was supposed to liquidate the two shoe stores we had, because we couldn't reopen. Well, I was able to open that store -- the smaller store at Montparnasse. And to try to liquidate the store. And tried to sell some of the main store. And then with the money, tried to go back to that hamlet. And from there we were going to try to come to America or through Spain or whatever. Well, we never did, because one night I came home to the apartment and ask a friend of mine to stay with me. So at least I wasn't alone at night. And so she did, and then after a while, we got to the apartment and we heard some noise inside, and we didn't know what to do. But we opened the door, it was my parents. They decided to come back. They couldn't stand the fact that they didn't hear from me, because there was no way of communication. There was no mail, there was no telephone. And so they came back. And then it wasn't great but, you know, for about, we're talking about 1940, until December of '41 -- I mean, we had the same lot that everybody else in occupied territory. But then little by little, it all started. And many times my father -- because first it was bad for the men, and then after it didn't make any difference. And so many times, he wanted to -- we wanted him to leave, but he never could. As a matter of fact, [I find a little -- has an] agenda. And it was 1941 -- and in the last day of '41, I said I hope that next year is going to be better and that how dearest father is still going to be with us. Because at first we were just concerned with the men in our -- and after it didn't make any difference. They would take one person and then they would come back for the rest of the family. So that was -- and then there was the [ceremonial] of the stamp and the identification card, Jews. And then the ration-- everybody was rationed. It was bad. The thing is, the Jews were not able to shop when they wanted like everybody else. I mean everybody else was in line, since 5am in the morning. So you can imagine, when the Jews were allowed [went out] 11 to 12, how much there was left. Although we all had ration tickets. And so anyway, as long as you were still free, so you make do. And then my father -- we had to eat. And then of course there was the ordinance that when the Jews cannot have any stores.

JR: So what happened with the shoe stores?

DS: So well, we just closed. And that's it.

JR: Your parents were in the same business with your grandparents?

DS: No, no. Well my father -- when my father as a young boy, when he decided to work for my grandfather -- I mean you know, before he became my grandfather. My father was always in the shoe business, because he knew everything about shoes. He knew how to, how do you say? Tan it -- tanning -- the leather. He knew how -- he used to make shoes by hand. And you know, and I...

JR: He had done that in Russia, as well?

DS: I don't think so because he left, he was a kid practically. I don't know what he did, frankly. Well he had learned the trade, because that's what his father was doing. So apparently he learned the trade there, but he knew how to make a pair of shoes from scratch, I mean, [I remember him in there] with a nail in his mouth [and the form], and making a pattern and cutting the leather. It was a different life. And so he knew everything about shoes. And so first he did well because he liquidated my grandmother's little store -- shoe store. Ladies' shoe store. And it was my grandmother -- she certainly was no businesswoman. And he did study formula. 39 francs for the women's shoes, 49 for the men's shoes. And it took like a [storm]. In no time at all the stock went. But that was before, you know, before the occupation. My mother -- my grandmother came to live with us. And then so my father realized that yeah, that's not a bad formula. So he opened his store not far from -- also in the Hotel de Ville. And in the poor section -- the older section of Paris. And that business was doing very, very, very well. Very well.

JR: How would you classify your family's class status?

DS: I would say bourgeois. Yeah, bourgeois. Comfortable bourgeois -- then. And so then they closed that store, and we closed the little one at [Modana's] -- and so during the occupation. So my father worked for a man, and that's how we could eat. I mean we had ration tickets, but if you didn't have a way of getting a little bit of food here and there, it was close to starvation. But anyway, and how I got to -- got into what I was doing is because we had friends, and I had met those people because I was friendly with their daughter. And her oldest brother -- there were three in the family -- the Musnick (sp?) -- I don't like the name. You [came across] the name, you know, in -- you know, (inaudible) in Europe or in France.

JR: I've read some stuff about it.

DS: But Musnick is a big name -- as a matter of fact, I have books if you want, I can show them to you. So anyway, they were friends of the family, and Musnick was a big -- he had been in the war. He was wounded during the [1939 and '40 war]. And he asked me if I wanted to be involved with what he was doing. And he was a big man in the Jewish Scout of France.

JR: Let me ask you, before you get into the details about that, about what your Jewish identity had been like before the occupation.

DS: Well that's interesting. My Jewish identity was that I know at Passover when you eat bread, although [there was bread matzo] on our table, OK? Now this is very interesting, that I feel so strong about Jewish identity. See my father –

JR: Now, you mean.

DS: Now and then too, you know, in a way. Even though I had absolutely no Jewish -- I mean religious background.

JR: So your family didn't go to synagogue or –

DS: No.

JR: -- or have the holidays -- celebrate holidays other than –

DS: Well we knew. We celebrate Rosh Hashanah. We had the traditional dishes. We had that. As a matter of fact, the first Passover that I really -- of importance to me -- was when I came to this country as a girl, because my father's sister had a Passover. You know, the real thing.

JR: What kind of school did you go to?

DS: You mean, in France?

JR: Mm-hmm.

DS: I went to the public school and to the Complementaire, yeah. And so let's see. My father didn't want to have anything to do with the tradition. And my father from the way he talk, you can -- I mean he was the one who was running everything. My mother was just very quiet and certainly not an aggressive woman. And no women's lib. But what Henri wanted, Henri had. I mean she was his slave really. I mean, not with a whip. Oh so when he -- he was bar mitzvahed. But the rabbi -- I mean that's what he tell me [someday] -- the rabbi was so mean and so horrible, he used to be beaten. Not him alone. You know, the other kids too. But after he was bar mitzvahed, I guess, and I don't know the involvement of the bar mitzvah -- he would never discussed it -- he didn't want to have anything to do with you know, rabbis, religion, or whatever. He knew he was Jewish. I mean he didn't try to live as a gentile, but absolutely not. Everybody knew that Monsieur Henri, you know his name was [Alan] -- right, in Paris he was Henri -- and he was called Monsieur Henri, and everybody knew Monsieur Henri was Jewish in the neighborhood. And his friends, certainly -- but he didn't want him to have any constructed religious life. So because if he had wanted to, my mother would have done anything, even if he wanted to [cross her arms, she would have had it].

JR: What was her family like religiously?

DS: Same, same. My grandfather was -- I was about eight years old when he died. So I remember him, but -- and my grandmother, she was just [another] housewife and no education, and she was just a mother -- a wife and a mother. So this was -- but my grandmother speak Yiddish and she spoke Yiddish and she [was cute], but she had a French [all of her own]. And so my folks spoke Yiddish with her. But I said, but as far as a tradition in religion, I mean, we didn't practice.

JR: And you didn't speak Yiddish. They didn't speak Yiddish with you.

DS: Well not with me, but I [do understand a little bit], because even if you don't want to, you can't help it when you're exposed to it most of the time. And I can understand quite a bit. I couldn't make a conversation, but it is interesting that with the background I've had, I feel so strong about my identity. Which I could have -- I [walk away] even more during the occupation. But I certainly wouldn't want to. I would have felt like a traitor. So anyway --

JR: When were you first aware of antisemitism?

DS: Well you know, I didn't know but maybe when I was in grammar school. Because that was a revelation to me, because it was also so stupid. One time one of the teacher -- I don't even know what class, what grade -- she said which one of you are not French? So I raise my hand. She said oh you, Khaitman? And I didn't like to be called by my last name, you know. And so I said, yeah I'm -- no I am Jewish. That the mind of a child. Because I can be French even though I'm Jewish, know what I mean? And then one of the classmate was absolutely horrible towards me after that. Horrible. But then she called up and she was OK and she was friends with me again. So that's the first time, because other than that, I didn't experience it.

JR: And then how did the occupation affect that? Your Jewish practice or your sense of Jewish identity.

DS: Well it made it even stronger. I mean the fact that we were singled out. I wasn't going to be a coward. I mean I didn't think of it that way, do you know what I mean? I just reacted that -- I have to do something to save our people. And of course my mother was not too happy about it, and not that she was selfish, you know but a mother of course -- a mother is selfish. So that friend -- that Musnick -- that fellow Musnick -- if you want, I'll show you. Are you interested to see what he looks like?

JR: Sure. Yeah.

DS: The poor guy died in [French name]. He was in contact with the German, and he was with the -- do you know anything about the Union Generale des Israelites de France, which is called UGIF?

JR: Oh I've read about that.

DS: Yeah, but there's been a lot of controversy. But you know, the people -- I mean, I don't mean even the people that were at the head of the organization, they were not any safer than anybody else. And we had a way -- the German knew of our activities because it was on their blessing -- not blessing. At least we were able to save some people. At least we were able to get bonds from America and to do something to save some people. And the kids -- it is so easy to criticize when you don't know the whole the story, and when you don't believe it. I'll show you, it's -- [I mean the] (break in audio) -- who wrote that book.

JR: Oh wow, I've read this book.

DS: You did?

JR: Yeah. Great book.

DS: Well, congratulations. It's not an easy one to read.

JR: Yeah, no it's -- that's right.

DS: And he remembers me. I don't quite remember him.

JR: I'm just going to describe for the tape. I'm looking at the book, The Last of The Just, by Andre Schwarz-Bart, who you're saying is one of the children that was saved.

DS: Yes, he was one of our kids.

JR: It's a great book.

DS: Oh, [wasn't it great, huh].

JR: It's amazing, yeah.

DS: And this one is one of our kids [who wrote that book]. And when I went to France in 1997, I met with some of my kids -- my kids, I mean -- who survived. Some of them had been deported from -- this one had been deported -- Auschwitz. Came back with a few more. And so it was very moving.

JR: This is a book by Charlotte Shapir and it's about the deportation of children.

DS: And this one is -- I have -- [it makes] -- (inaudible). You know, when I give my testimony to schools and so forth, so I bring my books and all that, and the kids come and then things get messed up and I don't always straighten it out. See, this is my neighborhood. I mean, close to my neighborhood. That's where my mother goes to do -- [a market when she wants] -- not that we kept kosher -- but she liked to go to the Jewish butcher.

JR: Right, have Jewish style food at least. Here's a picture of a neighborhood in France where you can see a sign for a kosher butchery and a man wearing a star in front of it.

DS: So that's [how you were], you know, and (inaudible).

JR: Which picture? This picture?

DS: Yes and this one.

JR: This one.

DS: I won't make you suffer.

JR: No, it's hard to tell.

DS: Yeah, no. This one. And you see the reason we were –

JR: How old were you then?

DS: - then, I was about 18. The reason we bought that house is because the kids [who are in those pockets come from Cannes with all sorts of, you know, things] in their head and --

JR: This is a picture from 1942 with pictures of the children. Interesting.

DS: And this one. This one took the rap for me. I tell you, when we're together. And one night we were to be on duty. But that was in another home. Not that one. That was the first one I worked in. And -- when there had been those big [raffle, called the] -- July 16th, 1942. And the [building], does that sound familiar to you? Have you --

JR: Mm-hmm.

DS: Yeah. And so that's why we were in that shelter at Lamarck -- to (inaudible) -- some kids we couldn't get out. It was just horrible. And this is her cousin. Her cousin, who visited me about two, three years ago, she didn't know the story. I couldn't believe it. One night -- that was in the other home for teenagers. You know we had little ones and then big ones, you know. But we worked at a home for teenagers -- [Vauquelin], which is also [known for] -- and we had to be on duty at night a few times a week. And one night, my father said you are not going to sleep outside of the apartment anymore. If we're going to be taken, we'll be taken together. So I asked that Annette -- I said will you take my place because I have trouble with father. She said, sure. Would you believe that night the whole home was wiped out? In this book I showed you -- the Shapir one -- she was a [climber]. Yeah that one. And she was in the same convoy with this one -- with Annette and a few others. So can you imagine how I felt for years? I said my father has given me such a hard time -- he doesn't want me to sleep outside of the apartment anymore. And so I said, "Would you mind?" [She said no]. Can you imagine? To these days, [I didn't know it]. And then I talk about it –

JR: Oh well, certainly there's no way you could know, certainly.

DS: Huh?

JR: Well there was no way you could know.

DS: But, oh yeah, I wanted to show you a picture of Musnick. [Found it]. Have you ever heard of [Gespi]?

JR: Nn-nnn.

DS: He's a professor at the Sorbonne, and he's the one who wrote that book. He's the one who wrote that book. That's his brother. And his brother didn't -- he didn't make it. He died shortly before the liberation, yeah. Anyway, he was arrested even though he was a big shot -- that fellow Musnick. And nobody was [spared], let me tell you. [They

had] said that some Jews worked for them because they knew that -- they knew very well that they were going to be gone [at one time or another]. So we were in constant, constant, constant fear. No matter where you were and at home, and not at home, anyplace. Anyplace. So anyway -–

JR: Let me just ask you one more question before you talk about how you got involved in the resistance. You were talking about your Jewish identity and how strong it's been. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how if your relationship to Judaism has changed over time, and if so, how, and what it's like now.

DS: Well, I am more interested, as far as a matter of history, there is no question. And I feel very strongly about my identity. I don't go to services. I used to with my husband, but I don't go to services. But every Friday night by myself, I light my candles. And one of the little boys who's now a grandfather who lives in Jerusalem -- he just called me a few days ago, because he thought I had my operation a few days ago, and he said, you make sure before you go to the surgery next week, put some shekel in your pushke. It's supposed to be good luck. And he writes -- what do you call it -- he is a scriber?

JR: A scribe?

DS: A scribe. Yeah. That's what he does. And so anyway, he was one of our kid.

JR: Have you ever visited Israel?

DS: Yes. I visited Israel. The first time, was it in '72? With Brandeis. Brandeis University organized a trip which was absolutely fabulous. And then the following year, [an uncle of mine, who] -- he was Canadian -- from Poland. He settled in Canada. He took 40 members of his families to Israel because his three daughters and their husbands gave money to that community to build a kindergarten in the honor of their father's 70th birthday. So we went out. We didn't have to pay a thing. It was not too bad, eh? And so that was the second time. And oh I had that -- there's a little

synagogue in [Azhdard], who -- it was built in memory of my paternal grandmother. And so we visited it, of course, then. And then when I went back three years ago -- went back to see it. And I had taken pictures of it, and my camera was stolen in Jerusalem.

JR: Who built the synagogue in memory of your grandmother?

DS: Well that uncle, who is the husband of my father's younger sister. She's still living, but you know, she doesn't know where she is, but -- and that family -- and my uncle was very religious and very strong Zionist. And so yes, they had three daughters, and -- [married and so forth]. And so they were very, very generous for the Jewish cause. [Could afford it], [but as we said before, that] some can and don't do anything.

JR: Do you have children?

DS: Yes, I have five adopted children. And so -- I am a grandmother, of course.

JR: How did you raise your children Jewishly?

DS: They went to Heder. And the boys are -- and they're bar mitzvahed. And the girls, they are bat mitzvahed. And now the only two really who still observe, you know, is my youngest -- and my oldest son died.

JR: I'm sorry.

DS: And so my youngest son, he is observant like I am, but he knows -- he has a very strong Jewish identity. And my youngest daughter. It is very important for her. Her daughter was bat mitzvahed. And unfortunately it was a very sad experience because the Rabbi was not too kind. You know, they lived in Florida then, and I guess it was a very wealthy community -- the synagogue that my granddaughter went to -- and they were not so wealthy. And so it was a [tacky] experience. But she's feels very Jewish, my granddaughter. Her brother didn't want anything to do with [it, with] bar mitzvah, [you

know, you have to go to] Heder. And -- but as I said, [the only] -- that's my younger son and my youngest daughter who have a feeling. She went to visit them recently because I went to a bar mitzvah in Raleigh, North Carolina. And my daughter Patty and her husband live in Winston-Salem recently. And she -- I had a book about the -- [Jocelyn Winters]?

JR: Mm-hmm.

DS: And she bothered me. She wanted the book, she wanted the book. And finally I brought it to her.

JR: Have your children been to Israel?

DS: No, no. She didn't. My youngest son went to Paris, but that is the only one. And he is the only one who [has a feeling] very French and very Jewish -- [any interest in it].

JR: Was your husband French as well?

DS: No, my husband was an American from Worcester, Mass. And we met each other -- not at the liberation of Paris. We met each other three weeks after the liberation of Paris, because he came to France. He was one of the Normandy guys. And he was in Paris for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, back here, '44, and he ask in the hotel -- who was fixing -- was doing the alternation for the American officers. So my husband ask him, would you know a little synagogue? I'd like to go to for the holidays, but I don't want to go to the big one -- the big [Rachel] synagogue where all of the officers were going apparently. So he indicated to him that little synagogue where I worked. That's where it was taken over during the occupation, and we had it at [Beaux Clan?] Paris. And it was a Yeshiva building. It was a Yeshiva. And that's why there was a little synagogue in it. And so the [teller] indicated to my husband to go to that one [if he wanted to] go to a little synagogue. And so he did go, but they came too late. I mean it wasn't too late because it wasn't sundown, but we had no electricity. So the services had to be done before the

sundown. So the services were over when he arrived with a few officers of his -- French officers. So one of my friend who spoke very good English and who worked with us -- oh the reason I went myself there that night because they were going to celebrate my birthday. And you know, you can imagine what the birthday meal was. We were still rationed, but who cared? We were free at last. So she saw him -- that little American officer. She said well come in the office. And then I came. And with me he spoke English. With my friend he didn't want to speak English. He wanted to speak French. And then I asked him if he wanted to stay for dinner. And you can imagine what the meal was like, but who cared? So and then we had record, so we danced, and then he had to go back to his base. So we went and we had a date, and he said to me, he said you know, the war is not over. I mean, Paris was liberated, but there was still some fighting [in the Reichstag Bromsing]. And he said I never know when I'll be shipped out. So we made a date. He said if I'm not there, don't wait for me. Because if I'm still in Paris I will be there. So I had asked my cousin who had lived with us because his parents were deported -- it's another story. And I said, do you want to walk with me to Montparnasse. I said I told an American I'm going to meet him there. And so because if he's not there, I don't want to walk back. There was no way of transportation. So he said OK, but the American was there. So we went -- we went and had a drink, and then we went back home, and he stayed overnight, because there was no transportation until 5AM the next morning. And so then the next date was Yom Kippur. That was Rosh Hashanah. And so the next date was Yom Kippur. So he came to our house -- to our apartment and we went to services in the building -- in a little synagogue in the building of Victor Hugo. The house that Victor Hugo [settled in, was an] old synagogue. And then we walked back to the apartment. And that night he asked me to marry him. And I said well I have to ask father. Well I told father -- [all right, all right, all right]. So the next morning he came to my room and he said, I asked you a question last night and I would like an answer. So I said well, I think I'll say yes, but you have to ask Papa. Well that was another thing. I wish you could have seen the scene. My father was a very strong looking man. And we

had the dining room -- my father was in the dining room and [the everything room] and there was a separation with the door. And so when we walked into the dining room and my -- that man -- that American -- when he saw my father, he starts turning -- he burst into laughter. You know I pushed him. I said that's not correct, that's not polite. So he asked my father -- he popped the question. My father knew because I told him already. And my father said, well it's all right with me on one condition -- that you have to [send her] back every year. Well, my -- [about that guy] -- after all, this is the second time that I've met him. Yeah, third time. And there was something very honest about him. I was lucky, yeah?

JR: Yeah.

DS: And so he said to my father, I don't promise every year. The poor guy didn't have -- didn't know what he was going to do when he came back to the States. He didn't have a job. He had one when he left to go -- he enlisted for a year, and then -- because he was caught for five years. He says I don't know what I'm going to find when I go back to America, but he says I promise every other year. And he did. If I didn't come -- if I didn't go, my folks would come. He did, really. So we were married -- so he had to go back to his base, of course, and then he managed to have his brother come to our wedding and he was -- the brother was stationed in Holland. And so we had the wedding. I'll tell you what my mother did, because it was still ration. We still had to -- we were rationed, yeah. It is incredible what she managed to put on that wedding dinner table. And so I was supposed to be here before he came -- they lost my dossier at the American Embassy. So it took -- he came back here in November and I didn't come until February of '46. And then we lived with his folks for almost two years in Worcester, Mass. And then he got that job of director of the community center [outfit for] -- in Leominster. And so I liked those years. Everybody said to me, after Paris, how can you like Fitchburg, Leominster? It was a community center for both towns. But I tell you -- I tell everybody, I did things in Fitchburg like go to shtetl -- I did things that I would have never done in

Paris, really. Because at the town there was a lot of plastic. And the plastic was booming there. And those big manufacturers, they used to import a lot of foreigners as executives. And I tell you there was so much culture in those two little towns. And what my husband did -- you know at the time I didn't appreciate it as much as I do now. You know when you have it, you don't quite realize it. But the culture he brought to those two communities was unbelievable. Unbelievable. He founded two orchestra -- an adult and a children's orchestra -- and he had platforms and he had big name comes to give opinions. And like Thurgood Marshall. And I mean really big names. And we used to get tickets -- press tickets to go to Tanglewood -

(break in audio)

JR: OK, now it's good.

DS: And to the concerts, and my husband would pick out -- and for the rehearsals. And my husband would pick out young, budding musicians who he felt had some stuff. And he had them come to Fitchburg, give them a platform. He used to have a critic come. And as [an effect], one of them -- maybe others -- but one of them made the cover of Time Magazine. I think it was a violinist, Norman Carroll. And another one was a big name with the Israeli Symphony -- Tel Aviv Symphony. So you know, [there were] -- it was exciting. And he put on plays and shows. And of quality. You know, I don't mean amateurish. Most of them could have made Broadway. So I had a very good time. I really did. And so -

JR: Well let's take a step back and talk now about your involvement in --

DS: Yeah.

JR: (inaudible) support.

DS: So my involvement was, because I met that Musnick -- you know, Musnick, OK? And he asked me if I wanted to work with him. I mean, not just for him, but for the –

JR: How did you meet him?

DS: He was the brother -- the older brother of a good friend of mine. And we were very good friends with his parents.

JR: Did you have many Jewish friends growing up?

DS: No, no, no, no. I did not. I really didn't. Well yeah, yeah. Maybe -- yeah, I had a few. Just a few. A boy and a girl -- they're friends of the family. We used to go on vacations together. And a cousin. But yes, I had that -- [Dylan and Fanny], but that's about it. My closest friend was Catholic. We still are -- she's still in Paris. And when we talk and I hear her laughter, it's the same one than when she was six years old. And yeah, as a matter of fact with her, it's another story. I mean she's a very, very loyal and very -- there is nothing mean about her. You know what I mean? She is so good, but not a sickening good either. But during the war, I -- and she was so faithful to not only me, but the family. And we didn't see her, practically, during the occupation and she apologized after. And why? Because her husband had been put in jail because they were at a printing company. They were [printing] paper for a dairy product. And the German arrested him and his father, because they thought he was a printing underground material. And so they were put to jail for -- son and father [and Ben]. And her mother-in-law told her that her husband -- both husbands -- were in jail because she is friends with a Jewish person. And she believed it. And she is not one who has -- there is no malice in her, you know what I mean? So I tried to rationalize. I said, well if it were me -- everybody was scared. Jews or non-Jews. Jews more, but -- so she came and she apologized that she had realized that she had been wrong and [I said] (inaudible). That friendship is incredible. Just unbelievable. So [why was I] talking about it? No, so, most of my friends were non-Jewish. Not that I had that many friends. In France it's just

not like here. Especially in those days. You know, I had schoolmates -- friends -- but no, they were not... I think in my class anyway, I was probably the only Jew. And there were -- there were Jewish school in Paris, but I never attended them.

JR: So you were telling me how you got involved in the –-

DS: So I got involved with that Musnick.

JR: How do you spell his name?

DS: M-U-S-N-I -- I think it's K or C-K. Would you believe it? I think it's C-K, I think. While I talk to you, I'm going to try to find it, because it's a thing with me, I thought I put the -- you know, the number of the page --

JR: So you met him through --

DS: So I met him -- oh, OK. So I met him through his sister. And he asked me if I would want to be involved with his organization. And I said of course. And my parents were very upset. But I did. So [my room was first when] I started in July '42, when there was a big, big, big -- the first -- really big roundup of Paris. As a matter of fact, we have a -- a cousin, but the cousin who lived with us, because his parents had been deported. And that's another story of my father -- I send my father three times to their apartment to tell them to get out, and [then they run]. Anyway, so he was [left then], why? There was no rhyme or reason with the German. I mean sometime they were systematic, and sometime they were not. And so anyway, my sister tells me that one of these grandchild -- that cousin's grandchild, I think -- he's going to be married on July 16th. And of course my sister and her husband -- my brother-in-law -- her parents had been taken June 6th, 1944. And very stupidly, because they went back to their apartment -- they had left their apartment -- to see if everything was all right. So oh sure, everything was all right, and then somebody denounced them. And they were picked up in their courtyard. So anyway, that July 16th was when there was the big, big roundup. And I'm talking about

'42. I'm talking when my brother-in-law's parents were taken was June 24th, that the German set foot in Normandy. So that cousin is going to be married on July 16th. I mean you know it may [sound] what's the big deal -- well it is a big deal, because it's such a horrible date. I mean what has happened on that day, and then it didn't stop after that. And so -- and what did I start talking about July 16th, '42? I wanted to make a point.

JR: That that was the first big roundup and that's when you started getting involved.

DS: Yeah, yes. So then that Musnick told me to go to Lamarck, which was a shelter for underprivileged Jewish -- aging. What was the word?

JR: Elderly.

DS: Elderly, thank you. And so we transformed that place the best we could as a shelter. [So in the kitchen, why] (54:55 -- inaudible) maybe we find them on the streets. Their parents have been taken here and there, and the poor kids were on the streets. No place to go. So -- and then I said -- [and when you show the picture of -- with the veil, like] the French nurses, because the poor kids. And some had come out of some camps. It was just horrible. Just, just horrible.

JR: So they were in bad shape. Those kids were very sick.

DS: Oh, gosh. So that was the first thing. That may be -- yeah, I mean, for -- what is the -- [yeah, at least] -- over a year. And then I was moved to Vauquelin, which was also another type of shelter. But while I was there, already we tried to place kids with gentile families. And as a matter of fact, the little boy from Israel, that's where he came to us. And you know, I said there is -- there is a lot of a controversy. And he said it's wonderful to listen to, because he thinks of us -- you know, I mean he has such fond memories of how kind we were. Well of course for some kids it made it sound like we were a little rough because we only had so many showers. And we had to push them and say come

on, come on, hurry, hurry. And you know, and in those circumstances they'd be traumatized enough even before we started giving them a shower, you know, in those conditions. And then there was -- you know some kids -- there is one of our kids who wrote a book, and she thought that there was a funny powder on the food that was served, and the cook was such a kind woman. And, you know, when you're a child and you've been taken away from your parents and you're so traumatized, I mean even -- anything can trigger distress. And so anyway -- so where was I?

JR: Were there other members of your family who were involved in the resistance?

DS: No, no, no. My sister was part of the Scout, but she -- but no she didn't. I was the only one.

JR: Were there many women working where you were?

DS: Oh yes.

JR: It was mostly women working with children?

DS: Oh, no. Women and men. That's how I met my brother-in-law. He worked there too. And he was wonderful with the kids. He was a kid himself. And that's how my sister met him. Not there, but after I came to this country. I mean we knew the family, because we'd first of all -- we were neighbors, more or less. So no, there were also men and I think in this picture I've shown you there were some of the men. And many of them are deported.

JR: So were there particular -- what was the dynamic between the men and women working there? Were there particular tasks that were given to men or particular tasks given to women, or was there -- [were they shared] --

DS: No, no, no, no. Well of course the men didn't take care of the clothes. But no, we did -- and of course don't forget we [had men] -- we had boys and girls, so naturally the boys -- I mean the staff -- the male staff would take more or less of the boys, and we would take care of the girls. So I was telling you about that -- my little boy in Israel was -- what do you call him? The one who write the --

JR: Scribe.

DS: Scribe. It is interesting how he got there, but anyway, he has such fond memories of us. He was five years old. And a little girl from Belgium. And the little girl -- we called her Yvonne Nicole because [the poor kid], she came from Holland. See, from Belgium, they spoke French, but from Holland, [that little kid], they all spoke Dutch. And we tried to communicate with her the best we could, and I said De-nise and you, uh, toi –- it sounded like bonne ecole. And [when -- we were not too far away], because now her name is really Yvonne Nicole. And so [we didn't like] any kids being adopted, because we were hoping that the parents might be back someday. And we just -- but we would place them with family who wanted them, [so that all] --

JR: The gentile families.

DS: Oh yes. Yeah. Well, although -- the little boy, I could -- to this day, I can't understand. He was placed with a Jewish family in the outskirt -- not the outskirts, still part of Paris, Neuilly. That I never could understand. And the guy -- I mean not even adopted, but the -- what do you call it?

JR: The foster parents?

DS: The foster parents, yeah. The foster father -- the foster parents were Jewish, and he was even at [Drancy], at that camp in the outskirt of Paris at one time. So I just can't understand why they did that, because -- but anyway.

JR: How did you find the families that you placed the children with?

DS: Well there weren't -- a lot of family knew that there were some Jewish kids that were without homes, so they would -- as a matter of fact, so they would get in touch with that organization UGIF -- Union Generale des Israelites de France -- and that's how. And as a matter of fact, the little girl from -- Yvonne Nicole -- from Holland. I found, recently, a letter. I don't know who sent it to me. And it was one of the relatives from Holland who had sent a letter to UGIF, trying to find her, you see. You know? So that's how. And Madame [Stern], who had been -- used to -- we were also -- we also sent kids to Switzerland and to Israel -- you know, Palestine. So that was an underground.

JR: So how dangerous was it to be arranging these transfers of children? Were you aware of how dangerous it was at the time?

DS: Of course. Of course. And one night -- more than one night -- I had kids -- youngsters come to our apartment. Because the next day, I had to bring them someplace, and they were all going to be taken by somebody else to be going away in safety, hopefully. Safety, well, when you think safety -- what was safety then? You know the story of that home near Lyon, [Les Isieux?] is it? No? Where one of the worker in the yard of that home -- it was on the unoccupied zone. And that wonderful creature told the German that was the unoccupied zone. And all wiped out. I mean you know, anyone who is here today knew not only French. I'm talking about what I know. What I read. It's a miracle. Because there was no rhyme or reason, [and many time I was arrested in the] -- I wasn't arrested, because I'm still here, but stopped by supposedly policemen in civilian clothes. And I was in perfect -- I mean you know, I had my star. I wasn't hiding it. It was perfectly sewed the way it's supposed to be sewed. Because if a pencil was put through it, just for that you could go -- end up in the oven. And I was in the last train of the subway, which -- the Jews couldn't use any other train. That wagon -- do you say wagon or train?

JR: Car.

DS: Car. Thank you. Car. So I said to those two guys, what do you want from me? Here I have my star. I have my Jews -- my identification card with the Jew on it. And it's not 8 o'clock. And I'm in the last car of the subway. So they let me go. But you know, you really never knew if it was real or not, so -- and a friend of mine was arrested because she was walking on the Latin Quarter, and she had a star, and the scarf covered it. It was windy. OK? So you were at the mercy of anything and anyone. They were building -- [keeper, now], in our building, which we call the concierge. You know that word? Concierge? She said to me one night -- that was towards the end of -- close to the liberation. Close, not quite. And I felt it getting a little too hot. And we -- my parents -- my sister and I, we had a false set of identification cards. It's funny, we couldn't find it. I don't know where it came -- where it disappeared. And so one day I left the apartment without my [star], and I had my set of false identification. I was going to look for a house or something -- Jewish shelter on the outskirts of Paris. And when I came back the concierge said to me -- she opened [with hello]. She says you know, if the German come here and they ask me if there are any Jews in the building, I'll have to tell them. I said well thank you very much. So and then when I [went, one night] -- I mean it's a miracle. You know sometime I pinch myself in my ear, because all the things that allowed my folks to escape -- I mean really, the four of us, we were together at the liberation. I mean is that a miracle? I went to see de Gaulle arrive at Notre Dame after the liberation. My mother was almost more upset with me. And shooting, shooting all over. And I'm still here. One day my mother and I, we went to bring food to a gentile friend of ours. Many times we went to a little tiny apartment to sleep over, because doing what I was doing, we had affiliation with the police headquarter in Paris. And we knew that this section was going to be bad -- particularly bad. You know they were quite systematic in the way of rounding up people. So we used to -- I said let's get out tonight. Why not slip in here. And we were lucky. When we came back, there was [never the seal] on the door, because many people would do that. When you came back to your apartment, there was

the seal, you couldn't break them. That was the end of it. You better say goodbye, and find another shelter. And so we were bringing food -- my mother and I -- to that friend of ours who was so good to us. The gentile friend. And shooting -- when we were close to the Hotel de Ville. And shooting from the Hotel de Ville. And then when I went to the -- to see de Gaulle, there was shooting from the top of Notre Dame. And I stretched flat on my tummy on the asphalt, and you know, and I'm here. So it is just -- just incredible. Just unbelievable.

JR: Did you work with many non-Jews in the resistance?

DS: Yes.

JR: Or was it mostly Jewish people?

DS: Yes. Mostly Jewish people. But we had non-Jews also. You know, we had a connection because they were helpful in one way or another. But it was mostly Jews.

JR: So how did your work evolve over the course of the war? Did it get more difficult as time went on to be able to place children or were you involved in different activities as time went on?

DS: No, no. I mean it was just, for me, it was the placement of children. And also -- no, but that was after the liberation, I was still involved with [that then]. It was another story -- then it was to try -- see a lot of people were in hiding -- adults. And they had no way of surviving. So we knew, but we -- but that was after the war.

JR: So you would try to find them and help them, or [you would] --

DS: Yeah, of course, of course. And bring them -- well that was even during the war -- that was towards the end of the occupation almost. Just before the liberation -- close to the liberation. So we had to give them a ration ticket because if you wanted -- this is

another thing. If you stayed in your apartment where you were known and you wear the star, so you had ration tickets. But if you were in hiding -- and unless -- you had to have a false everything. Because otherwise you couldn't eat. My uncle -- my youngest uncle -- the one who went with us to Courreges. He had a -- his best friend [Ben] was also a Jew, but he was living with a gentile woman who was crazy about him. And anyway, she found them a house in the outskirts of Paris, and every week she used to go and bring them food. Because if you wanted [to be clear of it, no way -- you only] could get food in the black market. So like I said, if you lived in your premises, you had to have a star. If you wanted to have another identity, you had to get out. And that's it. And when you're in your apartment at night, and you hear those [thud] -- those boots, your heart stopped. But anyway, this was my world, trying to -- adult, but mostly teenager and children to safety. What was safety? You know. Even in the unoccupied zone, [who do you know in the occupied zone]? And where we were it was a hamlet, a hamlet in the top of Courreges in the center of France, in a high mountain, okay? They came to take my grandmother. They were not German, I don't think. But you know, there were plenty of French who were no better than the German. And still today, as a matter of fact, when you hear of what's going on today, you know the things that are being uncovered, it makes your hair stand, really. So yeah, they came to take my grandmother, but they left her. I mean that was a miracle. So anyway -- so, but the best we knew how -- the best we could, we tried to put the children and also young adults to safety. What was safety, you know?

JR: So out of the country?

DS: Well some, yes. Yeah, we sent to Switzerland and to Palestine. Yes. Well you know, it was a big -- how do you say reseau in English, you know what I mean? Network, yeah.

JR: How many children do you think you were involved in placing?

DS: You're asking me too much. (laughter) You're asking me too much. Quite a bit. But you know --

JR: It's hard to remember.

DS: Right, it's not -- nobody kept track. I'm going to tell you something, because it was dangerous to keep track. But one thing that really made my hair stand, when I was in France -- when was it? 1992. I met a young scholar, and he wrote a book which is absolutely fantastic, about the Jews in the outskirts of Paris. My brother-in-law -- his family is in that book because they lived in that town -- that outskirt of Paris. He did a fantastic job. He didn't live it -- you know, he didn't. But the research he made, really unbelievable. So he interviewed me when I was in Paris. And as a matter of fact, some of my pictures are in this book. And he showed me -- oh no, he told me -- he said you know, when you go back to America, he said ask -- get in touch with YIVO -- are you familiar with YIVO -- they have records of you, about your involvement with Lamarck. I say, what? Sure. We didn't know that. The German knew exactly -- they knew. I say me, because you're talking to me, but I'm not the only one. When I slept at Lamarck -- because [where'd you] sleep at night, to -- you know, a few times a week. They knew who slept when, the day, the date.

JR: That's amazing.

DS: You see how protected [within -- to] we knew [we were not] protected, and it's to show you that on top of everything, to also have -- be under that kind of control. You know for me to still be here, it's just incredible. And you -- I say me because you are talking to me, but I wasn't the only one. It said when I had a day off or a night off, when I didn't sleep there. Can you imagine?

JR: Yeah that's incredible.

DS: Yeah. So they knew about every one of our activities. It is incredible -- incredible. And so -- but you know, the interesting thing is that some of the kids who are lucky, you know, [can] still be here. And -- like my little Dutch girl, and my little [scrap] boy. And it's incredible how they attached to me. I mean you know, we were going to meet in '97. I went to meet him, because I only knew him as a little kid. And she was -- and her husband -- her husband is not Jewish, and very Catholic. So they were supposed to meet me in Tel Aviv. And we were going to go to Jerusalem together to see Freddie. Now he's at [Fahim]. And -- but they didn't go because [neither was] -- there was a lot of bombing then at that particular [period], and they got cold feet. But I went -- I went to see him. He has a lovely life who is French. And -- but it is incredible [that -- he] called me yesterday, because he thought that I had my surgery on Tuesday. Isn't that remarkable?

JR: Yeah that's amazing. Those lasting connections.

DS: And she came to visit me with her husband last October. And she calls me, and we are in touch. But there's such affection. So it's very heartwarming. And he only can say good thing about Lamarck.

JR: So what would you say the most challenging part of your work was?

DS: The most challenging part was to try -- to try to appease the children. To try to give them sort of a decent life. I mean decent, you know, what was decent? But you know, some sort of belonging or being loved, of being cared for. Can you imagine how much they lost? I mean, little ones, big ones, taken away from their parents.

JR: How many children were there at a time usually?

DS: I don't remember. It could be hundreds.

JR: And did they stay -- well what do you think? Did they stay very long usually or were they moved out pretty quickly?

DS: We tried to move them. We tried to move them, especially when there were rumors. We tried to moved them, yeah. But we tried to give them a sense of belonging. [Like, on Friday night, I mean, it] -- (phone rings) -- it is just incredible the [love] we had. Anyway, we had this celebration of the hundred years of the [little] synagogue of Fitchburg in May, so my son and I went. It was like homecoming, you know?

JR: That's nice.

DS: Yes. So anyway --

JR: So you were saying that mostly you tried to get the children through fairly quickly. So do you think -- do they stay for weeks or months? Average?

DS: Oh for weeks. Sometimes not as much. If I had known -- and like all of us who work there and we're still here, we could have kept a diary. But we felt that -- oh, some people did -- but we felt it too dangerous. We don't want leave any track behind us. But I feel sorry, [anyway], because there were so many things that you try to remember but you're human.

JR: Right, and then it wasn't the top priority to...

DS: No, no. That's true. The top priority was to do what had to be done, and to try -- what was -- would you believe on Friday night in that open court, I mean we had to -- we weren't cautious. We had a little service for the kids. And we sang Jewish songs out in the courtyard. Can you imagine? You had to be young to be that unconscious. Really.

JR: How old were most of the people who were working in the resistance?

DS: They were late teens and early 20s. Yeah. Our director was 25 and we thought he was old.

JR: What were the most rewarding parts of the work for you?

DS: Well the most rewarding part was when you felt that you gave some comfort to those kids. You know, that you made them feel that they were worth it. You know, that life is not over -- that they will get to see their family again and you know -- and I tried to give them a sense of belonging, not to be just a number. That's what was very important to us. And because we were so very young, we were very dedicated. You know, we felt so deeply. And of course my mother was always worried about me. I mean, was worried about -- you know when we left each other in the morning, we never knew if we would see each other at night again. But I thought my mother was selfish [one day]. So much to do, why can't she be worried just about her children? But when you're a mother, [you understand a little better].

JR: So but were they ultimately supportive?

DS: Oh yes.

JR: Did they try to stop you from doing the work?

DS: Oh, even if they did -- except that my father made me stop. He [didn't want me] to stay overnight anymore, because after that incident I told you. But again, it was being unconscious, because even if you were taken together, usually it was not a happy reunion where you're going to be in a little corner of Auschwitz or you know. You are separated and -- but we would try to hang on, I suppose, to anything. And listen, I had the pictures where some of the -- one picture of me that was in the program. I had the picture taken I think with -- and I had my parents and my sister take one because I wanted a picture -- a history picture of each other, because in case we were separated, like they were going to let us keep anything. But at the time, we hang on to anything. And of course we didn't know -- [excuse me] -- then what we know now, because not too many things came out of the camp.

JR: So did you openly identify as a Jew in your work or were you --

DS: Oh yes, oh --

JR: -- you said you had false identity papers.

DS: -- wait, oh wait a minute. [I first] (inaudible). Yeah, no, no. In my work, I mean, I wore the star. Even in our uniform we wore the star. Oh yes. No, no, no.

JR: So when did you use your false identity papers?

DS: Well that was if I wanted to go out of -- if I wanted to be incognito, if I was going to go look for a shelter for us, you know, if we had to run away from our apartment. You see, if you stayed where you were -- where people knew you, and all that, and especially the concierge, you had to wear the star. You had to live as a Jew. I mean, [an identified] Jew. Visually. But once you were out of your premises, you could do anything you wanted. You could get false identification papers, and you know -- and postcards, Russian tickets and so forth. But, [see], that's how my uncle was able to survive because he was with -- his friend was Jewish, but he had that girlfriend who was not, and she supported them.

JR: So what did you do --

DS: Would you like more water?

JR: No, I'm fine.

DS: Sure?

JR: What did you do after the liberation?

DS: Well after the liberation, I continued to be a social worker. But then it was in other -- then we had a lot to do with not so much the children, but with adults and elderly people who had been in hiding. I mean, it was horrible [for] someone in hiding. And so we tried

to support them, to give them a good ration (inaudible). We tried to get them ration tickets. By that it was liberated, so it was open. And we got funds from America. No, it was -- you know, [the Jewish Appeal or] something like that, you see? And we got [fund] from Switzerland. From the Jewish organization. And so I continue to be a social worker. And then because I had [a paper, that's what you signed] that I was -- what's the word I want to use? I was assigned to go and try to meet the deportee [in] (inaudible). As a matter of fact, a friend of mine -- but we didn't know each other then, of course, who -- she wrote a book -- I can't remember the name of that book. But a very good book about her experiences at Auschwitz. Can you imagine that? If I had been in a camp, I don't think I would have made it. I really, really don't. I can see my -- she said once a month -- once a month she was at Auschwitz. And [she's friend] from Paris. She had to walk naked by -- and walk by Mengele. And so, you know -- she was in -- she's one, she has a lot of guts. I don't think I would have made it, really. And naked she says she would stand, you know, so straight, and she was waiting for the finger. If it was going to be the finger back to the camp, or back to the -- or to the crematorium. And you know -- and today when I read the book of Primo Levi -- did you read it?

JR: I've read some of his books, but not all of them.

DS: Yeah, well I don't know how many he wrote, but I read the one -- what's that, the first one, the -– "Si C'etait Un Homme", "If It Is A Man" -- it's in French. I'd have to tell you in French? What is it in English? But anyway. I mean when you, is -- I am lucky, I was never in a camp. I don't remember (inaudible)

JR: Well it's hard to know every (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

DS: I have a lot of [talk] and a lot of courage, but you know, oh boy. You know I'm more tortured today than I ever was, in retrospective, you know, because so many things come out, you know what I mean? And then there was so much to absorb, and then you only were concerned about trying to make it free. You know, not being in a camp -- in any

camp. So there was so much. And just to survive from minute to minute, that -- but anyway.

JR: Did you know many people in other parts of the resistance who were involved in different kinds of work or were the different tasks sort of separated?

DS: Well yeah. Well, the tasks were separated, but we knew of them. Yes, definitely. Well it was a world of intrigues. I mean -- when I mean intrigues, not like the Orient Express. But I mean it was the time of trying to survive anyway one could. Although at one point, I think that -- I'm talking personally -- I think I really was unconscious. I mean --

JR: It's a certain survival instinct, I think.

DS: Yeah, I mean, I really, really wasn't conscious. When I think today of the things -- not that I -- you know, I was not the only one. And believe me some did much more than I did. But how could we? How could I? You know?

JR: So when you came to the States when you got married, did the rest of your family stay in France?

DS: Yes. Oh yeah. They're still there. My parents are gone. But I -- and my sister and her husband, who was a little kid working with me. And her son who is in oncology there, and he's married. And they have a daughter. And I still have friends in France [like those two that] are still living, [like Neil and Maggie] -- the cousin of the one who took the rap for me, you know. And let's see, this one is gone.

JR: Did many of these people survive the war?

DS: Well that's what I'm telling you. Not too many. This one I still see. Let's see. He's gone. [But there is another] picture -- most of them in the picture, all gone. Yeah. And

that one, she was a fugitive from Germany, and she looked like a German -- she [wasn't] nice, (inaudible) so, let's see if -- [well, try to] --

JR: Well I also wanted to ask you some questions about your life after the war. And what you've done -- what you've been involved in since then. Did the kind of work that you did with the resistance kind of continue on in your life, or were you involved with different kinds of projects here?

DS: No, here I became a cooking teacher, and a cookbook author. And --

JR: Have you been involved in any kind of community service or volunteer projects?

DS: [Oh, well], yes. Especially when I was in Fitchburg. I mean I was involved in the community -- both communities, Fitchburg and Leominster. And I must say that when we came here, we were a little -- a little disappointed, because -- I say that because my husband, whenever he heard that there was a new family coming to Fitchburg or Leominster, right away we'd knock on their door and -- to welcome them, and see what we could do to help them no matter what, and ask them to join the Center. You know, I think it was they had free membership for a short while. I mean to make them feel part of the community. And one weekend here -- well, of course it was [good in a way] because we were so involved with the two communities, it was good to be incognito for a change, do you know what I mean? And -- because we were involved. And you'd think that I was getting a salary. My husband was a director, but I was so involved. I mean really.

JR: What kind of leadership roles did you have?

DS: I was -- they made me vice president of the synagogue, and then I was involved with all the organizations. And I was involved with anything my husband put on at the Center. And I was like a Pearl Mesta. Do you know who she was? Pearl Mesta? She was the hostess of Washington at that time. And any speakers who came to the Center, any artist who came, we entertained them. So our house was like Grand Central Station.

JR: A salon.

DS: Yeah, exactly. So I was busy there. So when we came here -- anyway, it was nice to be incognito, but --

JR: When did you move here?

DS: In ’69, I think, yeah. And there is a synagogue down the street. And the rabbi walked -- you know, on Saturday. He walks. [He will go right by]. Never knocked on the door to welcome us, you know, so we were -- and then, my husband offered his services. He had so much to offer to the synagogue. He was never called. And he had so much to offer. Yeah. So we were a little turned off. And so we went to the services at Brandeis. And so, yes, I’m still involved with Brandeis, and I’m involved with the Jewish Appeal, and Brandeis, I’ve said that already, yeah?

JR: What kinds of things were you doing at Brandeis?

DS: Well, I mean, I’ve been in committees. But -- [I'm a member]. And to tell you the truth, that I’ve been so involved in Fitchburg that it is nice to belong -- well yeah, I did things. I gave cooking demonstrations, and -- you know --

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

JR: Okay.

DS: And it’s to these days, when I hear the name Drancy, I shiver. Really. Because you have to realize that it was bad all the time. But at the end of the month, it was worse than ever, because they had to have a certain quota to ship to the death camp. So you know the roundups were more fierce. And so we were -- anyway. It’s true, to these days, when I hear Drancy, I just shiver. And there were other camps, [it wasn't the] -- but I’m

talking, you know, about what I know -- there's the one -- and that's the one that we tried to avoid, you know, to be sent to, or to have people sent there. That's why we had that network, and -- because I told you, we had spies, and they -- [particularly] the police, the police headquarters in Paris. And we were told most of the time when to get out of the section, or people get out their section, because -- like my cousin, the one who came to live with us because his parents were deported, my father -- my sister doesn't remember that. We talked about it recently. She doesn't remember that our father went at least three times to their apartment by foot to tell them to get out, because I had heard -- I was told that the [Arrondissement?] was going to be there that night, and they wouldn't budge, because you know why? My uncle by marriage said he is a White Russian, so he's not going to be touched. Well the White Russian was touched, and so his wife -- and I don't why, then they left their son. And so -- and just recently -- I mean, I didn't quite remember how he had come to us and they lived with us. And he's the one who took me to my first date with my future husband. So, you know, that's the way it was. And I tell everybody -- when I talk to my kids -- you know, I give testimony. So -- and I always ask them to write to me, because you know, when you talk to the youngster, you don't know what they get or they don't get, and they --

JR: Where do you speak?

DS: Well I spoke in many schools. But there's this [third time] I speak -- I'll show you the [letters] -- the one I just received. You know, when I read them, tears roll down all down my cheeks. Because as I said, you know when you talk to them, you don't know how much they get. But it's incredible. This is why I want them to write to me. And really, it makes an impact. And frankly that's what I tell them. They are the hope for a better future. If they are educated, if they are not led by the nose, by propaganda. But when they see things really happen and what a human being can do to another human being. And it's not fabricated propaganda. So that's the only hope. Don't you think so?

JR: Right. Education, yeah. It's very important.

DS: Absolutely. I'm really getting annoyed here, because I know I've seen that book. Anyway, so [I'll show you my -- show that page] (inaudible)

JR: So what grade were these students from?

DS: Eighth grade.

JR: Eighth grade?

DS: Yeah. But sometime I also talk to colleges and middle school. I don't know. Do you read French?

JR: I used to. Not so much anymore. I knew French in high school, but [I lost a lot of] --

DS: I have one in French, because it's a Franco-American school.

JR: Oh, interesting.

DS: So I speak to them in French, and they're supposed to write to me in French. But I have --

JR: Very interesting. I'm looking at a series of letters that were written to Denise Schorr by students in a class that she spoke to about her experiences in the Holocaust. I'm just explaining to the tape what I'm looking at.

DS: Oh, sorry.

JR: Since the tape can't see. These are great. Well I'm going to write these down. I'm going to keep a list of the things that I want to come back and take some pictures of. And I'll write down -- those are something that I'll look at in more detail [later]. I also just wanted to ask you about how you feel like your experience has affected you and the way

that you’re -- you know, how your experience during the war affected your life.

DS: I tell you how my experience affected me. There is one thing I cannot tolerate. Complainers. That I cannot. And I feel that there is always something constructive that one can do. And I am so thankful to be alive. And you know, sometime we are all human and I can’t forget -- and then I slap my face, say, "What’s the matter with you?" You know? Just to be alive. And to be free. And to be able to -- you know, and not -- to be able to have a good night’s sleep, and not hearing those boots, wondering if it's -- they’re going to come to your door or not. And I mean, just freedom.

JR: And how do you think that your work has affected others?

DS: Well, listen, I think when I see the youngsters who are now, you know, parents and grandparents themselves -- when I see the affections that they have towards me, and how they are eager to keep in touch, I feel I must have done something --

JR: Certainly, certainly.

DS: -- you know, because it’s not -- it’s over many years. And it is just incredible. It really moves me to death, really. Well look, I didn’t think I was a hero, believe me, and I still don’t. I did what had to be done. What should be done -- that anyone should have done. Because there was so much to do. And you didn’t think of yourself.

JR: Did you have any role models? Either at that point or since then, of people that you’ve looked up to?

DS: Well yes, yes. My supervisor. My supervisor. But that was -- you know [they did -- some years, a few years] -- I get a little mixed up. See, my problem is that I left all that behind me so many years ago, as my friends who are with me, they stay in the -- more or less, the [milieu]. When I go back to France, you know, I -- we meet again and so forth and so on. As a matter of fact, it’s thanks to one of -- my friend who worked with me at

Lamarck -- that I found my little girl from Holland and my little boy from Belgium, because he went -- he went to the Center of Research of the Deported, which is in my neighborhood. And my friend, whose mother was one of the first to be deported, she was a Russian -- Jewish. And my friend sought shelter at Lamarck. And her father then was able to move, [aid in the escape], but he was in Paris and could move to someplace. So she works in that center. She's a volunteer. And so Freddie, my little boy from Israel, went to ask the director of that center if they had ever come across the name of my little girl from Holland. And so the director said to my friend, "By the way, [Muriel], have you ever -- came across the youngster?" She said, oh of course. She says my friend in America is the only one who has an address. Well I had an address from the woman who took her. And I had met her, that lady. She and her husband lived in a little town in the northern part of France, and she had a father who was a physician in Paris, so she used to come often to see her father. And very fine couple -- very fine people. And so that couple took the little girl. And they knew they couldn't adopt [them] -- we didn't [let] any kid being adopted, because we were always hoping that maybe the parents -- you know, one parent would come back. So I had their address -- but the address, you know, not from yesterday. And so she gave my -- oh, she says, my friend in America, she has an address and a picture, I think of Yvonne Nicole -- that's what we used to call her. So he wrote to me from Israel. And he introduced himself, and I knew who he was -- of course, I knew him as a little kid, but [not] (inaudible), you know? So that's how we came -- oh, so I sent him the address I had. But you know, we're talking about a few years. But there was one cousin who still lived in that little town. So -- oh, and Freddie -- now his name is Efraim -- had put on the envelope please forward to the nearest relative, something like that. And so the postmaster did. No, there was still a relative living in that town -- a cousin. And he forwarded the letter to her. And that's how they got in touch after, you know, he got in touch with me. And that's how we met -- that's how we find each other. Isn't that something?

JR: Yeah, that's amazing. It's great to hear those kinds of connections get -- [yeah].

DS: But I tell you that the bond that there is between the three of us is just incredible. Unbelievable.

JR: Why these two children particularly, do you think? Just because you happened to stay in touch with them or they happened to seek you out?

DS: I don't know. I don’t know. I really -- I wanted to adopt the little girl. Can you imagine? I mean, [wasn't] very smart. I mean, I just -- I mean believe me, all those kids were in the same boat. But I suppose one is human. There was something about that little girl. There was something so sad, so pathetic. Not that the other kids were so joyful. But something so extraordinary about the looks of that little girl. And so I don’t know -- I was so elated when -- to find her. And she was living in Paris at one time. And of course I didn’t know. Can you imagine after all those years? And they’re both so attached to me.

JR: That’s very nice.

DS: Yeah, they call me and we mail. And so --

JR: That's great.

DS: Yeah, and they think that their stay at Lamarck -- especially Freddie, he said he only has good memories, so --

JR: Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you’d like to tell me about? Anything I haven't touched on?

DS: Yeah, I -- also my problem is, you know, [I said so many time, you know, so many] -- you know, after a while you wonder what is important and what is not really. And so -- well, I know [because I] -- well, the most important is what my involvement with the children and youngsters -- is that what you want? That's what you want?

JR: Yeah, that's the -- going to be the -- the way that we're organizing these stories is not so much -- I mean, we want to know background about people's families --

DS: Right, of course.

JR: -- and, you know, where they've been since then, but we want to sort of focus on the period of their activism that we're looking at.

DS: Right, yeah. Well, that was my activities -- from '42 -- the end of '41, '42, to '45.

JR: One question I still had is how you were able to find places to send the children?

DS: Well you know, when you are involved in one thing, you'd be surprised how -- you know, it's like a -- what's the word I would use -- I mean, it just happens. Do you know what I mean?

JR: You make connections here and there, and they lead to something else.

DS: Exactly, exactly. Yeah. Of course, of course. Yes. No question.

JR: Were there a lot of places like this? You know, sort of shelters that took in children in Paris?

DS: Well in Paris, I couldn't -- you know, it would be hard for me to tell you -- I mean, you see, the thing is, we were so involved about the problem, the tragedy, the chore, you know, of the moment, do you know what I mean? We were like in a constant turmoil. And no one, you know, could make a statistic. Do you see what I mean?

JR: Yeah, no, you're not -- you weren't trying to measure what you were doing against what other people were doing. You just wanted to do what you were doing.

DS: No, we did -- this is to be done now. So we did it, and that's it. And so that's the way it was. And we went on to the next thing. And really, you know, because there was

so much to do -- and maybe because also we were young -- I don't know -- but we just did. I mean, we were like robot in a way. You know, there was so much -- and I used to get [on it] with my mother when she was so upset because of what I was doing. And I said, how can you be so selfish? There is so much to do. But listen, when you're a mother, cannot worry about all the children of the world. And it would be nice, but that's human nature. And we just did what we had to do. I mean we just didn't think, we didn't... oh, I -- and really it is a miracle that you have some journal today -- you know, like Anne Frank and all them, because really we were afraid -- I was thinking about it during those time, to keep a record of day-to-day, but we were afraid. We were afraid of having anything written down.

JR: That makes sense.

DS: Listen, it's a miracle after all those years I still remember what -- and -- but listen, it was serious enough to make an impact. I mean, [pis casse]. Just incredible. You know I still can't believe that I'm alive to relate my life to you.

JR: Yeah it's great, it's amazing.

DS: I mean, really. When -- I mean at every corner you didn't know -- and those boots -- and those boots. During the night, I tell you. It was so -- it was pure terror. And how many times I'd say oh, I wish I was taken, I wish I was taken. You know, so that'd be the end and that's it. But --

JR: But luckily --

DS: So I feel -- I had a -- you know, when I feel -- when I forget sometime -- you know, we're human, and I slap my face, say what's the matter with you? It's better than Auschwitz. (laughs)

JR: Well I really appreciate your sharing your story with me.

DS: Well, listen, you know, I'm doing it because I feel if it can help for a better world. Anything, anything to help for a better world.

JR: Yeah. It's a good reason to do it. I'm going to turn off the tape recorder.

DS: Okay.

(break in audio)

DS: -- [not you, I mean].

JR: Yeah, now, so you were just saying that the generational difference about the kind of work that you did, versus women in later generations.

DS: Well, yeah, I mean for my generation -- I mean I didn't think about it then. But I thought it was pretty bold because -- well first of all, a woman was not liberated at that generation as they are now. And I always felt like a little rebel. I mean not to a great extent, because I still -- I had that strong European upbringing, and it was a certain generation. But I realize in my very small way, there was no talk of -- we knew about women's lib then, you know. I don't know in America -- well, when I came to America as a youngster just for six months, [I found that youngster] -- I mean of my generation, they were so lucky to be so free and so -- they had a lot of freedom which we didn't have.

JR: What kind of limitations did you feel were placed on you as a [woman]?

DS: Well just in the school -- just in the school. Because I had been asking [her to come and talk] -- at that time -- now it's nothing for a youngster to travel from one country to another. But then, as I told you before, I felt like a movie star. And I was asked to come to visit the high schools and talk, and so forth and so on. I mean I just -- it was just overwhelming to me at the time. And for my background and my circumstances, and my way of life as a youngster [in Paris], I thought I was pretty liberated. But next to the

youngsters in America, I thought oh they're so lucky. That's the -- when I went back to France, I told all my friends, my parents, that's the world for the youngsters -- America.

JR: For girls, particularly or for girls and boys?

DS: Well I thought girls -- I never thought boys, because you know, I was thinking of myself. Yeah, because a boy -- a boy is a boy, and there always was more freedom for the boy in France than for the girls. So yeah, so -- and I guess in my little way, I always felt like a -- women's lib. And my father, he used to say to me then -- he said, if -- he said I could never marry the woman like you, because he was a -- very, very male chauvinist. And so -- and I tell that my mother -- but she didn't know anything other and that she liked it, I suppose. But to me -- and I adore my father. I was closer to my father than to my mother, but I never could have married a man like him because -- well, maybe my mother spoiled him, too, maybe.

JR: Were you involved with women's liberation at all here in this country?

DS: Not really. Not really, because my home was very important. And the -- bringing up the children was important, and I was so involved with my cooking, and [I was used to] -- also was doing catering. And I didn't have enough to do, so I also took up ceramic and painting, so --

JR: Wow.

DS: -- you know, [involved in that].

JR: Right, and community work on top of that.

DS: Oh yes. Yeah, I did a lot of community when my husband was director of the Jewish community center. I mean they felt, you know, that they had two for one, if you know what I mean. (laughs) But in retrospective, [I don't swallow tears, yeah].

JR: How do you think that roles are different for women now?

DS: Well, just like night and day. I mean, they can express themselves without feeling any -- [what do you say that] in English -- retenu -- without any -- contraire is also French, so --

JR: Constraint.

DS: Eh?

JR: Constraint.

DS: Con--

JR: Constraint?

DS: Constraint? Yeah? Mean restrained? That's what it means?

JR: Yeah.

DS: Yeah, right. I mean, today, if you have thoughts, you express them. I mean in my time you may have them, but you wouldn’t dare express them. I felt that for my time, I was pretty liberated, do you know what I mean? But it was nothing. First of all, I had a husband who was -- I mean a wonderful human being, but he had to be the macho. Do you know what I mean? He had to feel that he was number one as far as running everything. He was very supportive of me though, I must say. But to a certain point, you know. So -- yeah, so I think that it came a long way. And in France now is like here. A woman is very, very much liberated. I experienced the both worlds. The both world and generations. So, you know, there is good and bad in everything.

JR: You’re a bridge.

DS: Hm?

JR: You're sort of like a bridge for the --

DS: Yeah.

JR: -- different communities and different generations.

DS: Yeah I mean, you know, nothing is perfect, but if you can take what is best in each category, that's -- well, I feel in all that I had a good life. I feel that I had a very rich life. Not money-wise, but, you know.

JR: In experience.

DS: In experience. I certainly do.

JR: Well thank you so much --

DS: Well, thank you.

JR: -- for adding this little bit onto the interview.

DS: Thank you for your interest.

[END OF INTERVIEW]