

**CH. 5: RESISTANCE**

**IN**

**THE HOLOCAUST**

**A NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER'S RESOURCE**

**FEATURING THE NARRATIVES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS  
WHO BECAME NORTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS**

This guide is available for free download, in its entirety and by individual narratives and chapters,  
at the Council website: [www.ncpublicschools.org/holocaust-council/guide/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/holocaust-council/guide/).

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North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

# V ■ RESISTANCE ■

## OVERVIEW

- *“[The Resistance] wasn’t a great big organization where people all knew each other. It was one person knew another knew another knew another. The less you knew the better, because if you got caught you could give away maybe one person. Maybe!—if you were not tough as nails.”*  
\_\_Barbara Ledermann Rodbell
- *“You would be surprised how easy it was when you thought of it. You were able to figure out how to do these things. You do not always have to be taught. Maybe they [Resistance] knew that I had this ability, and that I could, intuitively, find ways.”*  
\_\_Gizella Gross Abramson
- *“I was rarely frightened. I was young and felt sort of invulnerable, not thinking beyond what I had to do. There was a job to be done and I did it. None of us felt we were doing anything extraordinary or particularly brave. So many of my peers were doing the same kind of work. We did it because it was the thing to do.”*  
\_\_Simone Weil Lipman

When the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, many people wondered how it was possible for the Nazis to kill so many people without meeting overwhelming resistance. But for all the conquered peoples of Europe, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, resistance was extremely difficult and dangerous. Especially due to the Nazis’ carefully devised plans for the Final Solution, Jews had few opportunities for massive resistance. Under the Nazi policy of collective responsibility, anyone working against the Germans faced brutal punishment. Entire communities and families were held responsible for individual acts of resistance or sabotage. Despite this, resistance to Nazi persecution was varied and widespread. Many Jews worked with underground units and partisan fighters. Armed resistance took place both within and outside ghettos and camps, some leading to major uprisings. Many Jews exercised spiritual resistance by continuing to practice their religion despite the dangers.



USHMM/Belarusian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War  
Jewish partisan brigade in Belarus, Soviet Union, 1943

**UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE** Many Jews who were able to evade deportation or escape ghettos joined underground resistance units in their countries. Such units would gain enemy information, sabotage facilities and railroads, create false documents, help those in hiding, and accomplish other high-risk endeavors. Some could get false papers identifying them as non-Jewish, and those who looked “Aryan” (for example, with blond hair and/or blue eyes) could take on risky assignments that brought them into close contact with Nazi officials.

**ARMED RESISTANCE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE** Armed resistance came from those who managed to escape capture and deportation to the camps. Organizing themselves into small resistance groups, they fought against the Nazis with few weapons, inadequate food, and little help from non-Jewish residents. Known as partisans, they attacked German supply depots and military units, captured weapons, and served as links between the ghettos and the outside world. Most partisan units fought in the forests and countryside of eastern Europe and western

Soviet Union, such as the Bielksi partisans featured in the 2008 film *Defiance*. Partisan efforts did extend throughout occupied Europe. On April 19, 1943, members of the National Committee for the Defense of Jews, in cooperation with Christian railroad workers and members of the Belgian underground, attacked a train heading to Auschwitz from the Belgian transit camp of Malines and helped several hundred Jewish deportees escape.

**ARMED RESISTANCE IN GHETTOS** Resistance groups existed in about 100 Jewish ghettos in eastern Europe, and some led armed uprisings when the ghettos were being evacuated and destroyed. The largest and most well known is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April-May 1943. With few weapons and little outside help, young ghetto residents held out for several weeks against overwhelming German superiority; few of the ghetto fighters survived. In September 1942, in the Tulin ghetto in the Ukraine, 700 Jewish families escaped, but almost all were captured and few survived the war. Similar uprisings took place at the Bialystok and Vilna ghettos in Poland; in both cases most participants were killed.

**ARMED RESISTANCE IN CAMPS** While the strongest armed resistance took place in the ghettos, many concentration camps had resistance groups that helped prisoners get food from the outside, bribed camp guards, sabotaged installations, etc., and some staged uprisings when it was apparent they would soon all be killed.

- In the **Treblinka** uprising of August 1943, prisoners took weapons from a storeroom and set fire to some buildings. Over 300 prisoners were able to escape through the barbed-wire enclosures. About 200 were caught and killed, including most of the revolt leaders.

- In the **Sobibor** uprising of October 1943, prisoners killed about 12 guards, cut telephone and electricity wires, and set fire to the camp. About 300 escaped; about 100 were recaptured and killed.

- In the **Auschwitz** uprising of October 1944, armed Jewish prisoners, using gunpowder smuggled out of factories by women prisoners, killed three guards and blew up a crematorium. 250 prisoners died during the fighting, and about 200 were executed later, including five of the women prisoners.

Such uprisings and escapes occurred in several dozen camps despite the unlikely chance of survival.



USHMM/US Natl. Archives  
SS troops capture two Jewish resistance fighters during the Warsaw ghetto uprising, 1943



USHMM/Sylvia Kramarski Kolski  
Three survivors of the Treblinka uprising in Warsaw after the war. After escaping the camp, they hid in the forest and later with a Christian family until liberation.



USHMM/Misha Lev  
A group of the approximately 50 survivors of the Sobibor uprising, in Kholm, Russia, August 1944



USHMM/Jona Rosen  
Jewish parachutists living in Palestine in training in Egypt, ca. 1943. Of the 32 who parachuted into eastern Europe, 12 were captured and 20 successfully joined armed resistance groups.

**SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE** In the ghettos, forced labor camps, concentration camps, and death camps, Jews rebelled through daily acts of spiritual resistance. They participated in worship services at great risk, and in the ghettos secretly continued the education of their children by organizing schools. Others resisted by creating art or music, keeping diaries, or by stealing out of the ghetto to obtain food. In the camps, many continued to hold Sabbath and holiday services, and pray silently or aloud in the barracks so that others could be comforted. They shared food, helped the weak stand through roll call, or intentionally produced defective war materials in forced labor factories. All were extraordinary acts of courage and resistance.



## ONLINE RESOURCES

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### ■ Resources from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

- ♦ Jewish Resistance [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-resistance](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-resistance)
- ♦ Jewish Partisans [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-partisans?series=21826](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-partisans?series=21826)
- ♦ Jewish Uprisings in Ghettos and Camps, 1941-1944 [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-uprisings-in-ghettos-and-camps-1941-44](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-uprisings-in-ghettos-and-camps-1941-44)
- ♦ Warsaw Ghetto Uprising [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw-ghetto-uprising](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw-ghetto-uprising)
- ♦ Killing Center Revolts [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/killing-center-revolts](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/killing-center-revolts)
- ♦ Individual Responsibility & Resistance during the Holocaust (lesson) [www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/individual](http://www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/individual)

### ■ Resources from Yad Vashem

- ♦ Combat and Resistance [www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/combata-resistance.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/combata-resistance.html)
- ♦ Spiritual Resistance during the Holocaust: Maintaining a “Normal” Way of Life in an Abnormal World [www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/spiritual-resistance.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/spiritual-resistance.html)
- ♦ Solidarity in the Forest: The Bielski Brothers (partisan fighters) [www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/solidarity-bielski-brothers.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/solidarity-bielski-brothers.html)

### ■ Lessons from the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida

- ♦ Jewish Resistance Group Project [www.holocaustedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Daily-Lesson-Plan-4-4-Jewish-Resistance-Group-Project.pdf](http://www.holocaustedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Daily-Lesson-Plan-4-4-Jewish-Resistance-Group-Project.pdf)
- ♦ Response to the Holocaust: Resistance and Rescue [hhrecny.z2systems.com/np/clients/hhrecny/product.jsp?product=28&](http://hhrecny.z2systems.com/np/clients/hhrecny/product.jsp?product=28&)

### ■ SEE the online Holocaust teaching resources recommended by North Carolina Holocaust educators. ■

[www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/holocaust-council/resources/teachingresources.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/holocaust-council/resources/teachingresources.pdf)



Access the valuable teaching resources of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at [www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust](http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust). The museum's offerings include lesson plans, teaching guidelines, online activities, interactive maps, audio and video collections, the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and other exemplary classroom resources.

## LESSON ■ RESISTANCE

- **Narrative: Gizella Joins the Resistance**
- **Narrative: Barbara Gets False ID Papers**
- **Narrative: Simone Saves Refugee Children**

Jewish resistance to Nazi persecution took many forms: partisan and underground fighting, camp and ghetto uprisings, sabotage by forced laborers, smuggling food and supplies, secretly communicating information, etc. Here we focus on the dangerous work of three young Jewish women who were able to get false ID papers and pass as non-Jews. They performed secret assignments that, if discovered, would likely lead to immediate death.

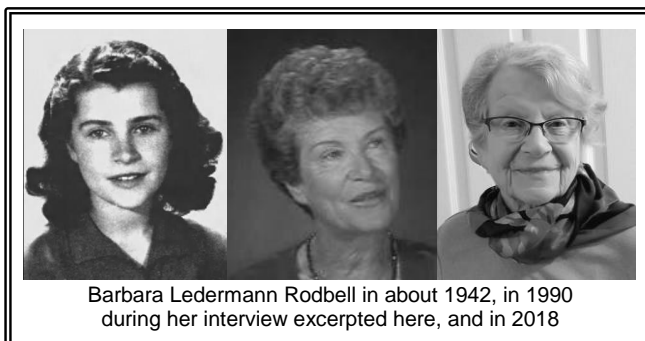
Introduce the North Carolina survivors whose narratives are presented here.

- ♦ **Gizella Gross Abramson** was 14 when she was brought into the Resistance in Poland, due to her language skills and Aryan appearance. She was eventually arrested and sent to the Majdanek concentration camp. She settled in Raleigh in 1970.
- ♦ **Barbara Ledermann Rodbell** was 18 when she joined the Resistance in the Netherlands. When her family was arrested, she was able to escape due to her false ID papers and Aryan appearance. She worked with the underground in Amsterdam until liberation. She settled in Chapel Hill in 1985.
- ♦ **Simone Weil Lipman** was in her early twenties in France when she volunteered to work in an internment camp in unoccupied France for Jews deported from other countries. When Germany occupied all of France, she joined a secret network to hide Jewish children and smuggle many to Switzerland. She settled in Chapel Hill in 1986.

Have students consider these questions as they read the narratives. Remind them that all three women were teenagers when they worked in the Resistance.

1. How did these young women enter the Resistance in Poland, the Netherlands, and France? How were they trained or prepared for their Resistance work?
2. All three used false ID papers created with their own photos but different, non-Jewish, names. How did they acquire the false IDs?
3. What dangers did they face? How did they deal with the dangers?
4. What did these women actually do in the Resistance? List 5-10 specific things they did, e.g., checking a Nazi officer's wastebasket daily, and moving Jews and downed Allied pilots to new hiding places. Why did their youth fit these assignments?
5. Why could Barbara be out past curfew? Why was Gizella assigned to work in a Nazi officer's residence? What experience did Simone bring to her work hiding and smuggling children? How did the individual characteristics of each woman influence her work?
6. One of these Resistance workers was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. One was nearly arrested but threw away incriminating evidence just in time. One escaped arrest despite going through police checkpoints regularly. How might they explain the difference in their fates?
7. We who learn of these brave acts wonder if we could do them in similar situations. What do you think these women would say to us?
8. After the war, how did Gizella and Barbara help *themselves* adjust to their wartime experiences and their postwar lives without family? (Their parents and siblings were killed in death camps.)
9. How did Barbara search for her family immediately after the war?

10. What does Gizella mean when she says “I realized I must not let Hitler win”?
11. What does Barbara mean in her poem, referring to her own children: “Children: beautiful / will they suffer? / of course! Later, sometime——”?
12. Choose one of these statements from the narratives and write a response to the speaker as though you were a teenager during the war and about to join the Resistance. How would you want the speaker to elaborate on her statement? What would you want to know to prepare yourself?
  - ♦ Barbara Rodbell: *“The Resistance wasn’t a great big organization where people all knew each other. It was one person knew another knew another knew another. The less you knew the better, because if you got caught you could give away maybe one person. Maybe!—if you were not tough as nails.”*
  - ♦ Gizella Abramson: *“You would be surprised how easy it was when you thought of it. You were able to figure out how to do these things. You do not always have to be taught. Maybe they [Resistance leaders] knew that I had this ability and that I could, intuitively, find ways.”*
  - ♦ Simone Lipman: *“During those years I was rarely frightened. I was young and felt sort of invulnerable, not thinking beyond what I had to do. There was a job to be done and I did it. None of us felt we were doing anything extraordinary or particularly brave. So many of my peers were doing the same kind of work. We did it because it was the thing to do.”*
13. Read Barbara’s poem “Autobiography” and study the collage which she created several years after the war, using photographs of herself, her children, and the dead of a concentration camp. Create a collage and write a poem entitled “Resistance,” based on the narratives of Barbara, Gizella, and Simone. Barbara ends her poem with the word “Hope.” End your poem with one word, too.
14. When Holocaust survivors speak to audiences today, most are in their 80s and 90s, and this can influence how we respond to them. It’s hard to imagine a woman of 94 bicycling in short skirts and ballet makeup as she moves people from one hiding place to another, as Barbara did. Think of questions you would ask Barbara if you heard her speak. Write them down while imagining you’re talking to the teenaged Barbara. How does this affect your questions, and how you ask them?



### ***“Translate statistics into people.”***

In its guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust (see Supplemental Materials), the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum recommends using first-person accounts of survivors

*“precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims; [they] add individual voices to a collective experience and help students make meaning out of the statistics.”*

## RESISTANCE ■ GIZELLA JOINS THE RESISTANCE

*Gizella Gross was born in Tarnopol, Poland, in 1928. She was 11 when World War II broke out, as the Nazis invaded from the west and the Soviets from the east. Her parents decided to send her to live with an aunt and uncle in the nearby city of Lutsk, but soon the Jews of Lutsk were forced into a ghetto. Her uncle was a doctor, so he was allowed to leave the ghetto more often to treat Christian patients. Gizella would accompany him, carrying his medical bag. One day her uncle called for her to bring a medical instrument to a patient's home. There she realized that, with her blond hair, she was mistaken for a non-Jew.*

I walked out without my yellow patches.\* Suddenly I hear, "Eh, Kleines? Wohin gehst Du? Wohin gehst Du, Kleines?" "Where are you going, little one?" I was walking with my head bowed. They were German soldiers calling me. "Now look at her," they said. "How pretty. She looks like my — look at the blonde hair. Look at those eyes. Do you want a piece of chocolate?"

I remember walking on. I didn't turn around then. I came to the farm and I must have looked a bit strange. Uncle says to me, "What's the matter with you? You look positively yellow. And where are your patches?" He turned to the wife of the farmer he was treating and said, "Do me a favor, put the patches on her." But the farmer's wife shook her head. She looked at me and said, "No, I won't. She doesn't need any patches. She doesn't look Jewish."



Gizella in May 1941, at age 13½

*As life became more perilous in the ghetto, her uncle found hiding places with Christian families. He and his family hid in one farmer's barn, and Gizella was to hide on another patient's farm. She slipped out of the ghetto and went to meet people who would take her to her hiding place.*

We were to meet at a meadow on the edge of town. I heard trucks coming and hid. When they arrived, they were full of people. The Germans yelled at them to get down, and I saw a shower of yellow stars as they got off. They made the people dig trenches as they argued about how deep the trenches should be. Then they lined everyone up by the trench and made them disrobe. There was a command to fire, and they started shooting. I saw one lady holding her baby. She was smiling and kissing her baby with tears streaming down as the bullets hit her. There was screaming for a while, and then it got quiet. Those voices have haunted me every day of my life.

The Germans left and I crept out. Blood was rising to the top of that pit. I was standing and looking at it when two men grabbed me. "What do you want?" I said. Then somebody put his hands on me, and I was placed under straw in a wagon. They said, "You be quiet. Look, we know who your aunt is. We know who you are."

*Her "captors" were members of the Polish Resistance who would train her to join the Resistance.*

And that was the beginning. I was taken to a peasant home. They listened to me speak German, Russian, and Polish. I spoke those languages without any difficulties. I was given the birth certificate of a young woman whom I knew—her name was Veronika. The birth certificate

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\* Jews were required to wear yellow patches with the Star of David (✡), a symbol of Judaism.

was authentic, but the only problem was Veronika was much older than I. So the next picture you might see of me, I had put my hair up so that I looked a little bit older. I remember thinking that I looked much more mature.

[One Resistance member] spoke Polish to me. He spoke fluent Russian. He would correct my Russian. He would correct my Ukrainian, never my Polish. My German was better than his. He said, "I want you to tell them that you live in a village [the village on Veronika's birth certificate]. Say you have a sore throat and that you have come to be cured in Lutsk. You have a sore throat."

At night he would shine a light in my face to wake me up. He would say,

"What's your name?"

"Gizella Gross."

"What's your name?" SLAP.

"Veronika?"

"WHAT'S YOUR NAME?"

"VERONIKA!"

That way I became conditioned. When I went for that certificate [ID], I was Veronika.



*After getting her false identification papers, Gizella began working with the Resistance. She was told she would know only one person among its members.*

The person that I was to know was named Makar. Throughout my stay, I only knew that one man. I was so naive that I didn't even ask why until I was sent on my second job and was given a different identity. I never was permitted to ask any questions. Nothing. If I did, their standard answer was "None of your business. None of your business."

At that job, I was supposed to be the granddaughter and a niece [of people pretending to be her grandmother and uncle] in this house, which was a nicer home than most in that neighborhood. The commandant, the German commandant in that city, lived in that house. My job was to polish his boots, bring his meals, empty the wastebasket. Anything I found in the wastepaper basket, I was told to bring to Makar. My job was to live in this house. Never ask any questions. And tell Makar about the comings and goings of the German officers and the types of insignias they were wearing. And I was to listen to what was said. "Pretend you do not understand German so that you can listen to their conversation. Be like a kitten. Ingratiate yourself."

I was always, always, on guard. It was ridiculous. I had no choice of where to go, what to do. They [the Resistance] knew my real name. They knew where my parents were. They knew where my aunt and cousins were. They had me right in their hands. They said they would help with my family.

***You were able to figure out how to do these things. You do not always have to be taught. Maybe they knew that I had this ability, and that I could, intuitively, find ways. Maybe that was my skill—that and those languages that I knew.***

You would be surprised how easy it was when you thought of it. You were able to figure out how to do these things. You do not always have to be taught. Maybe they knew that I had this ability, and that I could, intuitively, find ways. Maybe that was my skill—that and those languages that I knew.



*With little notice, Gizella left the commandant's house with the woman posing as her grandmother. Soon she was assigned to steal copies of identification and ration forms.*

In my next job, I had a completely different identity. I was provided with a job as a cleaning person in a house where all the identification forms necessary for Christians to exist were processed and stored. This was the hub of the German regional occupation. People could survive with those papers. I never knew whom they gave them to. That's what I wonder about today. I would like to know that I saved someone's life. Maybe they saved some Jews.

*In late 1943, Gizella was arrested at a checkpoint, jailed, and tortured for information. In January 1944 she was sent to the Majdanek concentration camp and endured brutal treatment and slave labor in a stone quarry, as well as being forced to translate for the Nazis. As the Soviet army approached in summer 1944, the Nazis evacuated Majdanek, sending most prisoners to other camps and executing those who were near death. Gizella was selected for the second group, but no bullets hit her and she was able to hide in the execution trench until the Germans left and the Soviet liberators arrived.*

*Now liberated, Gizella served as a translator for the Soviets—especially when they interrogated captured German soldiers—until the Allies achieved victory in May 1945. She entered a hospital in a U.S.-run Displaced Persons camp. After months of recuperation, Gizella came to the U.S. in 1946 to live with an aunt in New York. She was the only member of her family to survive. Later she recounted her troubled first years after liberation.*

Nothing made me happy. I remember I was like a machine. I ate. I answered questions. But I was dead inside. Why? Why? Why? A person's profile would remind me of someone I knew who was killed. When my aunt made a rare roast beef, the sight of blood made me ill to my stomach; I ran to the bathroom. One day she made hamburgers. The smell of the charred meat brought back the smell of the oven. And I hated. I hated so. One day I was taking a walk. I heard two women speaking German. I turned around. There must have been such hatred on my face. These women looked and ran away.

And I realized that I was given a chance, and that it was up to me to do something with my life. I could not hold onto this hate. I felt that the hate would eat me up, and whatever God-given ability I had, I would not be able to use. I realized I must not let Hitler win: "He will not kill me." If I did not change, I knew—sooner or later—I would break down. That's how I started. I would take one step forward, and two steps backwards. But I knew that if God in his mercy and wisdom let me live, I had to do something productive with my life. I am his partner. This was the beginning.

***I realized that I was given a chance, and that it was up to me to do something with my life. I could not hold onto this hate.***

Gizella graduated from high school in 1947 and from college in 1951. In 1952 she married Paul Abramson and in 1970 they relocated with IBM to Raleigh, NC. They had two children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. For over 38 years Gizella dedicated herself to teaching about tolerance and the Holocaust throughout the state of North Carolina.

[Read about Gizella's life in the Lutsck Ghetto in Ch. 4 (*The Holocaust: Ghetto*).]

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- "Holocaust survivor says 'learn to love,'" *Carteret County News-Times* (NC), May 18, 2008  
[www.carolinacoastonline.com/news\\_times/news/article\\_8f7a692c-b1c3-55a0-b4d6-95d18b2623d5.html](http://www.carolinacoastonline.com/news_times/news/article_8f7a692c-b1c3-55a0-b4d6-95d18b2623d5.html)
- "May you always walk on the sidewalk," *The News of Orange County* [NC], March 25, 2009  
[www.newsfororange.com/news/article\\_0cc1c458-c768-582e-b9a8-8fdbcb288c39e.html](http://www.newsfororange.com/news/article_0cc1c458-c768-582e-b9a8-8fdbcb288c39e.html)
- *Witnesses to the Horror: North Carolinians Remember the Holocaust*, by Cecile Holmes White in cooperation with the North Carolina Council on the Holocaust, 1987  
[archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit](http://archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit)
- Life after the Holocaust: experiences of six Holocaust survivors who rebuilt their lives in the United States (online exhibition, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)  
[www.ushmm.org/exhibition/life-after-holocaust/](http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/life-after-holocaust/)



Paul and Gizella Abramson, ca. 1993



Gizella (second from right) with her family, ca. 1993



Gizella with one of the many groups of students she spoke to about her Holocaust experience, ca. 1995

Selection from Cecile Holmes White, *Witnesses to the Horror: North Carolinians Remember the Holocaust*, published in cooperation with the N.C. Council on the Holocaust, 1987, [archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit](http://archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit). Reproduced by permission of the author. Family photographs reproduced by permission of Michael Abramson, son of Gizella Abramson.

## RESISTANCE ■ BARBARA GETS FALSE ID PAPERS

*Barbara Ledermann was born in 1925 in Berlin, Germany. In 1933, when she was eight, her family left Germany to escape the Nazi regime and moved to Amsterdam, Holland (the Netherlands), where her grandparents lived. In the same year, Otto Frank and his family also left Germany to find safety in Amsterdam.*

When we got to Holland and I went to my first school, there was a girl in my class named Margot Frank. Our parents met, having come from Germany the same year and having a lot in common. They and the Franks socialized a lot and, of course, the kids played. As a matter of fact, Margot dragged me through school. Without her, I would have never done anything because I was full of play. I wanted to become a dancer and I worked very very hard at that, but not at much else. So without her saying, "Today we study," I wouldn't have been able to get through! We all played together. Anne came to the house a lot and we went to her house a lot. My sister was a lot more serious than Anne was. Anne liked games the way I did. Margot also was very serious, very deliberate, very beautiful. She would have made a real mark in the world, I know that, just like my sister!

Until the Germans marched into Holland [in 1940], I didn't know very much about anything. I knew that there was Hitler and that Germany was ruined for us. Things were bad. But I was just playing and going to school and dancing and having a good time.

Then one day we heard the bombardment of Rotterdam. We heard it all the way in Amsterdam—the planes, the low hum of the planes. I remember standing at the window and the Germans were marching in right through our street, and my father was standing at the window and saying to me, "Take care of your mother. You know, they'll come for me tomorrow." It took a year and a half, but it did happen in the end. Many terrible things happened then. Jews started jumping out of windows and out of balconies, killing themselves with gas. I remember a man being saved from trying to gas himself and him yelling and screaming, "I don't want to. Don't do this. Don't save me. I want to die." I was 15. This made a huge impression on me. I asked my mother, "Why does he want to die?" My parents told me it's because they're Jews and Hitler doesn't like Jews. It was the first time I was really aware of this.

*After the Nazis occupied Holland in 1940, they began rounding up Jewish residents and sending them to concentration camps. While many assumed they were being sent to labor camps,*



USHMM/Barbara Ledermann Rodbell  
Franz and Ilse Ledermann with their daughters Barbara (right) and Susannah, on the terrace of their Amsterdam apartment, ca. 1936



Barbara's parents and Anne Frank's parents lived near each other and were friends. In this 1937 photo in Amsterdam, Anne is second from left, and Barbara is second from right.

*Barbara's friends in the underground, especially her boyfriend Manfred, convinced her that their likely fate was death. They urged her to get false identification papers and pass as a non-Jew, which, as a blonde and blue-eyed German, she was easily able to do. In 1943, as her family was about to be arrested, they said their final farewells. "Bless you. Go," her father said. "This is the end. This is the last time."*

Manfred told me that I would be murdered if I were called up [in a Nazi roundup]. He said to me, "you do not go." And I said, "That is impossible. I mean, what would happen to my parents if I don't go?" And Manfred said, "Nothing that wouldn't happen otherwise." I said, "What do you mean?" He replied, "Everyone who goes and gets into their hands will be killed. They are all going to die." And I wouldn't believe it. It took him about three hours to explain to me how anybody could not go, and what you do if you don't go, and how you survive and where you get food and where you get money. This was my first acquaintance with the possibility of not going.



False identity card issued to Benjamin Serphos in Amsterdam under the name Theodora Tijdgaat

And then I met a fellow and he had a friend who could get me false papers. He said, "You need papers. It'll be 300 gilden [Dutch money]." I remember that—300 gilden. That was a lot of money, you know! I came home and said to my mother that I needed the money, and she said, "What for?" I said, "For the papers." And she said, "Tomorrow, when you go back to school, you'll have it." And those were my first false papers.

And they were very bad, but they saved my life! In the early days, the false papers were of people who died or lost them or other ways that you could get people's real papers. What they would do is take out the picture of the person—the original person—and insert your picture and your fingerprint and whatever else they had to change. And, of course, these were not papers that had a J [for Jew] on it. They looked very authentic! Mine was of a 27-year-old girl. I was 17, maybe, and I looked like 13. Pigtailed, little! So they were unlikely papers. And then one night I told Manfred I had the papers, and he looked at them and said, "They're not bad. They're not bad. They're very good. Keep them where you can get to them."

I told my father I had the false papers and said to him, "I'm not going. Whenever they call me, I'm not going." And my father said, "You have to go. What will happen to us?" And there came this guilt that was put on me like a hood, you know, all over. If you try to save yourself—that's what he meant, you know—we will all die.\*

So for months I tried to live with that and say, "Okay. I can't kill my family!" And my father, he felt he had calmed me down. Then one night we were sitting at our big window in the living room and we were looking out—already it was curfew; there were curfews at night. And all of a sudden, we see trucks come—long rows of trucks. I couldn't believe what was happening. The Nazis came with lists



Jews expelled from their homes walk to an assembly center in Amsterdam where they will be deported, most to their death.

\* The officials had lists of Jewish residents and would know that a family member was missing from the apartment.

and they picked up people by name. They picked up old Mrs. Treuman. Mr. Treuman was married to a Gentile [non-Jewish] lady, and he and their children were okay. But they picked up his mother, and she could hardly walk. She was a very old lady, and they were good friends of ours. My stomach just turned. They picked up all the Jewish people I knew. And they stopped about two stoops [front steps of the apartment buildings] before ours.

However, Manfred always knew what was going on, and he knew they were picking up people on our street. He sent this Leo Weil, a friend of his—he wore a long leather coat and was on a motor bike and had a hood on. I mean, you can imagine what he looked like! And right in the middle of all this going on, the doorbell rang and—I mean, I thought I was going to die. Manfred had sent him to get me. So I put my false papers in my pocket, and the J [for Jew] was not on my clothes! I had taken it off. And I said to my father, “Goodbye.” He grabbed me and he kicked Leo down the stairs, and Leo drove off and told Manfred, “I can’t get her. They won’t let her go! I can’t make a fuss. If I make a fuss, I get arrested.” So he left and I was left there and, as I said, the Nazis stopped two platforms [stoops] before us, so nothing happened to us that night.

*Manfred hid Barbara in a factory owned by his father and then arranged for her to stay in a rooming house where the manager didn’t question her ID papers. Barbara missed her family very much and decided to take the risk and visit them.*

I hadn’t seen my parents for a long time. We talked over the phone. I was very homesick, very homesick, and they wanted to see me. It was terribly dangerous, it was stupid, and I did it anyway! I sewed on the J, and I went to see my parents and my sister, trying to get through without being seen by the neighbors. Of course, there was a lot of crying and a lot of happiness that we were still there and we were still together.

It’s now 1943, June 1943. Everything goes fine that first evening, and then the next morning at six o’clock, a woman we used to call Cassandra comes up and says, “I just heard. This whole area is closed off and we’re all—this is the big deal for this area. All the Jews are going to be picked up. This is not a little razzia [raid]. This is everything! Everybody!” AND I WAS THERE. I was there! I was caught! It was terrible! At the same time, I was with my family, and if anything happened to them, it would happen to me, too, and this was it. My mother—who had never before spoken up to my father—said to him, “Franz, sie geht,” which means “Franz, she goes.” “She has to leave, you know!” And I had my papers—I had my papers. Couldn’t take a thing. My

***My father says to me, “Bless you. Go. This is the end. I think this is it. This really is it. This is the last time. This is it.” He said, “You go. You go. Try it. Doesn’t matter anymore, you know. Just try it.”***

father says to me, “Bless you. Go. This is the end. I think this is it. This really is it. This is the last time. This is it.” He said, “You go. You go. Try it. Doesn’t matter anymore, you know. Just try it.”

I didn’t even think how fantastic that was, you know, that, at least at the last moment, he said I agree with you, go. Not that it lessens



Barbara and Manfred in the rooming house where Barbara first stayed, using her false ID papers

my guilt. Really, it doesn't lessen the guilt of not having been with them, not participating in that thing that happened to them. Anyway, I kissed them and went downstairs, and it was a beautiful day. A sunny, warm, June day in Holland. Beautiful Sunday—people were going to church! Quiet. Nothing going on. Two streets up, nobody knows what's happening so nearby.

*The day was June 20, 1943. Barbara's family was taken away to Westerbork transit camp in Holland, and for several months she was able to exchange mail with them. But in November she stopped hearing from them.*

The Germans would let you send packages to people in Westerbork, and I managed to send a lot of packages during the months that my parents were there, and we had regular mail from my parents. They received everything I sent. Nothing disappeared. I want to say that when they were taken away later, I never knew that they were in Auschwitz. I didn't know where they had been sent. I heard they had been sent on, and that was it. And it now appears that they were killed the day they arrived in Auschwitz. Learning this was a terrible shock, really an incredible shock!



A group of Dutch Resistance members and hidden Jews crowded into a room [possibly to listen to a clandestine radio]

*For the rest of the war, Barbara stayed in Amsterdam and worked with the Resistance.*

[The Resistance] wasn't a great big organization where people all knew each other. It was one person knew another knew another knew another. The less you knew the better, because if you got caught you could give away maybe one person. Maybe!—if you were not tough as nails [to withstand torture].

They put me to work. I was a dancer.\* There was a ballet company in Amsterdam run by Yvonne Georgi, a great dancer from Germany. She was put by the Germans into the Dutch national theater to run the ballet com-

pany. I went into her ballet school and took classes, and I was then asked to join the company. I asked the underground, "Was it all right?" Oh, yes!—because you'd get fantastic ID papers when you went there, into this company. Because the company traveled, you got papers to be out after curfew. And that way I could help shift people from one hiding place to another, like American soldiers—pilots who were shot down—and other people who were underground.

Let me tell you how this was done. There were no more trucks or taxis, and there were very few cars, because there was no gasoline. So what they had was people on bicycles pulling little wagons behind them. And the people that I moved were moved in the middle of the night, after curfew, with them being the bench and me sitting bent over—sitting on their backs, with a rather short skirt and my very good papers, with makeup still on from the ballet. When German soldiers or the Dutch police would stop me and ask, "What is this?" I would have a smile and [my false ID] papers. I shifted a lot of people that way, from one hiding place that had gotten dangerous to another one which was new and hopefully better.

At 19, they felt I was getting old enough to do some other things, also. I had to be good for something. Besides, standing in line for food was hard in the winter, in the rain and the cold, I can tell you. We took care of a lot of other people who were underground who could not come

\* When Jewish children were excluded from the Dutch public schools, Barbara received permission from her parents to attend a fine arts school.

out. I didn't particularly see these people, but I had to get food for them. Somebody helped me rent an apartment; it was rented under my false name, of course.

Then a very difficult time started. Very difficult! First of all, we went into the Hunger Winter.\* Not only us, but also the Germans! This was the first time they also had less food. They started to be hungry, and they started to be scared of the underground who had so many weapons! The Germans had weapons, but they were mostly old men and kids. It was just a very scary situation!

During that time I had the apartment which had big windows. I met the neighbors from across the street, and they told me that the people downstairs would go upstairs to our apartment when we were out and steal the food out of the closet. But we were hiding people there. Imagine the Germans running into these people. We had hiding places, closets—which used to be closets, now papered over—and there was an entrance via the floor and a rug that went up to it. The people we hid knew how to get into these closets. Of course, the Germans weren't stupid either, and if they did have a razzia [raid], if they did have a check into various apartments, they would stick their bayonets into the walls and into the floors looking for people.

There were no lights, no electricity. We had to go downstairs to get water from the fire hydrant and bring it to the third floor in buckets between three and five in the afternoon—you were assigned periods where you were allowed to get water. We were pretty starved. During that time we ate from the soup kitchen. We ate flower bulbs, soup made out of flower bulbs. We ate whatever the soup kitchen came up with. You had three little pots, and one of you had to go to the soup kitchen and get it. We hadn't had any butter or fat for so long that we were freezing to death. I was always cold. This is still one of my greatest fears. I can stand hunger better than cold. It was terribly cold! There were six or seven of us in the apartment. We would all go in one bed and put everybody's blankets and mattresses on top of us and we still were cold.



Dutch civilians and Canadian soldiers celebrating in Amsterdam, May 10, 1945, two days after the Germans surrendered to the Allies, ending World War II in Europe. The sign reads: "Amsterdam/Prov[in]ce: N[orth] Holland. This is May 10th. And it ain't 1940." The photo was taken five years to the day after Holland was invaded by the Germans on May 10, 1940.

***I was always cold. This is still one of my greatest fears. I can stand hunger better than cold.***

We were hungry, cold, and full of fleas by the end of the war. The hunger got so terrible toward the end. The Germans knew [that the Allies were near], and they let the Red Cross drop food in and around Amsterdam. They dropped cases of food on the roofs or in the parks or in open space, and the Germans were so scared by that time they didn't dare to pick them up. The food was distributed evenly, you know. If you found a case on your roof, you better take it, but we rarely ate the food because much of it was spoiled.

Then we heard that the Canadians were coming to liberate us. During that period we were getting sort of ready. You knew you could already go in the streets. We knew you didn't have to be as afraid.

\*More than 20,000 people died during the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945 in the Netherlands, caused by the severe winter and the Nazis' stopping food shipments to northern Holland after the Allies and Dutch Resistance liberated southern Holland. People had to survive on 400-800 calories a day.



In the early 1950s, Barbara Rodbell wrote this poem and created the collage with photos of her, her four children, and the dead of a concentration camp. © Barbara Rodbell.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Many women am I.  
Reach far into history.  
Walked through the desert with Moses,  
daughter of sages and wise men.  
Walked through Rome, Spain, Poland,  
Russia—  
walking, walking to Germany, Holland,  
daughter of poets, musicians, painters.

All Europe,  
its thought, religion—  
its suffering are mine.  
Holocaust, death all around;  
young and old—again, again—  
well known this.  
Prepare to fight, live: and do.

Alone now, as often before.  
Start over.  
Walk to America for husband and  
children:  
so nice, so nice (where next?)  
Children: beautiful;  
will they suffer?  
of course! Later, sometime——

Rest awhile, find myself;  
contribute, reach out and grow.  
Walk with my daughter  
hand in hand.  
Hope again, always hope—  
walk on and on.  
Hope——

And they were coming. And they did come. I remember looking at the trucks coming, full of these healthy, pink, blond, blue- and black-eyed guys. I'd never seen so much flesh! I mean, it was incredible. And, of course, we went out there and screamed. We just screamed.

The war's ending and people are showing up. My cousin Ava comes back. She says, "Here I am." She told me they—my cousins—all were dead. I started learning who was alive and who was dead. We started hearing that there were lists of people who were coming back, and that my mother was on one of the lists. Well, Manfred said to me, "Don't believe it." And I said, "I'm going to believe it." We then knew—we had learned about the concentration camps. In '45.

So I started going to the train stations when I had the time. I stood there and I stood there and I stood there. People coming out of trains, and they have their heads shaved and they looked awful, coming back from camps; and you asked, did you know so-and-so? Did you know so-and-so? No. No. No. Now I think that one of those people was some-body who took my mother's name to get back to Holland. And somebody showed up with my sister's name and, of course, when I started looking, she was gone. I mean there was nobody to find.

After the war I worked for two years in the ballet. I danced; that's how I made money. I went to the apartment where I had lived with my family and told the woman there where I was living and asked her to forward any mail that she would get and to let me look in the hiding places that we had around the house. And, of course, she'd found the hiding places. There was nothing there. And then the woman below us, who was a fascist during the war, said to me, "I saw you got on [stayed in Amsterdam with false papers]. I didn't give you away when you ran away. You helped me." And I said, "You were helped enough"—because she had a lot of our family's possessions and I didn't get anything back. So I said, "I won't give you away, just like you didn't give me away."

*After the war, Barbara learned that her family had been killed on their arrival at Auschwitz in late 1943. She remained in Amsterdam and worked with the ballet company until she came to the United States in November 1947, when she was 22. For a time she worked with the Ringling Brothers Circus. Settling in Baltimore, she met and married Martin Rodbell. In 1985 they moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, when Martin became Scientific Director of NIH's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park. They have three sons and one daughter, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Barbara has spoken across the state about her Holocaust experiences.*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- 1990: Oral testimony of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell, excerpted here, video: 2 hrs. 53 min. (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)
  - [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504687](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504687)
    - ♦ Segment on using false papers and living in hiding (1:21)
      - [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-false-papers-and-moving-people-to-hiding-places](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-false-papers-and-moving-people-to-hiding-places)
    - ♦ Segment on Anne and Margot Frank's parents (1:08)
      - [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-anne-franks-parents](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-anne-franks-parents)
    - ♦ Segment on Nazi orders to go to Jewish schools (1:57)
      - [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-her-reaction-to-nazi-mandated-schools-for-jewish-children-in-amsterdam](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/barbara-ledermann-rodbell-describes-her-reaction-to-nazi-mandated-schools-for-jewish-children-in-amsterdam)
- 1984: Oral testimony of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell, video: 2 hrs. (USHMM)
  - [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn520379](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn520379)
- 1998: Oral testimony of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell, audio only: 4 hrs. (USHMM)
  - [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn506651](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn506651)
- "Barbara Rodbell: Growing Up with Anne Frank," *The Story*, February 21, 2013, audio: 45 min. (American Public Radio)
  - [www.thestory.org/stories/2013-02/barbara-rodbell-growing-anne-frankreturn](http://www.thestory.org/stories/2013-02/barbara-rodbell-growing-anne-frankreturn)
- *Daring To Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust* (Martha Lubell Productions, 1999)
  - ♦ Video, 57 min. (about; video not online) [www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c483.shtml](http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c483.shtml)
  - ♦ Synopsis, teacher's guide, resources (WHYY/PBS, 2000) [www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/](http://www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/)  
[www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/barbara.html](http://www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/barbara.html)



Barbara and Martin Rodbell on their wedding day, September 10, 1950, in Baltimore



Barbara Ledermann Rodbell, 2018

Excerpted from the oral testimony of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell, interview by Linda G. Kuzmack, June 12, 1990; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504687](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504687). Reproduced by permission of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell and courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Excerpts presented without ellipses for ease of reading. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Other family photographs reproduced by permission of Barbara Ledermann Rodbell. 2018 photograph of Ms. Rodbell courtesy of Marianne Wason.

## RESISTANCE ■ SIMONE SAVES REFUGEE CHILDREN

*Simone Weil was born in 1920 in a small village in northeast France. At age three, she and her family moved to the larger city of Strasbourg, near the German border. After graduating from high school in 1938, Simone studied early childhood education and taught in a Montessori school in Paris. When France surrendered to Germany in June 1940, the country was divided into two parts, the north occupied by Germany, and the unoccupied south, "Free France," governed by cooperating French officials. When all Jews were forced to leave Strasbourg, Simone's family fled to the south of France. Simone was soon called to help children again.*

One day late in 1941, I got a letter from someone I had known in Strasbourg, Andrée Salomon. She was a member of OSE, a French Jewish children's relief organization.\* OSE had set up children's homes around Paris in the late 1930s to care for Jewish children from Germany and Austria whose parents had sent them to safety in France. After the German invasion of France in 1940, the homes were moved to the south of France. By 1941 OSE was taking care of several hundred Jewish children in 16 homes. OSE workers were trying to help families detained in French internment camps get their children out of these camps and into homes for children. Andrée asked me to come at once to an internment camp in Rivesaltes where many foreign-born Jewish families deported from the Rhineland [German region on the border with France], Belgium, and Holland were being held.

So I packed my bags and came. I was 21 years old. I had no idea what to expect at Rivesaltes.† I hadn't even known these camps existed. I was shocked at the conditions there. People were malnourished, inadequately clothed, and living in filthy rat-infested quarters. We set up infirmaries, clinics, and nurseries, and created programs for children and teenagers.

At this time OSE workers could take children under age 15 out of the camps and place them in homes for children. To be released from an internment camp, a child had to have a residence permit authorized by a local government official. Some officials found ways to help us, despite the orders of the Vichy government [the French authority in the unoccupied southern half of France]. First, however, we had to persuade the



Children cared for by OSE in the Rivesaltes transit camp, southwest France, 1942



A girl scout troop that Simone formed in Rivesaltes, 1942



A boy scout troop that Simone formed in Rivesaltes, 1942

\* OSE (o-ZAY): Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (Children's Aid Society).

† Rivesaltes is near the Pyrenees mountains (the border between France and Spain).

USHMM/Simone Weil Lipman



Rivesaltes transit camp, 1942

parents in the Rivesaltes camp to let their children go. The deportations had not yet started to the death camps in eastern Europe. Understandably, the parents, not realizing the grave dangers they faced, were reluctant to be separated from their children.

By August 1942, buses and trucks unloaded their human cargo daily at the internment camps. Rivesaltes became a central collection point for deportations. People were told they would be sent to work camps, but that wasn't true. The trains went to the death camps in Poland. At this time, some Jews could still escape deportation, depending on their nationality, date of arrival in France, service in the French army, and a few similar factors. For example, Jews with one non-Jewish parent might be allowed to remain. We scrambled to provide people in the camps with documents that would help them.

In our work we were aided by other relief agencies, the French Resistance, and the Jewish scouting movement. The Jewish scouting movement became a laboratory for falsifying documents and escorting people to safe places and across borders. Taking children out of the camps was now strictly forbidden. The Nazis and their French collaborators had ordered that Jewish families be kept together for their "resettlement to the East." The French police even took children from the children's homes after the parents had been tricked by the police into giving them their children's addresses.

USHMM/Micheline Weinstein & Jacqueline Levy-Geneste



Simone (right) with Dora Weissberg outside a building in Rivesaltes, 1942

By November 1942, all of France was occupied by the Germans after the Allied invasion of north Africa. Rivesaltes was emptied out, and I took a job in one of the children's homes taking care of the children whom we had gotten out of the camp. We cared for about 50 children. In spite of the risks, the police alerts, and the lack of food, we tried to make life in the home as normal as possible.

By early 1943, the French police were taking children over age 16 from the children's homes. The homes were easy targets for police roundups, because they were known to house Jewish children. The Germans conducted house searches and made mass arrests. OSE offices were raided and had to be moved

many times. Now French Jews like myself were as much at risk as foreign-born Jews. How foolish we had been to think we would escape persecution.

In the summer of 1943 we learned that the children's homes would soon be closed. We had to act quickly. OSE formed a secret network to place the Jewish children under assumed names in non-Jewish surroundings. The homes began to forge false identity papers and organize secret border crossings into Switzerland and Spain for the older teenagers. Everywhere frightened Jewish parents clamored for false papers and entrusted their children to OSE.



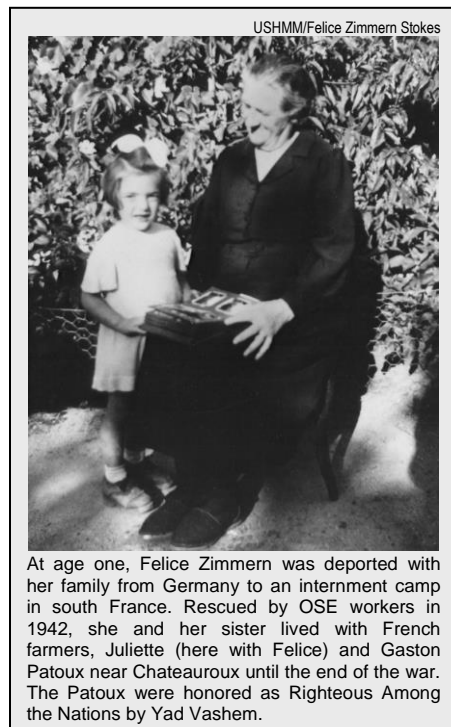
The new OSE operation needed workers, and I was eager to join. What were the qualifications? None, really. You had to do it and be able to blend in physically with the non-Jews around you. I began by changing my identity. I took a different name and obtained a false birth certificate, an identification card, and, most importantly, ration cards for food and clothing. By then a network of people forging false papers existed, so we had access to blank identification cards. I made my place of birth the town of Toul because I knew that Toul's city hall had been bombed and all the documents had disappeared.

Changing my prewar student card and library cards was easy, but to make my new identity more believable, I needed the help of my former professors at the School of Social Work in Strasbourg. I went to see them. Without asking me any questions, they agreed at once to help me. They got me a diploma under my false name and a certificate stating that

I was their student in 1938. These documents later helped to save my life when I got into a tight spot. I also needed a cover. The local Department of Public Health listed me as a member of its staff and gave me the documents to prove it. I went there only once to see what the place looked like in case I needed to describe it.

With my new identity established, I moved to Chateauroux, a safe city some 75 miles north of Limoges [in central France] and began my real job, helping to find safe places and new identities for children escaping from the Nazis. One of the first people to assist us was the Archbishop of Toulouse, who had spoken out from the pulpit against the discriminatory measures against Jews. He immediately gave his support to our project, helping to find homes for 24 children in Catholic convents, orphanages, and private schools. Soon we were combing the entire southern zone for Christian children's homes and even summer overnight camps willing to take Jewish children under false names.

The bewildered children came day and night, carrying whatever possessions they had. They traveled in small groups supervised by a social worker. We found temporary shelter for them until permanent housing could be arranged, and coached them in their new identities before taking them to new families. When, as sometimes happened, a false identity broke down, the children had to be moved at once and placed elsewhere for everyone's safety.



At age one, Felice Zimmer was deported with her family from Germany to an internment camp in south France. Rescued by OSE workers in 1942, she and her sister lived with French farmers, Juliette (here with Felice) and Gaston Patoux near Chateauroux until the end of the war. The Patoux were honored as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

Sometimes children came to us who were being smuggled into neutral countries, particularly Switzerland. We got them false papers, took the labels out of their clothes, and went through their luggage removing any traces of their true identities. I took them from Chateauroux to Lyons. Then someone else helped them cross into Switzerland. More than a thousand children were smuggled from France to Switzerland this way. Coded lists of the children's real and false names compiled by OSE workers were kept in Geneva [Switzerland], ensuring that the children could be traced even if all the OSE workers were killed.

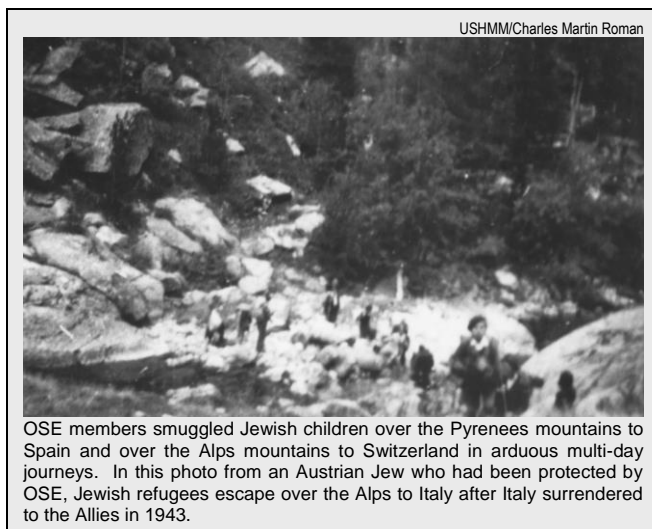
In February 1944, the Gestapo raided OSE headquarters. All the OSE offices and medical centers were closed. Workers were captured and shot as hostages or died in battles between the French Resistance and the Gestapo. Despite this, OSE's work continued.

***There was a job to be done and I did it. None of us felt we were doing anything extraordinary or particularly brave. So many of my peers were doing the same kind of work. We did it because it was the thing to do.***

finding Jews and members of the French Resistance. Limoges was the headquarters for OSE work in my area and I had to go there from time to time. I was walking down the street with a co-worker when a young Frenchman came up to us and said, "Follow me." Under his arm, he carried a gun. He belonged to the French militia which suspected my friend of being in the Resistance. He marched us to my friend's apartment and began ransacking her rooms. Neither of us knew exactly what he was looking for, but sewn into the lining of my suit pocket were the seals of town halls used in making false papers. I also had a coded list of my hidden children.

As I watched the French militia man tear apart my friend's apartment, I thought about how to get rid of the incriminating documents. I asked permission to go to the bathroom and they let me go. That simple little slip on their part saved me. In the bathroom, I removed everything from the lining of my pocket and flushed most of it down the toilet. The rest I threw out the window. When I came back into the room, they went through my papers but I was okay. I had my diplomas, my university student card, and my library card with the false names. Luckily no one asked me about the address in Limoges on my identification card. I didn't even know where the street was. If they had asked me to take them there, I couldn't have done it, but they didn't and I was saved. The militia let me go, but not my friend.\*

In September 1944, the war was over for us in southern France. OSE reopened its doors and we took the children out of the convents and homes that had hidden them and brought them to a large chateau in central France. We celebrated as the search for the children's surviving



During those years, I was rarely frightened. I was young and felt sort of invulnerable, not thinking beyond what I had to do. There was a job to be done and I did it. None of us felt we were doing anything extraordinary or particularly brave. So many of my peers were doing the same kind of work. We did it because it was the thing to do.

Around this time I was arrested in Limoges by the French militia, a special police unit dedicated to

\* Simone learned years later that her friend had survived the war.

relatives began. Months passed before the Allies reached the death camps in Poland. Only then did we learn that many of the children we had sheltered were now orphans.

*Simone helped to rescue several hundred children during the war. When France was liberated in 1944, Simone opened a preschool near Paris for Jewish children who had lost their parents during the war. Offered a scholarship by the National Conference of Jewish Women, she came to the U.S. in 1945 and earned a master's degree in social work, pursuing her career as a social worker in Cleveland, Ohio, and Syracuse, New York. She married Martin Lipman, also a Holocaust survivor; they have two sons and five grandchildren. In 1986 they retired to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In the 1980s Simone reconnected with OSE and attended OSE reunions, meeting with some of the refugees she had helped to save. Simone spoke to many students and other groups across the state about her war experiences.*



Simone Weil Lipman during her interview with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2006

## ONLINE RESOURCES

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- Video, 1990: Oral testimony of Simone Marguerite (Weil) Lipman, excerpted here, 1¾ hrs., with transcript (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum) [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504630](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504630)
  - ♦ Short selections from the testimony
    - Conditions in the Rivesaltes camp (2:11) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/simone-weil-lipman-describes-camp-conditions-and-her-work-for-the-childrens-aid-society-ose-in-rivesaltes](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/simone-weil-lipman-describes-camp-conditions-and-her-work-for-the-childrens-aid-society-ose-in-rivesaltes)
    - Moving children to safety (1:44) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/simone-weil-lipman-describes-helping-the-childrens-aid-society-ose-move-children-to-safety-in-southern-france](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/simone-weil-lipman-describes-helping-the-childrens-aid-society-ose-move-children-to-safety-in-southern-france)
- Audio, 1998: Oral testimony of Simone Weil Lipman, 4¼ hours, with transcript (USHMM) [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn506653](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn506653)
- Video, 2006: Oral testimony of Simone Weil Lipman, 1¾ hours, with summary (USHMM) [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn607951](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn607951)
- Video, 2008: Defying Genocide, conversation with Simone Weil Lipman and Damas Gisimba, director of an orphanage in Rwanda that was besieged by militias during the 1994 genocide, 18½ min., (USHMM) [youtu.be/TbM4ux8SKII](https://youtu.be/TbM4ux8SKII)
- OSE (Oeuvre de secours aux enfants), Wikipedia entry [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%92uvre\\_de\\_secours\\_aux\\_enfants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%92uvre_de_secours_aux_enfants)

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