

JEWISH HIDDEN CHILDREN IN BELGIUM DURING THE HOLOCAUST: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEIR HIDING PLACES AT  
CHRISTIAN ESTABLISHMENTS, PRIVATE FAMILIES,  
AND JEWISH ORPHANAGES.

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree for  
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2006

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Decoster, Charlotte. Jewish Hidden Children in Belgium during the Holocaust: A Comparative Study of Their Hiding Places at Christian Establishments, Private Families, and Jewish Orphanages. Master of Arts (History), December 2006, 91 pp.

This thesis compares the different trauma received at the three major hiding places for Jewish children in Belgium during the Holocaust: Christian establishments, private families, and Jewish orphanages. Jewish children hidden at Christian establishments received mainly religious trauma and nutritional, sanitary, and medical neglect. Hiding with private families caused separation trauma and extreme hiding situations. Children staying at Jewish orphanages lived with a continuous fear of being deported, because these institutions were under constant supervision of the German occupiers. No Jewish child survived their hiding experience without receiving some major trauma that would affect them for the rest of their life. This thesis is based on video interviews at Shoah Visual History Foundation and Blum Archives, as well as autobiographies published by hidden children.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADL	Anti- Defamation League
AIVG	<i>Assistance aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre</i> (Aid to Jewish War Victims)
AJB	<i>Association Juifs en Belgique</i> (Association of Jews in Belgium)
CDJ	<i>Comité de Defense des Juifs en Belgique</i> (Committee for the Defense of the Jews)
FI	<i>Front de l'Independence, Vrijheidsfront</i> (Independence Front)
KAJ-JOC	<i>Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, Katholieke Arbeidersjeugd</i> (Catholic Labor Youth Movement)
ONE	<i>Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance, Nationaal Werk voor Kinder Welzijn</i> (National Organization for the Children)
SIPO	<i>Sicherheits Polizei</i> (Security Police)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

After more than half a century the Holocaust remains a sensitive topic for debate. Some individuals and governments continue to deny or diminish the existence of the 'Final Solution.' However, an objective person cannot contradict that it happened. The lasting effects on today's society cannot be ignored. The testimony by Holocaust victims has captivated people for decades. Adult witness stories about survival in hiding, concentration-and death camps have filled the shelves of bookstores and libraries. Nevertheless, until recently the scholarly world ignored child survivors' testimonies. A short examination into the works on hidden children demonstrates that most studies were written after the 1990s. The belief existed that they did not accurately remember their hiding experience or suffered very little trauma. In a way, these children as adults continued hiding for many years through their silence. This attitude changed due to the gathering of several worldwide Hidden Children conventions. Since then, these child survivors have told their experiences, and their voices have been heard. They became a new source for scholars to explore the Holocaust.

Since the 1990s, the appearance of hidden child survivor testimony research has revealed that these innocent victims faced as much trauma as the adults. Most of them clearly recall major events that occurred to them and are ready to share them with the world. Unlike previously thought by researchers, they generally did not forget the trauma

they suffered and still live with the after-effects of this trauma. This study will take a look at the Jewish children hidden in Belgium during the German occupation from 1940 to 1945. In Belgium, about 55% of the Jewish population survived World War II.

Approximately 4,000 Jewish children in Belgium outlived the war in hiding. This number is relatively high compared to Belgium's neighboring country the Netherlands, where only 23.6% of the Jewish population lived to tell their tale.<sup>1</sup> Through the testimonies of 72 child survivors and reports by their rescuers, this paper will examine the daily life and trauma of the hidden children in Belgium. It will compare different hiding places and demonstrate how the trauma differed depending on the hiding locations of the child. The study will reveal the network that existed to maintain and hide these children. Finally, it will conclude that no child escaped Holocaust trauma, even though in some cases rescuers made every effort to prevent it. A look at the psychological after-effects will demonstrate that the discussion of hidden child trauma is significant because the survivors would endure the effects of their suffering for the rest of their lives. Their testimonies give a different view of the hiding experience during the Holocaust in Belgium.

### Historiography and Reason for Study

In May 1991, 1,600 former hidden children from 28 countries met for the first time in New York City at the First International Gathering of Children Hidden during World War II. The purpose of the meeting was for these particular survivors to share memories, help those who were too young to remember, and most importantly, tell the

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*. (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 52.

world that they were witness to the atrocities committed against the Jewish population.<sup>2</sup> Since then the study of child survivors has grown immensely. Many child survivors published their stories, and scholars have collected diaries and other written sources about them. Jane Marks published one of the first collective testimonies and discussed the issue of being hidden as a child during the Holocaust. She dedicated her book to the gathering at New York.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this expressive outburst is best explained on the Anti-Defamation League Web site which joined with Hidden Child Foundation: "For most, it was the first time we spoke of our Holocaust experiences and our stolen childhood. This gathering established beyond question that for us the Holocaust did not end in 1945. After decades of silence, Hidden Children finally uncovered their buried pasts, and openly shared their special histories with one another, with spouses, with children, and with the outside world."<sup>4</sup> The world needs to realize that Anne Frank was not the only hidden child, that there were plenty of other children and many survived.

Laurel Holliday assisted in reminding people that Anne Frank was not the only child during the Holocaust to write a diary expressing her emotion about her hiding. She amassed several diaries from Holocaust children living throughout Europe.<sup>5</sup> Jane Marks opened the field in 1993 to history scholars by giving a "historical perspective" written by Professor Nehama Tec to the hidden children's testimonies.<sup>6</sup> This increased the historical significance of hidden child testimonies and demanded the research of other academics. Since then, the historical studies slowly adopted the theme of hidden

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<sup>2</sup> Anti-Defamation League, "History of Hidden Child Foundation," <http://www.adl.org/hidden/history.asp>., September 9,2006.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secrets of the Holocaust* ( New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), vii-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Anti-Defamation League, September 9,2006, <http://www.adl.org/hidden/history.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> Laurel Holliday, *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Marks, *The Hidden Children*, 273-291.

children. Additionally, Jane Marks appealed to the discipline of psychology.<sup>7</sup> Similar to research into the effects of the Holocaust on adults, psychology academics delved into the testimonies of hidden children. They combined the studies of post-traumatic stress syndrome and Holocaust trauma to study them. Well-known psychologists and psychoanalysts, such as Judith Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman, soon published their edited works of several articles pertaining to hidden children.<sup>8</sup> Recently, the subject has grown and new writers such as psychologist Mary Gallant provided a more concise analysis of their trauma.<sup>9</sup> Despite the efforts of the psychology field, a concise general historical study on the children during the holocaust still needs to be written.

Belgian Holocaust historical research follows this same pattern of scholarly neglect. Initial studies only appeared in limited scope in the mid-1960s, some 20 years after the Holocaust. A first comprehensive history of the fate of Belgian Jewry during the Nazi occupation did not arrive until the mid-1980s. At this time five comprehensive accounts of the Holocaust in neighboring Netherlands existed. Additionally, the Belgian study was the work of one person, Maxime Steinberg, who undertook his study as a private researcher, not supported by any official academic institution.<sup>10</sup> Dan Michman, who wrote an extensive historiography on Belgium, gives four main reasons for this late

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 292-307.

<sup>8</sup> Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

Eva Fogelman and Judith Kestenberg, *Children during the Nazi Reign: Psychological Perspectives on the Interview Process* (Westport: Praeger, 1994).

Judith S Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn, *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing* (Westport: Praeger, 1998).

Judith S. Kestenberg and Ira Brenner, *The Last Witness: The Child Survivor of the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, Inc, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Mary J. Gallant, *Coming of Age in the Holocaust: The Last Survivors Remember*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Maxime Steinberg, *L'étoile et le fusil: La question Juive: 1940-1942, Les cent jours de la deportation de Juifs de Belgique: 1942, La Traques des Juifs: 1942-1944* (Brussels, 1983-1984).

Dan Michman, *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews Belgians Germans* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), 20-22.

research interest. First, the “King Question” absorbed Belgian research. It refers to the postwar problem of whether or not to retain the institution of the monarchy intact because Belgians felt that the reigning king had collaborated with the German occupiers. Secondly, the social character of the Belgian Jewry lacked the drive to promote interest in Jewish studies. In addition, a Belgian study faced the linguistic problems of the country by having to combine six languages: French, Dutch, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. Finally, the lack of interest in the history of the Holocaust in Belgium on the part of researchers from outside the country is a function of the very small Jewish community on the eve of the German occupation. To the researcher this might imply historical insignificance. Accordingly, the chapter on Belgium usually remains neglected.<sup>11</sup>

The disregard for Belgium is also obvious in comprehensive works on the Holocaust. Raul Hilberg gives the most original data on Belgium, but his only sources are German.<sup>12</sup> According to Michman, the most inclusive study, but with much outdated and erroneous data concerning Belgium, is Leni Yahil’s in *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*.<sup>13</sup> However, in all of these major studies, Belgium remains a small topic. For example, out of close to 550 pages, Lucy S. Dawidowicz dedicates only three to Belgium and Nora Levin writes three and one-half pages out of 700.<sup>14</sup> Only recently has the study of Belgium been initiated with the edited work of Dan Michman,

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<sup>11</sup> Michman, *Belgium and the Holocaust*, 21-25.

<sup>12</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 85, 364, 382-389, 670.

<sup>13</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 93-94, 119, 175, 225-226, 343-344, 393-394, 455-456, 496-497, 589, 608.

<sup>14</sup> Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against Jew, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), appendix.

Nora Leving, *The Holocaust; the Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945* (New York: T.Y. Crowell Co., 1968), 419-422.

who collected 75 essays pertaining to the history of the Holocaust in Belgium. His work demands further research in this neglected topic and hopefully will attract more research.<sup>15</sup>

With this background information, it is no surprise that a comprehensive work on hidden children in Belgium during the Holocaust is lacking. Several works on the Jewish resistance touch on the subject but do not give a comprehensive comparative study of the hidden children and their hiding locations. Some authors have looked at certain subjects pertaining to the hidden children. For instance, Suzanne Vromen studied the rescue of Jewish children in Belgian convents. However, her study does not elaborate on other Catholic institutions or hiding places.<sup>16</sup> Marie Albert-Blum discussed the operation of one of the Jewish orphanages but her knowledge is limited only to one.<sup>17</sup> The most extensive work is written by Sylvain Brachfeld who studied the different Jewish orphanages and gives a limited discussion of children at other hiding places. His work, currently published only in French and Dutch, constitutes the main secondary sources for students researching the hidden children in Belgium.<sup>18</sup> However, its scope is still limited to the Jewish orphanages, and other sources have to be consulted to receive a broader knowledge of the topic. Therefore, the existence of this gap in knowledge is the reason for this study on Jewish children hidden in Belgium during the Holocaust.

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<sup>15</sup> Michman. *Belgium and the Holocaust*.

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Vromen, "Collective Memory and Cultural Politics: Narrating and Commemorating the Rescue of Jewish Children by Belgian Convents during the Holocaust" (Paper, Bard College), 202.

<sup>17</sup> Marie Albert-Blum, *Le récit de l'espoir* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires Europeenes, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*.

## Definition of Terms: Child Survivors and Psychology

Before discussing the psychological trauma of the hidden children, psychological trauma and child survivors have to be defined. According to Judith Kestenberg, holocaust survivors are victims of a government sanctioned and organized persecution of people who had no chance for redemption. In her opinion, every victim of the Holocaust was persecuted; even those who escaped incarceration were in constant fear of being detected. The fact that victims were persecuted would become the single most important factor for the coming generation of descendants.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, child survivors are children who are victimized by an oppressing regime without a possibility of salvation unless this regime is overturned. This study will show that although the Jewish hidden children in Belgium were not captured they still lived in constant fear of being exposed. They knew if they were revealed or caught they had no chance for redemption by the Nazi government unless the war ended. Their capture meant the end of their lives.

Spencer Eth and Robert S. Pynoos define psychological trauma as caused by an extreme event that occurs unexpectedly and suddenly, is life-threatening or is perceived to be so, and has an intense impact on the senses of the person involved.<sup>20</sup> The following events can cause such traumata: being victimized through sexual or other violent infringements, experiencing murder and death in war or other disasters, and

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<sup>19</sup> Judith Kestenberg, "Adult Survivors, Child Survivors, and Children of Survivors," in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, ed. Judith Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 56.

<sup>20</sup> Spencer Eth and Robert S. Pynoos, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1985).

extreme fear. According to Elin Hordvik, who researched trauma in child war victims, some children, like those in war zones, suffer repeated exposure to such traumatic events. They are directly confronted with destruction, fear, and death. Some undergo personal losses, like separation from their families, loss of their homes, and their culture as well.<sup>21</sup> Most children hidden in Belgium lost their parents or were separated from them. All of them had to leave behind their home and many of them had to adopt new cultures to survive. Therefore, the hidden children in Belgium experienced repeated psychological trauma. This study will go more in depth on the different trauma these children encountered. The conclusion will discuss the long-term effects on the children and their psychological health as adults.

### Belgium during the Holocaust: Structure and Resistance

On the eve of the German invasion in 1939, about 85,000 to 90,000 Jews resided in Belgium, a country of nine million people. Most of the Jewish population did not hold Belgian citizenship; only a small fraction of them could call themselves Belgian Jewry. Eighty thousand Jews inhabited the two main cities of Belgium, Brussels and Antwerp.<sup>22</sup> Thus, they concentrated in large urban areas. This demographic feature mainly derives from the two major migration surges which brought mostly poor refugee artisans and their families from Eastern Europe to Belgium. The first surge came in the

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<sup>21</sup> Elin Hordvik, "What is Psychological Trauma?," in *Childhood and Trauma*, ed. Elisabeth Ullmann and Werner

Hilweg (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Weber, "Belgium and Its Jews During the War," in *Journal of Historical Review* 18 (1999): 2. , There is a discussion between historians on the exact number of the Jewish population before the invasion. Dan Michman puts the Jewish population on the eve of the invasion at 70,000. Dan Michman, "Research on the Holocaust in Belgium and in General: History and Context," in *Belgium and the Holocaust: Belgians, Jews and Germans*, edited by Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), 25. , Sylvain Brachfeld uses estimates reaching from 60,000 to 90,000 for the total Jewish population. Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 49.

1920s and existed mainly of Eastern European Jewry fleeing pogroms and poor living conditions in their own countries. The second immigration wave arrived when Hitler came to power, and was increased by major events in Germany and Austria such as *Kristalnacht* and the *Anschluss*. In addition, Belgian naturalization laws made it difficult for immigrants to gain citizenship, much more so than in other neighboring countries such as France.<sup>23</sup> About 30 of the total 72 collected testimonies by hidden children explicitly state that at least one of the parents emigrated from an Eastern European country. In 12 testimonies child survivors clearly claim German or Austrian nationality. This demonstrates that more than half remembered and stated that they were not Belgian citizens. Thus, during the occupation of Belgium, the Germans would not regard these children as Belgians and they would be handled as citizens of the countries they emigrated from. For example, a Jewish child from Romania would fall under Romanian jurisdiction. According to German agreements with Romania, Romanian Jews were not to be deported to concentration camps. This also counted for Jewish Romanian children residing in Belgium. This fact would often be detrimental in parents' decisions to hide their children.

When the German invasion of Belgium started on May 10, 1940, most of these 90,000 Jews headed for Southern France. Almost all the child survivors' testimonies refer to their families attempting to flee to France. Most of them did not reach the border. The German army caught up with them within three weeks. The Germans interned most of the fleeing Jews in "rest camps" in the region of Saint Cyprien, Gurs,

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<sup>23</sup> Lucien Steinberg, *Jews Against Hitler*, trans. Gordon and Cremonesi (Glasgow: University Press, 1978), 132.

and Vernet or recommended they return home.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, about 40,000 found refuge outside Belgium, and on October 1, the German authorities registered 45,652 Jews over the age of 15 in Belgium.<sup>25</sup> This number increased to 64,641 Jews during a later counting by the Nazis when the occupation had advanced. Thus, about two-thirds of the Jews did not flee Belgium or returned to Belgium after the occupation of northern France by the Germans. Two main reasons influenced the return of this high proportion of Jews: first there was the fear of being interned in France, and the other was the good news from Belgium that the Germans were not harassing the Jews who had remained behind. This contradicted alleged reports from the East describing the horrible actions and behavior of the Germans. Unknown to them was the fact that the German Sixth Army received *Sonderbestimmungen*, 'special directives,' before the invasion for the future occupied countries that 'the Jews were not to be touched.'<sup>26</sup> The Nazi regime and German army wanted to delude the Belgian and Jewish population into the belief that no harm would be done to them. The first anti-Jewish order was actually not published until October 28, 1940.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it encouraged the idea that Jews would remain safe under German occupation.

After the invasion, Belgium came under German military occupation. The Germans, as they had done with the Polish *Judenrat*, established a *Juden Vereinigung*, 'Jewish Association,' in January 1942 to gain control over the Jewish population in Belgium. The Germans named it *L'Association Juif en Belgique*, 'Jewish Association in

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<sup>24</sup> Jacob Gutfreind, "The Jewish Resistance Movement in Belgium," in *They Fought Back: The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe*, ed. Yuri Suhl (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 304.

<sup>25</sup> Steinberg L, *Jews Against Hitler*, 131.

<sup>26</sup> Lucien Steinberg, *Le Comité de défense des Juifs en Belgique; 1942-44*. (Bruxelles : Université de Bruxelles, 1973), 17.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, *Le CDJ*, 31.

Belgium,' or AJB. Chief Rabbi Soloman Ullman became the presiding officer. The AJB's main function was to carry out the orders of the occupation authorities. Its members obliged and issued orders such as the distribution of the 'Yellow Star,' performed assistance in the rounding up of deportees, and agreed openly with compulsory labor for their fellow Jews.<sup>28</sup> Its members consisted of notables from the Jewish community who thought they were helping their own people. According to Lucien Steinberg, their failure derived from thinking too highly of themselves and assuming they could help the Jewish population and themselves because of their high positions. He remarks: "If they would have been a little more modest about themselves, maybe they would not have made this error in judgment."<sup>29</sup> This gave the Germans the upper hand in dealing with the Jews.

Thus, the occupation in Belgium regarding the Jewish issue began smoothly. In the first few months the Jewish population returned to their homes. It seemed that everything would remain the same, and the Jews would not be harassed by the Germans. The first order, forbidding ritual slaughter, came in the beginning of October, 1940. However, the first major anti-Jewish law was declared on 28 October, 1940, ordering the Jews to register in a special *Juden Register*. From this point on the Germans posted the anti-Jewish orders regularly. With every order, they gave some time to let the Belgian and Jewish population adjust to the order. This way, the Jewish population would think this was the end of the orders and the Germans would go no further. The Belgian population at large was deluded into believing the Belgian Jewish population would not suffer. In reality, each order morally and psychologically broke

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<sup>28</sup> Michman, *Belgium and the Holocaust*, 355-356.

<sup>29</sup> Steinberg, *Le CDJ*, 55.

down the Jewish population and brought them closer to the extreme “Final Solution.” The most obvious order on 27 May, 1942, forced Jews to wear the yellow Star of David. This not only affected adults but for the first time changed the life of Jewish children.

On June 22, 1942, the “Final Solution” changed the destiny for the Jewish population in Europe. The transportation service by Adolf Eichmann requested special trains by mid- July for the daily transportation of 1,000 Jews to Auschwitz. As a start, the Nazis requested 10,000 Jews from Belgium to be deported. On 22 July, 1942, the first systematic round-ups occurred in Antwerp, Brussels and Mechelen. The first train to Auschwitz left Belgium on 4 August, 1942. It carried 998 people, of which 140 were children under 16 years. Only seven people from this first deportation survived the war. The Dossin Barracks in Mechelen became the deportation camp for Belgium where all the Jews had to assemble before deportation to Auschwitz. SS-Major Philipp Schmitt became head of the deportation camp. Most Jews only remained here long enough to form a transport of 1,000 people. People staying at the Dossin Barracks received their first concentration camp experience. They stayed in large rooms on hay sacks in extremely unhygienic circumstances and had to handle torture. This became the point of no turning back for the Jews. Many realized that something had to be done before it was too late.

The Jewish resistance already existed, but really came to life with the beginning of the deportation to Auschwitz. The main Jewish resistance gathered under *Le Comité de Defense des Juifs en Belgique* (The Committee for the Defense of Jews in Belgium or CDJ). The CDJ grew on the support of *le Front de l'Independence* (Independence Front or FI). *Le Front de l'Independence* was created on March 15, 1941 as a national

committee for all large traditional parties in Belgium. However, the communist party formed the main support for the FI. They had grouped together to fight their common enemy, Nazi Germany, and preserve the constitutional liberties of the Belgians.<sup>30</sup> Ghert Jospa, a Bessarabian Jew, an important member of the FI, saw the need for a committee for the defense of the Jews. He contacted the communist Jewish organization, *Solidarite Juive*, and the Zionist organization, *Poalei Zion de gauche*.<sup>31</sup> The actual link for the start of a Jewish resistance originated when Jospa met with Fela Perelman. She had already been active in hiding Jewish children with the help of the Belgian authorities. Her husband Dr. Chaim Perelman was a respected person in the Belgian university system and Jewish society. Chaim Perelman with his contacts, Albert Rotkel, Benjamin Nykerk and Eugene Hellendael, assembled with Jospa and Hambresin (FI), Abouch Werber (*Poalei Zion*), Maurice Mandelbaum (*Solidarite Juive*) at the Perelman home. This meeting resulted in the creation of the CDJ. Its founders represented all groupings of the Jewish community in Belgium. At this point it was just a committee to coordinate plans for helping their fellow Jews. However, they would become the main resistance group rescuing Jewish people in Belgium by building an extensive underground network in allegiance with non-Jewish resisters.

The CDJ became vital to the survival of the Jewish population. Their task not only included saving children and adults but also printing false papers and money, finding collaborators, and most importantly propaganda about the activities of the Germans. The CDJ was not alone in the rescue of Jews. The Catholic Church and many Belgians aided in the rescue. Queen Elisabeth, the Queen mother of Belgium,

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<sup>30</sup> Steinberg., *Le CDJ*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Steinberg., *Le CDJ*, 39.

made major efforts to restrain the Germans from deporting Jews. On 1 August, 1942, she invited the representatives of the AJB to the royal palace in Brussels. They described the horrible circumstance of the Dossin Barracks. She told them she would do everything in her power to save the Belgian Jews. She turned to the man in power himself, Hitler. A telegram from Berlin promised her that Jews with Belgian nationality would not be deported and that nobody would be separated from their family. She also interfered several times on behalf of the Jewish orphans in Mechelen. Thanks to her, several children and adults were saved from deportation to Auschwitz. However, in the end the Germans did not keep their promise. On 3 September, 1943, the Gestapo rounded-up, arrested and deported most of the remaining Belgians Jews.

The last deportation from the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen was on July 31, 1944 and contained 249 men, 268 women and 46 children. The CDJ remained active until the entry of British XXX Army Corps into Brussels on September 3, 1944. It recovered the archives of the Dossin Barracks and aided the interned Jews. After the liberation, the CDJ changed its name to *l'Assistance aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre* (AIVG).<sup>32</sup> By then, many of its members had already fallen into the hands of the enemy. In the end, out of the eight founders, six were arrested and deported and only half survived the war. However, thousands of Jewish children survived, thanks to the CDJ, to tell its story and that of their parents.

In spite of the intensive actions by the resistance, many Jews residing in Belgium reported themselves to the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen due to the recommendation by the AJB to cooperate with the Germans. Some did listen to the directions of the CDJ and realized that the Germans did not intend to have anyone return from Mechelen. The

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<sup>32</sup> Steinberg, *Le CDJ*, 166-169.

rumors of round-ups in particular frightened the Jewish population. With each restriction and order by the Germans they grew more anxious until they recognized they had to go into hiding. For families without children this was already very difficult but when children were involved the risk lay far higher. The parents had to find a safe haven for their children. This is where hiding options came into play for parents.

In general, there existed three main options for parents to hide their children. For instance, with the aid of someone they knew or a resistance contact, they could place their child in a Christian establishment. This was the first option. An underground network of clergy and laymen helped parents in these instances. Parents also contacted Christian establishments themselves and offered money for hiding their child. The other possibility lay in finding a Christian family which could take care of the child. This family could be friends or just a contact through one of the underground networks. Some parents did not want to separate from their children and opted to hide as a family together. Thus, these children all hid in a family situation. Finally, some parents did not find a hiding place for their child and through luck the child ended up in a safe haven. The Jewish orphanages constituted one of those havens for many children. They formed a large network that saved many children. In addition, private families and Christian establishments rescued Jewish children already separated from their parents.

Several parents chose one option first and through circumstances the child was moved to a different hiding place. Therefore, many children hid in several of the optional hiding places. For example, Joseph Camee's family placed him first with a Christian family. The family feared being caught by the Germans and brought Joseph to one of the Jewish orphanages. Finally, due to circumstances the orphanage had to place some

children at Christian establishments and Joseph hid at the Christian institution at the Schaltin Castle.<sup>33</sup> Every route that a hidden child took in Belgium was different. A review of 72 of their testimonies gives an idea of the differences between these hiding places and the trauma the children went through. Unfortunately, some children ended up in worse homes than others. The extent of the trauma differs for each child. The following discussion of the three major hiding locations, Christian establishments, private families, and Jewish orphanage, demonstrates the pain and suffering of the Jewish hidden children in Belgium.

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Camee, Interview by Luc De Roose, 6 January, 1993.

## CHAPTER 2

### LIFE AND TRAUMA DURING HIDING AT CHRISTIAN ESTABLISHMENTS

On the eve of the Nazi invasion, Belgium was essentially a Catholic country. The country counted nearly 13,000 priests and 50,000 nuns whom had a large impact on public life through education and health care.<sup>34</sup> The highest level of the Catholic Church in Belgium never took a position during the war on the persecution and deportation of the Jews by the Nazis. Cardinal Van Roey, archbishop of Mechelen, attempted to soften the German persecuting of the Jews. However, he supported the clergymen in the Church aiding in the rescue of Jewish people with a moral blessing but no official one.<sup>35</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld counted 225 institutions that involved themselves in the hiding process, but the list is probably incomplete and the exact number might never be known. Catholic establishments constitute three-quarters of Brachfeld's list.<sup>36</sup> Another study suggests that 29.5% of a pool of questioned clergy involved themselves in the rescue of Jews.<sup>37</sup>

In the testimonies collected for this paper, 31 of 72 survivors stayed at a type of Christian establishment during their hiding period. These establishments can be split up in two major categories: Catholic convents and Christian (Catholic or not) institutions.

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<sup>34</sup> Suzanne Vromen, "Collective Memory and Cultural Politics: Narrating and Commemorating the Rescue of Jewish Children by Belgian Convents during the Holocaust" (Paper, Bard College, 2002), 202.

<sup>35</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 72-73.

<sup>36</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 269. (This list is also partially available at the Ministry of Public Health and War Victims in Brussels)

Vromen, "Collective Memory and Cultural Politics," 205.

<sup>37</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 74.

Many convents throughout Belgium already housed Belgian children for the purpose of giving them a good religious education. Many of these children came from rich farmers, nobility, or rich city folks. Priests and nuns would hide the Jewish children among the Christian children. Often, only Mother Superior and a few priests knew about the situation. This lowered the chance of betrayal by insiders or outsiders. Many of these convents worked together with the underground resistance network to place hundreds of Jewish children in Catholic convents, institutions and families. Father Bruno (born Henri Reynders, 1903-1981), and Father Joseph Andr e (1908-1973) stand out among the many brave clergymen who led vast underground networks. The state of Israel proclaimed both clergymen as "Righteous Among the Nations," an honor bestowed on gentiles who risked their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup>

Christian institutions consisted mainly of Catholic orphanages, a few Protestant orphanages, rationalist children's colonies, cr ches, and Catholic summer vacation colonies. As in the convents, priests and nuns often ran these institutions but in several cases lay people governed them. For example, Mrs. Taquet and her husband Colonel Taquet directed Home Reine Elisabeth in the castle of Schaltin near Jamoigne. The home, originally a school for boys whose fathers served in the military, worked in collaboration with the *Katholieke Arbeiders Jeugd*, 'Catholic Working-Class Youth' or KAJ. It also followed the KAJ's scouts-like rules of conduct. Belgian Cardinal Cardijn created the organization in 1925 as a youth group for underprivileged children. During the war the couple hid at least 80 boys. Marie Taquet received the title of "Righteous

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<sup>38</sup> Roger Hacart, *Resistance: P re Bruno Reynders, juste des nation* (Bruxelles : Carrefours de la cite, 1993) ;  
Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 74-78 and 253-267.

among the Nations” in 1988.<sup>39</sup> Another example of an institution was a crèche in Beloeil for small children and babies where the underground placed Jewish babies. Thanks to the aid of these institutions and convents thousands of Jewish children survived the war, but not without experiencing some major trauma that most children do not experience during childhood.

### Shock of a New Christian Environment

Most of the children who arrived at these Christian establishments entered a world that totally differed from the one they had lived in before. This totally new environment added to the already upsetting separation from their parents that often occurred right before entering the convent or institution. The first impressions of entering the Christian establishment recounted by the hidden children hold some extreme views because many had never lived in a communal environment nor had they experienced Christianity. While the older children comprehended more than the younger, they still felt like a door shut behind them, and they had “to grow up in a matter of seconds.”<sup>40</sup> A feeling of abandonment and loneliness became part of their new lives. June M. remembers the following from when she was 12 as she entered into the convent of Saint-Antoine de Padua:

As we approached the building the lady (person bringing her to the convent) asked me my name and told me I could keep it because it sounded Flemish. She told me right before the door: “You be careful and take care of yourself.” The nun took over from her, grabbing my hand. It was an extraordinary moment which remains very vivid. I was an only

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<sup>39</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Center, “Marie Taquet,” <<http://motlc.learningcenter.wiesenthal.org/pages/t076/t07664.html>>, 12 September, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> June M., interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, July 13, 1995.

child, and I had never been in a convent. I really grew up the moment that door closed. I was there, and I knew what I had to do.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, younger children became overwhelmed and confused upon the first confrontation with a Christian establishment. They did not understand why their parents left them behind, and what they were supposed to do in this new place. Ruth Rubenstein was in total shock when she entered the convent.

My parents did not come back for me. The nuns, strange ladies in black who spoke French, a language I didn't understand, took me to a room with colored windows and wooden benches. I could see candles burning, but it was still dark. One of the nuns showed me how to get on my knees on the floor. Then she took my hand and tried to get me to make an odd sign across my chest. I was confused. I wanted my mother. Moments later I felt a chill down my back when the nun took my hand and dipped it into a small bowl of water.<sup>42</sup>

For most of these children, it would only be the first of many traumatic experiences to come. When this changed reality sank into these children's heads, the new task of changing identity began. Paul Schwarzbart comments on his confusing arrival at Schaltin castle under control of Mrs. Taquet:

Reality sank in, with the help of a few well-placed but innocent sounding questions: I had landed in a Catholic school, and what I had just witnessed so unwittingly, was the boys saying grace in Latin prior to crossing themselves! Chameleon-like miraculous overnight transformation: I was now a Belgian Catholic, and I had better learn to fit in quickly.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Rubenstein, "Legacy: Ruth Rubenstein," quoted in Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Ballatin Books, 1993), 115-126.

<sup>43</sup> Paul A. Schwarzbart, *Breaking the Silence: Reminiscence of a Hidden Child* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2004), 27.

## Changing Identity

As the children entered the Christian establishment they had to hide their true identities and change into a new persona. It started for many with the alteration of their name. For example, the KAJ escort on the way to Schaltin changed Marcel Liebman's name to Marcel Camara so his name would sound more Spanish, and he could take the identity of a Spanish Civil War refugee.<sup>44</sup> The modification of their name confused some children. They did not understand why they had to disregard their old name. Suzanne Vromen recounts the story of a six year old girl whose escort duly impressed on her that her name was Annette and not Sarah anymore. On the way to the hiding place in the tram another traveler asked the little girl for her name. The child turned to the escort and inquired: "What do I tell her, my real name or my new one?"<sup>45</sup> For some of the little children, remembering their name became a huge daily task. Ava Landy used a false name when she stayed at the *Institut Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs* in Weezembeek. She remembers that her new name was difficult, and she forgot it all the time. Still, she kept up the pose because she knew it would be the end if she did not.<sup>46</sup> Some were lucky to keep the same name because it sounded Flemish or French. This was the case for June M. who then still carried her birth name Frieda Beller.<sup>47</sup> These cases rather seem to have been the exception, and if it happened it was a huge relief to the child. It is curious to mention that during the interview process, those children whose names were changed always remembered it as a vivid memory. Some regard it today as an

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<sup>44</sup> Marcel Liebman , *Né juif: une enfance juive pendant la guerre* (Gembloux : Duculot, 1977), 140.

<sup>45</sup> Vromen, "Collective Memory and Cultural Politics," 205.

<sup>46</sup> Ava Landy, "The Legacy: Ava Landy," quoted in Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* ( New York: Ballatin Books, 1993), 183-193.

<sup>47</sup> June M., interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, July 13, 1995.

unpleasant detail from the past. Other children, such as Sylvain Brachfeld, retained their hiding name as adults in honor of the people who hid them.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the children, young and old, realized they had to adapt to the new situation promptly. Sometimes another adult or child guided the new arrival through the new Christian elements they had to learn. However, mostly the new arrivals had to figure things out themselves by faking and lying. Lying for survival caused for some of the children moral qualms since adults had always taught them not to lie, and now it was expected of them. Other children felt the need to do anything they could to please their caretakers because they feared not being loved or even being betrayed. They would live up to their new Christian persona, and almost lose their original identity. After the liberation, Israel Krasucki felt that he wanted to go on with his life the way it was at the colony in Schaltin. He wanted to remain just like everybody else.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, some children never adjusted to the new communal environment and did not cover their identity. As a result, the supervisor of the child removed the child from the institution or convent to insure the safety of the other children. Baruch Grun cites in his testimony another Jewish boy at the Petit Séminaire in Bastogne who would “talk too much.” According to Grun, the boy was quickly removed from the school.<sup>50</sup> Thus, swift action was taken in these situations because of the high risk of betrayal.

The accurate outward appearance and conduct of the Jewish children became vital to their survival. They had to look and sound like Christian children. For the Jewish boys this turned out to be quite a bit more difficult than the girls. Christian parents did

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<sup>48</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld, Interview by Charlotte Decoster, April 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Israel Krasucki, “Persoonlijk Dossier: Israel Krasucki,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 138-140.

<sup>50</sup> Baruch Grun, “Persoonlijk Dossier: Baruch Grun” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 130-132.

not circumcise their boys unlike Jewish parents who circumcised their boys at a very young age. This caused some difficult situations particularly during bathroom, swimming and shower time because the other boys and adults could notice the circumcision. In addition, the Gestapo would ask boys to drop their pants to discover if they were Jewish. On arrival at the *College van het Kruis* (College of the Cross) Shlomo Hanegbi received his first lesson in disregarding his Jewishness and adopting his new Christian character. Father Verhoeven, who gave him the introduction to the Catholic school, stressed that he had “to watch out that the other boys could not see him in the shower or bathroom.”<sup>51</sup> Circumcision became also a means of locating other Jewish boys. Nahum Fuchs states that he discovered in the shower with another boy that they were Jewish.<sup>52</sup> Another child survivor, Paul Schwarzbart, mentions in his book that,

Except for the tip of my circumcised penis, I am now unidentifiable as a Jew – if I keep my mouth shut and my pants up! Paul Schwarzbart is fading into the shadows and Paul Exsteen, Belgian and soon to be a devoutly practicing Catholic is emerging ... But not really displacing him.<sup>53</sup>

The boys realized that this increased their risk of being caught, and most of them accomplished hiding their anatomical difference. Jewish boys hidden in families ran a similar risk but they did not have the problem of hiding among a large group of unknowing peers who could betray them at any time. Thus, this issue was more extreme for boys hidden in Christian establishments.

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<sup>51</sup> Shlomo Hanegbi , “Persoonlijk Dossier: Shlomo Hanegbi” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 134-135.

<sup>52</sup> Nahum Fuchs , “Persoonlijk Dossier: Nahum Fuchs” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 128-130.

<sup>53</sup> Schwarzbart, *Breaking the Silence*, 24.

## Fear to be Caught

The hidden children, from the youngest to the oldest, lived with the fear of being caught or betrayed by someone at any moment. The older children often knew exactly what they feared, whereas the young children and toddlers feared more in general. Even if they did not understand the exact threat, they knew their lives were in danger. People surrounding the hidden child could increase or decrease this fear. Children who felt safe mostly stayed in an environment where they had a person they could discuss their feelings with or who would pose as a motherly figure. Several hidden children refer to Mrs. Taquet and Father Bruno as figures of comfort. On the other hand, some people would increase the children's fear. Nuns would discipline the children in harsh ways previously unknown to the children. For example, June M. remembers Sister Paula as being excessively mean. She would tell June: "If you are not quiet, I will talk openly." June admits that she still gets scared thinking of her today.<sup>54</sup> This shows how the fear of being caught stayed with the hidden children, in some cases for the rest of their lives. Fear was something the hidden children lived with. It was a constant thing, and they had to be aware of it.

Another constant fear of betrayal came from the other children surrounding them. The non-Jewish children would often ask questions or start suspecting something was different about the hidden children. Ingrid Kisliuk experienced this problem when the curiosity of two girls in her Catholic school increased. She hated inventing and lying to get them to believe her, therefore, this period became increasingly stressful until she decided not to return to the Catholic school.<sup>55</sup> Fear not only existed in the Christian

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<sup>54</sup> June M., Interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, July 13, 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Ingrid Kisliuk, *Unveiled Shadows: The Witness of a Child* (Newton: Nanomir Press, 1998), 113-114.

establishments. It occurred among hidden children at other locations as well. The difference lay in the higher chance of Germans entering the institutions and convents unannounced. Jewish orphanages were more prepared because the directors and staff organized a system to warn the children for the arrival of Gestapo. Unfortunately, this did not decrease the fear in children. The risk increased towards the latter part of the war because the Gestapo knew Catholic establishments offered refuge to Jewish children.

### Bad Sanitation, Hunger and Disease

The Christian institutions and convents took good care of many Jewish children. However, a war went on around them, and often provisions became scarce. Fourteen out of the 31 collected testimonies on Christian establishments explicitly contain complaints about hunger and bad nutrition. The ratio of children claiming to be hungry lay far higher in Christian establishments than in the two other hiding locations. The following statements by hidden children show the neglect by some institutions and convents. Robert Lambrecht recollects his experience at an institution in Dilbeek: “We ate excessively badly, we were crowded, they did not take care of us, we were hungry all the time.”<sup>56</sup> Lilly Silberman remembers: “What little food we had, often had worms and the bread was always rancid and moldy.”<sup>57</sup> Vera Ghilman recalls: “In the afternoon, we took long walks, this made our stomach hungry, but we only got little to eat. Especially, in comparison to what the nuns ate.”<sup>58</sup> The last testimony shows that the

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Lambrecht, Interview by Luc de Roose, 1 December, 1992.

<sup>57</sup> Lilly Silberman, “Beyond Secret Tears,” <  
[http://www.adl.org/children\\_holocaust/story\\_beyond\\_tears.asp](http://www.adl.org/children_holocaust/story_beyond_tears.asp)>, 2 February, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Vera G., Interview by Mr. Blum, 1998.

nuns served themselves a larger portion than the children. Together these testimonies demonstrate the children's need for better food, especially in the case of Lilly. These situations edge on the border of neglect by the staff of the establishments. In the discussion of the Jewish orphanage, it will be clear that they were able to provide plenty of healthy food for the children, even during extreme circumstances. Therefore, Christian establishments, under less supervision of the Germans and with more direct contact to the underground, should have been able to supply basic nutrition to the children. The lack in food caused not only psychological trauma but also physical suffering.

This disregard stretched farther than nutrition alone. One of the characteristics of Christian establishments was the bad sanitation which some of these gave the children. The testimony of Blanche H. about her stay at Milles Fleurs explains her extreme circumstance during hiding:

After a few days, I was told I would be taken to another orphanage on top of the citadel in Namur by the Meuse in the mountains called Milles Fleurs. It was a scene from Oliver Twist. We had no food. One meal a day was a lot. We had no sanitary conditions. We used leaves from the yard. We were maybe bathed once a month. We were infested with lice. I found an apple one day. I took one bite a day for a week.<sup>59</sup>

This Christian orphanage's actions can be seen as neglect because other children in orphanages did not experience this extreme lack in nutritional and sanitary provision. In addition, Milles Fleurs was one of the orphanages supplied by Abbée Andree. Therefore, Abbée Andree's underground network would have provided the institution with continuous supplies for the children. This meant that the staff at Milles Fleurs had no excuse for not providing basic needs such as multiple meals a day and at least

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<sup>59</sup> Blanche H., Interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, June 27, 1996.

weekly baths.<sup>60</sup> Similar testimonies of neglect at Christian establishments are not rare. Another child, Lilly Silberman, talked about a similar situation: “We lacked clothing, heat and medical attention. I don't remember ever bathing. I never saw a toothbrush, a handkerchief or toilet paper. When I did not see newspaper scraps, I used my clothing.”<sup>61</sup> When hidden children discuss bad nutrition and sanitation in their testimonies, they always refer to lice, coldness and no toilet paper. Such basic needs should have been provided at that time, war or no war. The Jewish orphanages and Belgian population had no problem giving their children toilet paper and other basic sanitary needs. The preventive practice of giving lice baths were already common in Belgium. There are several testimonies by other children referring to the ritual lice baths at their institution. A weekly routine of checking the children added to the baths would have been sufficient. In addition, *Winterhulp*, a government-run organization for supplying communal institution during the war, would have given the necessary products for the lice baths.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, no justification can be found for this kind of treatment, especially when the Jewish orphanages demonstrated that despite the hardships it was possible for a large communal institution to provide sufficient nutrition and sanitary care.

These appalling conditions often resulted in unnecessary sickness. Sickness caused problems since the hidden children could not be taken to a doctor because they could be recognized as Jewish. Malnutrition caused diseases like dysentery and bronchitis which the poor sanitation worsened. The presence of lice resulted in chronic

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Lilly Silberman, “Beyond Secret Tears,” <[http://www.adl.org/children\\_holocaust/story\\_beyond\\_tears.asp](http://www.adl.org/children_holocaust/story_beyond_tears.asp)>, 2 February, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 187.

bleeding. "I was awakened at night by lice crawling inside my ear and I had a chronic bloody infection on my scalp."<sup>63</sup> As previously mentioned, the Christian establishments had enough means to provide lice baths to prevent infestations. In addition, child diseases, like small pox and measles, infected large numbers of hidden children due to crowded situations at Christian establishments. Ruth Rubenstein became one of the unlucky children to contract the measles, probably because her immune system had weakened due to the bad care she received.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, children who were well taken care of did not avoid the risk of catching epidemics that raged in the institutions. Asher Langerman's arrival at a convent in Hervé, battling a severe skin disease, illustrates this predicament. He remembers being washed very carefully by the nuns every day to his displeasure.<sup>65</sup> Even the smallest of children would remember years later the diseases that threatened their lives.

In convents, nuns would react fearfully to sick children. In many cases, Mother Superior would contact the child's parents or relatives to demand them to come get the child. This reaction is understandable since it was very dangerous to bring a child to a doctor or hospital. By 1942, when most children went into hiding, the Germans had passed orders disallowing non-Jewish doctors to treat Jews. Thus, they ran to the chance of being easily betrayed. Therefore, the parents had to find a way to receive medical treatment for their child which was equally dangerous. This happened to Nicole David who endangered the other children in the convent with a constant throat

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<sup>63</sup> Lilly Silberman, "Beyond Secret Tears," < [http://www.adl.org/children\\_holocaust/story\\_beyond\\_tears.asp](http://www.adl.org/children_holocaust/story_beyond_tears.asp) >, 2 February, 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Rubenstein, quoted in Marks, 115-126.

<sup>65</sup> Asher Langerman, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Asher Langerman," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 140-142.

infection.<sup>66</sup> Consequently illness became a second major fear because it could lead to the abandonment or even death of the child.

### Religion

In 24 of 31 collected testimonies on children hidden in Christian establishments, the person unambiguously states that they had come in contact with Christianity or the traditions of Catholicism during their stay at the Christian establishment. The seven others who did not mention religion might have been too young to remember or ignored it in their testimony. The constant repetition of the theme of religion in the testimonies demonstrates its importance to the affected person. It stood out from all the other experiences at the Christian establishments. Religious trauma mostly affected the children hidden in Christian establishments. In comparison, the children at the Christian establishments received greater religious trauma than at the other two hiding places discussed for Jewish children. Children hidden in private families experienced the Christian religion and tradition but the cases are less numerous and less severe. The hidden children at the Jewish orphanages experienced greater conflict regarding the level of religion. Their problems derived from their own religion, not another one such as Christianity.

In the Christian establishments the Jewish children had to learn what all the other Christian children had exercised from birth. Jewish parents residing in Belgium raised their children in Jewish tradition with some of them observing extreme Orthodox Judaism. Most children had gone to the synagogue, and their families practiced the

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<sup>66</sup> Nicole David, "The Ordeal: Nicole David," quoted in Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Ballatin Books, 1993), 3-14.

Shabbat. In all the testimonies by the hidden children, the survivors mention that they attended Jewish or public school. Therefore, most of the Jewish children had no or little previous knowledge about Catholicism or Christianity in general before entering the Christian establishment. They would have to catch up years in just a few days.

One of the first experiences the survivors describe is their first Catholic dinner encounter since this was the first major communal occurrence when entering a Christian establishment. Some mention the strange movements the other children make before starting dinner. They refer to making the cross. Paul Schwarzbart recounts the following about his first dinner experience at Schaltin: “They were reciting things in a language I had never before heard. And they all made a gesture with their right hand, first to the forehead, then to the belly, and finally to both shoulders. I had no idea what was going on, none whatsoever.”<sup>67</sup> These circumstances immensely confused the children if not properly explained by someone in charge. Subsequently during dinner some of the children ate for the first time in their lives non-kosher food. One girl mentions that this was so shocking to her that she feared she might die because God would punish her. Their parents had taught them the kosher rules and now they broke them with nobody there to tell them it was alright. Others, viewing it not as a trauma, plainly indicate the foods that they had never eaten before. Baruch Grun learned to smoke, drink wine and eat pork for the first time in his life.<sup>68</sup>

From the moment they entered a Christian establishment religion would dominate the children’s lives. They went daily or weekly to church, learned all the prayers, went to confession, and communion. None of the Jewish children had ever

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<sup>67</sup> Schwarzbart, *Breaking the Silence*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> Grun, quoted in Brachfeld, 130-132.

experienced the Catholic practice of confession. Leaders of the institutions or other children sometimes told the new child what to do but often they were on their own and had to guess the procedures of confession. If the child was lucky they confessed in front of a priest who knew the situation of the hidden child and could help him or her. Otherwise, the child was alone and had to act like she or he comprehended what to do. The children knew they could not lose their cover story because it was crucial to their survival. Often Jewish children would exactly imitate other catholic children. For instance, if the child ahead of the hidden child confessed that he or she had lied, the hidden child would repeat the same confession. The hidden children performed the same ritual when it became time for communion or other common Catholic practices. They would copy the other children's behavior. Most of the children by the end of their stay at the institution or convent developed great imitation skills. They turned into perfect little Catholics knowing all their prayers, going to confession and communion. The only thing missing was that most had not been baptized. The following testimony by Paul Schwarzbart shows how much the Catholic religion governed the daily life of Jewish children hidden at Christian establishments.

Religion, Catholicism in point of fact, dominated our lives and marked our every waking moment. Naturally, we attended mass every morning, and naturally everyone took Holy Communion. Every single second was a learning experience. So on the first morning there I knelt too, mouth agape, tongue stuck out. And l'Abbe Rene Elisee Hardy, the 28 year-old priest, placed a small white wafer on it. Tasteless. My first communion. That was God, I was told. Hard to swallow for a ten-year old... I say this with the greatest respect, no pun intended. But it was hard to swallow, in regard. And the fact that the priest actually drank the blood of Christ. Smelled like wine, but it was transformed, I was again told. My poor little mind was reeling. But I never flinched and behaved like all the rest. Mustn't stand out, never stand out. I fully understood my responsibility to survive, I owed that to my parents, but I also understood that, were I to be

caught, everyone, the other boys and the monitors, some 30 of them, would pay the price with me.<sup>69</sup>

Paul's testimony reveals the immense pressure the children felt to conform to this new religion.

Conversion to Christianity and religion of Jewish children in convents and Christian institutions lingers to be a sensitive subject. Some clergy baptized hidden Jewish children without the consent of a parent or the child itself. In other cases, the child asked to be baptized because they thought it would protect them from the Germans, and they would fit in better.

I wanted to know everything. I wanted to go to communion. But for that I had to be Catholic. I felt like I was searching for security. I knew that there were Germans, I knew I was Jewish, I knew I had to do everything to save myself. One of the things was to be like everyone else, be a Catholic. Nobody forced me to this decision.<sup>70</sup>

Then on the other hand, there were instances in which the child asked to be baptized but the clergy would deny them this right until the end of the war when they could make a clear minded decision. In addition, some parents followed a similar thought pattern as their hidden children and consented to the baptismal so their children would be safer. Today, many still argue that the nuns and priests had no choice, that the children only would be safe if they were baptized. However, the Germans did not care which religion the Jews had, their only concern was their Jewishness. In a way some clergy brainwashed children into believing the fear of being caught would go away with their baptism, because the children did not know any better.

Only nine survivors of the collected testimonies of children hidden in Christian establishments overtly expressed forced religion. Forced religion means that the child

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<sup>69</sup> Schwarzbart, *Breaking the Silence*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Fuchs, quoted in Brachfeld, 128-130.

had no choice but to adopt Catholic belief and reject any Jewishness. Many of these forced conversion testimonies refer to incidents in which a Mother Superior or priest demanded from the child to be baptized or otherwise leave the Christian establishment. This meant a choice between change of religion and extreme endangerment of one's life. This is an extremely difficult choice for a child. Edita A. was one of the Jewish children whose mother consented to having her daughter converted under the pressure of to Mother Superior at the Catholic orphanage of Sacre Coeur in Overisk.<sup>71</sup> As previously mentioned, forced religion could also derive from the fact that a clergy member brainwashed the child with fear of their own Jewishness to the point that the child demanded to be converted. Ruth Bachner gives a description of this type of experience in a convent in Ruiselede.

I was taught catechism. In a way, I was brainwashed. They would tell me that if I was not baptized my soul would die in hell, my soul was blemished, and she would go to heaven if baptized. I started taking lessons. I was asked if I liked to be baptized. I felt it would be better that this way I might be released from terror and constant fright. When I am Catholic, they (the Germans) could not come and get me.

The nuns baptized Ruth with the written permission her parents given after much pressure from the convent. In the end, Ruth mentions that she felt like her life was saved by being baptized. It was a load off her shoulders but she really had no idea whether it meant anything to the Germans.<sup>72</sup> In cases like this, one cannot accept that the child requested the baptism. The clergy acted irresponsibly when traumatizing a child into converting, especially when there are other examples in which the clergy refused to baptize on demand of a child. In rare occasions, nuns and priests beat Jewish children into accepting Catholic religion. However, corporal punishment was

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<sup>71</sup> Edita A., Interview by Mr. Blum, 5 January, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Ruth B., Interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, March 14, 1995.

commonly accepted in Christian establishments for all children. Still several children remember it as a shocking experience during their hiding. Jacques Geyer came in this unfortunate position when he told a nun he could not kneel because he was Jewish. She smacked him so hard he landed in the front pew.<sup>73</sup> This example displays a dual psychological and physical trauma.

The extreme religious environment of the Christian establishment resulted in some Jewish children denying their own religion and even the creation of guilt feelings about their Jewishness. Curiously, the mentioning in testimonies of guilt feelings for being Jewish was less in Christian establishments than in private families. However, the adaptation to Judaism after the war was an extreme issue for many children leaving the Christian establishments. Some could not escape the life of being hidden for so many years and feared to live in the open world. For example, Israel Krascuki, only baptized in 1949, moved in with a Catholic family after the war continuing his life as a Catholic. He claims he lived hidden for many more years. He feels like he sometimes is still trapped today in the war that went on so many years ago.<sup>74</sup>

The hidden children who had a surviving parent after the war returned to a Jewish family. Many of them had to readjust to Judaism. Some Jewish parents understood the situation of their children whereas others still dealt with their own emotions and did not comprehend the Catholic fervor of their children. Parents not grasping the effect of Catholicism on their children saw their actions as a betrayal. Their reactions were to take away any Catholic or Christian object that the child had brought back from hiding. Many children wanted to go to mass on Sunday because it was what

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<sup>73</sup> Jacques G., Interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, 31 July, 1996.

<sup>74</sup> Krascuki, quoted in Brachfeld, 138-140.

their surroundings had taught them. This created fear and confusion in many Jewish parents who would lock up the child so that they could not attend mass.

The following constitute some examples of reactions of parents on the return of their hidden child from a Christian establishment. Ruth B. describes her reunion with her parents in depth. She had her bible with her and a statue of the Virgin Mary. They returned to the apartment. The first thing she did was to put the Virgin Mary on the mantle piece. Her parents did not say anything. The first Sunday she woke up her brother and said they had to go to mass. She told her mother she went for a walk and instead went to mass. On her return she hid the bible. Her parents realized where she went and they did not let her go the next Sunday, the virgin disappeared as well. Her mother said she broke it accidentally. She was petrified that next Sunday that she was committing a mortal sin. As time went on she became used to her Judaism again. Little by little they encouraged her to go back to Judaism.<sup>75</sup> Ruth's parents adapted the children without too much trauma back to Judaism.

The reaction of parents to take away rosary beads or a statue from the children was a reoccurring element in testimonies. Leopold Salomon Aybes' aunts did the same as Ruth's parents. Eventually, he returned to Judaism as well.<sup>76</sup> Most of them eventually readopted Judaism or became atheists. However, a few mention their still existing affection towards Catholicism. Nahum Fuchs still feels happy when he enters a Catholic church.<sup>77</sup> Those without surviving parents or family members remained in orphanages or immigrated to other countries like the United States and Canada. The

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<sup>75</sup> Ruth B., Interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, March 14, 1995.

<sup>76</sup> Leopold Salomon Aybes, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Leopold Salomon Aybes," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 125-127.

<sup>77</sup> Fuchs, quoted in Brachfeld, 128-130.

children remaining in orphanages either continued their Catholic life or became atheists. They did not have any support or education in Judaism. Immigrating children often found support in their new countries. However, some of these children also experienced incomprehension when it came to their Catholic practices. Basically, many of the children who hid in Christian establishments had to adapt once more to new situations when they left the Christian refuge.

### The Good Side

One cannot forget that although these children suffered some severe traumas, their lives were still spared thanks to these Christian establishments. A glimpse at the different testimonies shows a distinction between the Christian establishments which tried to make the lives of the hidden children easier and those that did not supply basic necessities. For example, several children will explain the same lack of nutrition and sanitation at the specific institution, whereas, other children will mention the great care at a certain establishment as well. In addition, some child survivors recognize in their testimonies certain people who were vital to their survival. These people not only gave the Jewish children a hiding place but also the warmth and comfort they missed from their parents. This little bit of trust in the child's life could make a world of a difference to them in regard to their experience as a hidden child. For example, Louis Davids remembers the aid of Abbé André. "He was a brilliant man. Concerning the first days at the parish center of Abbé André, I retain wonderful memories. I remember that when I went to bed, he came to me and whispered: "You are Jewish, I am Catholic. Let us pray together. Say the evening prayer in your faith, and then I pray according to my faith."

When the young priest kneeled, I said my Shema Israel.”<sup>78</sup> Louis is not the only survivor to recall important Abbé André. Blanche H. recalls that he gave her his bed while he slept on the floor when there was no place to hide Blanche.<sup>79</sup> Several children make reference to Mrs. Taquet’s evening snacks and cuddles. These moments of happiness stand out in the testimonies as bright lights in a dark time.

Other survivors indicate general contentment. Often these remarks derive from the fact that the child had been hidden at different Christian establishments or other locations. If one location in comparison to the other is more secure and pleasant the children will definitely mention it in their testimony. Fanny L. believes the nuns at the convent she stayed at were like cold careless nuns described in common perception. “They also saved me with affection, mentally. They tried to replace the warmth of a mother.”<sup>80</sup> Anna Tencer-Schechter remembers a nun coming to her bedside and reminding her that they believed after all in the same God. Then, they prayed together for the safe return of Anna’s parents. Unfortunately, happy memories like these are often overpowered by the daily traumatic experiences surrounding the children. Therefore, it overshadows the effort of some of these rescuers in the testimony of these children.

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<sup>78</sup> Louis David, “In het parochiehuis van Abbé André,” quoted in Jan de Volder and Lieve Wouters, *Van binnen weent mijn hart* (Antwerpen: Standaard, 1999), 127-131.

<sup>79</sup> Blanche H., Interview by Shoah Visual History Foundation, June 27, 1996.

<sup>80</sup> Fanny L., Interview by Mr. Blum, 11 October, 2005.

## CHAPTER 3

### LIFE AND TRAUMA DURING HIDING WITH PRIVATE FAMILIES

A glance at the testimonies by children hidden with a private family shows that they are in some instances comparable and in others different from the traumas of the children hidden at Christian establishments. Forty-three out of the 72 collected testimonies refer to a child hidden at a private family. Thus, the number of children hidden with a private family is higher than the children hidden at a Christian establishment or Jewish orphanage. A child hidden with a private family is defined as a Jewish child hidden with a Christian family with or without their parents, or a Jewish child hidden with their Jewish family. In other words, the children were hidden in a non-communal family situation. These children could experience different kinds of trauma but overall they faced the same ordeal. During their stay with the private family, the hidden child could have both the advantage and disadvantage of staying in a family situation. However, they avoided some of the trauma from living in a collective institution such as a convent or orphanage.

## Separation Trauma and Parental Pressure

The children hidden with their parents did not experience the trauma of separation unlike the children hidden by themselves within a private family. Sometimes the luxury of having parents decreased the overall trauma, whereas in other cases the presence of parents increased their traumatic hiding experience. In many cases Jewish parents tried to protect their children from possible trauma. By doing so, they would not explain or try to embellish the situation. However, the child would notice the increased anxiety of their parents which in its turn increased the anxiety of the child. While hiding during a Gestapo round-up in Brussels, Ingrid Kisliuk remembers the change of vision about her parents. "I observed that just like my uncle and I, my parents were shaking and their teeth were chattering. For an instant I was surprised, my childish impulse being to imagine my parents above and beyond my own fearful reactions. I recall my silent acknowledgement that the effect of terror is simply logical and natural in everyone."<sup>81</sup> This change of view about their parents had immense effect on the children. Similar to Ingrid they regarded their parents as normal people because they feared like everyone else. It increased their own fears because they did not view their parents anymore as the ultimate protector.

In a sense, they had lost some of their parents' protection. Normally, children should acknowledge this only during their late teenage years. Even the smallest children could notice a clear change in the attitude of their parents. The very young Jacques R., born in 1942, already acknowledged the anxiety of his parents while hidden in a cellar in Brussels. He claims that his parents unconsciously put their suffering on him. The little cellar they lived in became his world and would cause him to have many psychological

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<sup>81</sup> Kisliuk, *Unveiled Shadows*, 100.

traumas later in his life.<sup>82</sup> Older children like 16 year old Moshe Flinker recognized the most subtle fear in their parents. "Only fear remains, and all day long my parents have been very nervous. They can't stand the slightest noise, and the smallest thing bothers them."<sup>83</sup> In more extreme cases, parents broke down under the pressure of hiding. Clara Heller's mother had an emotional collapse after Clara's father failed to return to their hiding place and was found dead hours later. Her mother lay on her bed day after day, unaware of anything happening around her, without speaking, eating or even smoking. A frightened Clara had never felt as alone as then. She had always relied on her mother and father, and now everything had changed. Her siblings and she were on their own.<sup>84</sup>

The change in attitude by the parents and their helplessness resulted in children becoming adults themselves. They would take up some of the major tasks that their parents could not perform anymore. Often the parents were immigrants from Eastern European countries and did not speak Flemish or French. In these cases, the children became the translators for their parents. This also meant that they left the hiding place and came in contact with non-Jews. In order to survive in the every day Christian world, the parents told their children to lie about their origin and identity. Ingrid Kisliuk remembers the following about her new situation:

Since I had the most contact with people, I was the spokesperson. I felt I had to explain to the landlady the reason for my parents' accent and their lack of fluency in French, so I simply said that we had come from Austria to live in Belgium. Otherwise, it was left up to me to camouflage our past. But I never premeditated, I invented spontaneously as I went from one lie to the next, remembering what I had said, then building on more lies.

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<sup>82</sup> Jacques R., Interview by Mr. Blum, 15 May, 2005.

<sup>83</sup> Moshe Flinker, "Diary of Moshe Flinker," quoted in Laurel Holliday, *Children in the Holocaust and World War II* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 263.

<sup>84</sup> Clara Isaacman, *Clara's Story* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1992), 64-65.

Fortunately, I could rely on my good memory. ... I was anxious and feared being perceived as a liar. Lying made me unhappy and uncomfortable, and I often despised myself. What to say next to cover the lie became a challenge, until I was totally entangled in a fictitious existence, so much so that since I wished to be that person so badly, I came to feel that I was in some way that other me who kept gaining strength over my true identity. But all along there persisted inside the nagging guilt, the feeling of imprisonment in deception.<sup>85</sup>

As Ingrid shows the lying about their identity brought many mixed emotions for the children ranging from longing to be the person to extreme guilt and sometimes anger. This web of lies became too much for the children but they had no escape from it. Other child survivors like Ingrid remember similar feelings of shame and guilt that came along with the lying. Most of them could not talk about it to their parents because they themselves had to deal with their own problems. Consequently, parents in hiding with their children often generated a negative impact on their own children.

### New Identity and Environment

The adaptation to the new environment of a private family was not as extreme as the introduction to a Christian establishment. Different elements of their new environment became important to the children hidden with a private family. Unlike the survivors in Christian establishments, the children arrived in a single family with or without their parents and siblings, not in a community of several children and adults. They had to remain in small hiding places by themselves or had to blend in with the new family. If they arrived on their own they had to adapt to the current situation of the family with which they resided. The new family had different habits from their own family which the children had to learn. At their first meal, many new families introduced the Jewish

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<sup>85</sup> Kisliuk, *Unveiled Shadows*, 110-111.

children to non-kosher food, such as cheese and ham sandwiches. In most cases, the Christian families inadvertently gave the Jewish children non-kosher food. However, there remain instances in which a family mocked the Jewish child and purposely provided non-kosher rations. Misha Defonesca's caregiver treated Misha disrespectfully. The first evening she fed what Misha considered to be chicken, as she asked for more the woman screamed: "You want some more meat, do you? What a surprise!" Misha replied it was delicious where upon the woman answered: "Delicious! Of course it's delicious. It's a pork chop!" Following this comment, she began to laugh, apparently to Misha well pleased by some joke that Misha did not understand until much later when she found out Jews did not eat pork.<sup>86</sup> Ridiculing the children about their kosher food tradition occurred only in very rare occasions. Especially, since meats such as pork chops was difficult to come by during the occupation.

As with the children at the Christian establishments, many of the children received new names and backgrounds. Often, they took the name of their adoptive family. Children understood the reason for the name change but still for many it remained a difficult task. George W. describes his excitement at the end of the war when he could tell his friends that his real name was Weiss not Hoffman.<sup>87</sup> The Jewish children, coming mostly from poor urban families, were frequently placed in farming families in the countryside. This change of location gave the children a totally different environment in which they found out many things about life. The Goddard family hid Blanche H. on their large farm near Namur. The surroundings surprised Blanche. As a city girl, the farm was a different world containing many kinds of animals or

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<sup>86</sup> Misha Defonseca, *Surviving with Wolves: The Most Extraordinary Story of World War II* (London: Portrait, 2005), 31.

<sup>87</sup> George W., Interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, 20 February, 1998.

vegetables.<sup>88</sup> In the end, most children appreciated the natural environment around them. The countryside did reduce some of the hiding stress because there was not the constant imminent danger of being caught as there was in the city. Many of the rural families were large, while the Jewish children came from an urban environment with fewer children. For example, Blanche arrived in a family with nine children. Some children adjusted easily to the numerous other children, whereas others like Ruth Alster-Muller broke down. Ruth, as an only child, did not adjust and had to be removed to a smaller family. Luckily an adult son of the first family was able to take her into his family.<sup>89</sup>

On the other hand, many younger and older couples without children would hide Jewish children. These children received plenty of personal attention. Some caregivers expected the same in return from the children. They wanted to replace the parents the Jewish child had temporary or forever lost. They asked or demanded to be called mother or father. Dora Susswein hid at a home where the lady of the house asked to be called mother. This brought fear to Dora who wanted to please her caregiver but did not want to call her mother.<sup>90</sup> There always existed the extreme situations. As with the food provisions Misha Defonseca's caregiver expected to be called mother. Misha, who in her mind still had a mother, could not call this woman mother. Added to the hostile environment Misha had landed in, a sudden feeling of hatred came over her. "I wanted to hit her, stamp on her feet, kick her legs, anything I could manage, given my size."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Blanche H., Interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, June 27, 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Ruth Alster-Muller, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Ruth Alster-Muller," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 119-121.

<sup>90</sup> Dora Susswein, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Dora Jacobsohn-Susswein," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 135-136.

<sup>91</sup> Defonseca, *Surviving with Wolves*, 33.

Many of the hidden children hated to call someone their mother when they were not. They felt like they betrayed their own mother who they missed so much. The older children, who realized the severity of the Nazi persecution, considered it giving up on the survival of their parents. The better caregivers understood this problem and opted to be called something different. Several adoptive women chose to be named aunt. Others referred to themselves with different parental names such as *vake*, *moeke* (Flemish words often also used for grandparents), and pappy. These different terms for mother and father gave the children a sense of security without interfering with the rights of their natural parents.

If the new family already had children, they would have to adjust to the newcomer as well. Some parents told their children that the hidden child was Jewish, and that they had to be careful. Other parents did not inform their children about the identity of the new child, especially when it was a young child. Those children who knew about the situation often became curious of the newcomer with this different religion. Some even made a thorough inspection before really accepting the child. For example, the three oldest daughters of the farmer who hid Blanche Haber gave her a bath. They expected her to have horns or other weird things. They just wanted to make sure she was not different from them.<sup>92</sup>

When children knew or felt the fear of the hidden child, they would act cruelly or play malicious jokes on them. They thought the fear of the hidden child was funny. Blanche experienced this as well. Children at George W.'s school found out he was Jewish and hit him during playtime. George knew he could do nothing back.<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>92</sup> Blanche H., interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, June 27, 1996.

<sup>93</sup> George W., interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, 20 February, 1998.

hidden children became an easy prey for bullies. There are many references by hidden children in families in which they tell of other children scaring them. For example, Nicole David, staying with the Champagne family, was scared going up the stairs in the dark because sometimes the younger sons of the family would play jokes on her, and make noises on the top of the stairs. As a result for years afterward she was afraid of the dark.<sup>94</sup> This considerably affected them because they did not understand why other children could not have compassion for them. It made them feel like outsiders.

### Extreme Hiding and Silence

In Christian establishments most Jewish children had the ability to blend in with the other Christian children. They did not have to continuously or for long periods hide in small or unpleasant places. Many of the children hidden with private families had to hide in cellars, attics, closets, backyards, forests, and animal barns. They experienced the trauma of confinement that became known worldwide through the diary of Anne Frank.<sup>95</sup> Anne Frank's diary is not the only surviving text written by a Jewish child in hiding. Laurel Holliday collected several diaries by Jewish children hidden throughout Europe.<sup>96</sup> Moshe Flinker's diary entries eloquently describe his emotions and troubles during his hiding in Brussels with his family. Moshe was proficient enough to explain the different phases he went through during his hiding. In the first phase, he experienced continuous fear. The slightest change in the environment, such as a ring at the door, would upset the whole household. "This small event showed me how much we fear

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<sup>94</sup> David, quoted in Marks, 3-25.

<sup>95</sup> Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition* (New York: Double Day, 1947).

<sup>96</sup> Laurel Holliday, *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995).

deportation.” Then a phase of emptiness set over Moshe. “During recent days an emptiness has formed inside me. Nothing motivates me to do anything or write anything, and no new ideas enter my mind; everything is as if asleep.” Subsequently, Moshe’s mind filled with sadness, shame, and guilt. “I am overcome with shame for having forgotten their (his Jewish brethren in the concentration and death camps) plight.” He felt guilty for surviving and hiding while his friends and fellow Jews were fighting for their lives in concentration camps. Finally, he entered the final stage of restlessness. “In the beginning there was action and then came thought. Now I need action. It has been a long time since I have done anything except think. Thought after thought, and no action comes from any of this. Now I can think no more. What good is all my thinking without action?” There might have been more phases to come during Moshe’s hiding period if his family had not been caught. Just like Anne Frank, the Germans caught Moshe and deported him, never to return.<sup>97</sup>

Not all children hidden with private families were located in small spaces but at least 21 of the 43 testimonies by children hidden with private families explicitly refer to instances where the child had to keep quiet. There definitely existed different levels of keeping quiet and hiding among the testimonies. For example, Regina S.’s caregiver Mrs. Jacobs told her to hide behind the counter of Mrs. Jacobs’ store when Germans with a particular kind of cap walked in the store. Regina remembers clearly that she had more fear at this moment than at any other during her time in hiding.<sup>98</sup> This example shows that even if children were hidden for only a few minutes it could emotionally affect them. Many children in the countryside survived in a similar manner. The hiding

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<sup>97</sup> Flinker, 261-271.

<sup>98</sup> Regina S., Interview by Mr. Blum, 7 January, 2005.

family would have a secret hiding place somewhere around the farm or house where the Jewish child could hide under extreme circumstances. The children would only have to be quiet for a couple of minutes or hour until the immediate danger had left. Most of the children in this situation experienced extreme fear of being caught but the trauma ended there.

In the middle of the spectrum were the children who remained in families where they could not leave the house or apartment but had the capability to roam around inside. These children had limited freedom. However, this limited freedom was extensive enough to limit the trauma of hiding. The children knew about the extreme danger outside and accepted the space they had to play and live in. The hiding location gave them plenty of exercise space so they would not suffer from immediate illness. They also often received plenty of news from the outside world which gave them a feeling of importance. However, compared to short hidings the fear for these children was constant. Caregivers reminded them not to show themselves outside or make too much noise. Clara Heller lived in this situation when her family hid with Mrs. Brussels on the extremely busy Frankrijklei Street in Antwerp. She, her mother, and sister had to be careful but they could even play some piano during the daytime when neighbors were not home.<sup>99</sup> Another little girl, Regina S., hid with her family in a cellar of a country home in Schelle. She was able to play in the house and the little courtyard.<sup>100</sup> This life had its perks of running around through a whole house or a backyard but the children still were deprived of some basic things such as friends and toys. Jeanine Burk states the following in her testimony: "My life as a hidden child was ... how can I say it ... I had

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<sup>99</sup> Isaacman, *Clara's Story*, 88-89.

<sup>100</sup> Regina S., interview with Mr. Blum., 7 January, 2005.

no toys. The only fresh air I got was when I was to go in the backyard. I made up imaginary friends because I had no one to play with. I do not remember being hugged and kissed. That was my life for two years.”<sup>101</sup> Many children in this situation longed for the fresh air and outdoors. They also lost the important education of peer contact. This was the downside to the family hiding versus the Christian institutions where children continued interaction with children of their own age.

Subsequently, the other end of the scale holds children who lived in small spaces such as attics and cellars. These children had very limited contact with the outside world. They were basically shut off from normal life. They had very limited space to move around which would affect their muscle strength and normal child development. Little Jacques R. grew up with many medical problems resulting from hiding in a cellar in Anderlecht.<sup>102</sup> In many cases, the children could not move around at all and had to sit still on a chair or floor. A Catholic couple in Brussels hid Yvonne A. and her mother in their cellar for six months. The first three months Yvonne’s mother got the flu and lay sick for days without moving. Yvonne meanwhile stayed in the cellar and could only see the feet of people passing by on the street. Her only free time came when the drugstore the couple owned closed and she could play for a couple hours upstairs. During the daytime she was not allowed to talk or move around. She would sit the whole day in a chair holding on to her doll. She knew she had to be extremely quiet.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, many of these spaces were unsuitable for living. Cellars were very dark and humid, while attics heated up in summer and froze in the winter. Sarah Amitai-

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<sup>101</sup> Jeanine Burk, “Survivor Stories,” < <http://www.holocaustvictims.org/cgi-bin/data.show.pl?di=record&da=survivor&ke=5> >, 2 February, 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Jacques R., interview by Mr. Blum.

<sup>103</sup> Yvonne A., interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, 22 September, 1995.

Lowenthal remembers that her family only had a little roof window where they could see the sky. For two years they stayed in this attic where they could not to move. She recalls the increasing cold in the winter.<sup>104</sup> Since it was not built as living quarters, rodents infested the place. Clara Heller describes an extreme example in her testimony about waking up in a cellar of a bakery in Antwerp with mice running all over her. “I heard myself scream later. Something – many things – were crawling all over me. I opened my eyes and in the weak morning light filtering into the basement I saw mice. They were everywhere: on the flour sacks, on my clothes, in my pockets, on my legs. I screamed again.”<sup>105</sup> These hiding circumstances could create physical trauma in children in the form of diseases and also psychological trauma such as life-long claustrophobia and anxiety problems.

Finally, on the extreme end of the balance linger cases in which a caregiver, if this person can still be named that way, hid or locked up a child in an extremely small and awful place. These situations occurred throughout Belgium in very rare instances. Reading through testimonies, one is more likely to find such circumstances in Eastern Europe where the risk of hiding Jews was even higher than in Belgium. Although rare, they are not absent from Belgian Holocaust history. George Weiss’ parents placed him with a farmer towards the end of the war. He remained there until the end of the war. The last three months of his stay, the farmer dug a hole in the backyard and made George live there. Today, George remembers basically sleeping for the whole three months.<sup>106</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the never-ending trauma to a young child when

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Lowenthal. “Persoonlijk Dossier: Sarah Lowenthal,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 124-125.

<sup>105</sup> Isaacman, *Clara’s Story*, 50.

<sup>106</sup> George W., interview Shoah Visual History Foundation, 20 February, 1998.

this occurs to them. Luckily, most caregivers did regard this as a form of abuse and gave some form of decent shelter to the hidden children.

### Physical and Emotional Abuse

Although very few cases of actual physical abuse emerge in the testimonies of children hidden in Belgium, other forms of mental and emotional abuse are abundantly present. The issue of demanding money for the hidden child or family remains a sensitive subject. It was normal to demand some money for basic supplies for the child. However, in several cases the caregiver threatened parents for more money or asked for exaggerated sums of money. Amalia Grossman lived with her family in a rented attic of a friend. The father of this friend told the family he would report them to the Germans if they did not pay him extra. Amalia's mother risked her life going back to their old home to retrieve some hidden money from the cellar.<sup>107</sup> Others would report the child to the Germans or kick them out of the hiding place when parents ran out of money or were deported. For example, Leopold Salomon Aybes' mother placed him with a family in Waterloo. His mother paid for his room and board. After the family found out that his mother was deported and they would receive no more money, they handed Leopold over to an organization in Brussels. This organization placed him with a man in La Roche who worked for the Germans, and already housed several children. Leopold got no actual food but only some water and flour to make his own bread. Luckily a lady one day saw him eating from a trashcan and invited him to have dinner at her house. Eventually, this man made Leopold return to Brussels without any money where he

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<sup>107</sup> Amalia Grossman, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Amalia Dinur-Grossman," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 127-128.

found an aunt.<sup>108</sup> Several other children only received food depending on the amount of money the parents paid for the child. If they gave no money, the child would be given almost no food. This situation resembles the nutrition traumas at the Christian establishments. Misha Defonseca's caregiver made her scrape all the jam back of a piece of toast during her first breakfast because according to her Misha's mother did not pay enough for Misha to eat jam.<sup>109</sup>

In a few cases the caregivers did not see themselves as caregivers but employers. They would make the child work for their living, even if the parents paid for their hiding. Families with young children would take an older Jewish girl into their home to act as a nanny. Mostly they were just children themselves, not old enough to care for another child. Vera Ghilman experienced an unhappy time at the Henderson family because she had to do all the daily chores and baby-sit their small child.<sup>110</sup> Other children had to work as seamstresses or other related jobs. They were used as child laborers. Misha Defonseca and Edith Rechter worked as seamstresses making sweaters and repaired shirts. In Misha's case it became more a forced labor, whereas for Edith it was a way to pass time.<sup>111</sup> As proven in the previous situation, labor could be seen by the children as a trauma when the caregiver forced them or as a distraction from their boring life in hiding. Consequently, there were different ways for caregivers and rescuers to approach chores and labor.

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<sup>108</sup> Aybes, quoted in Brachfeld, 125-127.

<sup>109</sup> Defonseca. *Surviving with Wolves*, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Vera G., interview with Mr. Blum, 1998.

<sup>111</sup> Edith Rechter-Levy, "Persoonlijk Dossier: Edith Rechter," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 145-147.

Defonseca, *Surviving with Wolves*, 35.

Finally, there remains the question of religion. More than three-fourths of the Belgium population during World War II was Catholic. Several caregivers did not highly regard Judaism and wanted to raise the children as good Catholics. In other cases, the child had to blend in and had to convert to or act Catholic. As in the convents and Christian institutions, the children learned all the new rules and traditions of Christianity. However, compared to the children in Christian establishments, many children in private families were saved from extreme religion and baptism. Many of these children did not have to attend church or pray. Several families had no religious attachment and thus ignored religion or let the child practice their Judaism. Some children were attracted to the mysticism of the Catholic environment without the pressure of their caregivers. For example, Mrs. Meuldersmans was not Catholic and mocked Ari Livne for going to church daily. After the war, he confessed to the priest of the town he lived in that he was Jewish. The priest almost passed out when he found out. Ari wanted to remain Catholic because he thought everyone was so friendly to him.

### Separation from Adoptive Family

After all is said and done, most of the children hidden with a private family praise the family they stayed with in their testimony. As Edith Schwalb-Scheiner mentions in her testimony: "We (Jewish children) survived because a Christian family risked their lives for us."<sup>112</sup> However, even those children, who were well treated, did not escape the trauma of a hidden child. At the end of the war, the child had to return to its parents, or a Jewish organization claimed the child. Eleven testimonies unequivocally assert that

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<sup>112</sup> Edith Schwalb-Scheiner, "Edith Schwalb-Scheiner," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 148-149.

some children had a traumatic experience separating from their new family. When there was talk of going to Palestine or another country, and being forever divided from their caregivers, the child became extremely anxious. The brother of Ruth Alster-Muller found her back with her hiding family after the war. He placed her in an institution to prepare her to go to Palestine. Ruth was very unhappy and wanted to return to her wartime adoptive family, the Van Horenbeeks. She ran away and made the police call her “parents,” the Van Horenbeeks. They came and got her but were scared her brother would think they had made her flee the institution.<sup>113</sup> A more extreme case is presented by Zvi Amiram who learned from his brother and father that they would leave for Palestine. Zvi did not want to separate from his adoptive family, the Alardos, and told them that he would return to them. He lived hidden again with the Alardo family, now from his own brother and father. Although Jewish Brigade soldiers came looking for him, they did not find him. In 1946, after he heard a boat had left for Palestine, he wrote his father. He found his father had remained in Belgium and let his other sons go. His father knew that if he left Belgium he would lose Zvi again. He realized that Zvi needed plenty of time to adjust to the move to Palestine. Unfortunately, Zvi’s sister Regine stayed with her adoptive family and only made up with her real family in 1969. Zvi himself still has a close bond with the Alardo family.<sup>114</sup>

For children who had lost their parents, the separation from their caregivers became difficult because they knew they had to live with family members they often had never met before. In several cases, the only family members surviving the war were distant aunts or uncles who lived abroad. Ari Livne was sent to an aunt in France. Mrs.

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<sup>113</sup> Alster- Muller, quoted in Brachfeld, 119-121.

<sup>114</sup> Zvi Amiram, “Persoonlijk Dossier: Zvi Amiram,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 121-124.

Meuldersmans, his caregiver, escorted him. He was so attached to her that he did not want to stay in France. They both cried when Mrs. Meuldermans left. She was like a mother to him. They keep in contact until today, and he still visits her. In other cases, Jewish organizations made sure that the children were split up from their wartime family and placed with an intermediate family before returning to their real parents. The organizations trying to do their best for the children had to juggle them around from place to place. The children felt abandoned and could eventually not adjust to their real parents because it had been so long. Marie-Claire Rakowski was abruptly taken in 1947 from the Hickets whom she loved as real parents. As a four-year old she was perplexed and uncomfortable. She felt like the man who picked her up kidnapped her. She was taken to Switzerland where she reunited with her sister and placed together in a foster home. "The worst part (of the war) for me was still the shock of missing the Hickets, as my sister and I were sent to one foster home after another: a whole succession of strangers who did not know me or care about me."<sup>115</sup>

Several children tried to stay in contact with their wartime family after the war because of the happy memories. Parents and siblings could often not relate to these types of memories and formed a kind of jealousy. Especially siblings who had a rough time during hiding despised other siblings for having a comfortable hiding experience. Marie-Claire's sister hated her from the moment she laid eyes on Marie-Claire. "She (her sister) had contracted typhus in the convent and lost most of her hair. She could see right away that I was a more glowing, happy child in many ways, and she resented it. The first thing she did was to grab the doll I had brought and rip it apart. From then on

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<sup>115</sup> Marie-Claire Rakowski, "The Aftermath: Marie-Claire Rakowski," quoted in Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Ballatin Books, 1993), 101-112.

she took every possible opportunity to make me miserable.” Marie-Claire’s mother who had survived the concentration camps did not recover from the trauma. This created an almost impossible situation for Marie-Claire who as a child did not understand her mother’s reactions. Other parents would react in similar ways. Regina Sluzny’s father became mad when Regina drank too much milk and did not eat kosher. Her parents were mentally, economically and physically breaking down while her adoptive parents, the Jacobs, cared for her. She stayed close with the Jacobs and visited them every weekend. Her father remained jealous of her wartime family for the rest of his life. Regina, who could not relate to her father, thought he did not love her. Only later did she find out that he really cared. “I had a good time during the war. I started suffering after the war. I had two families and they had to share me. I had everything during the war.”<sup>116</sup> In the end, when she had a problem she went to the Jacobs not her real parents for the rest of her life.

In conclusion, the children hidden in a private family often had to endure some extreme traumas from changing identity to physical and mental abuse. When their parents were around their anxiety would increase the fear and trauma of the children. However, some of them experienced a perfect childhood without their real parents. Many had to go through the trauma of having two families or losing their wartime family. In the end, none of the children hidden in a private family escaped any form of trauma.

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<sup>116</sup> Regina S., Interview with Mr. Blum, 7 January, 2005.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIFE AND TRAUMA AT THE JEWISH ORPHANAGES

The Nazis promised the Belgian population that they only deported Jews to labor camps. They denied the existence of concentration camps so as not to cause a disturbance. This reasoning promoted the idea that children could be deported together with their parents, and the whole family would remain together. Nevertheless, the Gestapo had no excuse for the orphan children left behind because of the death and deportation of adults. According to this labor camp theory, there was no need for children to be deported since they had no more family. The Gestapo gave these orphan children the term *Alleinstehende Kinder*, meaning single lone children. They allowed the existence of two Jewish orphanages in Belgium, one in Antwerp and one in Brussels, to continue the illusion for the Belgian people of the non-existence of extermination camps. They officially defined the *Alleinstehende Kinder* as Jewish children who had no family and not reached the age of 16. The orphanages remained throughout the occupation under the control of the Gestapo and administrative direction of the AJB.<sup>117</sup>

Eventually, the Gestapo opened seven orphanages to house the increasing number of Jewish orphans: Antwerp Jewish Orphanage (later orphanage at Lasne), Orphanage of Jonas Tiefenbrunner (Brussels), Home Wezembeek (Wezembeek-Ophem), Home de Là-bas (Aische-en-Refail), Home Lindebeek, Les Moineux (Ukkel),

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<sup>117</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 155-157.

and a Jewish crèche (Etterbeek).<sup>118</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld estimates that during the liberation of Belgium the Jewish orphanages contained 500 Jewish orphans. He thinks that throughout the war probably 70 children passed through this system. His book contains a master list referring to some 682 children that stayed at the Jewish orphanages.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately, with the help of the underground, the Jewish orphanage gave tremendous aid to the rescue of Jewish children in Belgium.

### Arrival at the Orphanage

The collected testimonies by children at a Jewish orphanage all describe a disturbing tale about the separation from their parents and their arrival at the Jewish orphanages. Although most separation stories by the hidden children remain painful, the ones by children at Jewish orphanages follow a more dramatic pattern because nearly all the children knew they would never see their parents again. They had lost all hope for a safe and sound return. It became an inauguration to their life filled with trauma. Four ways existed through which a Jewish child arrived at one of the orphanages. The first type of arrival, and the least traumatic one, derived from parents or a family member dropping the child off at the orphanage. This meant that the child was not yet an orphan and likely had a parent still somewhere in hiding. In this case, the child still had a ray of hope for the return of their parents. However, unlike children hidden in families and Christian establishments, these children had no more contact with their parents. In various instances, a friend, not a parent, left the child behind at the orphanage claiming both parents had been deported or had died while in reality the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 161-237. These pages in Brachfeld's book give a description of each of the different orphanages.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 277-284.

parent(s) was in hiding. For example, the parents of the four Altenberg girls could not afford hiding with their four daughters and trusted them in the care of the Antwerp Jewish Orphanage.<sup>120</sup> On occasions, a family member or friend brought a child to an orphanage because the child had lost both its parents. Herman and Erna Klajnfeld ended up in the Antwerp Jewish Orphanage after the Gestapo rounded up their parents and their aunt could not take care of them.<sup>121</sup> Herman Jeger's arrival at the Antwerp Jewish Orphanage followed a similar pattern after his siblings could not care for him.<sup>122</sup>

Another way for a child's entrance into a Jewish orphanage was when a caregiver whom the parents had trusted reported the child to the Jewish community or orphanage. Frequently when the parents were deported, the caregiver no longer wanted to care for the child without monetary funds to provide for it. The caregiver could also become too scared and rid themselves as quickly as possible of the child. The children realized that the caregivers left them behind. Commonly they saw it as a second separation from loved ones. Sarah Cohen's caregiver found out that a maid had reported Sarah to the Gestapo. The next day, her caregiver brought Sarah to the Jewish Orphanage in Antwerp. Because she was not on an approved list by the Gestapo, Sarah had to hide in the attic when the Gestapo visited the orphanage.<sup>123</sup> Sarah had lost not only her parents but also a caregiver who she liked. Because of a mix up with the ration cards, Joseph Camee's caregivers brought him to the Home Wezembeek out

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<sup>120</sup> Altenberg, "Zo zijn ze in het weeshuis gekomen: Bekkie, Frieda, Annie en Micheline Altenberg," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 167-168.

<sup>121</sup> Herman and Erna Klajnfeld, "Zo zijn ze in het weeshuis gekomen: Herman and Erna Klajnfeld," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 163-165.

<sup>122</sup> Herman Jeger, "Zo zijn ze in het weeshuis gekomen: Herman Jeger," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 168.

<sup>123</sup> Sarah Cohen, "Zo zijn ze in het weeshuis gekomen: Sarah Cohen," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 168.

of fear they might get caught.<sup>124</sup> Addy Bader's caregiver, Mrs. Van Uffelen, asked the mayor of her town for advice. He recommended bringing Addy to the Jewish community in Antwerp. Addy ran away when Mrs. Van Uffelen left him. The Gestapo, not knowing he was Jewish, found and returned him to Mrs. Van Uffelen. However, one of them was suspicious and asked Mrs. Van Uffelen plenty of questions and returned several times. Mrs. Van Uffelen became scared and brought Addy to Home Tieffenbrunner.<sup>125</sup> The fact that Addy ran away demonstrates that he saw Mrs. Van Uffelen as a loved one and did not want to be separated again from his family. Thus, in these cases the children received a double trauma of separation.

An alternative way to end up in a Jewish orphanage was to wind up in the deportation camp in Mechelen as an orphan. When an *Alleinstehende Kind* arrived in Mechelen the camp procedure made sure the Jewish child was placed in one of the Jewish orphanages. These children had already gone through the traumatic experience of separating from their parents and staying at the Dossin Barracks. The chance to go to one of the orphanages came as a relief for them. The touching story of Dr. Fred K. fits this picture. During a round-up in Antwerp, the Gestapo arrested four year-old Fred and his mother and sent them to the train station in preparation for their transport to Dossin Barracks. While crying during the interview, Fred explains that the only thing he remembers is saying goodbye to his mother in the train station and walking by himself on the streets of Antwerp. Other memories are vaguer or he does not remember them. Marie Albert-Blum and Sylvain Brachfeld later informed him about many of the events that occurred to him. A nun from one of the religious orders in Antwerp picked him up

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<sup>124</sup> Joseph Camee, interview with Luc de Roose, 6 January, 1993.

<sup>125</sup> Addy Bader, "Hoe ze in het tehuis gekomen zijn," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 212.

and hid him in the convent. Unfortunately, the Gestapo received news about Jewish children hiding in the convent and picked up all the children. For a second time, Fred was on his way to Mechelen, now together with six other boys from the convent. Luckily, Mrs. Albert-Blum, director of the Home in Wezembeek, found Fred and the other boys in a corner of a room in poor condition where they must have been for several weeks. For a second time, Fred avoided deportation and arrived in the Home in Wezembeek. From here on Fred remembers a little more. Obviously, Fred retained the most traumatic experience and suppressed the following ongoing trauma at the convent and later the deportation camp.<sup>126</sup> Another child, Sylvain Sucholowski and his little brother arrived in Mechelen after the Gestapo caught him hiding in the castle of Basigne. During his stay at Mechelen, he saw his father but he never told the Gestapo or his little brother. Therefore, the Gestapo listed Sylvain and his brother as *Alleinstehende Kinder*, and following procedure they were placed in the orphanage at Aische-en-Refail.<sup>127</sup> Both Fred and Sylvain felt relief when leaving the deportation camp and going to the orphanage.

The final way to enter an orphanage came from the Gestapo or SIPO (*Sicherheitspolizei* or Security Police) agents dropping off Jewish children whom they had caught during raids or other seizures. The Gestapo seized families and placed the parents in prison or sent them alone to Mechelen. Sometimes the parents died or became ill which left the child behind alone. The Gestapo also discovered children in hiding places without their parents. Therefore, the Gestapo detained *Alleinstehende Kinder* which they immediately brought to the orphanages. The children arrived at the

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<sup>126</sup> Fred K., interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, 19 November, 1995.

<sup>127</sup> Sylvain S., Interview with Mr. Blum, 10 December, 2004.

orphanage in shock. They had just hours or minutes ago lost their parents forever, and now they were alone in an orphanage. Two men from the *Sicherheitsdienst* arrested Sonia Blumenstein-Kogan and her mother while on their way to get food stamps. After a night in a prison cell in Antwerp and plenty of threats, the Germans brought her to the orphanage and her mother to Mechelen. She still remembers her mother's final words in the truck at the arrival at the orphanage. Sonia asked: "Mommy, when shall we see each other again? And where?" Her mother answered: "In heaven, maybe."<sup>128</sup> The Gestapo and SIPO also found children unaccompanied on the street. Their parents had already been arrested, and the children had to hide on their own. For example, the Gestapo caught Moshe Bomasz running away from them in the street. They brought him to the orphanage in Antwerp where he rejoined his sisters.

These three arrival circumstances follow the psychological patterns of trauma and separation. All of the children's testimonies fall into one of these three categories. However, there remains one exception recited in the testimony of Herbert Kessler. His mother was arrested and one day his father never returned from finding provisions for them. Herbert debated going to the Mechelen deportation camp where he would find his father. However, a friend recommended instead turning himself in at the Tiefenbrunner orphanage. After approval of the AJB, Herbert moved to the orphanage. In this case, the child fit the definition of an *Alleinstehendes Kind*. Herbert realized he had to recover swiftly from the loss of his father. Luckily, he found help in time. It is exceptional for a child to adapt himself so quickly to a new situation and get to safety.

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<sup>128</sup> Sonia Kogan-Blumenstein, "Zo zijn ze in het weeshuis gekomen: Sonia Kogan-Blumenstein," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 168-171.

## Religion and Director's Influence

The directors of the different orphanages had a lot of influence on the atmosphere of each orphanage. The Antwerp Jewish orphanage under Mrs. Rotschild followed a strict religious regime while the Home in Wezembeek under Mrs. Albert-Blum did not impose religion. She created a Zionist influence instead.<sup>129</sup> In her autobiography on Wezembeek Mrs. Albert-Blum mentions: "In each of the five major orphanages, the director had their own different color of religion, and the orphanage followed their example. For example, Mrs. Rotschild, director of the orphanage in Antwerp, was a pious woman who respected the rules of Jewish life. She served cold meals on Saturday and two big thermoses holding warm drinks for the day. On the other hand, at Lindebeek, Rosa Jakubowicz gave at the table *seder* bread and *matzoth* from which the children could choose."<sup>130</sup>

Most of the testimonies by the orphans about Antwerp Jewish orphanage refer to the religious atmosphere created by Mrs. Rotschild. Haim Chadmon-Klajnfeld depicts a picture of the orphanage in which "there were a lot of prayers."<sup>131</sup> Herman Jeger describes Mrs. Rotschild as "a religious woman."<sup>132</sup> However, she was not the only one to influence the religious tone in the orphanage. Her father, Mr. Kugelmann, held the Jewish tradition in the orphanage high. Bekkie Altenberg remembers that he taught them about Pesach, *Benshen* after dinner, all the *Broches* before dinner, and other Jewish traditions.<sup>133</sup> Klajnfeld agrees with this testimony by Altenberg.<sup>134</sup> This

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<sup>129</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 181-183.

Albert-Blum, *Le recif de l'espoir*, 63-63.

<sup>130</sup> Albert-Blum, *Le recif de l'espoir*, 62.

<sup>131</sup> Klajnfeld, quoted in Brachfeld, 176-177.

<sup>132</sup> Herman Jeger, quoted in Brachfeld, 181.

<sup>133</sup> Bekkie Altenberg, quoted in Brachfeld, 177.

<sup>134</sup> Klajnfeld, quoted in Brachfeld, 176-177.

atmosphere became very important to many children. It gave them a feeling of importance of their Jewishness. In a way, it linked them to their ancestry and more importantly their parents. For some of them it was so significant that they did everything to obey the Jewish traditions. For example, David Weisbrot, ignoring the food rations, made sure he only ate kosher.<sup>135</sup>

This religious environment did not suit for everyone. Some did not come from such a strict orthodox background and needed escape from the religion. Mr. Martin Benzen, administrative director was the first to remark the extreme religion of the Antwerp orphanage. "It was a religious home. Sabbath was held into the details. ... Everything was according to the rules because Mrs. Rotschild was a very religious woman."<sup>136</sup> Mr. Blum, director of orphanages at the AJB, made sure he introduced a Zionist influence as a counter to the orthodox religion. Anna Ehrlich recalls the arrival of Edmond Mel from the orphanage of Wezembeek who was in charge of Zionist activities.<sup>137</sup> This disagreement about religion and adapting to the orthodoxy of Mrs. Rotschild in a way compares to the teachings at the Christian establishments where children had to familiarize to the Catholic traditions. Other children were pleasantly surprised when they arrived at an orphanage and saw that the children there openly showed their Jewishness. It was difficult for them to comprehend that on the outside they had to hide their Jewishness but inside these walls they could do whatever they wanted regarding religion. Herbert Kessler comments on his experience about his arrival at Home Tieffenbrunner: "When I entered the building at 34 Patriottenstraat, I

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<sup>135</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 185.

<sup>136</sup> Martin Benzen, "Martin Benzen," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 185.

<sup>137</sup> Anna Ehrlich, quoted in Brachfeld, 186.

had a feeling of entering an unreal world. When on the outside people persecuted Jews, when one was not allowed to wear a yarmulke, there I stood in front of a man with a yarmulke in a house where one followed Jewish tradition. This was January 1943.”<sup>138</sup>

The directors made an effort to celebrate the holidays with as much grandeur as possible. Mr. and Mrs. Tiefenbrunner made an extra effort to arrange the holidays to transpire with more sacredness. For *Chanoeka*, each child fabricated a present which was given to another child. During Sukkoth, the children built a Sukkah in the backyard.<sup>139</sup> More importantly, Mrs. Albert-Blum who did not stress religion at her orphanage mentions that at Wezembeek they celebrated religious feasts such as *Hanoukka*, *Pourim* and *Pesach*. They even had several collective bar-mitzvoth after which they served a special meal and the boys received a new outfit. The holidays probably distracted the children from the reality of life outside the orphanage.

This is as far as Mrs. Albert-Blum went regarding religion; she preferred teaching the children the values of Zionism rather than Orthodox Judaism. She did not use the synagogue during non-holidays. She did not make the children pray before or after meals. She thought they ought to have a choice if they wanted to experience a religious life or not.<sup>140</sup> Some of the children viewed this issue very differently. Moshe Bomasz who arrived from the Antwerp orphanage at Wezembeek disagreed with Mrs. Albert-Blum on the topic of religious conviction. It started from the first day he arrived at Wezembeek because he revolted when he was not served a kosher dinner. Life for Moshe became difficult at Wezembeek when the staff viewed his extreme orthodoxy as

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<sup>138</sup> Herbert Kessler , “Herbert Kessler,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 213.

<sup>139</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 213-214.

<sup>140</sup> Albert-Blum, *Le recif de l'espoir*, 63-63.

a negative influence towards the other children. Moshe suffered as he felt that Mrs. Albert-Blum took away his rights. He comments:

I had several difficulties with Mrs. Marie Albert regarding our religious beliefs. They took away my yarmulke. I made one from paper. There was a beautiful synagogue in Wezembeek. I organized prayers there and I taught some children to use the *Tefillin*. I succeeded in organizing a *Minjan*. I was ten years old. I read from the Torah. When they saw I became too serious, they closed the synagogue and banished me.<sup>141</sup>

Mrs. Albert-Blum claims the synagogue was closed because its use as a cafeteria disrupted the time schedule. This conflict demonstrates the difficulty the orphanages had in satisfying everyone. Even a great director with a lot of compassion for the children like Mrs. Albert-Blum could be regarded by the children as an authoritative person because certain leadership decisions. On the one hand, some children were attached to extreme orthodoxy and needed some major remnants of that in their life. Other children derived from a non-orthodox background and did not want to adjust to this new lifestyle. Therefore, a child could be differently affected regarding religion depending on which orphanage they resided in. Even though the directors provided as much religious freedom as possible to accommodate as many children as possible, some children received some religious inconvenience at the Jewish orphanages. Some children would view this inconvenience later on in their lives as a trauma. Of course, it is minimal compared to the religious trauma suffered by the children in a Christian establishment.

### Maintenance Issues and Daily Schedule

The staffs of the orphanages did their best to give the children a pleasant stay and home-like feel. This task included keeping the children busy, dressed, fed, and

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<sup>141</sup> Moshe Bomasz , "Moshe Bomasz," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 224.

healthy. To make this mission easier most orphanages divided the children up by age groups to have more control. Mrs. Rotschild devised a scheme in which the older children led groups of younger children.<sup>142</sup> Marie Albert-Blum basing her design on her Zionist background, grouped the children by age and gave each group the name of an animal; later on they adopted Hebrew names. She thought the orphanage should be a cocoon which protected the orphans from the world outside. "They (the children) did not know what was going on outside, they had no more contact with the exterior world." She ameliorated the interior life by intramural events. The only times the children ventured outside was for small walks in a large group with their yellow stars on. She never let a child leave alone.<sup>143</sup> Rachel Avidan who was 17 while at Wezembeek agrees with Mrs. Albert-Blum: "The children were always busy."<sup>144</sup> Giving the children no idle time provided them with no possibility to think about the scary outside world. It augmented Mrs. Albert-Blum's idea of a living in a cocoon. Testimony by the children reveals that the other orphanages created similar hard-working and active days for the children. For example, Sonia Kogan-Blumenstein, as an older child at Lasne, cared for a group of younger children whom she bathed and fed. She clearly remembers keeping the children busy at all times.<sup>145</sup> Thus, Mrs. Rotschild reinforced the idea of entertaining the children at all times as well.

Besides avoiding idle time for the children, the directors had to feed, bathe and clothe all the children. Compared to the testimonies by children hidden at Christian establishments the children at the Jewish orphanages did not complain about the

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<sup>142</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 188-189.

<sup>143</sup> Albert-Blum, *Le recif de l'espoir*, 59-60.

<sup>144</sup> Rachel Avidan, "Het leven in Wezembeek," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997), 223.

<sup>145</sup> Kogan, quoted in Brachfeld, 188-189.

nutrition or sanitation they received. Actually, most of them agree that they had plenty to eat and that every effort was made to eliminate disease. Haim Chadmon testifies about Lasne that children who arrived at the orphanage skinny and white quickly recuperated.<sup>146</sup> According to the testimony of the directors of the orphanages, the International Red Cross and *Winterhulp*<sup>147</sup> continuously supplied them with enough food. Their only worry came from trying to serve a meal as kosher as possible. However, this had very little influence on most of the children. Only two testimonies by David Weisbrot and Moshe Bomasz reveal the need to only eat kosher food.<sup>148</sup> Thus, in general no children suffered from nutritional defects or other nutritional trauma during their stay at the orphanages.

Several testimonies by children at orphanages and directors refer to the issue of clothing the children. Haim Chadmon's testimony fully demonstrates this problem: "The food was good, but the clothes were bad and unpleasant to wear. The girls who still had something from home were attached to it like *fetisjen*. The shoes we received were made out of cardboard." Throughout the orphanages the clothes passed on from the older children to the younger children. Mrs. Albert-Blum admits that she had to ask the older children to do her a favor and give the younger children their small clothes. This seems quite normal for an orphanage but it became an issue because the attachment of the children to the clothes they arrived in. She as well admits that the children were particularly attached to their clothes and shoes. She heard one boy fight for his shoes

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<sup>146</sup> Haim Chadmon, "Haim Chadmon," quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpres, 1997), 187.

<sup>147</sup> Winterhulp was an organization in Belgium and the Netherlands which during World War II arranged the distribution of extra food supplies, vitamins and clothing analog to the German *Wintehilfnwerk*.

<sup>148</sup> Bomasz, quoted in Brachfeld.  
Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 185.

and scream: “Watch out for my shoes! Don’t break them!”<sup>149</sup> The attachment by the children to their clothes represented their link to the outside world they had lost. Especially, a piece of clothing that came from home was worth protecting because it symbolized home and their parents. To keep track of the clothes, she gave each child a number to put on them. This not only helped the children but it also prevented contagious diseases because the numbers also belonged to the sheets and linen of the children.<sup>150</sup>

Disease was a major threat to the orphanage as it was to other major institutions such as large Christian establishments. Previous descriptions about disease ridden convents and Christian orphanages demonstrate the importance of sanitation and medical care. There are a few testimonies by children who became ill but they are very low in number and quickly taken care of. For example, Eva Schiff-Rotschild after an examination was found to have dysentery. She was separated from the other children in a small hospital room with the other “germ” children.<sup>151</sup> This testimony also demonstrates that the orphanage made serious attempts to stop diseases before they spread. Each orphanage had a system for regularly visiting a hospital or receiving a doctor to examine the children. Rachel Avidan remembers that at Wezembeek they went in groups with the sick children to Sint-Pieter Hospital. She testifies: “Even though it was prohibited, they visited with non-Jewish doctors. When a child needed an operation, it was hospitalized at Sint-Pieter. At the slightest chance of danger they escaped through the backdoor. Nobody was ever caught in the hospital. The children

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<sup>149</sup> Albert-Blum, *Le recif de l'espoir*, 60.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid*, 59-61.

<sup>151</sup> Eva Schiff Rotschild, “Eva Schiff Rotschild,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussel: Vubpres, 1997), 187.

also had regular examination of their lungs which was done through the *Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance* (ONE, National Organization for the Children).<sup>152</sup> The ONE worked close together under the leadership of Yvonne Nèvejean with the CDJ to help the hidden children in orphanages and other hiding places.<sup>153</sup> Thus, illness increased the fear of being caught but the instances were rare and generally caused no extensive trauma to the children. The structure of the orphanages apparently was quite able to deal with illness and disease prevention.

### Fear and Flight from the Germans

None of the Jewish orphanages were at any moment safe from round-ups and invasions by the Germans. Several arrests and round-ups at random moments kept the staff and children at the orphanage on edge. They knew they had to be ready for quick action in case the Gestapo arrived. The Home in Wezembeek became the first orphanage to suffer a major deportation of their whole population. Marie Albert-Blum, director of the Home in Wezembeek, describes in her autobiography the round-up of the Jewish orphanage. In the afternoon of October 30, 1942, the Germans arrested 58 children, Marie, and eight staff members and deported them to Mechelen. Luckily, the German authorities on the same date decided to show their *Menschlichkeit*<sup>154</sup> and conceded to return all children under 17 to the AJB by creating Jewish orphanages. Accordingly, they created the German controlled Jewish orphanage system. Another coincidence is the previously mentioned case of the seven orphans in the Mechelen deportation camp who were about to be deported. Mrs. Albert-Blum with the assistance

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<sup>152</sup> Avidan, quoted in Brachfeld, 225.

<sup>153</sup> Michman, *Belgium and the Holocaust*, 309-310.

<sup>154</sup> humanity

of the Belgian Queen Elisabeth convinced the head of the deportation camp to free all of them with the Wezembeek children. Among the children was a year and half old baby with no name, referred to as number 940.<sup>155</sup> The children survived this traumatic experience but it marked all them.

The arrest of Home Wezembeek symbolized the beginning of the fear that all other Jewish institutions lived with throughout the war. Hirsch Grunstein explains in his testimony: “We were *greifbar*, susceptible to arrest, at any moment.” Grunstein agrees with Brachfeld that the orphanage to the Germans were the anti-chamber to Mechelen, just a step in the process of genocide.<sup>156</sup> Accordingly, some children grasped the extremity of the situation they were in. The stressful situation increased depending on the location of the orphanage. The orphanage in Antwerp under the direction of Mrs. Rotschild was located next to a gathering place for *De Vlag* (the flag), a pro-Nazi newsletter. If the orphans entered the yard, the members of *De Vlag* bombarded them with rocks. This situation increased the tension for the children. In addition, the head of the Gestapo in Antwerp, Dr. Holm, decided to make Antwerp *Judenrein*. Therefore, the Jewish orphanage in Antwerp had to go in his opinion. To complete his goal, Dr. Holm held a final round-up which included prominent members of the AJB in Antwerp. The next day, Freddy Blum, head of the children’s section in the AJB, picked up Mrs. Rotschild and all the orphans to bring them to safety in the countryside at Lasne.<sup>157</sup> Marie Albert-Blum remembers the following about this traumatic event: “When everything was ready, the children could leave, there were about 60 of them. The

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<sup>155</sup> Blum-Albert, 47.

<sup>156</sup> Hirsh Grunstein, “Introduction,” quoted in Marie Blum-Albert, *Le recif de l’espoir* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires Europeenes, 1997), 13-18.

<sup>157</sup> Brachfeld, 178-180.

children and directors were much traumatized, and the situation was so confusing that the children on arrival at Lasne wore three layers of underwear and multiple dresses and shirts. They did not know if they would not end up in Mechelen.”<sup>158</sup> Mrs. Rotschild and her children were very lucky. Not only did they escape deportation but the Gestapo granted their move to Lasne. Now, the new orphanage was located in the countryside away from extreme supervision of the Germans which meant more freedom. However, the children’s fear had increased throughout the whole incident.

Eventually, the children at the different orphanages became used to the constant possibility of deportation but the fear never fully left them. In certain instances, they prepared for that ultimate day. During gymnastics in Aische-en-Refail the elder children, such as Herbert Kessler, encouraged the younger so that they would be stronger for the day they had to go to a labor camp.<sup>159</sup> Sylvain Brachfeld in *Ze Hebben Het Overleefd* concludes that most orphanages kept the children busy so that they would not reflect on their situation and a possible round-up. In his opinion, the children knew about the danger but most of them had a feeling of relative safety.<sup>160</sup> However, Edmond Mel, one of the older children, testifies that he did not forget that at any moment the Germans could be at the front steps of the orphanage. “It was my personal opinion. The younger children probably saw it differently. I had the feeling that the Germans would only temporarily allow the existence of the orphanages. I did not know what would happen afterwards. We only knew that there was a camp in Mechelen where Jews were

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<sup>158</sup> Albert-Blum, quoted in Brachfeld, 179.

<sup>159</sup> Kessler, quoted in Brachfeld, 230.

<sup>160</sup> Brachfeld, 230-231.

deported.”<sup>161</sup> The creation of a lookout at Aische-en-Refail to warn the orphanage of a possible arrival of Germans so that the children could flee on time, shows that fear was in the air. Brachfeld claims the lookout was there just for preventive psychological help to the children. This demonstrates that there was a fear among the children of a round-up by the Germans because otherwise the directors of the orphanage would not have made an attempt to calm the children.<sup>162</sup> In the end, the AJB with the help of the CDJ had to evacuate Aische-En-Refail and other orphanages which only increased the fear among the children. All children found other safe havens until the end of the war.

In conclusion, the children hidden or residing at the Jewish orphanages during the occupation had a relatively happy life and were well cared for. The children had no major complaints regarding nutrition and sanitation. However, they lived in a cocoon, and the staff of the orphanages had to protect them constantly from life outside the walls. Despite the persistent efforts of the directors and staff to diminish the fear of being caught and deported by the Germans, the children still lived in fear. Most of them had already experienced a terrible arrival at the orphanage which had caused severe trauma and kept the children on edge throughout their stay. Many children knew their parents would never return. This increased their attachment to home and objects related to it. Separation from these objects became difficult and the children clung to them. In addition, the directors pushed their own visions on the orphanage which the children reluctantly or willingly had to adopt. Life at the orphanage was tolerable and pleasant on several occasions. The staff did everything possible to help these needy children and make them feel welcome. In the end, they saved the lives of these many

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<sup>161</sup> Edmond Mel, “Edmond Mel,” quoted in Sylvain Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd* (Brussels: Vubpress, 1997).

<sup>162</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 231.

children but as at the other hiding places the children did not survive without some deal of trauma.

## CHAPTER 5

### PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS AFTERWARDS AND CONCLUSION

#### Psychological Effects

Disregarding the different traumas, the children all suffered some form of traumatic shock. There is not a single testimony that does not talk about exposure to trauma. These traumata led to life-long psychological and medical problems as adults. Renowned psychologist, Charlotte Kahn, questions the extent of this trauma because children lack the benefit of inoculation against stress and the preparedness that may reduce some adults' vulnerability to trauma. They have not even completely developed the personality structures that enable adults to cope with normal circumstances. Consequently, the trauma endured by the hidden children could be far more severe than those in adults. Kahn states that the earlier the trauma occurs in a person's life, the more devastating the effect. Thus, the extremity of these traumas still affects the Jewish community worldwide.<sup>163</sup>

Psychologist Elin Hordvik, gives the following description to the reaction by children to trauma: "A wide range of reactions, responses and emotions can be brought forth by such experiences. Such reactions might include a feeling that nothing is real, emotional apathy and confusion, as well as physical responses such as trembling, shivering or nausea. Long-term consequences include fear, vulnerability, depression and pessimism, irritability and anger, sleep disorders, extreme fatigue or difficulty

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<sup>163</sup> Kahn, *Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, 106.

concentrating, as well as the repeated and uncontrollable reliving of the event itself.”<sup>164</sup> As adults, the hidden children recognize in their testimonies the effects of their suffering. Several of them describe the permanent fear they still live with today. They also admit to other consequences such as the desperate hope for the return of their parents, showing they have not overcome their separation trauma. Others have turned their back to Judaism and gone through some religious crisis as adults. Several children had difficulty in school later on in their teenage years. Finally, several children confess to reliving the traumatic events.

The testimonies by the children almost always describe some type of lasting permanent fear in their lives; fright comes in different forms to them. A returning factor is extreme fear for their children. Dora Susswein testifies the following: “I still retained some stuff from the war. I always want to protect my children. We now live in Israel. When my daughter told me she was moving to the territories I started losing weight every week. I did not know what to do when my son went into the army.”<sup>165</sup> According to Kahn, infant traumatic experiences are stored. Unavailable to conscious recall, these early stored experiences nonetheless influence behavior, even in adulthood. Frequent, sudden terror experienced at a later age can be re-aroused by related stimuli, visual, auditory, or olfactory, and then retrieved.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, Susswein’s eating disorder and fear were triggered by the departure of her son and daughter which brought back those stored traumatic experiences. This theory explains other symptoms described by Belgian hidden children. For example, Susswein still has difficulty speaking loud, and

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<sup>164</sup> Hordvik, *Childhood and Trauma*, 23.

<sup>165</sup> Susswein, quoted in Brachfeld, 135-136.

<sup>166</sup> Kahn, *Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, 104.

suffers from claustrophobia.<sup>167</sup> June M. told her daughter to always have a passport so they could run when necessary.<sup>168</sup> Several other survivors suffer from claustrophobia, bedwetting, insomnia and extreme anguish; often these symptoms arise during major events in their lives or important occurrences. Cecilia W. mentions that critical events such as the tsunami and London subway bombings greatly distress her, she is re-traumatized.<sup>169</sup>

Religious crisis during adulthood shows up in several testimonies. Ari Livne mentions the following about his religious predicament: "I could not return to Judaism as he (his uncle) wanted. The distance was too great. I had built up a new identity. I did not cross myself anymore; I was 11 years old and received lessons in Judaism. When I was 13 I did my Bar-Mitzvah. I wanted to be religious. They thought I was a mystic nut, first Catholic, now Jewish. Since then, I have left religion behind me and approached Zionism."<sup>170</sup> Hordvik explains that during times of crisis or following traumatic experiences, religious or existential questions become particularly important to many people. Faith is then very intense and omnipresent. Children can be tremendously relieved to hear for example verses from the Torah, to pray to God, and tell Him about their concerns, their memories and their suffering.<sup>171</sup> This describes Livne's extreme religion during hiding and shortly afterwards. However, other children attribute their atheism or avoidance of religion to their suffering. They felt that they had suffered too

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<sup>167</sup> Sussweing, quoted in Brachfeld, 136.

<sup>168</sup> June M., interview with Shoah Visual History Foundation, July 13, 1995

<sup>169</sup> Cecilia W., interview with Mr. Blum, November 7, 2005.

<sup>170</sup> Livne, quoted in Brachfeld, 145.

<sup>171</sup> Hordvik, *Childhood and Trauma*, 29.

much for being Jewish. Blanche H. admits that she did not want to be Jewish anymore after the war.<sup>172</sup>

Some hidden children continued to hope for the return of their parents throughout adulthood. Psychologist Kestenberg says that child survivors, like elders, often still live in the Holocaust, yet most of them are quite capable of using their old survival strategies to adjust to their new lives. However, they never lose that attachment to the past. Kestenberg claims that memories of persecution and traumatization are repressed, denied, or disconnected from effect and from their deepest meaning.<sup>173</sup> Consequently, the survivors deny the loss of their parents and continue to attach to their hope of return. Edita A. waited for her dad for a very long time.<sup>174</sup> Kestenberg adds that when parents survived, child survivors frequently ended up being angry at them. They blamed their parents for abandoning them, or giving them away into hiding.<sup>175</sup> This demonstrates that even a blissful situation could be painful.

Several survivors mention in their testimony that they did not talk to their children or other close family members about their hiding experiences. Often, they are willing to discuss their story with strangers, such as researchers and reporters, but not their own family. According to Kestenberg, they themselves want to leave their stories to their children and grandchildren, but they cannot bring themselves to tell their stories to the children directly. She believes it is due to the fact that the children are looked upon as reincarnations of dead parents and relatives who will reproach them for their sins.<sup>176</sup> This fact is best demonstrated during the interview of George S. At the end, the

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<sup>172</sup> Blanche H., interview by Shoah Visual History Library, June 27, 1996.

<sup>173</sup> Kestenberg, *Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, 61.

<sup>174</sup> Edita A, interview with Mr. Blum, 5 January, 1998.

<sup>175</sup> Kestenberg, *Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, 61.

<sup>176</sup> Kestenberg, *Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, 59.

interviewer asks him if his children know his story. He answered: “No, my son is not interested, he lives in Israel. My daughter she is interested. We told her some. But not everything like now. If she asks the questions I will tell her everything.”<sup>177</sup> Thus, George will avoid telling his story to his children until they demand it. The silence to their families shows how much hidden child survivors still suffer. Unfortunately, the trauma done to them cannot be undone. However, psychologists have supported the benefit of telling their stories to others. For many of them it is a self-healing process in which for the rest of their lives they will mourn their lost childhood.

### Conclusion

This thesis has established the major different traumas the hidden children in Belgium could receive during their hiding experience. Most child survivors remembered some major traumas common to all Jewish hidden children in Belgium. All of the children had to live in constant fear of betrayal and being caught. They had to live on the edge everywhere at every hiding place. In some cases that fear became reality. Every hiding situation contained some good and bad people. Consequently, rescuers had a major influence on the hiding experience of the children. All the survivors had to adjust to a new environment that was different from their home situation before the war. No hiding place, the Christian establishment, the private family, or the Jewish orphanage could prevent the child from escaping traumatization. These distresses constitute the general repetitive traumata as previously described by psychologists Hordvik and Kestenberg.

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<sup>177</sup> George S., interview by Mr. Blum, 7 January, 2005.

Nonetheless, the hiding place thoroughly influenced other types of trauma. For example, the main trauma for children at Christian establishments became religion. Day in and out they had to adjust to and live with the Christian religion which was very different from theirs and often practiced in very extreme forms. They often sustained trauma through bad nutrition, sanitation and medical care. Similarly, the children hidden in private families, during hiding they had to adopt a totally new identity and forget their old self. However, this came harder to hidden children in Christian establishments because they lived in a communal atmosphere. The children in private families had to deal with their parents or adjust to a new family during hiding. They experienced more extreme forms of hiding since they often could not blend into a communal group such as a convent. When rescuers had little or no supervision of their activities with the child, they were more capable of physical and emotional abuse of the child. As demonstrated, in some cases this abuse could be severe. The most particular trauma to children hidden in private families was their eventual separation from their adoptive family and return to their family. This could be a very traumatic experience depending on the child and the adoptive situation. Finally, the children at the Jewish orphanages lived under a more constant fear in comparison to the other hiding locations. They knew how close they were to deportation at the hands of the Germans. Their main trauma derived from their arrival experience and the influence of directors of the orphanages. Their whole hiding experience was marked by the fact that they knew they were orphans and that after all of it there would be no normal life for them.

All of these traumas are of equal value. More research into the lives of the hidden children in Belgium and their testimonies might reveal more traumas. However,

these make up the major traumas experienced by these children, and they best explain life at the hiding places for the Jewish children. This is not an easy topic for daily research. It confronts the researcher every day with the pain and sorrow of these children. Sylvain Brachfeld, a hidden child survivor, said the following about his research: "For years I have listened to the stories of the survivors of the Shoah and every time I relive the horrors that they knew, over and over I see how they were marked for life."<sup>178</sup> This statement is very true, but it is not a reason to neglect this part of history. The history of these children should be heard and told. General comprehensive studies on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany should not overlook them. Their legacy still affects the Jewish community worldwide today.

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<sup>178</sup> Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 239.

APPENDIX

LIST OF TESTIMONIES BY HIDDEN CHILDREN, HIDING LOCATIONS, AND  
SOURCES

#	last name	first name	age	sort of hiding	Where	source
1	Alster-Muller	Ruth	1936	Private Family	Brussels/ Schaarbeek	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
2	Altenberg	Bekkie	?	Jewish Orphanage		Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
		Annie	?			
		Frieda	?			
		Micheline	?			
3	Amiram	Regine	?	Private Family	?	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
4	Amiram	Zvi	1933	Private Family	Dinant	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
5	Amitai-Lowenthal	Sarah	1929	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Mortsel	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
6	Anghouli	Edita	1930	Christian Establishment	Overisk (?)	Video Archive Blum
				Christian Establishment	St. George	
7	Aybes	Leopold	1932	Private Family	Waterloo	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Christian Establishment	La Roche	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	
				Christian Establishment	Herent	
8	Bloch	Fee	1931	Private Family	Antwerp/ Petit-Han	Van binnen weent mijn hart
				Christian Establishment	Durbuy	
				Private Family	Lustin	
9	Blum-Albert	Marie	?	Director at Jewish Orphanage	Wezembeek Ophem	Le Recif de l'espoir
10	Blumenstein-Kogan	Sonia	?	Jewish Orphanage		Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
11	Bomasz	Rosa	?	Jewish Orphanage		Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
12	Bomasz	Moshe	?	Jewish Orphanage		Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
13	Burk	Jeanine	?	Private Family		Holocaust Survivors: Jeanine Burk's Story
14	David	Nicole	1936	Christian Establishment	Ardennes	The Hidden Children
				Private Family	Profondeville/ Besine	
				Private Family	Saint Servais	
15	Davids	Louis	1928	Private Family	Brussels	Van Binnen Weent Mijn Hart
				Christian Establishment	Namen	
				Christian Establishment	Dinant	
16	Defonseca	Misha	1936 ?	Private Family	Brussels ?	Surviving the Wolves: The most extraordinary story
17	Dinur-Grossman	Amalia	1932	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
18	Flinker	Moshe	1926	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	Children in the Holocaust and WWII

	Last Name	First Name	Age	Sort of Hiding	Where	Source
19	Frankfort-Liebman	Therese	1933	Christian Establishment	?	Video Archive Blum
				Fled to Spain		
20	Fuchs	Nahum	1934	Christian Establishment	Beloeil	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
21	Ghilman	Vera	1932	Christian Establishment	Charleroi	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	St. Jos	
				Private Family	St. Jos	
				Christian Establishment	Chimay	Video Archive Blum
				Christian Establishment	Erwps-Kwerps	
				Private Family	Dillbeek	
22	Grun	Baruch	1929	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussel	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Christian Establishment	Bastogne	
				Private Family	location unknown	
23	Gutmacher-Ohringer	Michal	1930	Private Family	Assenede	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Private Family	Gent	
24	Hanegbi	Shlomo	1934	Christian Establishment	Maaseik	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
25	Heller	Clara	1930	Private Family	Antwerp	Jaren Van Angst: Het Ware Verhaal
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	Clara's Story as told to Joan Adess Grossman
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Antwerp	
26	Jacobsohn-Susswein	Dora	1940	Private Family	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Private Family w. Jewish Family		
27	Jerushalmi	Jacques	1936	Christian Establishment	Beloeil	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Christian Establishment	Sint-Truiden	
28	Kantor	Rina	1934	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	The Hidden Children
29	Kisliuk	Ingrid	1930	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	Unveiled Shadows: The Witness of a Child
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	outside Brussels	

	Last Name	First Name	Age	Sort of Hiding	Where	Source
30	Kemp	Nochtan	1934	Private Family w. Jewish Family	La Louviere	Video Archive Blum
31	Klajnfeld	Herman	1929	Jewish Orphanage	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Lasne	
32	Krascuki	Israel	1931	Christian Establishment	Schaltin	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
33	Landy	Ava	1938	Christian Establishment		The Hidden Children
				Christian Establishment		
34	Langerman	Asher	1936	Christian Establishment	Herve	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Private Family	Retinne	
35	Lewkowicz	Fanny	1932	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Rincansard (?)	Video Archive Blum
				Christian Establishment	Ardennes	
36	Lieberman-Ehrlich	Anna	1928	Jewish Orphanage	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Lasne	
37	Liebmann	Lem	1936			Video Archive Blum
38	Liebman	Marcel	1929	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	Nee Juif: Une Enfance Juive Pendant La Guerre
				Christian Establishment	Brussels	
				Christian Establishment	Schaltin	
39	Livne	Ari	1936	Private Family	St. Lamberts-Woluwe	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
40	Mahler	Charles	1936	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Begijnendijk	Van binnen weent mijn hart
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Begijnendijk	
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Aurodenberg	
41	Markowicz	Jacob	1939	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Anderlecht	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Ardennes	
42	Rajszejt	Jaques	1942	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Anderlecht	Video Archive Blum
43	Rakowski	Marie-Claire	1943	Private Family	?	The Hidden Children
44	Ramet	Nathan	1925	Caught and Deported		Van binnen weent mijn hart
45	Rechter-Levy	Edith	1930	Private Family	Brussels	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
46	Rubenstein	Ruth	1937	Christian Establishment		The Hidden Children
				Private Family	subarbs Brussels	
47	Scherber	Dora				Video Archive Blum
48	Schwalb-Scheiner	Editch	?	Private Family	Machelen	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
49	Schwarzbart	Paul A.	1933	Christian Establishment	Jamoigne	Breaking The Silence
50	Sluszny	Regina	1939	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Hemiksem ?	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family	Schelle	
51	Sorenson	Marie	1935	private family	Different locations	Coming of Age in the Holocaust

	Last Name	First Name	Age	Sort of Hiding	Where	Source
51	Sorenson	Marie	1935	christian establishments	different locations	Coming of Age in the Holocaust
52	Suchowolski	Georges	1936	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Mayon/ Durbuy	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family	Vauxchevanne ?	
53	Suchowolski	Sylvain	1929	Private Family	Mayon (Namur)	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family	Basigne	
				Dossin Kazerne	Mechelen	
				Jewish Orphanage	Aische en Refail	
54	Tencer-Schechter	Anna	?	Private Family	Zuun	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Private Family	?	
				Christian Establishment	Ter Hulpe	
55	Tencer	Iola	1933	Private Family	Zuen	Video Archive Blum
				Private Family	Zuen	
				Christian Establishment	Malaise	
56	Wolf	Cecilia		Christian Establishment	Audergem	Video Archive Blum
57	Brachfeld	Sylvain	1932	Private Family w. Jewish Family	Bois-de-Villers	Private Interview by Email
				Christian Establishment	Verviers	
58	Lambrecht	Robert	1936	Christian Establishment	Gilly	Interview by Luc De Roose
				Christian Establishment	Dilbeek	
58	Lambrecht	Robert	1936	Christain Establishment	Schaltin/Jamoigne	Interview by Luc De Roose
59	Camee	Joseph	1931	Jewish Orphanage	Wezembeek	Interview by Luc De Roose
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	?	
				Christian Establishment	Schaltin/Jamoigne	
60	Silberman	Lilly	1938?	Christian Establishment	?	Personal Web site
				Christian Establishment	Bruges	
61	Haber	Blanche	1934	Private Family	Namur	Shoah foundation by Fay Nicoll
				Christian Establishment	Serais-La-Longue	
				Christian Establishment	Namur	
62	Weiss	Georges	1933	Christain Establishment	?	Shoah foundation by Marie Kaufmann
				Private Family	?	
63	Meyer	June	1929	Christian Establishment	?	Shoah foundation by Naomi Rappaport
				Christian Establishment	Brussels	
				Christian Establishment	Brussels	
64	Bachner	Ruth	1930	Private Family	Zuen	Shoah foundation by Leslie Fass
				Christian Establishment	Ruiselede	

	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sort of Hiding</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Source</b>
65	Kader	Fred	1938	Christian Establishment	Antwerp	Shoah foundation by Sheryl Tatelman
				Jewish Orphanage	Wezembeek-Ophem	
66	Geyer	Jacques	1929	Prison	Liege	Shoah foundation by Sylvia Messeri
				Christian Establishment	near french border	
67	Aronson	Yvonne	1939	Christian Establishment	Brussels	Shoah foundation by Donna Puccini
				Private Family w. Jewish Family	Brussels	
				Private Family	Audergem	
68	Kessler	Herbert	?	Jewish Orphanage	Brussels	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Aische en Refail	
69	Jeger	Herman	?	Jewish Orphanage	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Lasne	
70	Cohen	Sarah	?	Private Family	Antwerp	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Antwerp	
71	Bader	Addy	1931	Private Family	Kappelen	Ze Hebben Het Overleefd
				Jewish Orphanage	Brussels	
				Jewish Orphanage	Wezembeek	
72	Grunstein	Hirsch	?	Jewish Orphanage	Wezembeek	Le Recif de l'espoir

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