

Second Generation: Vivian Jaffe

Born in Philadelphia in 1953, Vivian Starkman Jaffe has spent most of her life in the area. The Holocaust was hardly ever discussed in her home. Yet, it was a subject that haunted Vivian her entire life. Many years ago, she joined Children of Holocaust Survivors, a group created by Jewish Family Service to talk about what it meant emotionally to have parents who were survivors.

Vivian's mother, Leah Wajsfelner was born in Charleroi, July 31, 1929. She was taken away from her parents in 1942, never to see her mother again. She was hidden on a farm in Trescleoux, France. When the Germans would come to the farm, she ran into the woods. When it was safe, one of the family members would whistle, alerting Leah that she could come back. At the end the war, she made her way back to Charleroi, reconnecting with her father who survived Auschwitz.

In 1942, Maurice's parents contacted the top clergy in Charleroi, Belgium. There were a series of clergymen who facilitated the travels of Maurice to a boarding school in Melles-Tournai. The school was for younger children, so the director decided to have Maurice work with the gardener. Eighty more Jewish children arrived at the school; they hid in this occupied town. An attorney, Leo Chevalier, provided the funds for saving these children.

At the end of the war, Maurice went back to Charleroi, where he found his parents. His father arrived there very weak after his years in Auschwitz. His mother hid in the woods for several years; at the end of the war, she returned to Charleroi at then end of the war.

Vivian had the privilege of meeting the family who hid her mother in Trescleoux, France. In addition, she traveled to Melles-Tourna, the town where her father was hidden, visiting the area where the school stood. In fact, she had the opportunity to meet the granddaughters of Leo Chevalier, thanking them for their grandfather's generosity. One granddaughter said the following, "I knew my grandfather did a lot of great things, but now I can connect a face, a family, to what he did."



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