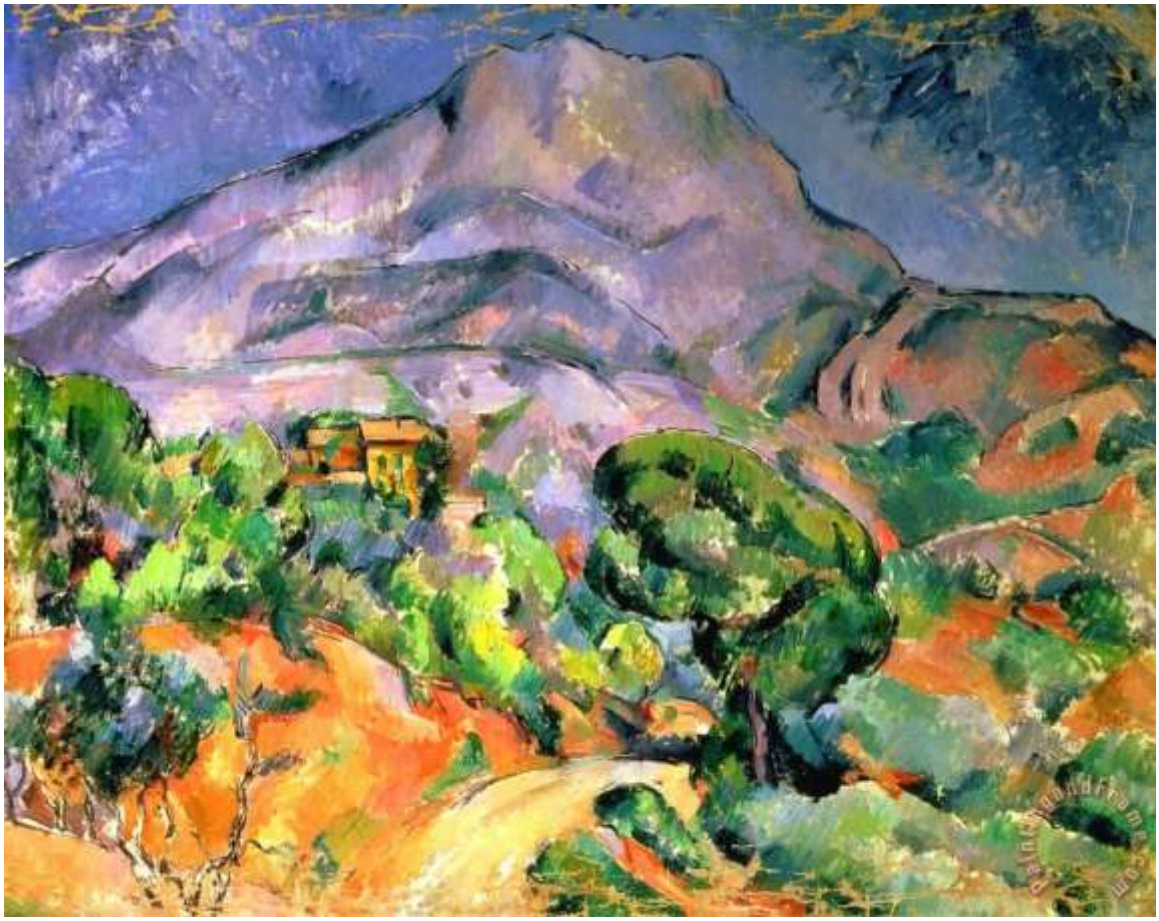
SOPHIE SELIGSON'S WAR STORY



This 1900 Paul Cézanne painting shows La Bastide St. Jacques, where Sophie and her family lived in 1941-42. It's outside of Aix-en-Provence and across the road from Château Noir, where my second cousin's parents lived. (You can google Cézanne at Château Noir and view Cézanne's paintings of the hills, forests and sky under Mont Sainte-Victoire.)

That second cousin, Carlo Tailleux, lives in the area. After Ric and I spent a luminous couple of days last fall with Carlo, I have worked closely with him on reformatting the original pdf from Walter Seligon's typed transcript of Sophie's death-bed audiotape.

During my 50-year college reunion, I loved the opportunity to speak in our Story-Telling Session about Sophie's four-year journey and my own post-war intersections with World War II. I'm privileged to share Sophie's Story with Oberlin classmates. I'd like to thank Alan Goldman, Tom Thomas, and John Kramer for their support in arranging web access.

We are interested in readers' reflections and questions. Feel free to talk to me at LornaDoone@97520.net.

Lorna Forbes, Oberlin '69

Introduction by Carlo Tailleux

Sophie Seligson's War Story was sent to my mother Eileen (Aline) Tailleux (born Eileen Forbes) some time after Sophie's death. It is a transcript of tapes made by Sophie and is completed by her husband, Walter, following her death on July 17, 1985 at age 70. He wrote from diary notes and his own recollections of the story of her survival in France during World War Two.

As such, the narrative can be a bit confusing and names are not always accurate. However, it is a compelling tale of a young Jewish woman's journey, over 4 years of being on-the-run and in hiding, from Belgium to the south of France and of the help received , from many including my mother Eileen and father Francis Tailleux.

Eileen and Francis had also fled through France from Paris in June 1940 when the Germans invaded the city. They had, in fact gone directly from their wedding, cycling off out of Paris and away towards the Pyrenees and later on to Provence, where their path would later cross that of Sophie and her family. As you will see from the text, Eileen's part in helping them would lead to her arrest and a stay of three months in an internment camp in Brens near Toulouse.

Around the time of the end of the war in 1945, Eileen had received a letter from Sophie to let her know that the family had safely survived the war and were taking a boat to Southampton UK, and from there on to the USA. Some contact remained between them, and Seligson family members also visited Eileen at some point in the 1980s.

I hope you find Sophie's story as fascinating as I do.

Carlo Tailleux

Sophie Seligson's War Story

This is the beginning of my War Story. The tale starts on May the tenth, 1940. I lived in Liege, Belgium at the time, where I went to Dental School. I lived in a rooming house, and in the same rooming house lived a young man by the name of Ferdi Kann, who is now Moni Ferdi.

That morning at dawn, I was woken up by loud noises. There were Messerschmitt German fighter planes buzzing at low altitude overhead. It was a frightening sound! I jumped out of bed, and we went downstairs (we, that is Moni Ferdi and I), and turned on the radio, and we heard that Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland had been invaded by German troops. This was the signal for us to leave Liege. I told my young friend Ferdi that he had to pack, and I was going to pack ALL our belongings (we didn't have very much with us). We went to the Dental Clinic where we kept our instruments. We packed those and then we went to

get our car, our Studebaker, which I had in a garage. We packed the car and then went to the bank, where I had kept a safe compartment with important papers, some money, some gold pieces. We took all that along and went on our way.

We left Liege by side roads for Bruxelles, because the main roads were forbidden for travellers. The Belgian Army was moving ahead and it seemed that they were going to encounter the German Army. (However, we couldn't see any of that.) We came through a wooded area, and suddenly in front of us, we saw an airplane dug in the ground in a deep hole, and it dawned on us that war really had started!

Strangely enough, on various occasions I had had a dream. A dream that I tried to get home and there were marching armies of German soldiers. Marching, marching, marching. I could not get through their lines. It was near our home in Luxembourg, but I could not get home. This was like a premonition of what was to come and what really happened.

Anyhow, we made it to Bruxelles late in the evening. It was dark already. The city was blacked out. No streetlights; the windows in the stores and in the

homes were blackened. Very dim lighting could shine through. We went to a Jewish hotel/pension where I had stayed previously sometimes, by the name of Robinson Family, and Ferdi and I stayed at that pension overnight.

The next morning, we went to downtown Bruxelles and there were lots of people in the street. There were extras in the newspaper— extra editions talking about the invasion. It was a very upsetting moment! We met a few people that had come to Bruxelles from Luxembourg and we asked if they knew what had happened to our families, but nobody knew because they had just, by the skin of their teeth, escaped and gotten out to Bruxelles. It was rather chaotic. No news from either Ferdi's or my family.

We then decided that we should go on, to a seaside resort by the name of LeCoq (The Rooster), where Ferdi's Uncle and Aunt had rented a villa, because they knew also that the situation in Luxembourg could become dangerous or not stable. Having known that the Germans had invaded Poland and taken over Czechoslovakia before late 1940. There was a feeling of fear and instability that some people thought they would be safer if they would not stay in Luxembourg.

We arrived in LeCoq and they were receiving us with open arms, Ferdi's Uncle and Aunt and Cousin Elsie, and we were to stay with them in their nice villa for a few days. Right from the start, I had that feeling that we could not stay very long in this nice place. We listened with the family to the radio and the news was not very good. Two days after the invasion, or maybe right thereafter, we heard that the Belgian Army had capitulated to the Germans and Belgian King Leopold had surrendered or left the country. The same thing had happened in Holland, there was not much fighting because of the overwhelming power of the Germans.

We met with the cousins of the— rather the Uncle— of Ferdi, another Wolf branch, in the evening, and decided that the next day we really had to leave. We did not have too many cars at our disposal. The Wolfs had a car and so there were more of the family than could just accommodate— could be accommodated— in one car. So our Studebaker, Ferdi was driving, and we took Ferdi's Uncle and Aunt and cousin; and in another car the other Wolf family came along, and Paul Meyer took turns driving with Kurt Wolf. Well, those names don't mean much to you. Anyhow, we left, packed everything that we could possibly carry in suitcases,

packed the car, took some food along and left the next day towards the French frontier.

We could not advance very fast because we were not the only people trying to reach the French border. As we moved along the road, soon there was a long line, a column of cars moving towards France. Since it was slow, we had to stop at various points and we saw even people on foot. They were refugees, Belgian, and others, that were trying to get out of Belgium.

We even saw one big group of people being sort of driven like a herd, and the rumor came around fast that this was the "5th Column," also considered as traitors or not safe people for the Belgian nationalists or for the Belgians— they were considered as spies. However, they were NOT spies. They were refugees, mostly Jews that in the first days of this invasion had been rounded up by the Belgian police, and now they were marched into prison camps. French or Belgian prison camps, rather. I wanted to explain that the "5th"—so-called "5th Column"— were mostly Jews that had come— fled Germany, Nazi Germany, and had found refuge for a while in Belgium.

There was one family for instance, with whom we, Ferdi and I, were well-acquainted in Liege, who survived there by having a little Jewish restaurant. We would eat our dinner at their place. Their name was Lazar. Mr. Lazar was one of the unfortunate men who, the very first morning on May the tenth, got rounded up and imprisoned. But, later on, we heard he got freed. These people after they were screened, then they were found out that they were Jews and not Nazis, because, stupidly, neither the Belgians nor the French people knew that there was any difference between German Jews and just Germans. They put them all in one pot until finally they got wise to it.

Well, we had to stay overnight on the road and funny enough, we met some people that had come from Luxembourg and also had fled and tried to reach France. Among others there was the family of Franz Meyer and Ed Mark, and in the open air we cooked some tea and had some sandwiches and were sitting by the roadside waiting to get into France. At night they had closed the border— the French Custom Officers.

At dawn the next morning, they opened up the frontier and let everybody who was in this refugee column pass

through and enter France. Though it was still slow moving towards some French villages. There were cars and trucks, even some people carrying birdcages and little belongings. Anyhow, we came finally to Dunkerque, which is at the border of Belgium and France, one of the first French cities.

To our surprise we saw a lot of British soldiers, British Army, who was embarking, leaving France going back to England. And there was like a bottleneck, we couldn't advance. We wanted to go on, we didn't have the intention to stay in Dunkerque for any length of time, but we had to and, as these soldiers— the British soldiers— were embarking, there was bombardment by some German bombers. Luckily we didn't get hit and we managed to leave Dunkerque.

From there on we moved along the coastline of France, we had various stops, in various villages, and at nighttime, we tried to get shelter in French homes. The French population was very, very friendly! They received us with open arms. They gave us beds in their homes, gave us food and drink and didn't charge a cent, because they said that some of their sons were in the French Army, might be prisoners of war, taken by the Germans, and they didn't know if they could

stay forever in their houses and they had great compassion for the refugees. We had thought that maybe we would eventually get to Paris, but the main roads were very clogged and reserved for the army, so we had to go by the byroads and along the coastline.

We finally arrived at a little place in Brittany called LaRoche Bernard. This is between Lorient and Vannes. A lovely place at the seaside, with rocks. And we stayed there for, I don't know, I don't remember how long, but it was at least three weeks. We found a cheap hotel, which offered excellent food. They had for instance lobster and shrimp, morning, noon and night, and I think since then I don't care, I don't like lobster anymore! It was still warm and early summertime. We didn't know exactly what would come next. But we soon found out.

There came an order from the city, the municipality, that one could not move around without *"sauf-conduite,"* safe conduct. You couldn't drive at will in the country— well, also gasoline was getting more expensive and rare. And one day there came an order from the municipality of LaRoche Bernard— or was it Lorient or Vannes?— that we had to surrender all our cars, and assemble them in Vannes, because it was not

possible to drive around anymore. They needed the cars, they needed the roads— so they said— for troop movements, which of course was not true. So, we had to bring our cars, the three cars, that were our car, the Studebaker, and the Wolf's car, and Leon Cerf's car. We had to bring them to Vannes. They gave us a piece of paper as a receipt and all the cars stayed in a big parking lot. Forever. That is we NEVER saw those cars again.

The news were getting worse, the news of the war. The German troops were advancing towards Paris, very close to Paris, and we were dangerously near Paris in LaRoche Bernard. So we had to get out of there and move on towards the South of France. Luckily, Leon Cerf, who was one of our Luxembourgian friends with us in this group in LaRoche Bernard, found out there was a bus available and together with the Wolfs, he hired this bus and a driver. And we packed up our little belongings and on the road we went towards Southern France.

Here we were about 25 people, I think, in the bus, all Luxembourgians and Jews, we knew each other, and of course, there were funny moments— squabbles too— among the younger couples, man and wife, especially

Leon Cerf and his wife, Edith. They were forever squabbling with each other, and they had two children, they were nice. So they, there was a love story too. Elsie and Kurt Wolf, they made love in the bus. So we had our fun moments although we mostly were a little bit gloomy, not knowing what the future would be, where we were going. We lived, really, day by day.

We had to cross the Loire going towards Bordeaux. As we were on the ferry, in the middle of the Loire, some German Bombers came on top of us and dropped some bombs! But luckily we didn't get hit. We made it across safely and then we came to Bordeaux. Bordeaux is a big city in France.

We stopped I think, at one of the Jewish organizations there. If I recall well it was the O.R.T., the ORT. And low and behold, whom did I meet there but the Klewanskys, who had fled from Strasbourg, Alsace and worked there for the Jewish organizations. Now, the Klewanskys, Selma Klewansky was Oma Ina's first cousin, and we had helped them in. . . .1932?? when they had fled Nazi Germany. One of the very first families from Eastern Germany and they had come to Luxembourg; and we had them with us for awhile, until they found some work in Strasbourg, Alsatia and in

1940 at the onset of the Nazi Occupation, by the Nazis, of Poland and Czechoslavakia, they had gone to Bordeaux. I must mention that quite a few Jews from the region of Alsatia had been evacuated to Southern France— among others, the Klewanskys.

From Bordeaux we went further south and came to Toulouse. This was now already beginning of July and France had been overrun— Paris, that is Paris had been over-run by the Germans, and there was a dividing line established that divided North Occupied France from the South— so called Free French Territory, territories, the Southern part.

Well, in Toulouse on July the twelve, my birthday, via the Red Cross, I got a picture postcard, the very first one that I got and it came from Luxembourg. And it was from Oma Ina, Pfeiffi, Ernie and Jeanny. That was the BEST birthday present I could ever have gotten! So, I knew they were still in Luxembourg and they were alive! Up to then, we had not heard from ANYBODY of the family. In Toulouse we did not stay very long.

We moved on to Lourdes. Lourdes is a very famous place in France where the Virgin Mary had been admired and prayed for. And she performed miracles,

as you might have heard, sick people, people with crutches had been healed. Well, this is all a belief. And we stayed in Lourdes, which is close to the Spanish border, already, near the Pyrenees. It is a very lovely place, as landscape goes. But at the time we got there it was rather empty, except for some refugees. No people came there for help or for prayer at that time. We stayed in several hotels and stayed a few— quite a few— days before we moved on. Funny enough, in Lourdes, Renee Wolf joined us! He is Ferdi's cousin and the son of Herman and Toni Wolf, the people with whom we first had stayed in LeCoq and who had been going along all the time with us.

We then moved closer to the Spanish Border and came to Biarritz and Bayonne. All along this trip through France we traveled by bus. We had to change drivers several times. And Ferdi, Paul Meyer, and myself— we were the adopted children of the Wolf family together with Leon Cerf. There was Otto Wolf, and Herman Wolf and Leon Cerf and they were well-to-do--they paid for us all along. I had a little money but not too much from what I had taken out of the safe vault in Liege. But it didn't amount to very much.

Anyhow, in Bayonne— southern, almost southernmost city of France, near the Spanish border, it was very, very hot and we didn't find good accomodations. I remember that one night we slept in a church. And Bayonne was full of fleas, and I got bitten by fleas. It was miserable.

Now in Bayonne, by chance, in the middle of one street, in the afternoon, whom did I meet, but my Uncle Jacques— Jacques Hertz and his wife, Marcelle, and their children, Claudy and Andre. They had arrived there because in Bayonne they had some cousin— Marcelle had a cousin there. And they somehow rented a little apartment near the shore, in a suburb of Bayonne. And it was really a coincidence that I met them there. But we did not take too much to each other. I had found out, or found out then, that they had not talked to Oma Ina and Pfeiffi and had not told them that they were going to leave and they had NOT told them that they should leave *{Belgium}* too, on the tenth of May.

We talked about going to Spain from this point, from Bayonne; the Wolfs and Leon Cerf even had talked to some boat people there in the harbor and it was impossible to get a boat to cross over to Spain. It was

too dangerous to go by boat and it cost too much money and, on the other hand, the Spanish border was closed to refugees.

From Bayonne we went inward toward Montpellier. In Montpellier the Luxembourg government had put up a mock government for a short while. The Grand Duchess and some of the ministers had stopped there and put a little government. Also, while we were in Bayonne— or Biarritz— we had met the expelled Prime Minister of Luxembourg and he had accompanied the Grand Duchess and they were staying in Biarritz before they went to the United States. Somehow, they got out. Montpellier was not a good place to stay either. Nobody could help us to get passports to Spain or the United States. So, we moved on to Marseille.

We came to Marseille late in the afternoon and were looking for parking and for shelter. And as we drove around, we stopped in front of a big building, thinking that it might maybe be some apartments, but soon we found out that it was the prison, and that was not the right place to stay! The guards of the prison told us that we should move on and not stay in Marseille. It was an overcrowded city already.

We moved then towards Aix-en-Provence and arrived there very late— it was getting dark. We stopped at the Rond-Point, a big square with a beautiful fountain. We didn't see the fountain because of the dark— the details of the fountain— and we got ready to rest there. In the middle of the night, some policemen, gendarmes, came and made the people in the bus come out. Among some of them were our friends the Leon Cerfs. And they talked to the policemen. They told us that we were parked illegally and we couldn't stay there. However, one of the gendarmes, with his flashlight, lit up Leon Cerf's face and discovered that he was a former schoolmate of his! Very funny! They had both gone to the same school in a small village near the French frontier in Luxembourg. So, he allowed us to stay at least until dawn, and that is what we did. At dawn the bus had to find a parking place other than this Rond-Point with the beautiful fountain, and we had to find shelter.

We looked around and found some hotels. Especially the one at the end of the Cours Mirabeau that was a long beautiful alley that ended up at that fountain. And very shady beautiful trees and I think they were maple trees or other. At the end of this beautiful alley there was the Hotel Mule Noire, the Black Donkey, and

we found some rooms there for most of the people that were with us in in the bus. We stayed there for a little while and oh— I forgot to say— that in the morning we looked around for some baked goods and found a bakery near the fountain that just had opened, and it smelled beautiful and they had the most marvelous croissants I have ever had in my life! So we bought some for the whole company in the bus.

Well, we stayed in the Mule Noire, which was not a luxury hotel, at all. One funny thing in Aix-en-Provence and in the Mediterranean cities and villages, all the floors are tiled, which is good because you can wash them and you can get rid of the fleas easier. In those days, as least in Southern France, there was lots of fleas. So, this hotel was just for rooms, they didn't serve any food.

We then, pretty soon after we had stayed there, we looked around for apartments, because the hotels charged high prices and that was not very good, because none of us wanted to spend a whole lot of money (nor did we have a lot of money). I must say that I was like the adopted child of the Wolf families— Otto Wolf and Herman Wolf, and they paid for my keep, as well as Ferdi's, their nephew and Paul Meyer who

was with us. Some of the Wolfs got reasonably priced furnished apartments in Aix.

And as the time went on we tried to reach our families that had stayed in Luxembourg via the Red Cross. At this early stage there were some refugees, Luxembourgians that passed through Aix-en-Provence. Some gentiles had left because they were afraid of the Germans— that they would be politically harassed. They were allowed to return home without any troubles. And we found some people and gave them messages for our family. Roline Braunshausen (well, the name doesn't mean much to you) but she took a message for our family home.

I had tried, and was successful, in registering and moving into the dormitory of the University. The *Cite Universitaire* in Aix. And I was successful in getting some of the young people like Elsie Wolf, Ferdi's cousin, and some of the others, young people that were with us, to get rooms at the *Cite Universitaire*, although they were not students. However, they accepted them and they got rooms.

At this time, there were no classes yet, it was too early, or the classes were suspended until later in the year,

until wintertime. So we had good, nice rooms there. It was nicer than in the hotel. There were no fleas!

Ferdi and I tried to do some studying or practical working, and we worked in Marseille, at the Dental Clinic of the big hospital. So several times a week, I guess it was not more than twice, because it was expensive and we had to get up very early in the morning to take the tram to Marseille from Aix-en-Provence, which took already more than an hour to go there. So we travelled into Marseille and worked at the hospital. This went for a while until we were told that we couldn't work there anymore. It was not acceptable, or they didn't want Jewish students. It was kind of tricky.

While we went to Marseilles, we also went to the American Consulate, finding out if there was a possibility to get a visa for America. And this was a project that was almost impossible to reach. We were put off. We waited and couldn't get any conference, or appointment, with any of the consul.

Through the communications of the gentile refugees that had returned to Luxembourg, I got some clothes that Oma Ina and Pfeiffi sent through the Red Cross

back to Aix. So they knew, meanwhile, that I was in Aix-en-Provence. And I got some trunks with clothing for winter and new stuff that I had never seen that Oma Ina had purchased. So that way at least I knew that at home my family knew where I was. I sent letters back to them and I think I got some communication, some letters hidden in the trunk once or twice. And I had the feeling that they were trying to join us, to come out, but there was no certainty about that yet.

At one of my trips to the American Consular, I met my Uncle Jacques Hertz, at the consulate. And to my surprise, I learned that he and his wife Marcelle, and the two kids, Claudy and Andre, were living in Montpellier. He said that I should come and visit them sometime. And I did that in December because he wrote me, or told me, that Marcelle was sick with the flu and the children were really still small, and he couldn't cope very well. So I came to help out, and take care of his household for a few days.

Unfortunately, at that precise moment, when I was in Montpellier, my family— Pfeiffis and Jeanny, and Ferdi arrived in Aix-en-Provence. They had finally gotten out of Luxembourg. They had gotten out, not by choice, but at the time it was still possible and the Jews

were urged to leave Luxembourg. There were convoys of buses into France, through the Occupied Zone of France, and these buses stopped at the borderline, at the unoccupied part of France, at that time France was still half free, the southern part of it. And at this point the people from Luxembourg were let out and came toward the southern part. So that's how Pfeiffis arrived in Aix. And unfortunately, at that time that they arrived (I think by train, it was cold, it was December 1940) I was just in Montpellier. However, the day after they arrived, I came back and learned at my return in Aix that they were there! That they had taken rooms at the Mule Noire, the terrible hotel that was unheated, and quite cold. And Jeanny wasn't feeling well.

Of course, we couldn't stay in that hotel forever, and I had found out at the real estate agency in Aix, that there were homes— even furnished homes— for rent. And one of them was outside Aix-en-Provence on the Petite Route du Tholonet. Le Tholonet. And it belonged to Dr. Francois of Marseilles. And it was a lovely villa, across from the Chateau Noir— the famous Chateau Noir where Cezanne, the painter, had lived years before. So this villa, La Bastide St. Jacques, was for rent. And it was expensive, but not too expensive, if it wouldn't last too long to live there. So I rented

that for our family. And soon after they had arrived, we moved out to this beautiful place.

Life seemed to take some normality, or I should rather say, regularity, while we were living in La Bastide St. Jacques. The winter was VERY cold. Because we had NO heat. And except for the kitchen— where there was a stove that we heated with wood and the burners used charcoal— except for this, we had no other heating place. Yes, there was a fireplace in the salon, but we never used it because it would have used up too much wood. Wood we had to buy and that was expensive also. And a fireplace, anyhow, is good only if you sit right in front of it, and it warms your feet, nothing else.

Anyhow, time went by. Oh! We had a little bathroom in this lovely villa, upstairs, with a bathtub, but no running water. So if we ever wanted to take a bath we would have to heat the water in a big pot on the kitchen stove and then bring it upstairs and fill the bathtub. So it was much easier, if we wanted a weekly bath, to go into town to Aix. To the public bathhouse there, where they had plenty of bathtubs. Of course, you had to pay for that, but it was worthwhile going to that station.

I don't know if I mentioned that in the fall, during the High Holidays, we gathered at the little synagogue of Aix-en-Provence. This was a Sephardic synagogue, and most people— Jews— living in Aix-en-Provence were Sephardim. There were volunteers— neither Cantor nor Rabbi— but the services were very good and it was an emotional time for everybody, because we didn't know where we would end up, what was in store for all of us.

There was a family from Morocco by the name of Abitboul, who had recently come to Aix-en-Provence. I mention this because they were very nice people. They had fled Morocco because there was plenty of Anti-Semitism already at this time. And they had come to Aix-en-Provence. They had three beautiful daughters. And they were very observant- I say almost orthodox. They had very different ways of living and expressing their religious feelings. Of course, the young boys like Paul Meyer and Ferdi, Ferdi Kannn— Ferdi now, they were very interested in these beautiful girls. And I guess they had even some dates with them. But the father was very strict and wanted no honky-tonky and asked even Paul Meyer, at once, if he was ready to get married. And, of course, there was no

time and no means for having a wedding right then and there.

Food was getting scarce and there were ration cards distributed for everybody. And also the Black Market started to flourish. Black Market in food and Black Market in money. Dollars, gold pieces. People went to Marseille— that's where the main seat of the Black Market was happening, taking place. And they exchanged those who had gold pieces, and dollars, or so— exchanged to high prices, and made some profits.

Jeanny and Ferdi, at the time, had their bikes and went over, on their bikes, to Gardanne, which is a neighboring village of Aix. There was a butcher who sold meat on the Black Market, and the word had gotten around, since food was so scarce. He would sell at high prices. So they went quite often on tours and enjoyed being together. Of course at the time Jeanny and Ferdi were secretly engaged to each other already.

We had a paying guest, staying with us in Le Tholonet at the Bastide. Mr. Emil Gruen, he was a friend of Opa, Pfeiffi and Uncle Alfred, who came originally from Breslau, had been in Luxembourg and now, finally, had managed also to come out into the Free Zone— still

Free Zone— of France. And he joined us and stayed with us for several months. He was a widowed bachelor and rather wealthy. We listened to his advice, more or less, and he advised that we should try, like he did, to leave and go, leave France. Well, he succeeded and after many months— I mean weeks of waiting, he got a visa to Portugal and got out. And from Portugal he even went to Cuba. We much later met him again, he survived; much later we met him again in New York. We tried of course, also, to get visas for America, without much success.

Now it was fall of 1941, and the Kanns, that is Ferdi's family, and all the Wolfs, got their visas to leave, and go to the United States. They had affidavits from Otto Wolf's brother, who lived— was an American citizen. So he got a lot of affidavits for his whole family and they left us in the fall.

We tried, Ernie went many times to the Prefecture, that is the Police Headquarters in Marseille, because not only did we need visas for America, but also, a release— a permit— from the French police to leave the country. And they refused time and again. They, for some reason— we to this day, have not completely found out why— but apparently, it seems, that they

had known, that we had some money in Switzerland, and they wanted to get hold of that. And they didn't let us out. So we did not get an exit visa from France, and we did not get an entry visa from the United States. We were stuck and our financial situation got bad and worse.

Our friendship with Francis and Aline Tailleux (who lived at the Chateau Noir) and also with the Marschuetz— Barbara and her husband— grew at this time. Aline had— was— very good friends with Jeanny and she also went with her together on trips for buying Marche Noir goods like meat, especially. Very reluctantly, but finally, not knowing what else to do, we asked Francis, Francis and Aline Tailleux, if they, we, could borrow money from them. Because they had some means and they were extremely wonderful, they lent us some money.

Then winter of '41 came and the fateful December seventh, Pearl Harbor, which was a complete cut-off for everybody who wanted to try to go to America. Because here, America was at war with Germany. There was NO MORE transport ships, regular ships, that would take people out of Europe. And so this was

the end of our hope and dream to go to America at this time.

We somehow survived this hard time, the winter of '41-'42 and in the spring we had some people from the Camp of Les Milles coming to us. This Camp des Milles was in existence, almost since the invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland. And it had people, mostly German Jews, also some political prisoners— Germans, and mostly from the invaded countries. They had put these together in prison camps, it was not like a concentration camp, but it was camp where people were not free. Treated like prisoners, undernourished. However, some of these people were able to get *sauf-conduits*, permission slips to go to Marseille, every once in a while and go to the American Consulate and apply for visas to get out. This was for the people that had means or possibilities, relations, or friends in the United States, who would vouch for them or would give them affidavits. And so somehow, the authorities— the French authorities— were lenient enough to let these people apply for exit visas.

Now what I was going to say was that in the winter and spring of 1942, we had, at various times, people that on the pretense of getting a visa, in Marseille, had fled

this Camp des Milles and tried to get out. And so, sometimes, we had a young man who did not return to Les Milles and we were hiding him for a couple of days in Tholonet, in our house. However, he was not safe there and they were checking on the prisoners and he could be found out easily. So, he left us and we heard later that he made it safely. He got false identification papers, I think, through the Jewish organizations in Marseille, and he made it to a small town in France and lived there with these false identifications as a shoemaker throughout the war and survived.

END OF SOPHIE SELIGSON'S VOICE ON AUDIOTAPE.

WALTER SELIGSON PICKS UP THE NARRATION, USING SOPHIE'S NOTES.

At this point, Sophie's story ends. She was never able to complete it. However, she wrote, or typed, several pages with the continuation of that story in French, which I translated. And where that story ends I added, from my own memory, what Sophie had told me about the end of her War Story, which is really the most gruesome part of the War Story.

It was dawn of August 24, 1942. We wake up suddenly. Somebody has knocked very loudly on the door of house Bastide St. Jacques. Two policemen of the Vichy government on bicycles request to enter in order to "verify" the identity papers of Dr. Pfeiffer, our Jewish stepfather of German nationality. After inspecting the passport for a minute, the two policemen say to prepare a suitcase with toilet articles and to follow them to the police station in Aix-en-Provence for additional information. They will return in a few minutes to take him (that is Dr. Pfeiffer) along after they have "visited" several other neighbors in Tholonet.

What favorable moment! Hardly dressed with the most necessary clothes, all five of us— my mother, my stepfather, my sister, my brother, and myself— run up the hills of Chateau Noir in front of Bastide de St. Jacques. Aline and Francis Tailleux let us into their house. Breathless, we tell them what happened. Jeanny, who is still very weak from her jaundice, and I decide to return to La Bastide. The policemen would not dare to touch two young girls from Luxembourg. After about 10 minutes from our return to La Bastide, the policemen returned:

“Where is Dr. Pfeiffer?”

“We don’t know. He must have left the house.”

The two servants of Vichy are furious. “We take you along as hostages in place of Dr. Pfeiffer!”

“You have no right to do that! We are Luxembourgians!”

In this moment Aline arrives and with one glance understands the gravity of our situation. “Leave this place immediately,” she whispers to me “Jeanny and I will follow as fast as possible.”

The policemen do not understand English. All rooms of the house are open to the outside, each by means of glass doors, except the living room where the two policemen are with Jeanny and Aline. I slip out via the kitchen and run once more to Chateau Noir on the little path behind the house. A little time later Jeanny arrives on her turn, ready to collapse. Francis Tailleux leads us into the forest, which is huge and dense and surrounds the hills of Chateau Noir. We stop at a small plateau— well hidden and far off from the house— to rest a little time while he returns to his house. He promises to return in a short time.

It is mild and quiet in the woods. Nobody dares to talk. I don't know how much time passes, but suddenly steps approach us! They are steps of Aline and Francis, who bring us a big basket with provisions: bread, fruit, and clean water in bottles.

Now, what happened in the meantime? After several attempts, my sister Jeanny succeeded to escape on her part, leaving only Aline and the policemen in the Bastide St. Jacques. She asked the policemen whether they are not ashamed to chase and arrest innocent people because they were Jews and because Vichy ordered it. At one opportune time, she leaves the living room and runs toward the large entrance portal. The policemen are mad and follow her. Aline, in a masterstroke, succeeds to close the heavy portal in their face and even to turn the key. While they try to climb over the portal, she disappears into the hills of Chateau Noir. The policemen only could return to Aix.

What to do now? Aline and Francis have a strategy. They will come and pick us up at dawn and take us in a van, one of the famous horse-drawn vans of the Avenue Mirabeau. They will pretend that we return from a picnic in the country and will leave the forest at a place that is

far from Tholonet and go to the house of Madame Ayette on the other end of the city of Aix.

It was successful! Ayette was in Switzerland on a secret mission, as we learned much later, and Aline had her house key. We entered her house without any noise or light. To avoid the suspicions of the neighbors, we stirred as little as possible. Aline and Francis went home and promised to come back the next day. We were very tired and fell asleep on Ayette's beds.

Early in the morning a key turned gently in the door, the entrance door opened and woke us up abruptly. If that were the policemen?! Soft steps went up the stairs. It was Madame Ayette who returned sooner than anticipated. Fortunately, Jeanny had met her a short time ago. The rest of the family did not know her yet. The expression of surprise on Ayette's face changed fast to expression of compassion and understanding, when Jeanny explained our presence in her house. We stayed three days at Madame Ayette. Aline and Francis came back to her house, at different times, and separately, to avoid all traces of suspicion. It became clear that we could not stay hidden in the small house too close to the center of Aix.

On the third day in the evening, Jean Meyer, a great friend of Aline and of our family, came to take us by train to his little farm, “Paye-Blanc,” several kilometers from Aix. Ayette provided us with some clothes and blankets. We could not carry absolutely anything from Bastide de St. Jacques. For the moment we were well and safe in our second hiding place, surrounded by woods and rural hills, hardly visible from the neighboring farms. The train passed by at some distance. We could hear the noise of the cars and even see the roofs of these merchandise cars. The prisoners of the Milles Camp were packed in these cars without windows. Their destination: the extermination camps in Germany and Poland, which we did not know at the time. The thought of that makes me shudder still now.

After two or three weeks on the farm of Jean Meyer (he had been the Secretary of Prime Minister Edouard Herriot of good old times), we realized that we could not stay forever. Jean Meyer had brought us something to eat every three or four days. He suggested, after consulting with Aline, Ayette, and other members of the “resistance,” that we try to go secretly to Switzerland. We needed false identity papers and the family had to separate into several groups. Jeanny and Ernest, my sister and my brother, were the first to leave the farm,

one gray evening in September. We would not see them again until the end of the war.

They succeeded to cross the border to Switzerland but, since they did not have any means, they were interned in different camps of foreign refugees. My mother and stepfather went by train to Father Singerle of Venelle the day after the departure of my brother and sister. I stayed several more days on the farm "Paye Blanc" before joining my parents at the Father Singerle.

As usual, the Presbytery was attached to the church. We had to hide in the sacristy behind the holy clothes and objects of the parish whenever the police would arrive. The young Alsatian priest was always optimistic, at least outwardly. He insisted that my parents would take his room while he would sleep on straw in the attic. His courage was as valuable as that of the other brothers and sisters of the resistance. Without doubt, his prayers accompanied us when we had to leave him.

I learned that the police had come back to Bastide de St. Jacques and had occupied the house, hoping to see us when we would return. They had interrogated Aline and Francis at the Chateau Noir and had combed the forest without finding our traces. Much later we learned that

Aline was interned for three terrible months in a prison camp some place in France, following her heroic actions. There were a good number of courageous people who helped us to survive these atrocious times of the war. Aline Tailleux takes the first place.

From the farm “Paye Blanc” we went by train to Marseille and then to the Swiss border. For my parents and myself, the attempt to enter Switzerland was a failure. After crawling through the barbed wire fences at the border, the Swiss soldiers pushed us back. We had to return to Marseille and find a hiding place.

After Aline and Francis Tailleux, after Ayette and the Meyer family— Jean, Jacques and Jeanine— after Father Singerle, there were the Doctor Jean Pichon in Marseille, the home of Catholic Girls in the Estelle Street, the Bishops of Marseille, the Mimolo family and several Jewish agencies which still functioned underground who kept us afloat. People of very different persuasions helped us. Especially the Catholic Church was very good to us, hiding us when it came to the cordoning off of whole blocks to search for Jews in every individual house.

Then, also, individual lower class people like the Mimolos, who ran a bordello and gave us room and provided us with false papers. I was a Mulatto girl by the name of Lucille from Martinique. The hatred of the Nazis and the collaborators Petain and Laval was very intense in the population. That was possibly the reason why so many people, courageous and good people, helped us wretched Jewish refugees.

We lived in all kinds of quarters, including even the rooms of the Bishop, in homes and even one bordello. When Marseille got too dangerous after the installation of the Gestapo there, we— that is to say— my parents and I, had to move to the Lozere. We maintained ourselves during all this time by receiving money from the remaining Jewish organizations, which were almost extinct, and many other people. We had been relatively lucky up to this point, as we were not caught by the policemen of the Vichy Government. Their leaders, Petain and Laval, had promised to turn over to Hitler thousands of Jews living in hiding in Southern France.

It is possible that, at the end of 1940 or even in 1941, the famous German writer, Leon Feuchtwanger, as well as the son and daughter (Klaus and Erica) of Thomas Mann were interned in the Camp Milles for some time.

They succeeded to leave for America. But perhaps, the detention of these famous people was only a rumor that should have been verified. An insignificant number of people who were interned in the Camp Milles obtained a safe conduct document to go to Marseille and to the American Consulate. To my regret, I have to say that the employees of the American Consulate were inhuman and refused to issue visas for the majority of these unfortunate people. Police headquarters of Marseille, the Mayor and police of Aix, collaborated with the Vichy Government.

The people imprisoned in Camp Milles were very undernourished. For some time several women and wives of prisoners had obtained the permissions to visit and to bring food to their men. These poor women prepared food from morning to night to bring something to eat to their men once or twice a week. Soon other prisoners— those that had a little money— bought some meals. An exchange in Black Market food developed. All this did not last very long. Horribly, as far as I know, these poor prisoners were transported to Germany to perish there, following the promise of the infamous Laval to Hitler to deliver to him 250,000 Jews for the extermination camps.

WALTER CONTINUES SOPHIE'S STORY FROM HIS KNOWLEDGE OF HER EXPERIENCE

At this point, tragically, Sophie's War Story breaks off, because on July 17, 1985, she passed away at age 70 of a heart attack. I, her husband of 37 years, have to somewhat fill the gap in her story. She seldom spoke of these two, two and a half terrible years that follow -- only on our honeymoon did she tell me the whole story and even many facts had slipped her mind.

I do know that whatever Jewish organization was left in the Marseille underground helped her and her step parents to get out of Marseille and locate in a little town called Le Monastier in the mountains of the Massif Central in the Provence Lozere of France— north of Montpellier, which at one time during the war was the seat of the government of Luxembourg, and northeast of Nimes, and west of the city of St. Etienne and south of the Provence Haute Loire.

It is a place that can get bitterly cold during the winter. So there was always a struggle for wood to burn. I think they found a home where they could live by themselves. Dr. Pfeiffer, who was from Breslau, Germany, and could not speak fluently and without an accent, was declared

a deaf mute and had to stay in the house to avoid any contact with the outside world. Apparently, there was a radio in the house, which they turned on secretly because it was strictly forbidden to listen to foreign broadcasts such as the BBC. For her whole life, Sophie has had the habit to turn on the news whenever they were broadcast, even here in America, a habit they had acquired during the war when they had always hoped for the defeat of the Nazis and their own liberation.

Even though nobody talked openly about the presence of these out-of-town people who were said to be from Alsace-Lorraine and displaced by the war, it seems that many people knew of their identity. But the resistance movement was powerful and somewhat of a shield. (Especially the people that let the house to them--the Mayor and others helped them.)

I found a list of people in among Sophie's papers and names. On top is Mr. Trocelier, then les *deux demoiselles* Boussugues, Mme. Aymes, Jeanette Ames, Mr. Rispoli--he was the Commissaire de Police— Mme. Boudet, Mr. Clavel a Chirac (apparently he was not in Le Monastier), les Dames Pages, Meyssonier— he was the collaborator—*le filou*, as she writes, Mr. Vassal-- he was the Mayor. Then I find the names of some apparently

neighboring towns like Marvejolles, Mende, and I also find the name of a Gestapo lieutenant with whom they got in contact unfortunately, Lieutenant Boettger.

To exist in this society of closely related people in a small French town was quite difficult, even though many of them belonged secretly to the resistance.

Sophie related one story about her stepmother. In order to make somewhat of a living, she made sweaters and similar clothes, which she exchanged for food from the farmers who gave her the wool. She became well known for this. When the Gestapo moved to Le Monastier, one of the lieutenants (I believe his name was Boettger) came to their house to order a sweater for his wife in Germany for Christmas, and visited them quite often. He was obviously a spy for the Gestapo and the situation was quite ticklish. One day he came to arrest Sophie's stepmother and took her along. She was denounced by that detestable collaborator, Mr. Meissonier. Sophie and Dr. Pfeiffer were terribly out of their mind.

After two hours, Sophie's stepmother returned, hale and hearty. At the Gestapo Headquarters she succeeded to denounce Mr. Meyssonier for spying on for the Germans and for falsely accusing honest Frenchmen for

underground activities and Black Marketeering. That he was arrested instead of her and she was sent home free! (Her stepmother was sent home free). An amazing feat for which I always admire her.

The other story that stands out: Sophie's weekly attendance of the Mass. In order to create no suspicion, she had to attend Mass and Communion. She recalls how ice cold the church was in the winter, how hard it was to kneel for a long time on the hard benches and the eating of the strange wafer. She had heard and even met some Jewish girls, also living in the neighborhood in disguise, who went to church also on Sunday for Communion, and had giggled when they were offered the wafer. They had to move to another area so that the Gestapo would not catch them.

The country around Le Monastier is quite hilly and the only transportation around there was by bicycle. Sophie must have gotten one, because she described how hard it was to pedal a bike on these hilly roads. And she had to use the bike for every purchase of food, which she got at the farmers. They had extremely little food, lived at the mercy of people who probably knew secretly who Sophie and her stepparents were. Dr. Pfeiffer had to stay in the house not to expose himself as a German.

There was a raid, I believe, by some Gestapo people. While they were in the house, they went to the bathroom and saw some razor blades. Don't remember what the solution was that they got out of this predicament that a male was in the house.

Also Sophie broke her shoulder once on the icy roads and she could not go to a doctor because that would be too suspicious, so she had to have her stepfather bandage her and finally heal this break.

Besides the hunger, there was the constant tension of being discovered. They lost a great deal of weight and when the war ended, Sophie looked like a skeleton. Of course there was the constant worry: no communication with Jeannie and Erni.

Towards the end of the war, the German and Vichy troops that occupied the country became more ferocious with all the setbacks for Hitler, and many courageous Frenchmen had to leave their homes and flee into the forests, where they joined the resistance movement. Sophie and her stepparents also had to hide in the woods.

Then, one day the Nazis disappeared and the word got around that France is being liberated! It was a tremendous relief! Now the struggle started to catch the traitors and in this tremendous upheaval many were caught and shot that were really innocent and the traitors sometimes got away, at the instigation of some personal enemies, people got arrested.

It took some time before Sophie and her parents got back to Luxembourg and were reunited with Ernie and Jeanny.