



Photo courtesy of William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum

What would it take to make someone willing to risk crossing the mountains, by foot, in the dead of winter?

ALBERT BARON

Albert Baron was born in Nancy, in northeastern France, in 1934 to Jacob and Rose Baron. Both parents had been born in Poland and had emigrated to France. Jacob was a master tailor who owned a clothing shop. All was well until German forces invaded France on May 10, 1940. In just one month France surrendered. On June 22, 1940, France signed an armistice with Germany. The German army occupied northern and western France. Until November 1942, southern and eastern France remained unoccupied. It was ruled by a government in the city of Vichy. The Vichy government was allied with Nazi Germany.

In 1940, Jacob Baron decided that to protect his family, they would escape to the south of France. The family fled to Toulouse. In Toulouse, Albert's father was caught in a roundup of Jews by French police. A cousin was able to secure his release from prison, but Jacob was concerned that he might be arrested again. Albert's family hid in attics and basements to avoid Jacob's capture. When the time was right, the Baron family escaped by train to Bagnères-de-Luchon, a small village in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains.



Photo courtesy of William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum

Albert and his family felt safe in Luchon for almost a year and a half. Many of the Luchon residents knew that the Barons were Jewish, but they did not denounce them to the authorities.

By the fall of 1942, Albert's parents decided that the family would need to escape from France. They sent their children to safety while they made their plans. Albert and his brother were brought to a monastery where they stayed for a number of weeks. His sister was taken in at a convent.

Jacob and Rose Baron, and two other families arranged to escape France by crossing the Pyrenees Mountains. It was near Christmastime, the weather was cold and snowy and German soldiers were out patrolling the mountains. The Barons believed that escaping by foot in those dangerous conditions was worth the risk.



Photo courtesy of Hike Pyrenees

For more than 24 hours, with their young children along, they climbed and trudged through the cold, going over the mountains and across the border into neutral Spain. With the help of Jewish organizations, the Baron family ended up in Barcelona, Spain. In March 1944, with the assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS, they were able to emigrate to Montreal, Canada. The family spent their first evening in Montreal at a Passover Seder.

"After four years of searching for freedom from persecution, internment and inevitable death, our family was free."

After the war the Baron family learned that almost all the members of their extended family who had remained in Poland, including Albert's grandparents, were murdered during the Holocaust.

Albert completed a degree at McGill University and went on to a career in sales and marketing. Albert and his wife, Rita, moved their family to Atlanta in 1970 when Albert accepted a sales position. The Barons had two children and grandchildren. Albert Baron passed away in July 2020.



Map courtesy of Map World Atlas, www.ww2history.org