

THE MISGUIDED IDEALIST

The Story of Rachel Gunzig's Life

As one of her first gifts, we give our daughter the Hebrew name, Sarah Rivka. Sarah was the Hebrew name of my father's mother who perished along with six million other Jews in the Holocaust. Rivka was the Hebrew name of my father's aunt, who was responsible for saving hundreds of lives, including my father's during her work in the Underground.

Caryn Rubinstein, Brit B'not Yisrael, Nov 27, 1994

Contents

Foreword	i
Summary	i
Chronology	ii
Cast of Characters	iv
References	iv
Poland	1
Early Schooling	3
Zionism/Communism	3
Antwerp	5
Palestine	6
Departure	6
Life on the Kibbutz	7
The Orange Groves	7
On Strike	8
After the Kibbutz	10
Belgium 1932-36	11
Antwerp	11
The Barcelona Workers' Games	13
Brussels '36	15
Prelude to Spain '36	16
Spain	17
Travel to Spain	17
Assignment in Spain	18
The Pharmacy	18
High jacking Incident	19
The Anarchists	21
The Drunken Driver Incident	22
Dolly's Assignment	23
La Retirada-The Retreat	24
Return from Spain	26
France	26
Return to Belgium, 1938	27
Belgium 1939-40	28
The War	31
Start of the War, May 1940	31
The Occupation	32
The Textile Business	32
Dolly's Arrest	36
The Deportations	40
The Trip to Valence	44
The First Misadventure	45
Arrest at the Border	46
The Escape-France	47
The Escape-Belgium	50
Return to Brussels	51
Liberation and Post War Belgium	52
Earning a Living	52
The Party Connection	54
Dolly's Fate	55
Spanish Veterans' Congress, Warsaw, 1950	58
The Belgian Party's Role	59
Planning for the return to Poland	59
Poland 1952-1956	63
Prague-1952	63

The Early Days	63
Job Hunting	65
The First Job	68
Early Doubts	70
Edgar's Vacation in Brussels-Summer 1954.....	70
Decision To Leave.....	70
Vietnam 1955-56	72
Return to Poland 1956	73
Planning the Escape	75
The Final Departure	76
The Final Return.....	78
France	78
Vienna	81
Brussels.....	83
Epilogue	85

Foreword

This is the story of Rachel (Rivka) Gunzig, Jessica's great aunt. Rachel was married to Jacques Gunzig, brother of Sabine (Sarah) Gunzig Sochor, Jessica's grandmother. I chose the title because it best describes the person whose idealism was exploited by a cynical radical movement. While it took Rachel over twenty years to recognize the true nature of international Communism and to break with the Party she never gave up the humanist and egalitarian ideals that drove her to it and continued to work for human rights causes to the end.

This narrative is an edited transcription of Rachel's conversation with her nephew, Marcel Braitstein, during her last visit to Montreal. The conversation was conducted in French and recorded on four audio tapes..

The contents of the tapes have been edited to remove redundancies and some irrelevant dialog and to rearrange the sequence of some of the material in order to maintain the continuity of the narrative. Otherwise Rachel's words have been retained.

The story as told on the tapes is incomplete. In some cases Rachel skipped over some events, dismissing them with the remark "you know all about it" either because she had told Marcel about them in earlier conversations or because he had lived through them with her. In order to fill in these gaps I have added some material, clearly identified as such, based on my own recollection of some events as told to me by Rachel as well as material supplied by Marcel and Rachel's son Edgard whose recollection of events in Poland doesn't always agree with Rachel's. These include excerpts from Edgard's imaginary diary, a literary device suggested by Marcel, to report stories that Edgard had told him and excerpts from Edgard's narrative at a family reunion at Vale Perkins in Canada, and referred to as Owl's Head.

Summary

Rachel was born in Poland in 1910 where she went to elementary and High School and where she was first exposed to Marxist philosophy. She moved to Belgium with her family in 1927. The move aborted her ambition to become a doctor. Instead she went to pharmacist school in Belgium. She joined a left wing Zionist organization in Antwerp, the *Hashomer Hatzair*, and went to Palestine in 1928 or 1929 to live on a Kibbutz. She returned to Belgium in 1932 disillusioned with the Zionist experience and became active in the Communist Party. This eventually led her to go to Spain in 1936, where she served as a pharmacist and her husband, Jacques, served as an officer in the International Brigade. In 1938 she fled Spain as Franco's troops were conquering the country and ended up in an internment camp in the South of France. She returned to Belgium in 1939.

THE MISGUIDED IDEALIST

She spent the war years from 1940 to 1945 in Belgium working for the Resistance. It is during that time that she successfully hid her parents, son and nephews, including Bob and Eugene.

Following the Liberation she became a very successful businesswoman, but never gave up her political ideas. Indeed, she followed through on her dream and after settling her parents and nephew Marcel in Canada, she moved to Poland with her son Edgard to live the Communist dream. Unfortunately this dream turned into a nightmare: she crossed the Iron Curtain just as, unrecognized by her, Stalin's purges were moving into full swing and as many of her friends from Spain were being jailed and worse. She spent four years in Poland, half of them trying to get out, including a stay in Vietnam with the Polish UN peacekeeping mission. She made it back to Belgium in 1956.

Joe, 1995

Chronology

The following chronology places Rachel's story in its historical context and may help explain why Rachel, and many like her, rationalized their loyalty to the Party in the name of a higher cause, namely the fight against Fascism.

Spanish Civil War

July 17, 1936	Start of the war
<i>July 1936</i>	<i>Rachel goes to Spain first time</i>
September 1936	Siege of Toledo lifted
October 1936	Siege of Madrid starts
November 6, 1936	Capital moved to Valencia
<i>Fall 1936</i>	<i>Rachel and Dolly go to Spain</i>
October 1937	Capital moved to Barcelona
April 1938	Castile cut off from Catalonia at Vinaroz on the sea
<i>June 1938</i>	<i>Edgard is born</i>
<i>Summer 1938</i>	<i>Rachel leaves Spain for France</i>
December 1938	Final offensive by Franco
January 1939	Barcelona falls
February 1939	Spanish President flees
1939	<i>Rachel returns to Belgium</i>

World War II

August 23, 1939	Hitler/Stalin Pact
September 1, 1939	Germany invades Poland

FOREWORD

May 10, 1940	Germany invades Belgium
June 4, 1940	Dunkirk
June 22, 1940	France surrenders
June 22, 1941	Germans invade the Soviet Union
1941	<i>Dolly arrested</i>
December 7, 1941	Pearl Harbor
December 13, 1941	Raid on Rue des Atrebatas
1942	<i>Dolly deported</i>
July 28, 1942	<i>Dolly killed in Mauthausen "while attempting to escape."</i>
September 1942	<i>Sochors deported</i>
November 7, 1942	Allied invasion of North Africa
November 8, 1942	Germans occupy the rest of France
Fall 1943	<i>Rachel arrested at French border</i>
September, 1944	Liberation of Brussels
May 7, 1945	VE Day
September 12, 1945	VJ day
Post-War Period	
1950	<i>Surplus Business in Brussels</i>
1950	<i>Veterans' Conference in Warsaw</i>
Nov '51	Slansky purges in Prague
'51	Gomulka arrested in Poland
1951	<i>Bonne maman goes to Canada</i>
Poland	
July 1952	New Polish Constitution
September 1952	<i>Rachel arrives in Poland</i>
October 1952	Polish elections, single list
October 1952	<i>Edgard goes to boarding school</i>
November 1952	Slansky convicted in Prague
November 1952	<i>Anti-Semitic incident in school</i>
December 1952	<i>Rachel gets menial job</i>
March 1953	<i>Bonne Maman dies</i>
March 1953	Stalin dies
September 1953	<i>Edgard joins Rachel in Warsaw in "new apartment"</i>
December 1953	<i>Under Police Surveillance</i>

THE MISGUIDED IDEALIST

March 1954	Security officials arrested
March 1954	Surrender of Dienbienphu
<i>Summer 1954</i>	<i>Edgard visits Belgium</i>
<i>Winter 1954-55</i>	<i>Edgard victim of anti-Semitic assault</i>
<i>1955</i>	<i>Rachel goes for Vietnam</i>
February 26, 1956	20th Soviet Congress
<i>1956</i>	<i>Rachel returns from Vietnam</i>
July 1956	Gomulka released
<i>Summer 1956</i>	<i>Edgard and the Youth Congress</i>
October 1956	Hungarian rebellion
November 1956	Soviets crush Hungarians
<i>1957</i>	<i>Rachel leaves for the West</i>
<i>1957</i>	<i>Move to Vienna</i>
<i>1958</i>	<i>Marriage and return to Belgium</i>

Cast of Characters

Rachel Gunzig-Keymolen nee Eckstein

Bonne Maman -Rachel's mother

Bon Papa -Rachel's father

Dolly, Jacques Gunzig, Rachel's husband

Edgard Gunzig, Rachel's son. Lives in Brussels, Belgium.

Alice, Rachel's sister

Maurice, Alice's son, Rachel's nephew

Monik, aka Maurice, Rachel's brother

Paula, Rachel's sister and Marcel's mother

Marcel Braitstein, Rachel's nephew who conducted the interview. Lives in Montreal.

Dov Lieberman, a friend in the Communist Party and the Resistance.

Yvonne Jospa, a Resistance member, who helped Rachel hide the children.

Yvonne Kunstlunger, a Resistance member, who helped Rachel hide the children

References

The following books pertain to the Red Orchestra, a Communist wartime espionage network that Rachel mentions in her story. The activities of the Red Orchestra indirectly led to the arrest of Rachel's husband in a case of guilt by association: a cousin of his was involved. The English language books are available in the Cherry Hill Free Public Library and probably others as well.

FOREWORD

Le Grand Jeu, Memoires du Chef de l'Orchestre Rouge by Leopold Trepper, Ed Albin Michel, 1975

The Great Game, Leopold Trepper, McGraw Hill, 1977

The Red Orchestra by Gilles Perrault, Translated by Peter Wiles, Simon and Shuster, 1969

The Red Orchestra by V.E. Terraut, 1995. The Soviet Spy Network Inside Nazi Europe. Cassell Military Classics.

In addition, the following book includes a section that describes how the Resistance in Belgium saved Jewish children and specifically identifies two of the women who worked with Rachel and helped hide the four boys, Bob, Edgard, Eugene and Marcel.

Rescuers, Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust by Gay Block and Malka Drucker, Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1992.

A recent book written by a German journalist describes the interception of a transport from Malines to Auschwitz by members of the Belgian underground associated with Rachel's group:

The Twentieth Train by Marion Schreiber.