

EPISODE 476

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:00] Speaker 1: Everything is good to go.

[00:00:02] AH: Everything's good to go, ma'am. Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:06] MK: I was born in Metz, which is the capital of state of Moselle in Lorraine. And I was raised in Metz until 1939 when the government in August 1939 asked the **[inaudible 00:00:37]** can move to Poitiers, which is south west of Paris on the train line from Paris to Bordeaux. They had already organized a long time ago where all the cities and all villagers from the east of France, northeast of France, would move away from Bordeaux, because Metz was only 36 miles from the German border.

[00:01:25] AH: When you mentioned August 1939, we're talking about the Second World War and the rise of Nazi Germany, right?

[00:01:33] MK: Yeah, it was before the Second World started in September of 1969.

[00:01:44] AH: Had your family been in the region for a long time?

[00:01:47] MK: Yes. We're in Metz 1896.

[00:01:57] AH: You witnessed anti-semitism growing up?

[00:02:01] MK: Yes. I witnessed anti-semitism, but it was not very often. It happened mostly I remember two times. When I was five, about five years old, we left to synagogue. My father – My two brothers deny. And a group started to call us dirty Jews, a group of boys. But they were really very bad boys. And my father ran up to them. And I was very, very happy that he did, because that was the first time that somebody called me a dirty Jew and I could not understand why they were doing that. I was five years old. I think to myself I'm a Jew, but I'm not dirty.

And my father ran after them, and I didn't get along with my father very much, but that day I loved him a lot because he defended us. And the second time when I was about 10 years old, a girl in my neighborhood that was not a friend. I just knew her by side. I came back from a store where my mother sent me to buy your dozen eggs, which I had in a little, what we call a [inaudible 00:03:38] a hidden bag. And that girl started calling me dirty Jew. And I told her what I said before, "I'm a Jew, but I'm not dirty." And she kept singing, "Dirty Jew. Dirty Jew." So I just walked myself ahead and I headed home. And my mother didn't punish me. She told me it was right to do it. You have to remember too that Metz was very close to the border. Only about 36 miles, and we had a lot of Germans living in Metz. [inaudible 00:04:28] anti-semitism once Hitler came to power.

[00:04:34] AH: What did it feel like when the Nazis invaded France?

[00:04:38] MK: That was a terrible [inaudible 00:04:40]. We could not understand what was going on. But it was such a chaotic France. So everything was so chaotic. We didn't even know what was going on most of the time for the last two or three weeks. And we were in Poitiers, I told you, which is southwest of Paris. And it became [inaudible 00:05:13] state in the occupied part of French with German arms. So we lived under the German at that time. But it was a terrible thing. And my sister and I, my older sister [inaudible 00:05:34] and I, we were going home for lunch and we saw the first German on a motorcycle. And I don't even remember why I said that, but I said that, "I hope he breaks his neck," and he fell at that time.

[00:05:57] AH: Can you tell listeners about what happened to the rest of your family?

[00:06:02] MK: My oldest brother was a prisoner of war. He was in the army, in the French army in the marginal line. And he became a prisoner when the Germans invaded the east of France. And he escaped when he heard that the Germans did not know that he understood German. He never told them. But he heard them say that they would be transferred to a camp in Germany. So he escaped that evening. And he was able to come home to Poitiers. And my youngest brother was in the army. He was doing his military service into army. And in 1940 [inaudible 00:07:01] became the chief of the government Jews had — young men had no right to stay in the French army. So he was sent home too. So he joined us is 20 — and my two brothers were able to get not together, but [inaudible 00:07:26] they were able to get to the non-occupied

France, because the prisoner of war escaped, he would have been immediately sent back to Germany. So he went to non-occupied France, my oldest brother. And my younger brother went a year or two years later when things became very dangerous for young men. Because we were very naïve. We thought that only young men were in danger.

And so whole family — the rest of the family — stayed in Poitiers. My oldest sister was in Paris, but that means I was now the oldest at home. I was number 5. On of the boys — we were three boys and five girls. One of them both died during World War I when he was two years old. So I never knew him. But we were raised 2 boys and 5 girls. I had four sisters. One older than I, and three younger than I. And in 1942, on June 17, 1942, the German came to the house and arrested my sister. I did some research and I found out that my sister had been arrested by SIPO. It's just initials of a very long word, because you know Germany they take a word, other word other word, and make a huge word that you can find in any dictionary. But the SIPO came to the house and arrested her because she and I, we were helping a lot of people to go from occupied to non-occupied France. And every day, a lot of people would run to us and ask us to help them.

And we didn't know who they were. We didn't know from they were coming. But they needed help. We could go one person once a week. So one week, I went to see her, and I brought her all the things my mother had prepared for her. And I told her, I reminded her said that mother needed her as much as her children. And she looked at me and said to me, "Don't you realize that if I escaped, you are all going to be arrested." I had never thought about that.

So on my way home, I had a very long way. I decided that we would all who were still in Poitiers escape crossing the line between occupied and non-occupied French and go to non-occupied French. And we did it. And we were successful. But my sister was never able to escape. He was later **[inaudible 00:11:23]** a terrible camp near Paris and then to **[inaudible 00:11:32]** he was deported on September 21st, 1942 to an unknown destination. In her last letter, she could write to us, "We were now in un-occupied French." So she hold to a friend in Poitiers **[inaudible 00:11:57]** she added it's the last rumours we are going to make to work. So need to dramatize. But in reality, years, years later, we found out that she had been sent to Auschwitz and she never came back. So that's the story of my sister.

[00:12:25] AH: That was fascinating, and I'm very sorry about sister. That must have been so tough. And you had a fiancé, Jacques.

[00:12:34] MK: It was the hardest thing for me, because even now, I feel that I did not help her enough. I could not – But I still feel guilty about it. Because I saved all the rest of my family, but not her.

[00:12:57] AH: You were very brave.

[00:13:00] MK: You are talking about my fiancé, Jacques **[inaudible 00:13:04]**. Yeah, we were engaged. He was a medical student. I met him because he was a classmate of my sister, and she invited him for my 21st birthday. We had a party in my house and he came and that's where we started to know each other. I never met him before. So Jacques became engaged in the resistance in 1943. I met him in Paris where he came to write the examination for a medical examination to become an intern in the hospital. But then he told me that he was engaged in the resistance. And I told him he couldn't go back to Poitiers. He had to immediately go south to non-occupied French to Spain and try to get to England to join the goal. But he told me he had to go back to Poitiers, which he did. And he was arrested with his brother, Marc, and three other young men, all students in the University of Poitiers.

And they were first tortured by the French police which arrested them. They were not arrested by the Germans. They were arrested by the French. And then they were given **[inaudible]** who told the judges that they were young students who love their country and had done things to defend their county and they should not be condemned to death. So they were condemned to force labor. But the German took them over because they had sabotaged ammunition train and they were condemned to death. All four of them were shot on October 6th, 1943 on **[inaudible 00:15:47]** in Paris. The worst prison in Paris at the time.

And I learned that Jacques has been probably shot, because they said that four of the five were shot and one was still in forced labor. So I didn't know if Jacques was the one who was shot or not. But in October 1943, I read in the newspaper of Marseille, where I was in school finishing my studies as a nurse. I read in the paper that 12 of them had been shot. So I hold to a friend in Poitiers a letter that she understood. And she answered me that a patient had died. So I knew

that – I finally knew that Jacques had died. So that's the story of Jacque, and that happened in 1943.

[00:17:05] AH: And tell us how you joined the French Armies Intelligence Service, Marthe.

[00:17:11] MK: I was in the French army three weeks before I joined the Intelligence Service. And when I arrived in **[inaudible 00:17:24]** where the front at the time and where the first French army of the **[inaudible 00:17:32]** was located. I was told that that I was not going to be a nurse, but a social worker. I was trained in nursing. I had lots of first concepts of what it entailed to be a social worker, but in the army, and that counts for all armies of the world. If you're told you're a social worker, that's what you are.

So for three weeks, I was a social worker. And then one day crossing the square of the town. That's my next question. I met the colonel of the regiment in 1943. We were all told that hat a resistance had killed the first German at the metro station **[inaudible 00:18:43]** in Paris and yet escaped. But we didn't know his name. That was highly secret. That's when I joined the regiment, the 151 regiment of infantry, which was in Metz before 1939. And **[inaudible 00:19:05]** was then colonel **[inaudible 00:19:09]** when I joined the army in 1944. In 1944, he was the chief of the 151 regiment of infantry in Metz.

So I never had met the colonel before. But when I crossed the little square at lunch time, I met him, and I had learned regiment when I met him that he was the resistant who had killed the first German **[inaudible 00:20:00]** in 1943. And it was Colonel **[inaudible 00:20:10]**. And he stopped me and he asked me to answer his phone during lunch break. So I went with him to his office. He showed me around and leaving. He was courteous. He told me I'm sorry. I have nothing to read for you here. There are only German books. And I answered, "That's quite right, I read German fluently." So extremely interested.

He walked back towards me and asked me if I spoke German, and I told him yes, as well as French. Then he explained to me that Germany all males from the age of 12 to old age were all called in the army and were in uniform. So if any male of that age from 12 to old age would work in streets of Germany in civilian clothes, that person would be immediately noticed and arrested. That's why they **[inaudible 00:21:39]**. And he asked me if I accepted to be **[inaudible**

00:21:47] to the intelligent service of the 1st army, which I accepted. And that's how I became a spy.

[00:21:58] AH: Tell us more about the types of things you did for the French army.

[00:22:04] MK: As I was trained to become a spy, I underwent extremely intensive training. And when the training was terminated, they asked me to create my own alibi, because that would stick much better. That's an alibi given to me. So I created my own alibi, presented it. It was accepted. After that, I was assigned to the commando of Africa, a regiment of the 1st French army. They all came from North Africa, from Algeria. North Africa they had found it's not anymore Africa, but it's in Africa. And they had found in Italy **[inaudible 00:23:08]**, and now they were fighting in France. So I was very flattered to be assigned to such a unit. Colonel **[inaudible 00:23:19]** asked me to interrogate. Oh, that was before we overcame that. Colonel **[inaudible 00:23:28]** I met him. Asked me to interrogate prisoners of war to know the plan of retreat of the Germans from Germany. And I interrogated general and colonel **[inaudible 00:23:54]** would have known anything about the plan of retreat. But every army of the world had the plan of retreat, as well as a plan of attack because you never know how change would have turned out.

And I interrogated prisoners of war and I can boast about it, because in one of the citations of my **[inaudible 00:24:25]**, which is a medal of the French army, it is written that I provided Colonel **[inaudible 00:24:35]** with precise information, which was later confirmed about the plan of retreat of the German. So that's my first achievement in the army. After that, Colonel **[inaudible 00:24:51]** asked me to cross the front in **[inaudible 00:24:57]**. And I tried 13 times **[inaudible 00:25:02]** and I was never successful. During the war, everything is so fluid, and they change very fast. I was told by the army that I had to go from A to be B, and at B I would sign the certain things. But when I arrived at B, there was nothing I could find. So I could not proceed. That's one of the reasons which happened several times. There were other reasons. We had military guides explained to me what I will find on the ground and how to proceed on the ground from A through B. That they are humans and they make mistakes twice the military guide made mistakes. Do you want an example?

[00:26:11] AH: Yes please.

[00:26:13] MK: Okay. One night, I was always taken very late at night. One night, two officers told me **[inaudible 00:26:23]** and stopped in a huge field covered in snow. It was February 1945. They told me to cross the field and go northwest where I will find a small town with a group of German soldiers to mix with them, to follow them, and to send as much information I could. I had only a little suitcase with clothes of which I had taken all the labors of so nobody could tell I came from French. But I had no map. I had no compass. I had no arm. I had no radio. I had nothing in writing. Everything I needed to know is in my memory.

So I took my little suitcase and I started walking on that field covered with snow. I didn't have a flashlight. And suddenly I heard a huge crack, and here I was immersed in ice cold water of a canal, because there are lots of canals, and the guy, the military guy had forgotten to tell me there was a canal. **[inaudible 00:28:03]** because there was snow allover.

So I popped up from the canal and tried to get out. You can understand that I couldn't call for help. I had to do it on my own. So I tried to grasp the edge of the canal, but everything was so frozen that it was impossible to get out of the canal, which was narrow, like all manmade canals. I was now much heavier because I was drenched in that ice cold water from my head to toe. So it took me a very, very long time to find a place where I was able – I need to get out of the canal. And I walked all night drenched in that ice cold water by an extremely cold and dark night.

At daybreak, I noticed that my footprint showed that I had walked in circles all night. And years later, I read in a magazine that if you have no compass and you have no other way of directing yourself by a very dark night, you walk in circles, which explained why I had done the very strange, weird thing. And that's one of the examples why 13 times I could not cross into the German line.

So after that, the captain who directed our **[inaudible 00:30:06]** for our little groups, which means communication. And the captain beside said they were going to go through Germany through Switzerland. Now, Switzerland was neutral, but the Swedes had helped the Germans as long as the Germans were victorious. That we were victorious, they were helping us. That's neutrality.

So I was taken by one of our officers to Basil stopped the car near a forest and we crossed the forest by foot. And on the other side of the forest, he showed me a huge field, which was

bordered on northern edge by a small country hold. The field and the forest was Switzerland, but the road was Germany. And on that field, there was no barrier whatsoever. You could cross from the field on to the road. But the road was under the surveillance of two German military sentinels heavily armed which came one from the western edge of the [inaudible 00:31:53] of the field walked to the centre of the field and the other sentinel came from the west. Walked towards the center, met the first one [inaudible 00:32:12], turned their back and walked to the edge of the field on each side. And they were doing that constantly without stopping. So Mr. [inaudible 00:32:26] told me 12 evening. But when it's still very light, I will tell you that's the time to go. And you have to call along the field and hide behind the bushes near the road.

When the German sentinels have turned their back and walked to the edges of the field on both sides and when they come back and leave again and turned their back to you walking to the edge of the field, you get up, walk on the road, walk towards the east towards — And you will meet the German sentinel coming back from the eastern edge. And he explained to me what I will do that I have to show him my identity card. And then walk away as fast as I can, but not too fast to become suspicious before he met the other sentinel and they may talk about me.

So we stayed, Mr. [inaudible 00:33:56] and me, in that forest all afternoon. Mr. [inaudible 00:34:02] was a middle-aged men. I was 24 years old. He talked to me about his wife and children and a lot of other things. And then suddenly in the afternoon, with a very strange smile he said to me, "You may be killed tonight. So why not have a good time now?" But that was not on my agenda. So after that, we talked about other things and throughout the evening. But when it was still very light, he told me now is the time.

I took my little suitcase in which I again had taken off all the labors of my clothes. Now I had two new things in my suitcase, which was given me the day before I left. I was given vouchers to buy everything I needed in Germany. But because everything was on vouchers like in France, but nobody, like intelligence officers, was able to tell me how to proceed with the vouchers, because you cannot just keep a voucher. You have to know how to proceed with it. But nobody knew enough about what was going on in Germany at that time. And I was given a lot of German money to be able to pay for anything I needed.

So when Mr. **[inaudible 00:35:50]** told me, it was time to go. I took my little suitcase and I called along the field and hid behind the bushes. And until then, everything was perfect. But once behind the bushes, I suddenly realized the immensity of what that was going to undertake. And I had never time before. I was kept so busy. I never had time to really think of what I was going to do in Germany. And I was told that I needed – I was sent for two purposes. I was sent for my military information, but also information how the Germans reacted to the war and behaved, which was very important allies were invading Germany.

So once I hid behind the bushes, I suddenly became so terrified. I wonder I was going to do in Germany. And I was terrified mostly, because I knew that it was extremely important that I know how to proceed with the vouchers. I became so terrified that I was absolutely paralyzed by fear. And it took me a very long time to overcome the fear. But suddenly, something blinked in my brain and I remembered something, which made me take up, take my little suitcase and crawl and walked on to the road when the German sentinels were both walking to the edges of the field.

And when I walked on the road, I met the sentinel which came back from the eastern edge and I raised my right arm “Hail Hitler,” And he asked me for my identity card. I was called now Martha Ulrich, and like I told you, I had an alibi, a very good alibi in Germany. That sentinel looked at my card and my identity, which was forged by the intelligent service. I was now called Martha Ulrich. And I wondered, if he too would know, or would recognize that card had been forged. But he gave it back to me without questioning. I was now in Germany. So I walked away as fast as I could, but not too fast. And I arrived in **[inaudible 00:39:22]**, which was only two kilometers from some place in the enclave where I had crossed from Switzerland into Germany.

And when I arrived, it was all very dark because I had waited so long to get up and walk. And I saw two men sitting at the center of **[inaudible 00:39:54]** near a well. One of them had a flashlight that he opened sometimes, and they showed armbands that said they were from security. So I walked towards them coughing so that they didn't get surprised and shoot me. And they were very nice. They told me where the house I was looking for was. It was very close by. Because I had an address there — I walked that home and walked up to flights and rang a bell. And a young woman already home at night opened the door and asked me what I wanted. And I

told her who sent me, and she became very hospitable immediately, and told me to come in. And she gave me some food and she gave me a room. I slept all night.

And the next morning I got up. I went into the kitchen where she was already cooking. And I noticed immediately that she was a very bad mood. And she called me. I couldn't sleep all night. I noticed that her stockings were completely torn. I had fallen in craters, because on the road there were many craters in the dirt. I didn't see them. And I had fallen into craters on the road because **[inaudible 00:41:52]** had been bombarded heavily by the allied because they were manufacturing things for the German army.

And then she looked at me straight in the eyes and told me, "Fräulein," which means young girl in German, "Are you a spy?" I was standing in front of her. I bent a little bit. I started laughing immediately. I bent a little bit, stretched out my two arms and told her, "Do I look like a spy?" And she looked at me and started laughing too, and we became extremely good friends. I helped her with a little boy. Her husband was on the eastern part and she had no news for several months. She didn't know what happened to me, because at that time there were hundred thousands and thousands of German family had no news of their loved ones in the army, because everything had become so chaotic in Germany — that they were out of news. And I knew. And that's why in alibi I had a German fiancé. And when I told my handlers that I needed a German military fiancé. They went to a prisoner of war, camp, and they found Hans, which they felt was a good fiancé for me. And they made him write letters and sign pictures to my little Martha Ulrich. And I had his letters. And everywhere I went in German, that helped me greatly, because so many people had no news from their own military, German military people. That women, the next day evening, took me to the train station, because nothing, no transportation worked in day time because of the allied bombardment. Train worked only at night, like buses, military cars, nothing functioned in day time, only at night.

So I took a train to **[inaudible 00:44:48]**, but when we arrived at the station, she took out my hand the voucher without me asking her, and we two walked out. That's how we learned how to use a voucher. She saved my life without knowing it. I would have been arrested immediately if they had noticed that I didn't know how to use a voucher. So I arrived in **[inaudible 00:45:26]** the next morning. And I never took another train, because in the train, they constantly check our

papers every few minutes. And every time they looked at my card, my identity card, I was afraid they would discover it was forged.

[00:45:51] AH: And you were able to report some significant pieces of information, right?

[00:45:57] MK: Yeah, but I had no radio. To have a radio, you have to be two. You cannot be alone and have a radio. So I had one place from where I can report, but I had to walk from **[inaudible 00:46:20]** to switch border where that family lived in a farm. They were German Catholics, very religious and very anti-Hitler. And one of the daughters was married to an agent who was in my service. And that husband would come to the border the farm was less than a half of a mile from the Swiss border. The husband would come on the border and stay on the Swiss side of the wire. And the wife would stay on the German side of the Swiss border. She would give him my letters, and he would give her the letters he brought from my service. And that's how I got information. But I had to work all the distance every time I needed to give information. And I walked three times back and from **[inaudible 00:47:44]** to the border. I did not know what was going on in Germany really. So I was watching what people were doing. And I noticed that in day time they worked, but they always worked in groups. They never worked separately. So I joined a group going in my direction. And in the group was an SS who came back from the Russian part and he told us right away that he had been wounded at the Russian front and he came back from the hospital and he was now assigned to the district light.

And as we worked, it happened that I walked next to him. He said that smelled a Jew a mile away, but that morning his smell was pretty bad, because he never discovered that I was Jewish. But we walked, and he was telling all the atrocities of the SS and all the personal had committed on the eastern front, which was much, much, much worse than anything, all the atrocities they committed on the western part. So as we worked, he suddenly fainted. And I was a nurse, a German nurse on my alibi. So I took care of him. And when he regained consciousness, he was so grateful that I had taken care of him that he invited me to visit him into district light and he gave me his phone number. And I heard on the German radio that allied armies were going to invade any minute. So that's when I decided to walk to the district light to visit my friend the SS.

And when I arrived at the district light, I discovered that the district light had been completely evacuated in that region. And that **[inaudible 00:50:35]** were leaving and they told me that the district light was completely, completely evacuated. So I walked back to **[inaudible 00:50:48]** as fast as I could, so about 10 kilometers. And when I arrived in **[inaudible 00:50:56]**, the people of the city were running to their homes to lock-up because they were terrified and the thought of a foreign army invading them. And I understand because I had lived through that in Poitiers. So I went to the main artery and I waited boulevard, and I waited. And the first tank arrived and drove towards me. How was I going to explain to them that I was a friend and not an enemy? I had no document, none, none to prove who I was. So I walked into the middle of the boulevard and I raised my right arm as high as I could and I made a V sign, the victory sign of Winston Churchill, to show them that I'm a friend and hoping they would understand that.

And as I am very, very lucky, the tank did not kill me, but stopped. And so I asked the officer in charge to come down. And he came down. I was quite assertive, I might think. When he came down, I told him that I had very important information and to take me immediately to a headquarters. And I discovered that I was even more lucky, because it was a French army which invaded **[inaudible 00:52:54]**. If an English-speaking army had invaded **[inaudible 00:53:00]**, I would not been able to communicate with them, because I didn't speak English yet. But with a French army, there was no problem. So that officer took me on the tank and drove me to the headquarters where I met **[inaudible 00:53:23]**, and that's the regiment from North Africa from the 1st army.

So I told **[inaudible 00:53:34]** immediately that I came back from the victory line, where it was completely evacuated. And he looked at me and said "Who knows if it is true? It may be a trap." So I took a piece of paper and a pen on his desk and I wrote a phone number, because we had the same technology as American army to call any service in the field. So he called my service, which was very happy to hear that I was still alive.

[00:54:18] AH: Your story is very powerful, Marthe. And what did you do after the war?

[00:54:24] MK: Oh, after the war, I stayed in Germany until January '36, and I left for Vietnam. I was a nurse in Vietnam. No more intelligent service. I never did any intelligence service then. Colonel **[inaudible 00:54:46]** both asked me to help them with intelligence after the war in

Germany was finished, but I have refused, I did not want to do that anymore, mostly in Vietnam. **[inaudible 00:55:08]** asked me to do that in Vietnam, and that was a type of intelligence service I would never accept. He asked me to go out with all Chinese men to find out how much money they give to the Viet Cong, and that was something I would never have done. I never worked in intelligence, but I never forgot what I did, and I'm very proud of what I did.

[00:55:43] AH: You should be very proud. You were incredibly brave.

[00:55:47] MK: Thank you.

[00:55:48] AH: When did you come to the United States, Martha, because you're in Los Angeles now? Is that correct?

[00:55:54] MK: I came to the United States in June 1956. My husband, Major **[inaudible 00:56:03]**, is an American who I met in Geneva in Switzerland. I was back in school in Switzerland, and he was in school too in Switzerland, and we met firstly. It was 10 years after Jacques had died, because I had made a vow not to marry. And you see, I changed my mind.

[00:56:31] AH: Thanks ever so much for your time. It's been amazing to speak to you. I'm humbled and honored to have spoken to you. Thank you.

[00:56:39] MK: I didn't talk about all that for many years. But since I started talking, I keep talking.

[00:56:48] AH: Well, thank you for talking to me.

[00:56:51] MK: Yeah, as long as I live. My husband said that's what makes me alive.

[00:56:58] AH: Yeah. I mean, you're very much alive. It's really been a pleasure. Thank you.

[00:57:04] MK: Thank you so much, much alive. It's really been a pleasure. Thank you so much.

[END]