



*How did a village save a family
from certain death?*

MANUELA MENDELS BORNSTEIN

Manuela Mendels Bornstein was born to a Jewish family in Paris before World War II. She, her parents, and her older sister, Jacqueline, spent time with their many relatives in the Netherlands and Germany. Life changed when the Germans invaded France in May 1940, and in June, took control of northern France. Manuela and her family, like the other Jews of Paris, now faced discrimination. Her father was forced to give up his business. Manuela's parents' identification cards were stamped to identify them as Jews.



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In 1942, Jews in France were ordered to wear a yellow star. That summer, German officials and French police began rounding up Jews. In July they arrested over 13,000 Jews in Paris and imprisoned them for days in a sports stadium – the Velodrome d'Hiver – in the heat and with little food. When the deportations began, some people were sent to work camps or

concentration camps; others to Auschwitz, where many were murdered upon arrival.

It is a mystery why no one came for Manuela's family during the round-ups, but sensing the danger, the Mendels family decided to leave. Two young men in the French Resistance helped them catch a train to the south of France, which was controlled by a separate government in Vichy. Manuela's family soon landed in the town of Le Got. There, the mayor took responsibility for their safety. He found a job for Manuela's father and provided false identification cards to her parents.

“To this day, when I talk to my sister, we wonder why we weren’t rounded up. ... It’s a miracle; there’s no other explanation.”

Manuela and her sister rarely felt the danger their family faced every day. They went to school and played with the village children. On Sundays, Manuela remembers her parents raising their glasses and reciting: “The four of us. Until next Sunday. Hoping to be alive another week. Until next Sunday.”



Photo courtesy of A Dimanche Prochain

Imagine the girls’ excitement when their baby brother, Franklin, named after the American president, Franklin Roosevelt, was born in August 1943! But threats still existed. When German troops marched through Le Got, people, including Manuela’s father, hid to avoid being rounded up or shot. The Mendels survived with the help of the community of Le Got.

After the liberation of Paris in 1944, Manuela’s family returned. Over time, they learned that almost 200 members of their family had died in the Holocaust.

After the war, Manuela met her husband on a visit to the United States. In the late 1970s, Manuela and her family, now including two sons, moved to Atlanta. She is close to her children and grandchildren. Manuela shares her story to tell others about the good people who saved the lives of her family.



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