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Terry Lee Howard (TH): Today is May 22nd, 2018, I'm here with Simone Andree Gyslaine, that's G-y-s-l-a-i-n-e D'Addario. She was born in Poitiers, France in March—on March 30th, 1937. The Germans invaded France in 1941. Simone, why do you like sports?

Simone Andree D'Addario (SD): Simply because my father was a fencing master. We were always on the road with competitions. I think I learned competition before I learned anything else.

TH: On the road with—for competition, could you explain? I mean, you travelled in France?

SD: We travelled in France with my dad and his students whenever there was a competition somewhere.

TH: So, he taught fencing too?

SD: Oh yes, he was a fencing master.

TH: Okay.

SD: He was a master of the three arms. We called them (loud beep) the foil—. That just shut down?

TH: [Sounds of TH checking the equipment] Let me see. (inaudible) It's still recording. I don't know what that means.

SD: He was a master of three foils. That means the foil, the first arm, is just a *fleuret*¹ [blossom]. We call it—I don't know what you call it in French—in English. I think it is the same: foil, épée, and saber.

TH: Three types of swords?

SD: Yes.

TH: What was the first one? The—

SD: The foil.

TH: F-o—foil?

SD: Yeah. Yeah. That's the first—the beginners always start with a foil. Some of them go further into the foil, because there are very big competitions, like the Olympics, with a foil. And the épée, épée is a heavier piece of equipment. And then the saber. My father was a master of the three.

TH: And he had how many students?

SD: Oh, he had a school. But, at the time, he taught students—just plain students. Later on, he taught, you know, other children.

TH: Okay. Well—so, was that his vocation? Is that how he managed—?

SD: No. He was, he was—he entered military school right after World War I. Military school in Paris. And in the sports, he was mostly directed towards sports education, so he became an education—what do you call this in high school? Uh—

¹This refers to the knob or material affixed to the end the blade in order to blunt it.

TH: Coach?

SD: Coach for fencing and for all sports in school levels, okay? And then, as the year went by, you could not earn enough money just as being a professor or a teacher of any kind, so he was also—he was still under the military supervision, okay? Until World War II.

TH: After—after college?

SD: After college. He went to military school, so he stayed in school—in the army, until World War II.

TH: Was he, like, in the reserves with—was he part of the reserves? (both talk)

SD: No, no, no, no. He was an active—.

TH: Active?

SD: Yeah. But, in addition to doing the duties of a soldier, he also did the duties of sports and soldier.

TH: Was he an officer?

SD: Yes. He was *sous-officier* [non-commissioned officier].

TH: *Sous-officier*. (telephone rings) What—could you explain what that is?

SD: That's between the regular army and the big cheese. (SD laughs) Whatever you call them.

TH: But, that was his rank?

SD: That was his rank. Um-hm.

TH: Okay. And can you say that again? And spell that?

SD: *Sous-officier*. S-o-u-s—*officier*—o-f-f-i-c-i-e-r—officer.

TH: Oh, okay. So, that would be equivalent to just an officer?

SD: Yeah. Or maybe—maybe—over here—maybe—what is a sergeant, but pretty high to the sergeant?

TH: Staff sergeant or—?

SD: Yeah. The big one. Yeah.

TH: Okay. All right, and then—so he was full-time military?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And his—on the side he was a teacher?

SD: No, no. He taught the army—the soldiers.

TH: Oh, he taught soldiers?

SD: Yeah. Oh yeah.

TH: What did he teach?

SD: Until World War I.

TH: What was his—?

SD: Fencing.

TH: Oh, fencing?

SD: He would teach—do you know they go through courses? And at the time—at the time they had horses.

TH: So, the cavalry?

SD: Yeah, yeah. My father was in Saint-Cyr², the military school—sport branch of Saint-Cyr. Saint-Cyr is a very important school. It's like West Point in America. They picked up—they did—West Point copied from Saint-Cyr. West Point is a child of Saint-Cyr.

TH: Spell Saint-Cyr.

SD: Saint. S-a-i, a-a-a—

TH: S-i—?

SD: No. S-a-i—

TH: Okay. S-a-i—?

SD: —i-n, n-n-n—

TH: S-a-i—?

SD: N. And Cyre. C-i-r-e—Sain Cire [Saint-Cyr].

²École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr is the premier military academy in France and participates in student exchanges with both West Point and Sandhurst Military Academy. It was created in 1802 by order of Napoleon Bonaparte.

TH: The equivalent to West Point.

SD: This is equivalent to West Point school.

TH: And it was—it was a military officer training school before West Point?

SD: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, way before World War I. (SD laughs) In the 1800s, this school existed.

TH: Did they have competition with West Point? Did they ever compete with other military—?

SD: Oh, I'm sure they did. I don't know about it. But, at the time, West Point was not, you know, really going strong yet. (coughs) Although, my father was offered a job there.

TH: To teach?

SD: To teach. Yeah.

TH: To teach—?

SD: To teach fencing and sports.

TH: To teach—offered a job—?

SD: To be a coach at *Saint-Cyr*. At West Point, for sports in general. And my mother refused because she just had a baby, and it was a boat trip, and she would not come with him. So, he turned down the position. Always regretted it.

TH: Okay.

SD: And when he came to visit here, he was invited to do the color—the color—every night they have the color guard.

TH: Color guard.

SD: My father was invited one night, and so I drove him. We drove to West Point for him to do—to do the color guard.

TH: How did West—the people at West Point know about your father?

SD: Because he was a fencing master, and he had been requested to teach there and turned it down because my mother and—she was so young and wouldn't come with a baby three months old, you know. There are—this—the whole idea of leaving your family, in the 1920s, that was a very big thing, you know. Boats were not always arriving. (SD laughs)

TH: This was before you were born?

SD: Oh yeah. My brother was ten years older than I was. So, he was—he was just three months old. He must have been in the early '20s.

TH: Okay. Just after World War I, in early '20s, 1920s.

SD: After World War I, yeah. And my father always regretted that. Always. I mean, I did not realize until I was grown up and living here. And seeing him at the color guard that night and tears coming down his face. I knew he had, you know, very many regrets of not—of anything done earlier in his life.

TH: I see.

SD: Yeah, that was his biggest pleasure, when this happened.

TH: Do you recall his parents? Your father's parents?

SD: I recall my grandmother. My grandfather was already dead. I think my sister was about six years old when my grand—just a few years before I was born my grandfather died in an accident. And so, I never met him. But, I remember my grandmother, she was [a] tough little woman, but very tough. I didn't like her very much. She never had any, you know, affectionate ways with her.

TH: She wasn't warm?

SD: Oh no.

TH: Now, were they in—

SD: Pretty cool. Even to dad.

TH: —Poitiers?

SD: No, no. They were in the countryside. My father came from the farmers—a farm family. And my—I had an uncle, a big—an uncle from my father, but I didn't know him very much.

TH: Brother? Your father's brother?

SD: No. He was an older man, and he was an officer in our French Army. And he saw that [there was] the possibility that my father could make the military school and get out of the farming thing, because you—my father was not, at all, a farmer. He hated it. He hated his life as a young man, I would assume. Doing well in school, but just hated the work. Coming home or skipping school to do the work with dad, you know. So, it was very obvious that he would never make a good farmer, so my uncle tried to—got his scores at school and everything, and got him in the school at *Saint-Cyr*. And so—.

TH: So, your grandmother was—stayed on the farm?

SD: Oh yeah. But, after that, when my grandfather died, everything was gone. I guess she sold everything. I have no idea what happened. So, she—I saw her during World War II because I would go on vacation there, you know. But I had another grandmother that was much different, and loving and everything, so—.

TH: That would be your mother's mother?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Tell me about her.

SD: I went away. I ran away from her. When my grandmother—paternal grandmother—I ran away from her house with my bag and everything. I was on vacation at her house, and she did something. She offended me very, very personally.

TH: How old were you then?

SD: Oh, I must have been about six years old—five or six. (TH laughs) And she called—she ran to a neighbor who had a horse and a cart and said, “My granddaughter is running away. She’s going to the other village where her grandmother is. Can you follow her so nothing happens to her on the way, you know?” That was during the war. So, I must have been about four years old—five years—at least five or six years old. I ran away and I was never going back to her house, and I never did. (TH laughs)

TH: Do you remember what she did to offend you?

SD: No, I can’t. I can’t say that. It’s very personal. (laughs)

TH: Okay.

SD: But, she did something and offended me in front of other children, and I never could swallow that because I was not at fault. So, I went anyway. So, this man followed me [and] I didn’t realize.

TH: So, you packed your bag?

SD: I packed my bag, and I walked all the way to the other village—maybe six [or] five miles—six [or] seven miles away. And my other grandmother, of course, was happy to take me. And the guy went back to my paternal grandmother and said, “She’s okay. She’s staying with Virginie and she’s fine.”

TH: So, your maternal grandmother—was she—were they from a farm family as well?

SD: No. Maybe she was, but I don't know. Obviously, she was from a very good family because her name—but I don't her last name before she was married. I know Migné. She was married to a Migné. But, before that, I don't know. But someone just made some research and I have an ancestor on the Arc de Triomphe. His name is on the Arc de Triomphe. He saved Napoleon's life during a battle.

TH: Now, who was this? A great relative?

SD: I don't know. I never heard of him before. Suddenly, we own—we have—my grand—my maternal grandmother's name on the—at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

TH: (laughs) Okay.

SD: Her ancestor or maybe two generations behind her.

TH: What was her name? And what was the name—?

SD: Oh my god, I don't know. This is the problem. (laughs) I'm waiting to get more information from my niece, who's doing all this. And I had a call from Paris, and they wouldn't tell me who was doing the research.

TH: Okay.

SD: So, they even—the mystery things—

TH: Well, when you went to the other village, did your maternal grandmother live in a village or out in the country.

SD: Yeah. She lived in a village. She was then, you know, at a certain age. And she was retired, but she still lived in a hotel. Her husband built a hotel at the end of the village. It was very, very, very, very pretty. Just a big building, but in the back, she had the ovens to do the bread and all this, you know. No running water, except in the house. They did this just before the war. They ran the water in the house, but otherwise she would do her bread all the way in the back. They had ovens.

TH: Outdoor ovens?

SD: Not outdoor. It was a building, very low building. And you'd go in—and we would go in the morning and put the bread in there. She'd started the fire, certainly before I was up. And then on the other side of that building was the places where they put their carriages, and then the place for the horses. And they would stop. They would be mostly salesmen that would do the villages in there. And they would stop over at night and eat. She would feed them, and they would go to bed and go back—go away in the morning, you know. And my grandfather must have been some—I never met him either, because he died before I was born. But my grandfather was a musician. He did construction because he had to earn money to support eight children and a wife. (laughs) But he would entertain the customers.

TH: At the hotel?

SD: He was a fiddler. He fiddled at all the weddings. We—I have a book. I have to find it for you. He fiddled at all the weddings, so he was fed for free and he drank all he could. (TH laughs) And every night after he entertained the company, mom—my grandmother would do all the work, and my mother, of course. I'm sure, she was the oldest. And my grandfather would go up to bed, and on his way up to bed, he would write music pieces on the wall. (TH laughs) And in the morning, the children's job was to cover the wall with the white paint, where papa had written his music the night before.

He must have been quite a guy because everybody smiles and laughs every time I talk about—they talk about him, so—. But I don't know—I don't know where he came from or Migneau. It's a big family in Vendée, I guess. But he was—he must have been quite a guy because my mother said, "You have no idea how many coats of paint are on those walls. How many pieces of music that could be very important now" she said. (laughs) So, I had some funny, funny relatives here, [for example] our grandfather. But I never met him. I wish I had.

TH: So, your grandmother ran the hotel herself?

SD: She ran the hotel herself. She had a big room with big tables, you know, and people would sit at this big table. And then, the kitchen where we always sat, had a huge chimney. You could stand in it. And we would cook—we would cook in the ashes. During the war—

TH: In the chimney ashes?

SD: Yeah, in the chimney—you know, after the big fire was—would warm up the whole place. That's all she had. But, during the war, we had no wood. We had nothing. You know, to start the fire. It was difficult, so we went and picked wood that would be dying and try to dry it and everything. And, in addition to this, we went into the fields and picked up cow manure. We would turn it over—my grandmother would pay so much to the farmer. She would turn over the cow manure to dry up a couple more days, and then we would go pick it up, and that was our fire. That was what we fed our fire with in the countryside, you know.

TH: Okay.

SD: Because wood was difficult to get. The Germans would take anything that you cut down. They would take for themselves, you know.

TH: So, you don't recall anything before the age of four?

SD: I don't recall anything until the day the Germans entered Paris. I was washing the dishes in the sink.

TH: Now, you with your family, lived in a house in Poitiers.

SD: On—in a military compound, yes.

TH: On a military compound in Poitiers?

SD: Yeah. My father, of course, left that day. He was still with us, until noon time. He was washing his salad. He always made a fresh lettuce for lunch. And he was washing this in a garden. Always washed it, and he was shaking it with basket, you know. I remember him doing that. My mother picked me up, went to the window and called him and said, "Papa they are in Paris."

TH: How did she know?

SD: Because we had the radio going.

TH: Okay.

SD: “They are in Paris.” He dropped the basket right there and then he came in the house, and they said something to each other. He went to the bedroom, picked up his piece of luggage that he had ready, I guess, [and] came back. I remember him kissing me. My sister was in school, my brother as well.

TH: Now, how old were your brother and sister?

SD: My brother was ten years older than I was, so he was already—

TH: He was 14.

SD: He was about 12—12 or 13 years old. And he was in military school, so we had no control over that—about that. And my sister was at school. She was seven years older than I was. So, he kissed me, I remember. Kissed mama. She went to the door with him. I went back doing my dishes, that I remember. And after that it’s like a black hole. Can I explain that? I don’t have any memories of anything else for days. And then people leaving the building. I remember neighbors going away. You know, the ladies going away with the children to the country, I guess—to their families, you know, because the Germans were coming—were there. They drove in right away—that same—I don’t know if it’s the same day. But, the first week, they drove in the camp—the military compound, and they started taking the apartments. You know, the officers moved in, of course. So I don’t remember very much of anything for quite a while, until the Germans started giving us orders to do this and that. We had to—we had to walk around with a mask—a gas mask on our neck. That was heavy stuff, and I was a little girl.

TH: That—why was that required?

SD: I guess they were afraid of an attack—a gas attack or something. I don’t know—bombing? They insisted that we wear those all the time. At the camp and going to school.

TH: So, is this school—you still went to school?

SD: I still went to school.

TH: Okay. And your mother—?

SD: Maybe—maybe—somedays my mother didn't send us to school, but we went to school. I remember going to school because it was far. My sister had—we had a stroller. She put me in a stroller to walk to school. So, that was far—it was—that was Sainte Anne. It's still there. I saw it this time.

TH: Your—the school?

SD: The school I went to. Yeah.

TH: Okay, you just came back from France?

SD: Yeah. Just came back about four weeks ago. Um-hm.

TH: Did you go to—?

SD: I happened to be in the same city because now my daughter lives there, so—.

TH: In Poitiers?

SD: In Poitiers, yeah. She teaches in Poitiers. She lives in a little countryside place, but she teaches in Poitiers, so she—you know. Automatically, you have to go and look at things different. It's changed a lot.

TH: Some of the building are the same?

SD: But the old buildings are the same. The churches [and] the cathedrals are the same.

TH: People change but not the buildings.

SD: No.

TH: Unless they're destroyed.

SD: And it's cobblestone city. All cobblestones. It is so beautiful. Around the place, *du marché* [the marketplace], where—used to be an open market, you know, with everybody opening food markets and all that. Now, it is a covered market, but around it all the stones, the cobblestones are still there. I walked in the same—on the same stones I did when I was a child.

TH: Did it take you back to your childhood?

SD: Yes. A little bit. Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Yeah. It does. You know, those things stay. Maybe the stores change, and everything changes, but the stones are there. I mean, this—I went to the cathedral of—she teaches on the same—in the same area, and I did speak to her to classroom or classes. And that day I walked—what—you know, she was teaching another class, and so I had to walk around for a little while, and then I went to speak to the class. But, I was walking around, and there is the church where I heard—we had a singer in France, right off, during the war called—Tino Rossi³. And he used to be a singer. He could've been an opera singer if he wanted to. He had such a voice. And he sang, at one Christmas Eve, during World War II.

I remember my mother—we had friends that had a drug store right there, on that particular area. And they were right across the street from the cathedral, and they said, Let's go and listen to a concert by Tino Rossi. Well, I was a little girl, but I knew all the ladies [were] excited around, when they said the word. So, of course I wanted to hear him, too. And I went there and he sang the "Ave Maria". Oh, and it was absolutely beautiful. Since then, this is something that makes me cry every time. So, I have my little tear right there, just remembering, you know. It's—how strange life is.

TH: So, while the Germans were there in your village—

SD: Not village, it's a city.

TH: —in the city of Poitiers.

SD: Poitiers. Yeah. Was a very major city.

TH: I think you mentioned once before that the regular German Army was—

³Prior to WWII, Rossi was a successful singer in the French speaking world, but it was during the occupation of France by the Germans that his film career reached its peak.

SD: Human beings.

TH: —were regular people.

SD: Regular people. Of course, they had to follow the orders. But, you know, we lived with them all the time. I mean, because we were so close. My mother never moved out. They were not going to make her move. (laughs) She was not giving up her furniture for anybody, mostly not the Germans. (laughs) But, no—anyway—we had no choice. We couldn't go to the family. We wanted stay near dad. We knew dad was in the area, you know. He was in the Maquis⁴ at time, but we knew he was there.

So, anyway, we were with the Germans all the time, so they were familiar faces, and they were very friendly, you know. They—I think they felt sorry. Some of them felt sorry doing what they were doing. They had children at home. They were concerned about their home as well. That was my feel—that was my personal feeling. And my mother wouldn't say hello to them, but I did. I was a child with—you know. And if they had—well, not good food. But they gave me chicken to eat when they were done—the little leg of chicken. That was wonderful, I never—you know, we didn't get that stuff. We couldn't get it, we had tickets to buy just bread and the necessary one meat, one week. We had three tickets for the month for the meat or fish. I didn't know what bananas were until I grew up. Bananas were, for me, dried up in the sun, black, and you'd chewed on it. That's what bananas looked for me—look.

TH: So, what's so—

SD: But they were—that's not the German themselves that were bad, that was the elite army: the SS⁵. They were out to kill anybody. I don't think they thought anything about killing anyone. I just—I—that was the feeling you had, the way they looked at you. They could have had as much as just put the—what they did to a little boy—but I mean, they could have asked—you know, you knew. But, the army—their [own] army were afraid of them. They were afraid. The minute the SS were coming to the camp, you knew the difference. You could feel the difference of tension. The soldiers were, you know, they didn't look at you with a smile anymore because the SS were there. And every time they came—or they had an office with an SS officer right there, all the time, but—every time they came, the camp changed attitude. You could feel it.

TH: Now, did they know your father was in the army? Did they ever ask your mom about your father?

⁴Band of underground, guerrilla fighters during World War II

⁵*Schutzstaffel*, which translates literally to protection echelon. This unit was responsible for policing action, central security, intelligence and mass extermination.

SD: They never questioned anybody in the camp. Never. We were pretty free to leave, go back and forth. They never bothered us. They bothered us a few times, but it was because we were doing crazy things, sometimes with a—on the ground, you know, for information. And they, once in a while, they would go down the cellar and go through the cellars, and check all the cellars of all the little places.

TH: To see if you were hiding somebody?

SD: Someone.

TH: And what were they—?

SD: They were such idiots, really in a sense, because my father being where he was—we had a family. One night we got [a] cousin to visit—coming to visit. We got a note, and mother says, “You have cousins coming to visit from Vendée. So, you’ll go to school with them for a few days.” [I said] “Okay mom, you know, cousins.” So, they come. They come in the night. There’s a man, a woman, and two kids. Well, we start calling them our cousins. The next morning, we go to school with the two cousins. The nuns are already—they already know. So, how do they know? I don’t know, okay.

TH: This is a catholic school?

SD: It’s a catholic school. The nuns are waiting for us. They stay with us for about—I would think it was Christmas, so they would stay—they stayed at least two weeks with us. In and out of going in the garden. Picking up a salad or something. My mother had a beautiful garden in back, and the cousin did some gardening too, I think. You know, they were cousins.

TH: Were they yours—?

SD: They were Jews. We were passing a family, a Jewish family, waiting to get to Spain. They were right there in front of the—on their nose. I mean, in their face, all the time.

TH: Now what about the parents?

SD: But that was the best way.

TH: Did the parents stay in the basement or—?

SD: No, no, no, no. I'm telling you, we went to the garden. He would pick up the vegetables. He was a cousin from the country that [was] visiting on vacation. He was the one that made me my first Christmas tree. I never knew what a Christmas tree was before. We just put our little shoes at the chimney, you know. And we only had one chimney in the house, so we put all our shoes there in my parent's bedroom—I remember. But that Christmas, he made us a Christmas tree in the middle of the dining room table, and I was so excited. And he decorated it and everything. The Germans didn't say anything.

TH: And how—they were there maybe two weeks?

SD: They were there approximately—I can't tell you for sure. But, we were pretty—pretty much friends and you know—way back then. And what I found out afterwards is that my mom spent hours brushing the damn star⁶ off their clothes because when they were given that star to put on, they were supposed to sew it, you know, so that it would always be on their clothes—on the outer clothes. But they sewed it so beautifully my mother had a hard time taking all the stitches off, because then you had the imprint of it.

TH: The star shaped imprint.

SD: So, she used—I remember she mixed a couple of—I don't know what she used. It was very strong. It stunk. And she brushed it, and brushed it, until you couldn't see the star anymore. But she did that on their clothes. And mother told me that afterwards, but as, you know, as a child I remember the Christmas tree, how nice they were. And one day they were gone. One morning we got up [and] they were not here anymore. How they left, during the night, I'm sure that's—dad got them an out.

TH: Did your father—do you know what your father was doing? He just left. Was he with the French underground?

SD: When he left he was—when he left he was with the army.

⁶Nazi Germany resurrected the practice of forcing Jews to wear identifying badges as a means to isolate and mark them as different (and inferior) to everyone else. All Jewish men, women and children over the age of six were mandated to wear a star of David on all of their outer clothing.

TH: The French army.

SD: You know, they were retreating to free France. Okay? So, when he left, he went—he joined his battalion, and he left. They emptied the whole place. (laughs) They were gone, and trucks and everything. And then—I can't say if it's a year or less than a year—one Sunday, Mama said, "We're going for a picnic." Whether you go on a picnic, you know—I mean, we used to go on picnics all the time, so we're all excited. And she packs whatever we have, and I remember her putting two or three old brie cheeses that she had gotten from other people. And she got it all in that case, and we carried out little bags, you know, and we walked because you have to walk to the country.

TH: That's your mother, and your sister, and you?

SD: And me, yeah.

TH: Your brother was off—?

SD: My brother was not. My brother was in school.

TH: Military school?

SD: Yeah. In free France.

TH: Okay.

SD: Where he was taught German, not French anymore.

TH: Ah. They had German teachers, came in and took over?

SD: Taught German. So anyway, we walked in the woods, and we're setting up in the woods and suddenly my dad is here. I hadn't see him for so long, you know. I can't [remember] how long, I'm so tiny. I'm some cute little thing, you know. And so, I remember we had the picnic with Papa, and then they showed us this—they did, what they used—well now you use them for doing

—you know, you put it—it’s a kind of wood that has been burned, and they—now we start our grills with it. We—

TH: Charcoal?

SD: Charcoal! They were doing charcoal to help run the cars and the trucks. You know, the trucks—it worked on that. You heat up the fuel, and it was set up next to trucks. During the war, they didn’t have any gasoline or anything, so that’s how they ran the trucks. And my father was living in one of those smoking places where they made that charcoal. He was living in the middle of that.

TH: He was living in the middle of it?

SD: Yeah. He had a bed. I mean, a bed—you know, a cot.

TH: This was near where you were having your picnic?

SD: Yeah.

TH: So, he was out—?

SD: In the woods. And so, he was living there.

TH: Nearby?

SD: And I know he had—he took all the cheese, and he was so happy because he enough to eat now, for a few days, you know. But, he was not alone, there were other men there. And then—then it’s a blank for me for quite a while. I would think for a good year. I can’t remember anything. You know, playing with the kids or playing with the other children there. We had two or three families that stayed, so we were with them. And then one day, my dad comes in dressed like a police man. And this is his uniform and—

TH: Just shows up at the house?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Were the Germans still there?

SD: Yeah. Shows up in a uniform of a police man. Too young to question, my sister, of course, must be aware of all this. And now, *poursuis*, I can't remember a thing. And Daddy goes to work in the morning and comes back at night, and blah, blah, blah. Sometimes he doesn't come back at night. And then my brother comes on vacation in '44, 1944, school vacation. He comes in by train. We go pick him up at the station, and two [or] three days later we have the bombing. The biggest—the biggest one in Poitiers.

TH: It's American bombers⁷?

SD: English and Americans. They bombed the station. Thank God that my brother's train wasn't there. But, another train with children was there, coming back from summer camp—from summer camp. They would go one week and, you know, to the seashore or the mountain, and then back. And one of those trains was in the station. There was another train, of course, with ammunitions from the Germans, so that's what they came to bomb. But they missed quite a lot. And we had enough—a lot of bombs that were not exploded. So many of them.

TH: Well, it started in 1941. Did you have any inkling of an end to this? What was—?

SD: No. You see, what you cannot see, being so far removed from all this, you cannot see that we lived day to day. You don't think. Some people are thinking for you, yes, of course. People like my father that, you know, saw an end to it. Wanted an end to it. We wanted an end to it, but we—we are a mother and children. What can you do, you know. The Germans are telling you what to do every day, you know. There's an alert up. We have to go into the—what are they, you know, cellar—but—

TH: Bomb shelter?

SD: Bomb shelters. But the bomb shelters are not built properly. In 1940, the bomb shelters were built—you'd go in [but] there is no exit. So, if a bomb explodes at one end, you're pulverized inside. That's what was happening every time we had a bombing. We would lose 50, 60 people each time, just pulverized in there. Make a bombing—my father kept saying, "They have to have an exit so that the force goes through." But they didn't. So, they did cellars, for example, in

⁷During WWII, 1,570 French cities and towns were bombed by Allied forces. It is estimated that 68,778 men, women, and children died from Allied bombing.

England we went in the cellar. If a bomb exploded on top you're cooked. We weren't ready for this war at all.

Now, it's, you know, in retrospect you think of all those things, but at the time—and my father was against going into a bomb shelter. He was so against it. So that night when the bombing started, he said, "Just run, run toward the fields." That was the *chantier* [campsite or building site], where they did all the army things, you know. He said, "Go there. It's better than the shelter" Well, we never made it there. We didn't even make it at the end of the street. The bombs were falling behind us, so my mother laid down in the gutter with me on top—on the bottom, my sister in front of her, and my brother behind her. The three of us in the—the four of us in the gutter.

Dad is home closing the door, by the time he realizes that—everything just flew. The bombs are falling on us, not in the—at the railroad station like they said—like they're supposed to be doing it. They're doing it on us. It's falling right on the top of the camp and he realizes, that's it, my kids are dead. He thinks all of us are dead. And, just 27 minutes of it, can you imagine? Twenty-seven minutes of a bombing? Unbelievable. So, my brother has the feeling, he has to go save his father. So, he leaves, goes back home, and he still doesn't know why that day—he said, "I just crossed the street." The bomb fell where he was. He did this, and got the shrapnel right in his arm.

TH: He put his arms up over his head?

SD: Just, you know, to protect, an automatic thing. And he got the shrapnel right there. So, we still think—I mean, mom thinks that he is in the back of her. He came back when he realizes he was hurt. He came back running, laid behind her, and opened his luggage and kept throwing his clothes over us, to protect us, I guess.

TH: Your dad or your brother?

SD: No, my brother. Dad is still at—he can't go anywhere. The bombs are falling, and he's down in the corridor of the building. And, it stops—

TH: At your house?

SD: Yeah, at the house. He's—the bombing stops. So, right away, with a flashlight—he had a—we all had a flashlight in our bag. Right away, he took the road and started walking in it until—the building is down—the house is down. He says—and he's looking for us. He's looking for—

TH: Other people?

SD: He's looking for the bodies. We were the last one to leave the damn building because he didn't want us to go with the others. And he is expecting us to be dead. And, suddenly, mom hears the steps, you know. And she says, "Is that you Dad?" and I remember that. "Is that you Papa? *Est que ce vous, papa?*" [Is that you Papa?] "*Alors, oui.*" [So, yes] "*Alors,*" Papa respond, "*vous et tous bien?*" [So, Papa responds, is everyone okay?] You are all well?" She said, "No. Dédé is hurt, and Ghyslaine is hurt." And she's bleeding all over her head also.

TH: Your mom?

SD: Yeah, sure. She had cuts all over her face. I mean, everything flew, you know. And then we looked at my brother—(both talk)

TH: And your sister was—your sister—?

SD: My sister is bleeding, too, all over. They had glass. They have, you know, window things all over them. I'm perfectly fine, just very happy to breathe properly. I remember that. And then I looked at my brother, and I saw what his arm was—looked like. Oh my God. So, my dad picked up a shirt from whatever was on the ground. Picked a shirt. Fixed my brother, you know, to hold the arm up.

TH: A sling?

SD: And he said, "We have to take him to the hospital." So, he tells my mother and I, he said, "Go back home. Go back and get whatever you can, and you wait there until we come back." So, he takes my sister with him. They had to help my brother. And they went over, my sister says, countless bombs. Unexploded bombs were on a road, on the side of the road, you know, not exploded, just fallen I guess. And we get—we were against a—the sidewalk was against a big wall, and at the back of the big wall was a big garden. Somebody was doing gardening and selling the vegetables and everything. And there they found 14 unexploded bombs.

So, I think my father always felt that it was the end of the bombing, and they had to get rid of the bombs before they went back to England, and they dropped everything on us, on top of the hill. They had to empty. They couldn't go back and land with the bombs, so that's what my father says so many, so many fell right there. It wasn't supposed to, but—.

TH: Were there a lot of people killed?

SD: Yeah. I saw a lot of bodies.

TH: Of people you knew?

SD: People I knew. Not too many people we knew, because we were pretty, pretty empty there. Pretty empty on our building. But, people, you know, not little children. They were just pieces. It's not—you can't say, "Oh, I know this person" you know. It's such a mess. It's horrible.

TH: Pieces of people?

SD: Pieces of people. Just, you know, you see an arm, but then there's so much junk over it. You just see an arm and a hand or a leg. But this did not come back to me until this book. This did not come back to me until I read *The Nightingale*⁸. I don't know why. This touched a thing with me. I have read a lot of book of World War II and—but this one really just opened up the—a—I don't know. Was my body ready, my mind ready, to accept? But I have—I had to retain all this all those years and [it] never came out. They never came out.

I was—I was absolutely physically sick when I read this book. But I knew I had to do it. I had to read it. I don't know why, but I knew I had to read it. And it was awful and—but at the same time good, because it finally—finally, I know why I am who I am. Why I behave like I behave. Now, I know why. And it makes me feel even stronger as a human being, you know. But I wish it had happened a long time ago. I would have maybe done my life differently? I don't know. But, you know, fate is there. And, whatever happens to you, is supposed to happen to you. I think so. But this war was horrible. All the other bombings after that, I reacted funny to it. And then every time we have thunderstorms, I hide in my closet. It is the same noise, the same vibration than what the bombs did, you know.

TH: Was that—the bombing you're telling me about, was that, like, the first of many or was that the, like, middle?

SD: No. It was the first big long one that I remember. The other ones I would hear them. We would go in the cellar or in the bomb shelters, and you won't hear anything. So then all the kids play, you know, and then we come out when it's over. So, my—you don't have the same feeling.

⁸*The Nightingale* is a work of historical fiction set in France during World War II.

Here, I was right there. I could feel everything falling on my mom, and her praying, and then saying, “Ghyslaine, Ghyslaine.” And the noise was so loud. She was calling Ghyslaine, she was calling Dédé, my brother. And you could feel her tension, her whole body—I was under her. I could feel that body vibrate, you know. I can’t explain what the feeling is, I really don’t. I just—there’s nothing else. I mean, this is what happened.

TH: Your ear doctor said you still have the scar tissue in your ear.

SD: Yeah.

TH: From that particular—?

SD: From that particular one, yeah.

TH: Okay. Now—

SD: And I can think—if I’m under my mother, I can think what my sister goes through or my brother went through. I don’t know. I don’t—we never spoke when we were together, and of course, we were together not too often because she lived in Africa. He was in Indochina. I mean, we’ve been all over the world, but when we met—when we were together as adults, we never spoke of the war. We never did. And now, I’m thinking about it, you know. Some people do, and say, Do you remember this? Do you remember that? We never, never [had] a conversation like this with my dad, and we had big dinners and everything. We never did.

TH: Never spoke about it with your mother or father either?

SD: No. I questioned Mom because I was with her for ten years alone, you know, with her near the end of her life. And so, she loved to remember things, and so I learned a lot more from her than—I never heard my brother or my father talk about it. And I know my brother had [a] very hard time when he was in military school because the Germans had taken over, and it was not a very easy life as a young man of 12 [or] 14 years old to be in, you know. And—.

TH: Did the Germans had in mind to train these young French to be part of the German—

SD: Well, obviously they were trying to teach them at least the language, and I’m sure—again, I never spoke with my brother to find out what did they teach you during all those hours because

that's—they ate very little. One meal a day. Breakfast, and then, one meal around four o'clock [or] five o'clock in the evening, and then they had to study again until nine [or] ten o'clock at night. He just felt that France left him—let him down.

TH: Well, France couldn't do anything. France was kind of beaten.

SD: That's right. They let him down. He felt always like that. He felt that after Vietnam⁹. I mean, it was Indochina¹⁰ at the time, but he felt like the French government let him down—let us down. All of us. He became a socialist because of it. My brother—

TH: Late, late, late in life?

SD: Late in life. After Africa.

TH: So, I was going to come back to your brother, later. But you said that he was in Indochina prior to the Vietnam War, when the French were trying—it was still a French colony, I assume?

SD: Yes. Um-hm. French territory.

TH: As I recall—French territory? And they were fighting Ho Chi Minh¹¹ at that time?

SD: They had been—Ho Chi Minh, yeah. They were fighting for many years, I would think. There—a long time my brother went there. I was still a child. I was still young. And, he went to Indochina after Africa, I mean he was in North Africa for training as a paratrooper. And then after that he went to Indochina. (both talk)

TH: That would be in Algeria?

SD: Yeah. *Algérie*, yeah. He was in *Algérie* for a few years.

⁹Vietnam was a part of French Indochina from approximately 1887 until 1954 when the French evacuated from Vietnam following the Geneva Accord of 1954.

¹⁰The French colony of Indochina covered what is now Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

¹¹Ho Chi Minh was advocating for Vietnamese independence as early World War I while a young man living in France. He later joined the communist party and traveled to the Soviet Union. In 1930, he helped found the Indochinese Communist Party, and in 1941, he founded the Viet Minh. At the end of World War II, Viet Minh forces took control of Hanoi and declared North Vietnam to be a democratic state with Ho Chi Minh as president.

TH: Training as a paratrooper for the French army?

SD: Um-hm. And then, he went to Vietnam or Indochina, and it was his men and him. He was an officer in the army, and his men and him were parachuted to Dien Bien Phu. I don't know if you know the battle of Dien Bien Phu¹².

TH: Can you spell that?

SD: I can't

TH: Dien Bien—

SD: Dien Bien Phu.

TH: —Phu. Okay. I've heard about it. Tell me

SD: Dien Bien Phu. That was the army of—the French army was stuck there. They were completely surrounded by the Vietnamese, the Viet Cong. And they were completely surrounded, so my brother and his men were parachuted to help out, and they got caught in the middle of it all. It was horrible. And so, they all had to evacuate. No more landing of planes or helicopters, nothing. They couldn't bring anything in.

TH: They were on their own.

SD: So, they had to go through the jungle. Through the jungle. And I mean, he saw his men—they—the Vietnamese use to put—they had water, and a lot of water. And, every time they traversed or they had to cross a river, the Vietnam[ese] had traps on the water where they would get completely—

TH: Impaled

¹²This decisive engagement during the First Indochina War ended the eight-year-old war. The Viet Minh victory had lasting effects on French public opinion and helped to contribute to the end of the Fourth Republic in 1958. Charles de Gaulle left retirement to preside over the transition to the Fifth Republic and a new constitution.

SD: —impaled.

TH: With bamboo spears?

SD: Yes. They had their spears set up in the water, so my brother saw a lot of his men—he almost lost all his men on the way back from there.

TH: How many were in his—was a platoon leader?

SD: I have no idea. Yes, he was.

TH: Company or platoon?

SD: He had a company. He had—they were parachuted together. Him and his men. And they all had to evacuate through the jungle. Well, his men were not prepared for that kind of war. And, not only that but they all died, almost all of them. When he went back—

TH: So where was the safer—where were they getting back to?

SD: We did the same for three years.

TH: Was it Saigon or—?

SD: Well, they had to go towards Saigon. They had made a road for them. They were waiting for them, and some areas they couldn't—they had to through that by themselves. They could—the army could not come and rescue them. They couldn't. They had—really, they were trapped. It was a trap. And so, they killed us. Like my brother says, it was—he didn't say anything because he never said—never mentioned it until he died—he was dying. But, he said, "It was just a river. Rivers of blood." That's what he—that's the only thing he said to me. And when he was dying, he definitely relived all that.

TH: And he was in an office when the US—?

SD: Oh yeah. When the US Army arrived, and we were French leaving. They were leaving the place. And he was emptying his office, and this American officer comes in and they talk together, you know, they spoke. And my brother says, “Do you know that you’ll be doing the same thing in a few years?”

TH: That was probably—

SD: “This is a battle you will never win. Never win.” Because China was behind it, Korea was behind it. And I mean Korea was already at that time, you know, a little bit communist on one side and they were getting—they killed 10,000 of them; 20,000 soldiers would come behind. There was no way they were able to win that war. No way! That was just for the American economy. That’s awful to say because that was a useless war.

TH: Most people see that today.

SD: And that started in 1930s. They had problems already then. When World War II started, French people, French army in Vietnam—in *Indochine* [Indochina] were having already this revolution going. It never stopped. They got stronger and stronger.

TH: Let’s go back to France during the war. Now, tell me about the SS, when they came to town.

SD: They were just young men, beautiful, well dressed, black boots. You could see in their eyes that something was different. I mean, even their army was afraid, as I said before. And they just, I think, enjoyed giving example to people about how strong they were, how, you know, special they were. So, any occasion they had to crucify somebody or to hurt somebody in public, they loved. They enjoyed that. And on our way back from school one day, and at—by that time, I was walking without the stroller so it must have two or—two years later. But, two years later, near ’44. They were, really, near ’44 because that’s when I stopped. I mean, at the end of ’43, we were coming back from school. I mean, we walked five [or] six miles because my mother wanted us in this private school. So, we would have to walk all the way back home, and I wasn’t the only one of course. So, we would leave as a group, and then some would stop on the way to go home, you know, like—and I know we lived—the one—the farthest. That I know for sure.

TH: Instead of a bus you walked as a group?

SD: Oh yeah. We had no bus. We walked. So, we leave school together, you know, and one would go and—because he had to west, I don’t know. Whatever. And this little boy, we would leave usually. We went on the—a little *passerelle* [bridge], we call it. It’s [an] underground

tunnel that was made very nicely in stone. Still there, I saw it. And we would go under that tunnel, and his house was right down the—I saw an angel this time, where that little boy had been killed by the SS—and we would leave him after going. We turned left, and he lived around—on the street we took to go home. So, he said, “goodnight,” and goes to the house, and the SS are at the door. They have a little car and they’re standing, two SS at the door.

And we’re looking and looking and, you know, we’re curious. And they’re talking to him and they’re pushing him, like, against the wall, you know. And, I mean, he’s about seven [or] eight years old, and he’s saying, “No! No!” And they’re looking for his parents, and they want to know where they are. He doesn’t know. He’s coming home from school. And so, they eventually push him against the front door, and they have him stuck there, you know. And so, we stop walking and we’re watching. And he’s saying, “No! No!” He doesn’t know where they are. I can hear that. And he’s then screaming, “No! No! No!” They just shot him. He’s seven or eight years old, he’s telling that he’s coming back from school. Oh my God, did we run. Did we run. We took off running.

I think when we got home I couldn’t breathe anymore. I must have been so—and my sister was crying. I mean, she was very, very upset. And my mother didn’t know what to do, so we just gathered the three of us together. Me, not understanding too well yet. Knowing simply that they shot this little boy. But my sister was quite upset. Oh my god, was she upset. Swearing, she said, “I’m going to kill one.” And she takes a knife in the kitchen, and she wants to go outside and kill one. And we have a lot of them around, you know. (laughs)

So, my mother stops her and she—and then, we found out that they did kill him. They did. The little boy died. And we didn’t go to school for a few days, I remember that. We didn’t go to school for a few days. We were scared. And then the bombing came, it was all in that, around the same time, ’44, in the spring, June. And maybe we missed school more than I thought, you know. I remember they used to give us shots, and it took two or five of their soldiers—German soldiers—to hold me for the shots. (laughs) I wouldn’t have them—I didn’t want any shots, I remember that.

TH: Let’s stop for a minute.

SD: Yeah.

Pause in recording

SD: —after wars, after wars. Why is some people—those children had known nothing else. Nothing else. They don’t know what eating a pizza, relaxing somewhere, or eating a hot dog. They have to share it with ten people—the same hot dog. I had to share a piece of gum with a

little boy friend. The Americans gave us a piece of gum. I chewed it one day, he chewed it one day. And then one day it fell apart in my mouth and I was so hurt, and he was hurt too, because I killed it. But we didn't know that chewing gum didn't last forever. (laughs) We never had one before. I never had a piece of chocolate until I swallowed the one I was given. So, I never tasted it. That was my first chocolate experience.

TH: Was that—?

SD: That was right after the war. And we're invited for tea. I remember it was in 1946, maybe '45. And we're still recovering, and we still don't have very much of anything, and somebody invited mother for tea. And so, we are invited, my sister and I, for tea with mom. And it's a big thing. It's just after the war, we—I've never gone to a tea—and then my sister says, "And there will be a surprise." I said, "What surprise?" she says, "I think she's going to give us a piece of chocolate." "Well what is chocolate?" Well, my sister knew because before the war, she had chocolate.

TH: Where was this and when?

SD: In Poitiers.

TH: Poitiers. And whose— (both talk)

SD: In '45.

TH: —who was inviting you?

SD: My mother—friend of my mother was inviting me—us, for tea. Was it Madame Poirot, Madame Chasse (sic)? *Peu etre* [maybe]. Madame Chasse possibly. And so, I'm all excited. We get dressed up and everything. And there we go, the three of us, to tea. While mother knew what this sort thing was, because she was a military person and she had done a lot of teas, but I didn't. And so, we get there and she tells us, she tells my sister and I, says, "You will behave yourself." And, of course, my sister says, "You better behave yourself or you won't get this chocolate." So, we have tea and we talk, and people are talking, and I'm antsy, and I'm moving on this chair. I remember, I can't wait for this thing to come. I don't know what chocolate is. (TH laughs)

And so, here she comes with a little dish and there is four pieces of this brown stuff. Four. I remember them. Very small dish. And she says, "Hi. This is what I wanted to surprise you with, a

piece of chocolate.” My sister takes a takes a piece of chocolate. I take mine. Mom did not take hers until later, I think. But, anyway, my sister and I take it, and I’m looking at it and my sister takes and starts eating it. I’m so excited that I pick it up, [put it] in my mouth, and I swallowed it all. (TH laughs) I never—never was so sad I’m my life, it seemed.

TH: Because it was all gone?

SD: It was all gone and I never tasted it. (laughs) It just went down. Was not a big piece, but I will remember all my life. We walked back home that night—that afternoon—I cried all the way home. My sister says, “You idiot! You’re supposed to chew on it!” (laughs) Well, I never had—and—but then my father felt so bad. I don’t know how he did it, but about a week or two later, he brought me a piece of chocolate. And I knew how to keep it in my mouth this time. (laughs) Not to let it melt away. (laughs)

TH: Now, we’re getting way ahead. I hate to go back to the dark time of the German occupation. But we probably should. And I do want to hear about the liberation that must have been, you know. But let’s get to that—let’s go back to the dark times, if you don’t mind, for a little while?

SD: No. I don’t mind.

TH: So, this little boy that was killed, that had an effect on you?

SD: Yes. But, it certainly did, it came back to me. I don’t think I ever forget that—I ever forgot. What bothered me on that is that he had done nothing wrong. You see, usually, when the SS attacked and hurt people like this—and they shoot people like this in the street, they did it easily—but, we also knew that they would take them for questioning and all that, you know. We would talk, kids together, you know. He killed him or he killed my neighbor, or—

What bothered us is that he was in school with us all day, and they were pushing him against the door, telling him—tell—you know, and he kept saying, “No. I don’t know!” But, they never listened to him, and then they shot him like this. And he knew we were watching, you know. And—(both talk)

TH: Was it one soldier?

SD: There were two SS. Two SS.

TH: Do they always go in pairs?

SD: I have no idea if they went in pairs. Usually, they were always together anyway. They always stuck together, not one alone. Never. I don't know if they went two together or—but not one alone. Did they do other things when they questioned people? That, I don't—I know atrocities were made. They were made on both sides of the—you know. But atrocities were made and we heard of many people. You know, one that I did not mention to you—I must have mentioned it to you. At one time, the Maquis did something to the Germany army, in Poitiers. They did something, the Maquis. Maybe a bomb or something.

TH: What's the Maquis?

SD: The Maquis was the underground. We called them Maquis.

TH: How do you spell that?

SD: M-a-q-u-e—or—no, i. M-a—Maqui [Maquis]. Like that or—I'm not too sure. And has to have an "s" because some people said Maquisards. That's the underground people.

TH: Okay. And they did something—?

SD: They must have done something in town, in the City of Poitiers. They sabotaged something that the German were doing, or something because the SS came back very mad. And so, they said, We're going to pick up 18, 18-year-olds. You don't want to turn them—turn out—you know. They wanted people to inform—to be informer. Says, if you don't want to inform on this Maquis—on this underground people—we're going to pick up 18, 18-year-olds in town and we're going to kill them."

So, they came, and they did it. They picked up 18 kids, 18 years old, or maybe 17. Not older than that. They picked up out of Poitiers to make an example. They wanted people to come out and turn the underground in, you know. I guess something bad was done because they were fuming mad, and they did it very quickly. They picked out those kids, those young men, and brought them to the *chantier* [campsite or building site]. That where I told you they used to the maneuvers up there, that was all fields for the army, and of course, we had our military camp up before the German came. So, it was still there. They had built barracks up there—

TH: Barracks?

SD: Barracks for the prisoners, because they had prisoners up there. But, they took those kids and then picked us up. They—mom and children, and old dad and old grandpas, grandmas—everybody that they could pick up to be right there, to watch that. They picked them up on telephone poles—

TH: Did it—? (both talk)

SD: (both talk) —tied those kids to the telephone poles.

TH: That were planted in the ground?

SD: Yup. That was prepared before we got there. So, did the kids have to do it? Dug the holes? I don't know. But when they brought all of us, the public, that's exactly what it was: a show. *Salopards* [bastards], when I think about. And I remember mom. Ghyslaine wasn't there, my sister wasn't there. She must have been in school. I don't know. But Ghyslaine was not there. I see mom and I, and some of the neighbors, and people from down the other streets, you know, in the area. And mom said, "No. They're not going to do that. They're not. They're just—somebody is going to give up somebody—a name or something." Nothing. They tied those kids. I mean, some of them were crying and screaming, "I want my mom!" you know. They're kids, 18 year olds. Some did not, very stoic, and I remember a couple of them just very white and very scared. They're shaking in their— (both talk)

TH: Did you know any of them?

SD: No. No, I did not know anybody. They picked them up downtown. Certainly at—coming out of college or high school, or you know, that area. And then they shot them. They really did shoot them like this. It's very fast, you know, when they do this. It is so fast (telephone rings), and then—I'm not answering. I can't answer that. (telephone still ringing). And then they brought boxes—board boxes—not big, not too long—they put the bodies in it (telephone ringing)—

TH: Coffins?

SD: —and we are watching. They don't want us to turn away or anything. And they put those bodies in, put the nails or not too many nails. I don't remember them spending too much time over it. Mostly, the prisoners did that, they had the camp right there. The prisoners were right

there. I don't remember. It's not the SS that put the nails in. I know that. They wouldn't touch that stuff. And then they made our parents—the old people and Mom—to carry those boxes to the trucks. Until she died, Mama says that the box she was carrying with two other people, the boy was moving in the box. Until she died, she said, “I can still feel him moving” when she was holding the box.

How can they ask people to things like this, you know? So, they buried those boys. I don't know where—they buried them. They just put them on those trucks, and then we walked—they didn't take us back with bus—with trucks to our homes. We had to walk back. And Mama said, until she died, she says, “Simone, it was moving. Somebody was moving in the box.” So, how many were alive when we buried them—when they buried them—no. This was not a beautiful part of the war. There was no beautiful part in a war. There's no beautiful part in anything like this.

But how can human being be brought up to think this way? To behave this way with another human being? How can this man or—and his cohorts because he was not alone. Hitler was not alone. Let's face it. How can they do things like this to human beings? They trained those kids. We had one downstairs, here, who claimed that he was in the countryside. No, he wasn't. He was in the boy's camp. I know where he was. And the Germans never did things like that, no, not the good Germans. Not the German—the regular guy in the street. No, that one didn't do those things. But those trained monsters— (both talk)

TH: The SS?

SD: They were trained monsters. They had no regards for anything. I mean, can you think—when we visited my father after the war, insisted—although we were not—my mother was not willing to do it—insisted on tickets—one of the camps in Germany. We went to Dachau¹³, one of the most—bad one. My father insisted that we should tour it. He was right; he was right. In a way, he was right. But he wanted us to learn a lesson, he said, “This is what some people would do to others. And so, we went to Dachau, and in Dachau they show it—part of the museum, or area, you know. And it wasn't far, not long after the war. It was still in the '40s. It had to be '48 [or] '49. Dad wanted us—the smell in there, when you enter the camp you knew.

TH: It still smelled?

SD: Oh, yeah. And that was in 194—at least '49, because then I was grown up, and I could realize. They had made, out of the skin of human beings, lamp shades. Can you believe this?

¹³The Dachau concentration camp was opened in Germany in 1933 by Heinrich Himmler and remained in use until liberated by American forces on 29 April 1945. There were 32,000 documented deaths and thousands of undocumented deaths due to suicide, disease, execution, and torture. Many camp inmates were subjected to medical experimentation, but the true extent of what they experienced may never be known as the original records were purposely destroyed.

Lamp shades made of the human being's skin. How can—I don't know. I just—this is just an example, they had other things too, like, the teeth or the mouth or the—now, this is the 20th century. But, that, that killing of those boys—but nobody ever gave the name. Nobody. And the boys didn't know. The boys were just victims. They were just picked up at random. I saw grandfathers, old men, like, maybe in the 70s or 80s, crying that day. I saw them crying. Mom didn't cry; mom didn't cry. But I saw—

TH: Tell me about your mother.

SD: Quite a lady. Quite a lady.

TH: Tell me about the flag.

SD: Okay. We'll, I think it's around 194—I would say 1943. We were all [a] bunch of little kids at, you know, and we were always with the Germans because the Germans are where the—you know, the camp. And so in 1943, some of the kids were about maybe 12, 13 years old, and they dared me and Philippe, my little friend, and we were always together. We were tied around the hip, maybe. Me and Philippe—(both talk)

TH: Now, what year was this?

SD: Nineteen forty-three. It has to be around 1943.

TH: You were probably about five or six years old?

SD: Yeah. Yeah. And there was a small wall between the major camp—where all the officers, the German office. All the officers were in the *caserne* [barracks], it's called. And it's a small wall separating them from the small apartments and the buildings for the—well the—(both talk)

TH: Families?

SD: —the families. And they dared us to bring the German flag down at noon. They carried us to the wall, put us over the wall.

TH: Who's they?

SD: The other kids in the group.

TH: The bigger kids?

SD: Yeah, the bigger kids were 13 years old. Yeah—the bombs—well, anyway—and Philippe and I, went right in the center of the court, the big court, and here is their flag flying. We brought it down. And so, of course the army came, they took us both prisoners.

TH: You and Philippe?

SD: Yeah. Me and little Philippe. We went to the jail, and then the big one—the big kids must have told the mothers, because an hour later the mothers were at the door, screaming at the jail (laughs), “We want our daughter—our children—we want our children.” Well, the officer there in charge said, “No. They brought our flag down, and they’re going to be punished.”

TH: This was not the SS?

SD: No, no, no. No SS that day, no. They were smart enough. Our kids were smart enough. We knew. They knew the difference, you know. And so, the officer said, “No. No. They’re going to be punished.” Meanwhile, Philippe and I, we’re in the room with the officers and, whatever, the German soldiers, and they’ve given us chicken. We’re drinking beer (TH laughs), and we’re so happy. And I was jumping from one bed to the next.

TH: In the barracks?

SD: In the barracks. And eating chicken and drinking beer. And then, eventually, a couple of hours later they released us both. We had a terrific afternoon: meanwhile, our mothers were so upset. (laughs) I remember my mother, says, “Don’t you tell you tell your father when he comes home tonight.” And my sister says, “Don’t you tell dad what happened today.” My mother tried to keep it quiet. For many years she did keep it quiet; eventually, later on in years, maybe she told dad. But, we had a grand time. Philippe and I had chicken and beer. We never had neither one of them. That was very good; we had a good meal that day. (laughs) Yeah, that was a good one.

TH: So, you told me one time that you were out in the woods. You had to hide out in the woods, or to get away from battles?

SD: No, we did a bombing. When already we were—we had already left our home because it was destroyed in the bombing in June, the big one. The bad one. We couldn't live there anymore, so we left.

TH: That was the one where you were injured? You were all injured?

SD: Yeah. With my sister and my brother—

TH: And your house was destroyed?

SD: —was injured badly. Yeah. And the house was gone, so we had to move. We had to go away, and my father found us a room over a farm house maybe 10, 15 kilometers away from home. But, of course, we had no transportation, so we had to walk it. So, we walked all the way to that village. It was not really a village. It was a beautiful little *maison particulière* [private house], meaning a little castle if you want, but very small, you know. And then a farm attached to it, so they owned quite a lot of land. How he knew these people, no questions asked. You know, those are things you don't ask.

And the lady of the mansion—of the house—knew my father very well. He knew an awful lot of good people, and they gave us this beautiful room above the farm—above the animals, so we could hear them doing the hay and everything, every day. And that was a nice room, so we had at least three beds to sleep on. I mean, on the floor, but three places to sleep, and we had a place where we could sit and have a meal together, and a big window giving on a big field, I mean, a huge field. And at the end of that field was a hay—a big haystack—but, I mean a huge haystack, like they used to do them a long time ago.

TH: Size of a barn maybe?

SD: Oh yeah, at least. Those were haystacks that last years and years. They have rooms inside of that, and we had the Maquis, or the underground people, living in that haystack, because two days after we moved there, the Germans moved into the farm. I think they were following us.

TH: You and your mom, and your sister?

SD: They moved into the farm. My brother was with us. It was after the bombing, so Christophe, my brother was recovering from his arm; he had not gone back to school. And we moved in, the Germans moved in the farmhouse downstairs, so we could hear them talking and—

TH: Did they know you were upstairs?

SD: Oh yeah.

TH: Okay.

SD: We came out. We came down. And we used to go to the river to wash, because of course, no running water or anything like this. It's—they were luxury things that—we never had that. After we lost our home in the bombing, that was it. So, we used to go the river to wash. Well, they found out about the river, so they used to go the river and wash too. So we organized ourselves, that the Germans would wash around five o'clock in the afternoon, and we would wash at four o'clock, you know. Not to be together. And, well that is where I learned how to shoot a gun. I shoot a revolver, yeah. Revolver? Yeah.

TH: Revolver?

SD: Yeah. That's where I learned to shoot that.

TH: Who—?

SD: We were taught to—the four of us were taught to shoot the revolvers, so that if one of us or my father was caught, or something, mom shoots one, and all the others, and blah, blah, blah. So, anyway—

TH: Blah, blah, blah, what? Your mother—

SD: Blah, blah, blah, we had to shot each other.

TH: If they—Germans were going to take you?

SD: Yeah. If they took my dad and came for us, we were to shoot each other.

TH: Because?

SD: Because they didn't want—nobody wanted us to suffer.

TH: Okay.

SD: If they caught my father being on the—in the underground, the whole family would go—would be eliminated.

TH: Did the Germans do that with families—

SD: Yeah, with the SS, yeah.

TH: —once they found one person in the family?

SD: Yeah.

TH: They would—?

SD: —get rid of it all.

TH: Destroy the whole family?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Well, how could you shoot a gun without the Germans hearing it and knowing?

SD: In the woods. You kidding me? In the woods. You could do so much in the woods. You have no idea. All I know [is that] when [it] was my turn do this thing, it was too heavy for me. I couldn't do it. (laughs)

TH: The gun was the revolver?

SD: It was so heavy. I went off, it went (firing noises), threw me against a wall. Not a wall, it was tree. But, threw me against a tree. It was too much [and] I was too small. But we were supposed to do that, so they learned how to do that.

TH: You, and your sister, and brother?

SD: My sister, my brother, and Mom. Mom's supposed to shoot me. But I don't know the order of the—the order of shooting. My sister knew that and she used to remember. Good thing she's not here. She's here but I can't call her and ask her. She can't remember a thing. Poor sweetheart, maybe she's right, she shouldn't remember. But, that was a little episode, okay? So, we learned to do that.

TH: And while you had this window, you could see people in the haystack come and go?

SD: Oh, so funny. I mean, here are the German downstairs from us, doing their thing, you know, doing their boots and everything. And once in a while they—

TH: Polishing their boots?

SD: Yeah. Once in a while the SS would come and take a look. Where—already they were in—they were retreating, slowly. But it was obvious, you know.

TH: This was late in the war?

SD: Yeah. That was '40, late '43. And so, you could see the—we could look from our window. We would look at them, they would go around and around, and you know. And—(both talk)

TH: Who? The Germans?

SD: No. No. The underground. The underground people.

TH: The Maquis?

SD: The Maquis. You could see activities, you know. And then the Germans are downstairs. They were—one of these days it's going to pop, you know, somethings going to happen. And it did, it really did. But, before it happened, you know, a lot of things went on and on for weeks.

TH: So, now you're telling me that they had rooms inside this haystack?

SD: They had to have room inside the haystack, like, my father had room inside that thing.

TH: The haystack?

SD: No. He was doing that wood, you know. I told you, he was making that charcoal stuff.

TH: Yeah.

SD: How can he live in there? How was it set up? He was not living alone in there. He was not the only one sleeping in there. That was a way of camouflage, I guess. But the haystack was something else, I mean, we count them, "I saw three tonight, Mama." (TH laughs) "You sure? You sure? I saw two this morning" So, we knew there was activity there. And it was just a big field. And it was at the end of the field, and that's the end of the road. That's where they caught the whole group, the whole German group when they left. They left the farm that day. They were retreating, and we were in our room, locked. Doors locked and everything.

TH: How did you know something was going to happen? Your mom told you or your dad?

SD: Something is going to happen. That's all he knew.

TH: You don't recall how?

SD: No.

TH: And this was late in the war?

SD: That was late in the war, that had to be. That's the last place we stayed after the bombing. We stayed in a few places before we got to that farm. And—now, that's the last place we stayed, and we had been there a few weeks.

TH: And Germans were retreating?

SD: They were leaving the farmhouse. You could see that.

TH: Like how many of them? How many Germans?

SD: The officers were in two cars, and then the others were on foot. It was a—I don't know, not a battalion, but a small group, you know, maybe 30 [or] 40.

TH: That'd be a company or so?

SD: It could be a company, yeah. And the SS went first, and they got away. They were not expecting the SS to go first. The SS and the officers got out of the road, the rest did not. The soldiers on foot were killed right there.

TH: The Maquis?

SD: By the Maquis. They were waiting for them at the end of the road, but the two cars must have rushed through, I guess. Or something. I don't know. We didn't get too many details, but we didn't get out for the whole day. They searched everywhere, the woods and everywhere, to see if we had—if there was any survivors. Any Germans.

TH: Germans? The Germans?

SD: Once in a while you would hear, pop!, pop!, pop!

TH: So, wait the—

SD: They were on foot. Leaving.

TH: —the Maquis were looking for Germans that got away?

SD: Yeah.

TH: It wasn't the Germans looking for—?

SD: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

TH: This was later—

SD: The Germans were on the road leaving, okay? In very good order with the cars. The officer car in front, and the Maquis was waiting for them at the end of that little road.

TH: So, there was more Maquis at this time, than Germans?

SD: Oh yeah. No. I don't think so. Oh, no, no, no. No, there was a good group of Germans down there. But—

TH: I mean, after the shooting, did the Germans come back in?

SD: No. After the shooting, what—whoever they could kill, they killed. Some of them may have gotten away in the woods.

TH: The Germans?

SD: Sure. Tried to escape, you know?

TH: No. I mean, the tide had changed, rather than the Germans chasing people—French, the French were chasing the Germans.

SD: Oh yeah. We had—yeah—we had orders not to leave the room at all.

TH: Okay.

SD: We were locked in there, and Mom says, “We’re not moving out of there until dad gives us the okay.” And Dad came two days later to give us the okay.

TH: Okay, so—

SD: Because they had officers in the big house too, you know. I mean, the beautiful little house. I mean, it’s looks like little castles. French people—

TH: The Germans had officers still?

SD: Yeah, yeah. In the house—they took—all the officers took position in the house, and the rest of the army—of the group—whatever—I don’t know.

TH: The company or whatever.

SD: The company lived in that farm. They were attached together, you know, and the house is—

TH: So, your father was with the Maquis?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And they never really questioned you guys?

SD: Oh no.

TH: Because he even had a policemen's uniform on. They thought he was pro-German, but he wasn't pro German. You know, say yes or no.

SD: That was a very good position for dad. I think that's why he—all of sudden he became a police man. How could he become a police man? He never went to police training or anything.

TH: But he was a police—

SD: He was an *adjunct du chief* [adjunct for the chief], *adjunct du chief de police de Poitiers* [adjunct for the police chief of the City of Poitiers]. He had his office and everything. And then he stayed in until retirement.

TH: But, I mean how did—

SD: But he only got one retirement: the army.

TH: How did—I mean, he must have convinced the Germans that he was pro-German.

SD: Oh, I don't think so. My dad just stayed very straight. Maybe he was very polite with them, yes. Absolutely. Very polite with them.

TH: But he wasn't pro-German?

SD: Oh, not at all. (laughs)

TH: Interesting.

SD: It was so funny because—but it was so easy. Like, he said some of them were so, you know? He had this little job, and he did his little job. He came to see us at the farm on bicycle with a basket in front, with some potatoes and things like that, that he would bring home at night because we couldn't go anywhere. We were far away from everything. He would leave.

TH: He was still back in—

SD: Poitiers.

TH: —Poitiers.

SD: That's where he did all his policing.

TH: His police work?

SD: Yeah. But it was always a question, I said, "Dad, how you could become—from an army officer—and you're a police man?" He says, "You don't ask those questions. It is."

TH: Don't you wish you could ask him now? I mean, he could tell you. He would tell you.

SD: He could've told me so many things. He could have told us and never spoke about it. Never. And my brother never spoke about it.

TH: And your brother, by the end of the war, was getting pretty old. He must have been 18 or—

SD: But, no, almost, yeah, 18, yeah.

TH: He could've been one of those boys that they rounded up.

SD: He was 18 years old. He could have been there yeah, but he was still younger at that time when they buried—rounded them up. And he was not in Poitiers; he was in school.

TH: Now, you said before you got to that farmhouse, you lived in a couple of other places?

SD: We stopped and asked for, you know, if we could sleep over the cows and things like that.

TH: In barns?

SD: Yeah, in barns, yeah. Farmers were not too generous, you know. Farmers are well—not known to be very generous. They usually complain about the—Oh you know, this year I didn't get those and—farmers are good for lying a lot. And those farmers, they had butter; we know they had butter. They didn't give all their milk and cream to the Germans. They kept some. Do you think they shared it with people like us? That's how my sister and I went and stole the chicken—two eggs. We went in the chicken coop to steal eggs, while they were sleeping we were in that farm. We stole two eggs, so by stealing those two eggs we had so many problems. Not from the farmers. They didn't say anything because we were gone by then. We were on the road, but we stole those eggs in the chicken coop. Do you know what chickens have? Chickens have bugs that get into your skin.

TH: Like fleas or lice, or something?

SD: Lice. So, the two of us caught lice on our way to that beautiful little farm house. Supposedly very—it was very good, but we had to stop at the Red Cross. At a hospital, you know, road hospital. And they had to clean us with—

TH: You and your sister?

SD: —what is it called?

TH: Turpentine?

SD: No. No. It's yellow. It gets yellow when it's on your skin. It stinks.

TH: Iodine?

SD: No. Sulfur.

TH: Oh, sulfur.

SD: With a brush. To brush us from head to toes, with the sulfur. We [were] yellow for days. We were yellow for days after that. My mother used to say, "Good for you, you didn't have steal those two eggs." (laughs)

TH: And with the chicken, too? You stole a chicken, too?

SD: No, no. We didn't steal the chicken, but we stole their eggs. And we ate the egg right away. We had learned—somebody showed us that you can put a hole on one end and one on the other and (sucking noises)—

TH: You can suck it out?

SD: Yeah you suck it out. We'll we certainly sucked up our egg, but we didn't know we caught lice at the same time. (laughs) My God, oh was it bad. So, we were yellow for a few days, yeah.

TH: So, you stayed at a—you—they—(both talk)

SD: And my mother stole the milk, but I mean, she milked the cows herself at three o'clock in the morning.

TH: She got some milk for you all?

SD: And we got a glass of milk, for Ghys, and me, and my brother. And then we left the farm, "Thank you very much." I didn't know I had lice then nor my sister. (laughs) We went on the road, and we started itching like crazy and mother says, "Oh my God! Where did you go?" I said, "We took an egg." My sister said, "Why did you tell her?" I couldn't lie, oh God. We did so many things.

TH: Well, what are some other things? I mean, you—that was one night on the road. You said you were more than one night on the road?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Where'd you stay the other nights?

SD: Under the trees sometimes, or maybe if it was bombing—if we could hear the bombing too close, we would stay in the woods.

TH: In the woods?

SD: On the border of the woods, you know?

TH: So, how long—?

SD: I don't know why we felt so protected by the woods. Isn't it strange? Sometimes I wonder, you know, why did Mom take us to the woods every time?

TH: The woods generally aren't a target for bombs.

SD: That's strange, but—

TH: They usually look for more industrial targets.

SD: I felt better there. I felt secure there, I really did. I felt more secure in the woods than anywhere else. The only time I really felt secure was in that farm, at the end of the war. When we were in that room upstairs.

TH: With the big window?

SD: With the big window. That, I really felt secure.

TH: And now—so, how many? Like, how much time did you spend in the woods?

SD: Well, we were on the road, from Poitiers to this little place my father had found for us. We were on the road [for] about five [or] six days. I took us that long to, you know, to do it. It was not that far, but we didn't, you know.

TH: Five or six days?

SD: We stayed in the morning. Maybe we stayed in one place a little bit longer and—

TH: You told me you ate dandelions?

SD: Oh dandelions. We ate a lot of it, and walnuts because the walnuts were right on the ground. You could pick them up.

TH: Walnut trees?

SD: And we would eat walnuts. That, sometimes, were our meal for the day. Yeah, those were good.

TH: I have to ask. Did you have—? You see these pictures of people during that time; in fact, there was something on TV the other day about Germans massacring an entire town in France.

SD: Oh, yeah. But that's the near (inaudible)—they're near us.

TH: Was that near you?

SD: Rocamadour. Rocamadour. They put people in the church.

TH: Spell it.

SD: Rocamadour.

TH: R-

SD: R-o-c-a-m (speaking softly to herself) rocama. A-d-o-u-r. I think it is the way to spell it. Rocamadour. I'm not so sure, but I think it's close. I'm not so sure how to spell it. But that's where they put—that's the SS, again. They took people in the church and set fire to the whole place. Not only were they satisfied with the fire, they also shot them. (mimicking machine gun sounds) The ones that could escape, trying to escape—shot them all. The whole city—the whole town. But I think they did it in more than one town.

TH: Why?

SD: And that was in retaliation, again.

TH: In retaliation? Okay.

SD: Yeah. That was in retaliation for something the underground did. They love to make an example of that, you know. They did that in Italy as well.

TH: So, travelling in the woods, did you—? What I was going to lead up to—you see these old pictures, and people have one heavy coat that went up from their—all the way down to their ankles.

SD: Of that, I don't know about the ankles.

TH: Did you have heavy coats.

SD: No. No, we had our winter clothes all the time because—I had a change of clothes in my luggage, that we insisted on, my father and my mother. So, we had a change of clothes in our luggage, all of us, so if the bombs were coming, or the bombing, the siren would start. We'd take our bag and go. So, we'd have toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, a towel, underwear, and warm clothes. Always warm because even in the summer, in the woods, it was cold.

TH: Did you have big heavy coats?

SD: No. I don't remember.

TH: Did your mom have a heavy coat?

SD: I don't remember. I see her with [a] rain coat, possibly a rain coat. We had rain coats, yeah. Maybe it's more dramatic to show them with heavy coats all the way down to the ground.

TH: In all the old movies you see people with heavy coats.

SD: Yeah, that shows—but, no. No. I don't remember walking like that, no.

TH: So, okay let's—when they—

SD: Another thing that my father did not want us to do, is get in groups. He thought that was the worst thing to do. If you're going to travel for a few days, travel alone. So, we were just the four of us, always four of us, during that trek to the farm. I don't remember anybody else. We didn't have to share the hay with them or with anybody, just the four of us, three children and a woman, you know. And I think it was better than having to start, "Oh, I don't want to do this. I don't want to take this road. I want to take a left." No, my father did not want that. And the day of the big bombing, the one that hurt my brother and all that, we were just the four of us.

TH: Very interesting.

SD: Daddy did not believe that it was good to trek like this with a lot of people. Trust each other.

TH: Family. All right.

SD: Maybe that was not his—I think it was part of his reason.

TH: Because probably you wouldn't know—anyway, I can see—I can think of the complications with more people that could get you in trouble. The end of the war, like, when the Maquis attacked those Germans leaving that farm. That was—

SD: That was good.

TH: —toward the end?

SD: That was the end. That was, for us. They were going back toward Germany.

TH: And that was the end for you?

SD: They were going back North. So, I don't know.

TH: The liberation?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Tell me what you recall about that.

SD: Some very ugly things happened during the liberation, very ugly things. I never witnessed any. First, I was very young. (Sound of microphone being handled) Still on?

TH: Uh huh.

SD: First, I was very young and things like that, but you know the Maquis? Some of the underground was communist, some were just [for] de Gaulle and [the] Republic. But we had the communists as well. I mean, the red guys, you know, and the ones that fought very hard. I mean they did fight very hard for our liberation and against—but, out of that group, out of that mass of underground people, some were definitely communist. Some definitely were not.

And the communists wanted retaliation for all the things that had happened, and some horrible things to their families as well, you know. I don't know it. It's very personal thing[s]. But they did gather all the ladies that played with the Germans, or befriended Germans. Some of them were just befriended because they were forced too. You'll see in this book. Some of them, just to save family, did it. And they picked those [up] all those women, shaved their heads, did horrible things to them that we will never know, you know, except for the ones that did it. Paraded them in the city. Beat them up naked—did horrible things. That was their vengeance. That was their—that was not very, very beautiful.

The rest of it, everybody started, you know, wanting to do many things. And the black market. The black market started because we couldn't get anything. For two [or] three years, we couldn't get butter or things like this, unless you paid or unless you did something, you know. It was a horrible time. I mean, horrible time but a happy time, too, because we didn't have that pressure of wondering, you know, are we going to do it tonight? Are we going to be here tomorrow?

TH: The constant fear?

SD: Yeah. Constant. You lived [in] constant—it's survive. I just think of those people in the Middle East, that have been three [or] four generations in a war. How can they live like this? And

that's something—go wrong—I mean, they've got to blame somebody. So, if they're directed one way or another and religion gets into it, that's it. It's the end. No. But it was very fun. I mean, for me, for children, the Americans came and they were like the good guys. I remember they came in our neighborhood with a truck, and they gave me the chewing gum to me and Philippe, and [said], "After you chew it, you leave it in the back of your ear." (laughs) Of course I had. And he chewed it one day, I chewed it another day, and eventually it fell apart in my mouth. And how can I tell Philippe that the chewing gum is gone? He's expecting his time. [TH laughs] I said, "It just went in pieces." And that's exactly what happened. Couldn't help it. I think he was mad. He must have been mad at me for many years after that. I mean we lost each other. After the war, people went their way, you know. And he became a nurse.

TH: Philippe did?

SD: Yeah, Philippe did. He was that kind of a kid, you know, felt bad about everybody. Yeah, he became a nurse. And so, that was fun. That was fun. And they picked us up in those trucks, and they said, We are liberating the prisoners. So, of course, everybody got in the truck. We went up to the fields—as I told you, that big field—and we opened the door for all the prisoners to come out. They all came out with a blanket over their head, or over—very skinny. Very, very. Some were from the city. Some were from the city. Anyway, they came out, and then more trucks came in and we put them in and they took them. I don't know, to an area where they got their names, and, you know, really—but they had a few Germans on the side. And we threw the Germans in the camp and closed the door, that was the fun part. They were so happy [that] they were the prisoners, and we were, "Beh! beh!" (SD sticks out tongue) You know kids.

TH: Sticking your tongue out at them.

SD: Sticking your tongue out. And then it a happy day, but then it was very tough to get food and to get anything going, you know. That was hard. That was hard. We didn't eat very well.

TH After the war? For a long time?

SD: Yeah, for a long time. We couldn't get good stuff, you know. I know some people would come from the countryside, and we could buy a dozen eggs, for example. Oh my God, that was good, to have an omelet. I remember making an omelet, one night, for a group. I don't know what—where—must have been some of my father's students—young students. And we got together and—we were supposed to be eight or ten, so my mother put nine eggs in, you know, and more came. So, what do we do? So, my mother added water to the eggs, I remember this all my life. That made a bigger omelet, but, you know, not as nourishing, but it made a bigger omelet. (Laughs) So we were about to give it to everybody. I remember. We counted the eggs, my God, you didn't dare break an egg.

TH: So, it took a long time?

SD: Yeah. Take a long—it took a long time.

TH: To get back on your feet?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Now, your father stayed on in the army?

SD: No, he stayed on—he stayed on at the police.

TH: Oh, yeah?

SD: Yeah.

TH: But he was paid by the army?

SD: Obviously.

TH: Okay.

SD: The retirement just came that way.

Track 1 ends; track 2 begins

TH: Okay, we're recording.

SD: The Germans that were in the building were very respectful. My mother (inaudible)—

TH: Okay.

SD: Now, I can't say they did—they messed with either one of them.

TH: Your sister or your mother?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Did Germans—the regular German soldiers were respectful?

SD: Yes, they were lower, you know, they were officers but a lower grade, possibly. I don't know. Those are the ones that lived in the same building as we did. I mean, they moved in the apartments that were empty.

TH: That was out in the country?

SD: No, that was in Poitiers.

TH: In Poitiers? I thought you had a house of your own?

SD: No, no, no. We had house of our own, and then we were moved by the Germans into an apartment. When they came, the big cheese took all the small houses.

TH: The officers—bigger officers?

SD: But my mother refused to leave her furniture there. (laughs) So, what they did, again, they made their soldiers move the furniture that was in the apartment we were assigned. They moved into the house and they brought my mother's bedroom and our bedroom, my sister and I, our bedroom, and the dining room table into the apartment. She refused to leave her furniture to the Germans.

TH: This was right at the beginning of the invasion?

SD: Way at the beginning. When they took over the camp. They came by and told us that they needed to have houses for their officers and other members of the army, you know, that were a little higher, I would assume. And that they would have to move us into the building with the rest of the group, so my mother said, "Yes, on one condition. I want my furniture." They moved everything for her.

TH: The German army, the regular soldiers, were—

SD: They were decent.

TH: —decent people?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And it was the—?

SD: The SS. That were the one they feared. They were feared by everyone. By us, but mostly by their own army. They were not—they were feared. There's no other word for it, but fear, because they never hesitated to shoot whoever was not too respectful of them.

TH: Okay. So, that was the first year?

SD: The first year and a half, maybe, you know. When everything was getting into gear for all of them, for us, and we had to get used to being there, you know. We were stuck there, we couldn't go away.

TH: And there was no end in sight for you. I mean, you didn't, we didn't—(both talk)

SD: (laughs) No. Went one day to the next, you never knew. That's how war is for people that are living through it, you know. From one day to the next you don't know. But you accept it, you have to. That's the only way to survive. You take one day at a time and one *catastrophe* at a time, whatever. That's the human nature. (both talk)

TH: So, at the time, you didn't know if the rest of your life you would be under the rule of the Germans.

SD: We had no idea, no.

TH: Interesting.

SD: You never have that, you know. (both talk) It's hard for you because you're not, you know, but we took day to day as day to day.

TH: Okay. And then—(both talk)

SD: We adjust, maybe that is the word, you know, you adjust.

TH: So, what other events of the first year do you recall? That would be '41.

SD: Whatever I told you. We tried to keep the—I realized our mothers tried to keep the, you know, everything going normally, I think. (both talk)

TH: Normally for the kids.

SD: I admire mom now more than ever because we always had little things, like at night we would sit—it was a—I remember the minute spring came she got us busy in the garden, and she would keep on doing the flowers, you know. And she also found a way, with old blankets, that she was able to—she was always able to find things somewhere. Old blankets, military blankets, we had a lot at one time; she made shoes. You could buy this—the soles—the *liège*—I don't know what you call it—cork?

TH: Yes. For the soles.

SD: For the soles. And she would buy—is it going?

TH: Yes.

SD: She would buy the soles, you know, higher for platform—they were platform. And she would prepare the old blanket, she would cut the old blankets and make tops for the soles, and then put the nails on the side. It was very, very nice. I mean, she used to make them for my sister, for herself. Not for me, no, I had regular galosh—(both talk)

TH: The nails went under the side of the cork?

SD: I would think so, yeah. And then—(both talk)

TH: The soles were thick enough that the little nails were tacks.

SD: Then sometimes they would, a couple of times a year—not couple of times a year—maybe two or three times during the war, I can't remember exactly. But, I remember, when they were putting tar on the roads, we would have to go and put the sole of those shoes on the tar and let them dry so that would be waterproof. She figured that one out. And we would go on the side, you know, where it goes near the gutter, it would have some of the fresh tire—tar. So, you—she would go in with the sole and push them into it, so that the bottom of the sole would be waterproof. (both talk)

TH: Waterproof. (laughs) And then the soles were made of cork?

SD: Yeah. They were—we could buy that, and I don't remember where—I mean, she found a way to buy them somewhere.

TH: And the Germans were paving the streets?

SD: No. The town—the people—the employees from the city, I would think, kept [and] continued to keep up as much as they could.

TH: Okay. So, they didn't—okay, the city—(both talk)

SD: They didn't stop. (both talk)

TH: —the city government kept on operating. (both talk)

SD: Yeah. On running. Well, they had to.

TH: Very interesting.

SD: Under the supervision of the German army, and the SS.

TH: Okay. Now, did the SS have representatives in town all the time?

SD: Oh, of course. They representatives in town, or in any cities in France, before they even invaded France. They had friends in France. Let's face it, we had people in France that really believed in Hitler. And were enrolled into spying for the rest of us—on the rest of us. Some of them were caught, nicely, at the end.

TH: Interesting. And did you know any of these people?

SD: No, but my father did. Oh, we knew some people that did business with the Germans, yes.

TH: You suspect—(both talk)

SD: (both talk) Of course, *ouah*[wow]. [It] was visible, it was—yeah. He did.

TH: Okay. So, most people just co-existed with them?

SD: Yeah.

TH: But some people were—(both talk)

SD: (both talk) You had to.

TH: —more—(both talk)

SD: (both talk) You had to. It's like—no, I'm jumping away from where we are, but the Red Cross—Red Cross was getting through, sometimes, to help out people. They didn't help the people that really needed the help. All of the gifts and all of the donations they were sending were given to people that collaborated with the Germans.

TH: I see. So, that—(both talk)

SD: It went in the wrong direction. The Red Cross made very big mistakes, but I guess they had no control after it left their hands. I don't want to accuse the Red Cross anymore, I had bad feelings, you know, when I was younger, but then—let's forget it—I don't think they could supervise what couldn't be supervised. But the distribution of all the goodies that they sent us, even in '46 and '47, only went to some people. They were not the collaborator at the time, they were people placed, politically, in different places, and they were able to get the packages. The goodwill packages.

TH: Let's go back to your mom. So, she made—you had German blankets or blankets—(both talk)

SD: No, they must have been from the—no, no, from our army. You know my mother would have a few blankets put aside, and I'm sure when they realized the war was coming, she must have had a few more blankets put aside; knowing my mother. So, they were that green color, army, you know, very thick, it's like *vert*, you know. And she would cut them, she made patterns, and she made—I think I have a picture of my sister and her in those shoes. I'll have to find it for you.

TH: I would like to see that. Okay, so that was like the first year of the war? (both talk)

SD: Maybe the second year, by the time she figured it out. (both talk)

TH: (both talk) Forty-two?

SD: Forty-two, '43, yeah.

TH: That was when you were in the thick of it, and you didn't know.

SD: In '42 we just—from the beginning, you don't what is going to happen, you know.

TH: And your father was gone by then?

SD: Dad was not with us at the beginning.

TH: And you don't really know where he was. (both talk)

SD: —came back in '43. Well, he was doing this *charbon boi*[charcoal]—what are we briquettes¹⁴. He was making briquettes in the woods.

TH: Oh, making briquettes?

SD: I knew what he was doing, but I don't think the Germans knew what he was doing.

TH: Well, did the—(both talk)

SD: You know, he was making briquettes with the wood. It would—it's—(both talk)

TH: Charcoal bricks?

SD: —charcoal! Dad was making that to help out [in making fuel] for the trucks.

TH: And the charcoal—I don't understand how they made the charcoal into a liquid. It's a process.

SD: Not a liquid. It didn't make gasoline, it heated up whatever we were using to maneuver the trucks. You have to find out—it was done. In Europe, we did. It was like a, you know, when you make alcohol?

TH: A still?

¹⁴A briquette is a block of compressed charcoal or coal dust used as fuel.

SD: A still. It was like a still, attached to trucks, and you would feed that still with those briquettes, and that gave enough of the fuel to operate the trucks. I don't know what it was and I've never found out. I never was curious enough, until you woke me up to everything I saw, you know.

TH: Okay. And he was—(both talk)

SD: He was in the woods. He was actually—(both talk)

TH: Did the Germans know where they were in the woods? (both talk)

SD: Oh, no, no, no, no. No. I told you, we went for that picnic and that's when dad showed up.

TH: Were there roads into this place? And if they had trucks there—(both talk)

SD: Yeah, yeah, but they didn't have the trucks themselves. They made the wood—that charcoal—in order to help those trucks to continue to work. Which trucks they were? I don't know. I know he was just getting himself occupied because he was not in a free France, he was still in France, after he left us. He never went to free France. Some of the army people, some of the soldiers, went to free France to escape, thinking they were escaping. They were not, but—no, that state in the region—where? We don't know. Where? We don't know. Everybody had their own little—(both talk).

TH: Niche?

SD: —niche. If you would—if you had decided to join the, you know, the underground. They all had their niche. My brother in law, in '44, was very young, my brother was about maybe 18, 19 years old, maybe 20, and he was passing people through the Pyrenees to Spain.

TH: Okay.

SD: And he's in two books, he's mentioned in two books.

TH: Your brother in law?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And who was he?

SD: Why? He has nothing to do with the beginning of our story here.

TH: Okay. All right. Well, that's interesting. All right, so that was '42? (both talk)

SD: Forty-three, '42—'42.

TH: Forty-three. When did the bombing occur? That was in '4—(both talk)

SD: Why, we had bombings before I mean, we had bombings in '43, when the English and Americans started—when the Americans got into it. So—(both talk)

TH: In '43? Well, '41 we got into it, but we didn't really crank up until '43.

SD: No. Yeah. Forty-three? That's when regular bombings took place. Not always very well settled, and we didn't have all the things you have now. And I think they dropped their bombs in some areas that were not necessary. They would hear of a convoy of trucks coming for—while the trucks—the train they got was cognac and all that stuff was going to Germany, and it never got to Germany, it got in the river, but in Poitiers.

But that's when they heard of something going on, that's where they would go and bomb, you know. There was a convoy of maybe seafood or something going up north, [the bombers] would stop it or something like that. Or maybe ammunition, because they mixed ammunition [and] prisoners in the trains as well, so that the train looked like it transporting one thing and it had other things inside. They did that a lot, too. So, maybe the Germans were sending some ammunition somewhere and they would hear it through, you know, through the grape vine, as we say. But, no, through the information—secret information. Those we don't—this was constantly going on, you know.

It's like us with the Jewish family, many people did it. Many French people did it, some kept the children, you know, some kept the children and brought them up with their own, you know.

Some never said that—never told the children that their parents had been shot or something, you know. Some I'm sure, to this day, some of them still think they're French.

TH: Did you know any of these kids? (both talk)

SD: (both talk) Small memories. No.

TH: Okay, just the ones that came to your house? And your mom said—(both talk)

SD: Oh yeah, just the two of them. Yeah. (both talk)

TH — they were from the country. Cousins for the country.

SD: We know that they got to England, but we never got news from them. They never wrote us any letters or anything.

TH: How did you know they go to England?

SD: My dad said they got to England.

TH: Okay, cool.

SD: That was enough of the word. (laughs) You didn't ask for many details in those days, you know. Is it to satisfy us? I know that he got them to Spain.

TH: So, then that was '44?

SD: Forty-four was the end.

TH: That's when—? (both talk)

SD: You had the invasion.

TH: In Normandy?

SD: Um-hm. And we were not far from Normandy, you know, it's about four and a half hours on the road.

TH: From Normandy?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Did you know about it? Did you know it was coming or did you—? (both talk)

SD: We guessed something was happening. We guessed something was happening because they were starting to move their people, the Germans, you know. We had more Germans, military people in the camp—I mean, we lived there, so we had more at the beginning. But, around the end of '43, they were all moving out somewhere, so we knew. We heard that something was happening with Russia. Dad didn't give us very many details, he knew a lot more than—

TH: Your father?

SD: Yeah. But he didn't want to give it to us because, you know, you never know when you're talking to people, that you could say something. So, it was more mystery than anything else. Now, the night that—when he passed some guns, once, on his bicycle, and this is near the time they taught us how to shoot them; the revolver. And, he was carrying this, with the fish in the newspaper.

TH: Carrying what?

SD: Yeah. The police—(both talk)

TH: Revolvers?

SD: Yeah, he was pushing—he was passing some ammunition, some arms, through with his bicycle. Somebody was in dire need of something, I don't know what it was. But, that night, he

was coming with his bicycle. He had a basket in front and he would put some food that if he could get—could get some food on his way home—and that night he was driving all the way—he was riding the bicycle all the way from Poitiers, to the little house, the farm room that we had over the farm.

So, that was quite a long way, I mean it took him over two hours to—on the bicycle, you know. And none of the police, I mean, police, not the French police, but the army—German army people—ever stopped him. Usually, they would, one or two would stop and he would have to share *papier*—his papers, identifying him. But, that night, nobody stopped him, it was absolutely luck. My mother knew this was happening because she had me, and she had her and my brother staying up all night waiting for papa to come. So, they knew something, he was passing something. So I know he had papers and a few guns, and that's when he decided we should learn to—he was quite near. You know, if they had found him, that was it. So, that's when he decided that he should have us all learn to shoot a gun.

TH: And you went out into the woods to learn?

SD: Yeah, way into the woods to learn. Yeah.

TH: That's when you shot it and it pushed you back into a tree.

SD: Yeah. You know, I was small, so they usually kept me away from the conversation. I was just—got the action—you know, if you understand. Later on, I asked that question, I said, “Why did they make [me] put this thing in in my hand, and it shoot me right back?” (laughs) My God, my arm was asleep for hours and hours afterwards. I was very upset. But, it was that, I guess that night he got very scared. He must have realized that we were all in danger, so that's when he taught that.

TH: That would be in '43 or—(both talk)

SD: Forty-three, '43. Near the end of '43, yeah.

TH: That was in the thick of it, I guess.

SD: In the thick of it, yeah.

TH: In '44—(both talk)

SD: My brother was there too, though. That's why I'm questioning, Was it '43 or '44?

TH: Yeah. Early on, your brother was away at military school.

SD: Yeah, and he didn't go back after the bombing, but the bombing was in '44. So, this—that night must have been very close to near the end of the war. You see, things are not organized in my mind so well, but that night, he was home because he went with mom [and was] waiting in the woods. I mean, on the side of the road, you know, in the bushes for papa. Because the Germans were downstairs in the farm, that's what concerned us the most.

TH: Oh, so this was while you were at the farm with the big window?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And he was coming out there to get you?

SD: He was coming home. He was bringing us some food, you know. He had a piece of—he had a big fish in there. He had a fish and some vegetables.

TH: But he was also bringing—(both talk)

SD: But he had also some guns in it. (both talk)

TH: —guns. (both talk) Well, where did he drop the guns off?

SD: Oh, that I don't know. That I don't know. But we didn't want mom—mom did not want him to be stopped by the people downstairs—I mean, at—in the farmhouse. You know, the soldiers—
(both talk)

TH: (both talk) So, she went where?

SD: Well, she went in the woods with Pierre—Pierre, no—with my brother Dédé—with André. She went—they went out and they must have turned around in the bushes or something, and went further up on the road, you know.

TH: So, they could warn him?

SD: And dad, he must have dropped those guns on top the road where the underground was in that hayloft.

TH: In the haystack?

SD: I have the feeling that's where it happened. But mom didn't know that. I know she was very nervous that night, I could feel that, and I know she was whispering with my brother, you know, we were in one room so you could see them whisper sometimes.

TH: How much older was your brother than you?

SD: Ten years.

TH: Ten years older? So, he was like a teenager?

SD: Fifteen, yeah.

TH: Okay. And, at the beginning of the war, he was away—

SD: He was at school—military school in the South of France. I don't know exactly what city he was [in], but that's a military school that we had in France for young boys. [My brother] resented the idea of going, but his work was not too good with the school he was going to, so my father said, "Okay, you're going to military school. You don't want to get your grades up? Up you go." So, he always resented that, mostly after, when the Germans got in and started teaching him German. But he spoke it very well. Yep.

TH: He learned to speak it very well.

SD: Well, he had to, yeah. Very interesting. But that has to be later then, you see? See it's—when I put it all together, it has to be later.

TH: But he was there when you were bombed?

SD: Oh yeah. He was with us. He was on vacation; that was June.

TH: So, when your—it wasn't your house, it was apartment that was destroyed.

SD: Well, it was the house, yeah. The building.

TH: The building that you were living in, was it the apartment?

SD: We got the bedroom out of it. My mother was able to save her bedroom all the way through the end of her life.

TH: So, where did the bedroom—(both talk)

SD: As our bedroom fall on my mom and dad. (laughs)

TH: Now, wait a minute. So, go back to the bombing where you and your mother, and your brother and sister, were on the side of the road in a gutter.

SD: Yeah, that was in '45—'44.

TH: Forty-four?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And your apartment house was destroyed? But not the bedroom?

SD: But the bedroom was fine.

TH: So, where did she take the bed next?

SD: That's when we moved.

TH: When you moved to the farm house?

SD: Yeah. When we—no, no, no, no. We couldn't touch anything there, at that time, we had to leave everything, okay? And it was really in bad shape, so we couldn't stay there. Although, we slept there for a couple of nights before we decided where to go. (laughs) But we could not live there. No electricity—(both talk)

TH: That was right after the bombing, you stayed there a couple of days?

SD: Yeah. No electricity, nothing. My brother was not well, and so we were able to clean up—(both talk)

TH: Because of his arm he was—(both talk)

SD: Yeah, so we cleaned up the blankets and all, put them outside, shook them, and we slept there for a few nights, and ate outside, you know. It was not structurally safe, but we had to stay somewhere. So, we had to leave everything there. At the end of [the] war, then, when we were able to go back, that's when mom had [the] bedroom moved. (laughs)

TH: That's—okay. So, it stayed there, and then you went out to the farm house? And—(both talk)

SD: Yeah. None. We had no bedroom there, for sure.

TH: In the route to the farm house, you were staying by yourselves? You weren't with any other people? (both talk)

SD: No. My father insisted that we should be alone.

TH: You were in the woods and you said you ate nuts and berries or—?

SD: We had nuts, we stole the chicken; the eggs, you remember that one?

TH: I told you that, yeah.

SD: My mom stole a couple of cups of milk.

TH: Milked the cow? (both talk)

SD: (both talk) She milked the cows around two-thirty in the morning. (laughs) Unbeknown to the farmer, of course, but she felt—you know the first night that bothered her, knowing they were chomping downstairs. And she thought of the milk, and so she knew what time the man was starting the milking in the morning. Serves them well. “I’m going to go and milk a cup of —”(both talk)

TH: So, this family was eating downstairs while you were hiding out upstairs.

SD: Well, they were in their home, I guess. We slept over the barn—in the barn.

TH: But did they know—they didn’t know you were there?

SD: Oh, yeah. They knew, but they said we could stay there for a night or two, you know.

TH: Okay.

SD: But then go on. That’s the way we approached it, mom said, “We are on our way to so and so, and we have to stay somewhere tonight. Can we stay in your barn?” So, we stayed there two nights.

TH: Okay. And—(both talk)

SD: I was not privy to the conversation she had with the farmers, but I have the feeling this is the way she did it. And they saw [that it was] just the four of us.

TH: Okay.

SD: If they saw a big group, they would not have accepted the point of sleeping, you know. You sleep under the stars, you know, like a lot of people do—did.

TH: Were there big groups of people travelling in the countryside?

SD: There would be groups of people.

TH: In the countryside?

SD: Yeah, they'd come—coming from the city, from Poitiers for example. They looked for an area in the country. Some had a little better money, so they would rent an old house, you know, and stay there.

TH: And get away from the fighting?

SD: Well we have to get away from [the fighting] because they were bombing the cities, they were not bombing the countryside. So, you know, in order to protect everybody, you had to find a niche somewhere. Yeah.

TH: Okay. So, how many—the chronology is making more sense now. Now, you stayed one or two nights in the farmhouse? Where else did you stay in route?

SD: We stayed under the trees. Under a tree [for] one or two nights, because we could hear the bombing not far. I don't know where it was falling, but mom didn't want to take a, you know, a chance on taking on the road, so we would go off the road and we stayed there because we had a—there was a big bombing, and it had to be Angoulême or Poitiers, again. I don't—I'm not sure. Or in the area there because it was really strong and, you know, she had me in her arms and we would count, "One, two, three." You could hear, (makes whistling noise) you know, that noise when a bomb comes down. Ugh, it's awful. It's awful. I don't want to hear it again. But, anyway, so we would stay there—we can stay [since] when had something to eat, we had nuts, and we had some hard bread. Boy did I eat good bread. It gets hard like a rock, but we ate it.

TH: Tasted good?

SD: It tasted good with a little water on it, it made it softer. No, it was okay, it was fine, we made it fun. Mom made it fun. You know, like, you know we used to—okay, I remember we used to put the nuts on top of the bread and put a little water here and there so that would soften the bread, but that made the nuts taste so good. You have no idea how good that is. When I went back to France to take care of her, in 2000, one day I said, “What would you like for dinner, mom?” She says, “You know what I would like? I want walnuts on a piece of bread with butter.” Because she would tell us, she said, “You know better than butter—better than water would be butter. So, when the war is over, we always said, When the war is over—she said, “We’ll put butter, and then we’ll put the nuts on it and you—” And so, one night, mom and I, in 200—maybe 2003 [or] 4, we did it. We had a glass of milk for dinner, and she said, “Isn’t it good?” It was delicious. It really was delicious.

TH: Isn’t that something. Now, where was she? Is she now living by herself or in a home or—?
(both talk)

SD: She was alone and started to fall, and my sister called and said, “What do we do? Should we put her in a home?” And I said, “Well before we put her in a home, I want to see what’s going on.” So, I closed the door here. I moved here in 1997—fall of 1997, September to be exact. And I flew back to France in November 17, 1997, to see what was happening. She was falling. She had a cleaning lady, and she would find black and blue mark on my mom. Mom would say, “Oh, that’s nothing.” She was falling.

So, she was 92, then. And so, I decided to go, so I shipped my car. I have a little geo tracker, you remember my tracker [which] is 20 years old? Well, at that time, it was fairly new and I shipped my tracker to Europe and decided to go spend six months with her and see what would happen—what was happening. So, I did that, and when I got there she got better. But, eventually, fell apart again but—so, I was gone—I fought six months, because I wanted to come back here. I had just moved [and] all my boxes were in the front room of my apartment because I didn’t have time to undo them.

TH: In this apartment right here?

SD: Yeah. And so, I locked the doors. A friend of mine picked up—took care of my electricity and [helped] to pay and everything. And I moved to mom with my car, and I stayed eight and a half years.

TH: Eight and a half years?

SD: She lived—she lived to be 100, and died. (laughs) Isn't that wonderful. The doctor said, "You gave her nine years extra in her life."

TH: My goodness. And she—(both talk)

SD: Yeah, she died with me.

TH: Did she have a home there, a house?

SD: She had an apartment, and then I had to move her from that apartment.

TH: In the same town?

SD: Same. Not Poitiers, but the [place] where we moved eventually after the war. Now, we're jumping from one thing to the other here. (laughs)

TH: I'm getting way ahead, but that's okay. That's okay.

SD: Yeah. And so, I had to move her out of there because we had stairs, and she—eventually, the men that used to carry her up and down could not do it anymore. And I got another apartment, and you'll see—I'll tell you eventually, when we get into that part of my life, how I found this apartment and where it was. And if you think that fate has nothing to do with our lives, it's wrong. This was fate.

TH: Finding the apartment that she—(both talk)

SD: Nah. Finding the apartment and where it was and everything.

TH: Well, you can go ahead and tell me about that right now.

SD: I can?

TH: Yeah, it does have to be—(both talk)

SD: Well, it got to the point where I could not bring her downstairs anymore, she was locked in the apartment, and one day—(both talk)

TH: And what town was this in?

SD: In Châtelleraut¹⁵.

TH: Spell it.

SD: C-h-â-t-e-l-l-e-r-a-u-l-t. That's a big one.

TH: Yes.

SD: Châtelleraut. It's a smaller city, north of Poitiers.

TH: And you—she was living there?

SD: We moved there after World War II, in 19—I was ten, so it had to be 1947, late 1947. My mother opened up a little grocery store.

TH: Now, when did your father—he—was your father dead now?

SD: No.

TH: He was still alive?

¹⁵Châtelleraut is a commune in the Vienne department in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region in France. It is located in the northeast of the former province Poitou, whose capital city was Poitiers.

SD: Um-hm.

TH: And he was still in the army?

SD: Still with the police.

TH: The police.

SD: Still with the police, until the end of his life.

TH: The state police?

SD: Yeah.

TH: The French police?

SD: French police.

TH: Okay, and your mom started a little grocery store. This would be after the war?

SD: Yeah. In '47.

TH: Nineteen forty-seven, yes.

SD: Forty-eight, I think. Forty-eight. No, we were not in Poitiers [for] that long after the war. We were on a year and a half, that's it. So, it had to be '47. So, anyway, we lived there for the rest of my parent's life. At first, it was a grocery store and we lived above it, and then we rented a house *rue Jean d'Arc*. And it was an older house—

TH: *Rue Jeanne d'Arc*, is that the town?

SD: *Rue Jeanne d'Arc*. No, that was Joan of Arc street.

TH: Oh okay.

SD: And we lived there until I left for America, and my mother lived there another ten years after, I think they stayed up there. And then a friend of theirs offered her—offered them—an apartment for life, if they would take care of the building. He had two apartments, one downstairs, one upstairs. My parents chose the upstairs, and they agreed to stay there for life for nothing.

TH: If they took care of the building?

SD: If they took care of the building.

TH: Okay. This in Châte—?

SD: Châtellerault.

TH: Chate—(both talk, sounding out word)

SD: Châtellerault.

TH: Châtellerault.

SD: You know what they made in this city? And they are making—they make cars now. But, before that, always in the metal industry. They did rifles and knives, they were known for making rifles and knives. Always with steel, you understand? And now, they're making cars.

TH: Chenaults¹⁶?

SD: Not Renault, not Peugeot¹⁷. I don't know what car they're making but they're making cars.
(both talk)

¹⁶He is possibly confusing Renault with Citroen or Chenard-Walcker.

¹⁷Renault and Peugeot are two of the more famous brands of French cars.

TH: (both talk) They're making cars, okay.

SD: At—parts for cars, I would think. But the metal still is there.

TH: It's a steel town?

SD: Steel town. Yeah. Was always a steel town. So, anyway, this—in this little town—finally, one day, my mother says to me, “Simone I think I am going to die here.” And, for her not to be able to go outside and enjoy the flowers and the garden, was like, I'm going to die. So, I said, “Mom I'm going to put an application and request an apartment. Lower level [and] in town.”

TH: This was in 19—jumping ahead, again.

SD: In 2000—in 1997—1998. Okay?

TH: Okay.

SD: In 1998. So, one day, I'm waiting, I made the request, you know, [at] every office. I mean, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. You can't hear nothing. [And then] make phone calls, “Do you have anything?” “No. No.” Meanwhile, I'm not taking mom out.

TH: This is in the town?

SD: Yeah, in the city. It's a city. And so, I'm getting a little bit frustrated, and I don't think—and she's getting worse and it's just not good for her either. I go to get a new—no—her hearing aids to be verified or, you know, correct—cleaned up and everything. That—they have offices like here. So, right next door, is a—how do you call them? Places where they rent houses or sell houses?

TH: Real estate office?

SD: Real estate office. Right next door to the store. And, while they're fixing my mother's ears—
(laughs)

TH: (both talk) Oh, this is—they were doing—working on your mom’s ears?

SD: They were working on mom’s ears—one door—I go next door and say, “You wouldn’t have any apartment for rent—”

TH: On a first floor?

SD: “—on first floor? My mother is older.” “Well, as a matter of fact, this lady and this gentleman that left here are putting their apartment for rent.” I said, “Well, I’ll be interested in seeing it.” She says, “Well, it’s not on the first floor. It’s not on the first floor.” We’d call a *rez-de-chaussée*[ground floor]. She says, “It’s not on the first floor, but the apartment is in a building with an elevator. A lift.” I said, “And it has a ramp for chairs?” My mother, by then, was in a chair already.

TH: Wheelchair?

SD: Yeah. So, I said, “I’m interested. I want to see it.” I didn’t ask any more questions, then I made an appointment to go see it. She’s okay. So, I went home, prepared lunch, and said, “Mom, I’m going. I’m going to go see an apartment. Watch your TV, I’ll be right back.” I go and I get there and I meet the lady, she said, “All right, I’m going to show it to you.” So, we’re driving and she stops, she says, “This is the apartment.” It’s in *Rue Jeanne d’Arc*, across the street from the house we had when I grew up.

TH: Was the grocery store—(both talk)

SD: No. The grocery store—we had moved into, you know, when she left the grocery store we rented a house. *Rue Jeanne d’Arc*, it’s across the street from my house where I grew up in. (both talk)

TH: The house that you grew up in? (both talk) How cool.

SD: [We] go to the third floor. The apartment is absolutely perfect, and I go on the—at the balcony and it’s a beautiful balcony where my *maman*[mother] can put flowers and everything. I’m seeing my own yard and the fence where I used to go over, that night. (laughs)

TH: You went over the fence at night, when you were growing up there?

SD: Sure, of course. (laughs) All teenagers do that. And so, I don't know why, I said, "I want it." And so, okay. We did the paperwork and I go home and I said, "I think we have an apartment, mom." But the owners had to interview us, they made us wait three weeks, with no phone calls. Nothing. Uh oh, said, "Something is going on here." So, I went back to the real estate people and I said, "What going on?" "Well, Mrs. D'Addario, you know, you mother is aged, she's in her '90s, and we had the experience with an older person and we ended up—by not getting the rent." I said, "Excuse me?" I said, "This is—" What do we call it? It's against somebody or a certain type of people.

TH: Discrimination?

SD: Discrimination. It's just beginning in France, since 2000. Discrimination word, you know. And I said, "This is called discrimination." I said, "This is not right." I said, "I'm offering. I will pay the rent. I'm [a] responsible person, this is my information, you know I'm French. I will not run away." Well I was very mad, and the husband of the owner of this real estate place was running for office in the city, I said, "And I will go to court if necessary." Meanwhile, he was in the office next door. He heard it all. The same afternoon they set up an appointment for an interview with the owners, and I got the apartment, of course.

So, I'm so happy, I got the apartment, I signed the thing and I come home and I realized [that] in all of this—I was so pleased, and I was so happy—all of this to—suddenly, I said to myself, How much is the rent? I forgot with all this going on, to ask how much was the rent. This is a luxury apartment and I'm saying to myself, Oh my god. I have my husband's social security, it's paying for the expenses here. I said, "What do I do here? I'm not working." I had no health insurance, but it was so important, I knew we had to have this apartment, so I took all my savings and I took care of it, and we had the apartment. We moved *maman* in, we took the bedroom, still.

TH: She still had the same bedroom set?

SD: Yeah, yes. We took that bedroom in, although, she had a hospital bed. It set them up—but, until she died, her bedroom was with her. It was very important in those days, you know, when you were the oldest of the eight people—eight kids—and then your husband is in the army, it's not that much money. So, when they bought that bedroom, they must have made a big sacrifice because it was, to my mother, life itself. And so, this is my story with the bedroom. I'm so glad I was able to put it up of the third floor. (laughs)

TH: And it overlooked your other—your—(both talk)

SD: Can you believe this?

Pause in recording

SD: That is so bad—you know, when you're kids you want to try it but—

TH: Go on.

SD: When you're children you want to try everything and your parents, being good parents, say, "Why not?" So, I tried piano, violin, voice—(both talk)

TH: (both talk) Well let's go back—the end of the war?

SD: Yeah. We came back to Poitiers, lived in a rental for about a year and a half. They fixed the building where my mom's bedroom was. (laughs) We stayed in that apartment, we never went back to the house. We stayed in that apartment. It was a difficult time because you couldn't find anything, you know, it was hard. We couldn't find butter, we couldn't find even fake butter, that sort of thing. That was a hard time for my—for feeding the family, I think. Thank God, we had a garden, and then something happened. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother died and left the hotel, you know, to be divided between eight children. (both talk)

TH: Can I close that door?

SD: Seven children. Oh, between seven children and my parents decided, well mostly my father, not my mother. But my father decided that we should buy the hotel, you know, with all—(both talk)

TH: This was the one that your mother grew up in?

SD: Yeah. "We should buy the hotel." He promised my grandmother that he would take care of it, you know, blah, blah. So, it came, the time to—the funeral and blah, blah, blah. And they would not sell it to my father.

TH: No, blah, blah, blahs anymore?

SD: No. (laughs) So, they would not sell it to my father, to my mother or—and my father.

TH: This is your mother's brothers and sisters?

SD: Yes. They voted that, no, it was not enough money. My father said, "Listen, this is the price that the real estate people give. That's the price I'm going to sell it for. I'm offering to buy it with my wife's part, portion, and our savings." They wouldn't let him and he got very upset, so he said, "All right, I won't buy it." Very, very upset. Eventually, they sold the property for less, of course, than what my father offered, and with my mother's half—I mean, part—inheritance—she decided to open a store. We had to find a home, or we had to find someplace to go, we couldn't live the way we were anymore, so my mother said, "Okay. I want to open this little grocery store." It was a business that was on already, she said, "I'm going to open it and we'll live upstairs." They had the apartment above; two stories. So, we moved to Châtellerault. Well—

TH: Okay.

SD: That's why we moved to Châtellerault right after the war, and I went to regular school, I loved that, I didn't have to wear a uniform so I was very happy. And I went to a regular school and my mother opened up that little grocery store, and dad took the train everyday [and] went to work in Poitiers.

TH: How long a commute was it?

SD: Was a good hour.

TH: Okay.

SD: An hour, and an hour at night when he came back. And we were fine for a few years there, we were doing fine. My sister lived with us and she worked—she helped my mother, and she was in school for accounting—accounting and, you know, typing and all that—office work. She wanted to be a hairdresser but she couldn't solve her problem with her heart, so she was in the school being trained to be an office secretary.

TH: And your brother?

SD: I was in school—and my brother was then—by then he was in the regular army as an officer. *Sous-officier*[non-commissioned officer]. And he was in Africa. He decided he was going to be a paratrooper, and was trained over there and—so, the store is doing fine, until they opened up a big department store across the street from my mom. (laughs) Used to be a bookstore across the street and she was fine, she was alone in that little store, you know, had beautiful fruit, beautiful everything. I remember her going to the market early in the morning, around three o'clock in the morning, to get the best fruits, the best everything, fresh. And she pulled her little wagon and bring it home to the store, and all that, those were the way it was at the time. Well I know we ate a lot of bananas. (laughs)

TH: But she had fresh vegetables and fresh fruit?

SD: Fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, no meat or anything like this. Nothing perishable, but just fresh fruit, herbs. She took care of all the dry herbs, you know. She was a little bit of a, like, a pharmicicle—pharmacy—what we called free medicine or, you know, that sort of—“You take this herb and you'll feel better.” You know that sort of thing. It was *épicerie fine*[delicatessen], it's called. And a lot of candy jars, candies of every sort, that I used to steal and take it to school and sell it. (laughs) She used—she never counted those candies, poor sweetheart. If she only knew. So, yes, I used to sell my kids at break through—you know, around ten o'clock we had a break, so I would sell the candies. I made good money, I really made good money. I think my mother knew I was doing it.

TH: You think she did?

SD: I think so. She was a smart kid. She was a smart woman. Yeah.

TH: The oldest child is usually the most responsible.

SD: Well, there was no—you know, my brother was away. I mean, since my birth my brother was never home, except for vacations, even during war, you know. So, then he ended up by marrying a girl from the south of France, and went back to Africa—no—yeah. They lived in Algiers for a while, then he was sent to Vietnam.

TH: Algiers?

SD: Um-hm.

TH: That's in North Africa?

SD: North Africa. And that's where he got his parachute—paratrooper's thing, you know, in the army. Something my father didn't want him to do. But he did. And my father tried to bring him back to Europe, didn't work, he was already in training and the captain would not free him. So, my father didn't win on that part.

TH: So, whose home was in Algiers for a number of years?

SD: They lived in an apartment, yeah. Nice apartments.

TH: Okay.

SD: That was my brother.

TH: Did you visit him there?

SD: No, my parents did. Not me.

TH: Okay.

SD: Because by then I was in college, and after that I was married, so—(both talk)

TH: Where were you in college?

SD: In my home town. College for young ladies.

TH: What was that, like, a liberal arts college or just all girls college? Ladies college? (both talk)

SD: No. You—it was a girl's—just a girl's college. It's now a boy's, you know, it's a mix now.

TH: It's co-educational?

SD: It's co-educational now. It happened while I was, maybe, married two or three years, that's all.

TH: So, how long was your college—you still lived at home or your—(both talk)

SD: (both talk) I lived at home. I lived at home all the time, I did not go away. Stayed with my family, it was very comfortable. I was the baby and was left by myself. My sister was where—she was in the south of France, she went to live—what she did—she went to live with my sister in law, because the baby was coming and my brother was sent to Vietnam.

TH: Your brother's wife?

SD: Brother's wife was pregnant, immediately after the marriage, so my sister went to stay with her. Found a job there as a secretary for a store or something, she had a good job. And so, I was the only child left, you know.

TH: And you were how old?

SD: Well, I was seven years younger than my sister, so I must have been about, what, in '20s—12 years old, 11 years old. So, I was alone there. Why should I move anywhere?

TH: Because you were selling candy and making all this money at school. (laughs)

SD: No, no. I was just a very happy child, so my mother was strict on some things, but my father was very straight, when he said no, it was no, it was never going to change. So, you knew that, you know from the beginning if you could get them or not. I could get my mother anytime I wanted, but not my dad.

TH: You could get her to go with whatever you wanted to do? (both talk)

SD: I mean, to—almost.

TH: Okay.

SD: I never was—I never was a bad child. I just loved sports. So, my time was spent—we belonged to a tennis club that did tennis, rowing, volleyball, you know. So, I spent my days off from school or the hours that I was not school, I was always playing basketball at school, or I was rowing with the team on the river, or I was on a canoe ride somewhere. And then—

TH: A canoe ride? On the rivers? (both talk)

SD: Oh yeah. I love canoes. Yeah, in the river, yeah. We had a big river. We have a very big basin, so it's wonderful to do rowing.

TH: What was the basin of the river?

SD: La Vienne.

TH: How do you spell the river?

SD: V-i-e-n-n-e. Vienne, that's the river.

TH: River? Huh, okay.

SD: Good basin, so you could do that, you know, so we had a team for rowing. I did the four and the six.

TH: Four and—four what?

SD: Four row—rowing—(both talk)

TH: Four rowers?

SD: It's called the four and the six—no—the eight. The six I tried, I did not—

TH: Did you read the book *Boys in the Boat*?¹⁸

SD: No, I never did. (laughs)

TH: I will get that for you. But, anyway, go on. So, you were in rowing teams?

SD: So, we were—we were—yeah.

TH: Did they compete with other schools? (both talk)

SD: We did competition. Oh yeah. Yeah, we had to compete with two and—yeah—no—(both talk)

TH: (both talk) Or other clubs?

SD: Yeah. Other clubs, not school. School was not in rowing, school was just basketball, volleyball, and then athletics racing. We used to do—

TH: Foot racing? Running?

SD: Yeah. Running.

TH: So, you played basketball?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Volleyball?

SD: Volleyball. (both talk)

¹⁸*The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* is a book about the University of Washington eight-oared crew that represented the USA in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, and narrowly beat out Italy and Germany to win the gold medal.

TH: And you [were] a runner?

SD: Well, not a good runner, no. I tried for the school but I was not a fast one. I really wasn't. I was not a good jumper either. Or high jump, no. We did all this, you know, Olympic type of sports at school.

TH: But basketball was your favorite?

SD: Basketball, I loved, yeah.

TH: How about volleyball?

SD: I did too, I loved volleyball. I just love all sports. You offer it to me, I do it. And I had my fencing with my dad, you know. He worked but he taught—also, he we had a *salle*¹⁹—it's called a *salle*, a *salle d'armes*, it's a gymnasium specifically for fencing. You know with a *piste*²⁰, you know, running—you're working on a special—(both talk)

TH: Platform?

SD: —platform. It's not really a platform, it should really be on the floor, but—(both talk)

TH: How wide is it?

SD: Oh, I don't know. It's about—(both talk)

TH: Two to three feet?

SD: Yeah. At least four feet wide.

19A *salle* or a *salle d'armes* is a hall or room specifically used for fencing.

20The *piste* or strip is the playing area in fencing. International rules require the *piste* to be 14 metres long and between 1.5 and 2 metres wide (approximately 46 feet by 5 or 6 feet).

TH: Four feet wide.

SD: You see it in the Olympic games. You see where they are. They are on the *piste*, and they can (inaudible)—(both talk)

TH: What's it called?

SD: *Un piste*.

TH: Spell it.

SD: P-i-s-te—(both talk)

TH: P-i-s—(both talk)

SD: -t-e. *Piste*.

TH: Okay, interesting. And—

SD: So, I did all this. I did all this. I was not having problems in the streets or anything like this because I always had something to go to. On Wednesday, we had no school, Wednesday we take off. And I always had sports on Wednesday, so one way or another, I was busy doing—my mother—my parents knew what I was doing, you know. I had just—but, sometimes I came late and you didn't want them to know, so— I also had the roof. I had a room at the back of the house that we rented in *Rue Jeanne d'Arc*, and there was a nice little roof. I could get off my window to the roof. (laughs)

TH: If you wanted—(both talk)

SD: The problem was getting back up. I could jump, but coming back, I didn't have a ladder or anything so they had to give me the—(both talk)

TH: Oh, who is it? Your friends, your boyfriends?

SD: My friends. No, my—yes, I had boyfriends too, like everybody else. I had a boyfriend. He lived in the same street, that was the problem. So—

TH: Why was that a problem?

SD: That was not a problem. But, yeah, we saw each other too much, I think. (laughs) No, it was fun. It was fun. It's kids, you know, kids doing that. But I never—oh yeah, I had one boyfriend once—I mean, very nice guy. He became a beautiful dentist. He's still the dentist in town, he's retired yet, he should be. He's too dangerous. He became a dentist and his parents had a store not far from the grocery store, and we met each other very early in our years. They were a Jewish family and one day he says, "Oh, let's take the canoes and go on a little, you know, trek." I said, "Well, I'll take mine." He said, "No, no, no. We'll go to together on the same canoe." "Okay." So, we up on the canoe and we onto my cute little island, we always stopped at—when we were on the canoe.

TH: A little what?

SD: Little island in the middle of the river, you know. And he became fresh. Simone didn't like to be fresh people, I guess. So, what I did, I jumped off in the river, crossed wherever—to the side—and started walking home. It's not next door, you know, it's about maybe 10 miles. And I'm walking and he's following with the canoe because he signed up for the canoe at the club, I didn't sign off on the canoe, (laughs) and he said, "Please, get back in the canoe. This is ridiculous." I said, "This is not ridiculous. I'm not getting back in that canoe." So, finally, I got home—I got at the club, and I was mad as hell. Took my shower, got dressed, took my bicycle, went home, and I said, "Mother if he come near the house, shoot him." (laughs) She knew right away, she said, "Uh oh, something happened." I said, "Yes, certainly did. " I didn't, you know, it's funny, that's the only boy that I went out with that I got scared of, you know.

TH: That's interesting.

SD: And it's very, very hard for a young person to take. I couldn't trust anybody for a long time after him.

TH: So, your basketball, you played for the school?

SD: I played for the college where I was, and then I played—and my coach, in college, invited me to play for the state team in Poitiers. So, I said okay. So, I went to play with them and I

played like this for—I played for the school—my school—and I played in Poitiers for the pro—for the pro-group, well I wouldn't call them, really, pro-pro.

TH: Did they pay you to play?

SD: No.

TH: No, not then?

SD: No, she wasn't being paid either. In those years, you know, we had—basketball was not that big in Europe. But I remember going and playing in the rain, on dirt. We didn't have gymnasiums like you have here, you know, this—we're talking after the war. No gymnasium, just—at basketball thing—in the dirt, in the mud, and sometimes there was no nets around it, just a round circle. And how do you dribble—

TH: In the mud?

SD: —in the mud. Huh? Tell me? And then we would go by train and come back by train like muddy people, because they had no showers. So, we played university against a university, that was the—the professionals were a little bit more organized. So, I started going with her once a week for training, and then I had the school, I had to keep up my grades. And that's when I didn't feel too well, I was growing too fast. I grew too fast. I don't know how many centimeters in the six months' time, so, I had problems with my spine, so I had to stop all exercise completely. So, they did a few—(both talk)

TH: X-rays?

SD: Well, they did X-rays, they did all that. I was diagnosed with the beginning of *Mal de Pott*²¹. It's spinal tuberculosis, that's what it is. Simply because my nourishment when I was growing up was not very good. I didn't have good diets and I didn't have a lot of calcium and all that, so they had to shove all this at me within a few—I missed school [for] about seven months. My friends brought the work at home for me to do. My parents set up a bed in that house across from the beautiful apartment we got eventually.

²¹Pott disease or Pott's disease is a form of tuberculosis that occurs outside the lungs whereby disease is seen in the vertebrae.

And I considered doing suicide, I was about 13 years old, and my father sat with me for many, many nights. I had it all set up, I knew I would—because I didn't think I would walk again, and so—I think what, you know, they used the medicine they knew [and] the knowledge they knew at the time. They did two spinal taps, right in my own bed, and you're not supposed—you know. And this was very dangerous and they certainly wouldn't do this today, but that was done because the hospital was not set up yet, or anything like that. So, no. It took a long time to get back to normal, I learned to walk again. My father—(both talk)

TH: So, you couldn't even walk because of the pain in your back?

SD: Well, because there was so much space in between my—(both talk)

TH: Vertebrae? (both talk)

SD: —spinal cord. Each—it's so much space, that, if it cut my spinal cord it would kill me. So, it got to that point, very simply, by two big growths on the side of my leg, and that appeared one day, very red, and very scary. And, from that, this happened.

TH: What was the name of it, again? Spinal—(both talk)

SD: Spinal tuberculosis. *Mal de Pott*. If you put *Mal de Pott*, it will—a long time ago, right after the war, you had a lot of those conditions with children, that's what happened.

TH: Because of bad diet during the war?

SD: Well, you know, we had no milk or anything like this. To build your bones—

TH: Calcium?

SD:—starts in the calcium. And then they shoved too fast, too much, and I grew so much. Well, anyway, this was a bad—like my mother would say, “A bad year.” Because we didn't know. But, everything went fine, but my dad is the one that took me to a specialist. Somebody drove us to Poitiers. This man just retired, he was a professor at a home for children with tuberculosis in Brittany²². And he retired, and he retired in Poitiers; he was not seeing any more patients, but my father was able to—through people—to get a visit with him. So, I went to see him, and then he

²²Brittany is a cultural region and historic province in the northwest of France.

got me up on my feet—dad helped me in the back—and he examined me and he asked me, he says, “Do you want to stay like this for the rest of your life? In a wheelchair?” And I said—I had big tears coming out and he knew I was very upset, and dad was upset too, of course. I said, “No. I don’t.” he said, “Well, we’re going to get you back on your feet.

So, every morning, I had a father that was absolutely outstanding. Every morning, at six o’clock, we would be at the river and dad and I would go in this water, and go downriver to the club from—almost the island where the little accident happened with the guy. Almost from there, every morning we would go down the river swimming, the two of us, then we had another policeman waiting at the pier around seven thirty to help me, you know, get back to the car—to the house, and by seven weeks, after dad had started all this with me, and the medication, did mine—and the massages and everything—I was walking.

TH: So, you didn’t walk for—

SD: I would—I didn’t walk for at least five months, at all. At the beginning, it was just a—they had just a spinal tap done and you’re not supposed to move, so I would stay.

TH: So, the swimming—(both talk)

SD: The swimming did it, and my dad. Because many times I wanted to quit, because someday that river was pretty cold.

TH: Cold? But your dad got in with you?

SD: Um-hm. We swam together every morning. It was so very—you—he saved my life. He really did because I don’t think I would’ve lived in any other way. No. We used to sing. And, you know, we’re down the river, and in the morning the—you know, the humidity is down so it’s like smoking on top of the river, and dad would sing and the—the sound went way up, you know, and no one is around and the world was just ours. And he used to tell me stories and sing.

TH: And how did—did he—what kind of strokes did you do? Did you do the regular crawl?

SD: No, we—no we don’t—no. I did my breast—

TH: Breaststroke?

SD: —my breaststrokes.

TH: And that way he could sing while he's doing a breaststroke.

SD: And I am—and I would do a little tapping, once in a while, to relax, you know. Just tapping with the legs, and it was good for my back and my hips. And he would do and he count—he would count them. No, we did breaststrokes. I didn't crawl until later on. It was not a very common movement: the crawl. Not for us anyway. We wasn't taught that.

TH: So, did you get warmed up in the water, once you got in there?

SD: Well you would have to. It felt like (mimics shivering) at the beginning. I remember making like this (mimics shivering) "Sweetheart, sweetheart." He would say, "Sweetheart come on, don't think about it, don't think about it." Those were the bad days, ugh. That was so cold, and then you would get home. I remember he would put that robe around me, when we got out at the club, they were nice at the club. They were always there—somebody to help, you know, to put me in the car. But that didn't last long, I mean the training, yes, but eventually I was able to get out by myself—(both talk)

TH: On your own? (both talk)

SD: —on my own. Very quickly.

TH: There was a ladder there?

SD: That was a quick—you know, you atrophy yourself when you don't move, and this is what was happening to my body and that doctor saw it, and said, He can't let this happen. So, he must have talked with dad very seriously, and we started about two days after, we made arrangements and—(both talk)

TH: Good for your father. (both talk)

SD: —we got it done. Somebody would drive us from—the police station was very—the police station in Châtellerault was very nice. Dad didn't work there but he was known, so they made

sure that they took us in the morning to that point in the river, and then at the club there was always somebody to help us when we came.

TH: So, it was later on that you played basketball and volleyball?

SD: I was playing before, too.

TH: Okay.

SD: But, after that, I did. Yeah.

TH: And you got back in?

SD: That was good. Yeah.

TH: You got back at it?

SD: It was wonderful. It was wonderful. It was—I was doing too much at one time with the basketball story, because I started sports very early, I mean I remember fencing when I was four years old with the foil my father had made for me, you know. But, it was so much, I mean the training—the basketball training, and I didn't want to leave the pros, you know. I was so proud at school. I was the only one playing for a pro-team, you know, and it was so—she didn't see it and I didn't see it until one day I got so tired, and it was—the sickness was there, but I was fighting it I guess, I didn't want to say anything to anybody about—and then this big lump came on, and it was definitely an infection, so then it had to be discovered.

TH: You were—(both talk)

SD: But sports, it's a savior for many people, it's very important to do some kind of exercise. It really is.

TH: Are you walking today?

SD: I walk, yeah. I walk. We had a bike too, but the bike had to be taken away because the doctor said it was not good for my new knee, and I stressed the old knee, and so he said, “No, no. You walk and when it starts hurting you stop.” But I like to swim, yeah. Thank God we have a pool.

TH: You swim here?

SD: Yeah.

TH: In the summer when it’s warmer?

SD: No, no, we have a heater in our pool, so—(both talk)

TH: And you go every day?

SD: Well, I would like to do it every day, but I don’t. I’m a little lazy lately. I know I should go back to everyday, yeah. I go through moments in my life where I do a lot, and then moments where I don’t want to do anything. I don’t know if it’s like this with everybody, but right now I’m at a point where I don’t give a shit about anything, you know. And that’s wrong. I need to get back into myself and be serious about the whole thing, but I do plan on going every day, yeah.

TH: Good for you. Okay. Now—(both talk)

SD: So, those are lessons you learn as you grow up. Now, I’m gray, getting very old. (laughs) They don’t seem to be too important anymore.

TH: You’re not that old.

SD: So, they did—

TH: Stop—(inaudible)

SD: So, in 19—

TH: Go ahead.

SD: So, in 1947 we moved to Châtellerault. Then we had a better organized life. Mom had her store, I had school, my sister was in school, dad was working. Seems to go very well, you know. Financially, no. My mother was not making much money out of the store, but she was happy she was doing something that she wanted to do. And then, eventually, she had to leave it, I mean the accountant said, “We’ve got to give it up, the store across the street is set up with cash registers, and fish, and meat, and all that.

TH: It was a grocery store across the street?

SD: Grocery store.

TH: A big grocery store, not just a department store.

SD: No, no, no, no. So, she had to give it up. It was never a store after that anyways. So, we moved to that house on *Rue Jeanne d’Arc* and took a—yeah, a good normal life, you know, like everybody lives. You have some ups and downs and—but that’s fine. And dad opened a little school—I mean, he didn’t open it, it was at the police station. They gave him a whole area, and they built some *piste de* (inaudible) for the thing. And he started teaching the children from high school and college, and my *maman* became the mother because some of the parents would not pick them up on time at night, you know, so he would bring them home. And so, he was like a big dad.

TH: These are the fencing students?

SD: Yeah. You know parents drop them after school, and then never pick them up. Same thing in dancing, when my daughter was a dancer, same thing. They forget. And so, my mother would give them a cup of soup or something before the parents finally came to pick them up.

TH: They come to you house to pick them up?

SD: Yeah, dad would bring them home and say, “I’m sorry, but mom didn’t show up yet.”

TH: So, high school and college, where's the cutoff for high school, and where does college begin?

SD: That's the same school for us, okay.

TH: It's all one school? Okay, okay.

SD: All the way to the baccalaureate.

TH: Which is—what age and what grade?

SD: It's—okay—it's in third— *sixième college*[sixth grade]— *sixième, septième, huitième*—no. *Sixième*[sixth grade], *cinquième*[seventh grade], *quatrième*[eighth grade], *troisième*[ninth grade]. On third, so that's three years. [On the] third year you go for the *brevet supérieur*²³.

TH: Is that a test?

SD: That's the—that's a test. Yeah.

TH: Examination?

SD: From all over the world, from all over France, same test. Okay? Everybody has to pass this. That's like graduation from high school but a little more—(both talk)

TH: Intense?

SD: —intense. Than what you do here. It's not based on what they done all year, it's based on that exam. They have an oral—they have a written exam, and then an oral exam. And if you don't make the written, you don't even go for oral, you're not called.

TH: What—about what age is this?

²³*Le Collège* is what Americans would think of as Middle School, from ages 11 to 16 Years old. It is compulsory and ends with a test called “le brevet” which is a national diploma exam which tests seven common core skills. While these ages are typical, it is not uncommon for French students to have repeated a year and be older than the ages listed.

SD: Well that's—(both talk)

TH: (both talk) Eighteen?

SD: Yeah, seventeen, eighteen. And then you go directly into university study depending on the direction you take, you know. Some—I wanted to go to law school, so I had enough points, but I wanted two more years in a regular college to more strength into some of the areas [that were] a little bit weaker. I wanted—my parents thought that was good thing to do, then I met somebody so I got married, so—but, my intention was—the direction was college. I mean, it was a university in Paris, and I wanted to go to that particular university and I never made it there.

TH: And it was a law school?

SD: That was law. I mean, it had more branches but, you know.

TH: A law school as part of the university?

SD: (both talk) They had a very good law school. Yeah.

TH: In Paris? What was the name of that school?

SD: That was the—I forget—that's the best—the big one. That's the best one there is. It will come back. It will come back to me.

TH: We can come back to that.

SD: Still on—it's still the best school in some areas.

TH: So, where were you when you met—(both talk)

SD: I was in Châtelleraut, when—(both talk)

TH: —this fella you married?

SD: Oh my God. All right, I had—we had a very good family friend, also in the business of food. He was a fisherman, he was fishmonger (telephone rings). Not a fisherman, but a fishmonger. Fisherman—I mean, he had a fish market.

TH: He had a fish market where? In—

SD: (inaudible) Originally Monsieur Coireau had worked for a big fishmonger in Poitiers. Big friends with my—became a big friend with my father because they loved to hunt—to go hunting. And so, they became friends and their family lived outside of Poitiers, in a little village and we met them a couple of times at a big hunting lodge, you know, things like that. And my father talked to him about opening his own fish market in Châtellerault, because we needed a fish market there, my father says, “There are none in that area and you’re going to make good money.” So, his friend took his word, opened the fish market right near where we lived in—near *Jeanne d’Arc*. So that’s how we had a fish market. What were we talking about?

TH: How you met your husband?

SD: Oh yeah. So, they had two daughters, and they had one daughter my age and one three years older, Lilian and Coco—Colette. And we became good friends, you know, very good friends because [in] all the big celebrations we were all together anyways, so we became good friends. And Lilian, after our bachelor’s exam, got a bachelor’s degree and went to work for the American camp. We had an encampment of American soldiers outside of Châtellerault, and so they were employing a lot of French people, and they employed her and other people with English background. You know a little bit of an English education.

TH: A US—a US military base stayed in France?

SD: Yes, a US—Yeah, well one of them. There’s quite a lot, but we had a big one. So, she found a job there after college. I was still in college, I was three years behind her, and she met a nice guy, a nice American soldier, automatically, you know. Mostly, they were working for [the] American camp. So, she met John Addison, and started going out with him. Well that was a big no-no in town. Yeah. All—French people are very uppity, some people. So, anyway, she started going out with him and she said—I think—they became very serious about it and she said, “I think I’m going to go to the United States with him. I’m going to leave and go.” I said, “You’ve got to be crazy, I mean, you know, that’s a big thing. That’s a big change of life.”

So, they did go out for a couple of years, and then he was on his way back, his tour of duty was over and he was leaving, so, maybe six months before he left—maybe six [or] seven months—he had met my husband John. That did not—was not in this camp. He was in La Rochelle, that's a port in France, south of where we were. And I don't know how they met each other but they became good friends.

TH: Was he in the military as well?

SD: My husband? Yeah, both of them were in—so, this John Addison, Lilian's friend, managed the club at the military camp. Is it where he met John? I don't really know. So, one night he said, he has a friend visiting him from La Rochelle, "Why don't you come?" And I loved to dance, I just loved to dance, so every Saturday night, every Sunday, we danced our little feet away. And so, he came and—to the dance—with John Addison and Lilian, and I met John. And well, I guess he loved to dance, too. And we had such a good time, very good time, I mean, we danced, and danced, and danced. So, he said, "Well I'm coming back next weekend because you have a good club." It's true that we had a very good night club.

TH: Oh, it was in a night club? It wasn't part of the military base?

SD: No, no, no. John was managing the club at the military base, but this was a night club in town. Very good orchestras.

TH: In which town?

SD: Châtellerault.

TH: Okay.

SD: So, we loved to dance there and they had good bands every time. So, you know, how kids are, we loved to go dancing. So, we came back the next weekend, and we danced again, and danced again. It was fine, it was good. Meanwhile, I'm still in college and I'm still working, and also, I had passed the *concours*, a state test for a *secouriste*, meaning that all medical things that are emergency medical—I had that. I was taking this course, and I also—swimming.

TH: Emergency medical technicians?

SD: Yeah. Something I—that's—(both talk)

TH: Like an EMT in this country?

SD: That's it, EMT. (both talk)

TH: Kind of like the nurse? (both talk)

SD: Yeah. So, I put—I passed that exam. All that, during my life, and also for swimming; lifesaver. And so, I applied because I was being paid for that—summer camp advisor, you know, so I made it to a very good camp in—they accepted me at a very good camp that went to Brittany to take care of young children that had problems during the year, health problems and all that. So, I was hired to do that, to do lifeguard and, you know, be there just in case of an accident or something. So, I got a group of kids, and I had boys in it, so I had to go away.

And John declared himself very interested in going out with me, blah, blah, blah. He drove me to Tours, where I was supposed to go and meet the bus with the children and all that, and very seriously, he said he was very serious—could I—could he see me after I came back from the summer camps? I said, “Of course, you know.” It was fine, I had somebody to dance with so it's good. And so, when I came back—I was gone about six [or] seven weeks—and when I came back, he came on good weekend, and we danced of course. He said that he was interested in getting married. That was decided very quickly, I think. Maybe too quickly (laughs) but, you know, you're young, he want—I know how—it was very interesting to think of America.

TH: How old were you?

SD: I was 18. And so, I said, “Yes, but my parents have to say yes.” And so, he prepared himself to come and meet my parents. My mother knew about the romance a little bit, but she had never met him, and we had a very good—we had a hunting dog, of course, that used to bite anybody in uniform, so this was a problem. I had to tell my father that this young man was coming to see him, but he was wearing a uniform, and it was an American uniform. And we were concerned about the dog, you know. My father said, “Well, I'll see him such and such date.” Made a date. I said, “He comes on [the] weekend because he works in La Rochelle, he's not here.” So, he came, the dog kissed that guy. I can't believe it. He came in his uniform and the dog did nothing. (laughs) We thought—my mother and I said, “That's it, he's going to pull the pants off this guy.” I had prepared John, I said, “John with the dog, it hates uniforms. That's it, he hates uniform.”

We came to meet my father, and my father—so he met my father at the entrance, then my father took him in the dining room and closed the door, so mom and I are at the door trying to listen to what's going on because my dad does not speak English and John speaks very, you know, English—broken French. And I'm not listening anything, and then we're getting nervous and he finally opened the door and makes us come in, my father makes us come in. He said, "Well—" John was all red in the face (laughs), his ears were red and everything, it was so cute.

I was very nervous, and dad said, "Well, if you think it's going to work, it's going to be your life not ours." And John said, "Yeah, I know." I said, "But, I'm leaving. I have to go back to the United States." That was in November, maybe October or November. Said, "I have to go back to the United States in April, and I would like to be married immediately so that my wife can come with me." So, my father says, "You're talking about what?" He said, "Well, we'd like to be married for Valentine's Day, then we will leave together but not after. We have to be married in the middle of February, otherwise she will have to come later." And he says, "I don't want that. I would like to take her with me."

So, anyway, my father said yes, so we had to rush into organizing the wedding, and it was a very small wedding. Meanwhile, my girlfriend had left for America, not married. That was a big, big thing to do, you know. She left single and when she got there they got married about three weeks later, but that was a big, big chance to take. So many of them got very bad things, but here we just—my husband—I was not interested in telling his family anything. Telling them, simply, that he was getting married. So, when I arrived here, they didn't know what to expect.

Track 2 ends; track 3 begins.

TH: Simone, today is July 23rd. We're trying to wrap up our interview about your life. And a couple things that I think we need to discuss is the US entering a war. You just now told me that you really didn't know anything about the US, and your news was very—of what was going on—

SD: Very sparse, and it would be, you know, through other people because we couldn't have a radio or anything. So I would think that my father knew most certainly, when it happened.

TH: When what happened?

SD: He knew when the when the Americans got into the war. I'm sure he knew long time before we did, and it was from word of mouth. You know, the Americans are with us now and that sort of thing. And that's how we knew that the Americans were coming. And everybody said, The Americans are coming. There was like, you know, My God, finally, somebody is going to interfere, to intervene, because for a long time, we heard nothing but sad things, just the bad news of Monsieur Richard being picked up last night, and I don't think we'll see him again—

TH: Who being picked up?

SD: No, I mean, I'm just giving you an example. The bad news we heard every day, somebody had been picked up by the by the Gestapo, certainly, or the Germans. The Gestapo mostly did the pick up and the bad things. You know, so—

TH: When people would disappear, you'd never see them again?

SD: That's it. We would not. We knew. Or if they came back, there they were like zombies, or they were beaten up. I'm telling you, even when they questioned people, they were not afraid of beating them up. That was the Gestapo. They were lousy people. I mean, they were murderers. There's no joke about it. I mean, some of the French people were part of that group. They were ready before the Germans even arrived. The Gestapo was already involved. So it was terrible. Even when Germany was still, you know, getting hungry and picking up all those countries, we had spies all over France. We knew we were being spied on. And some of—

TH: By fellow French.

SD: But not only just French; Germans, the Gestapo was already in the country before anything else. They were preparing the grounds for the army to come in gloriously in Paris. But many, many months before, in Paris, you couldn't say a word, you know. You couldn't say anything against Germany. Because somebody would report you somewhere. We were always afraid to be reported by somebody, and that was a terrible way to live, even as children, you know.

TH: Did you know who you could trust?

SD: No. No. Absolutely—

TH: Of your friends and neighbors and your mothers—?

SD: Oh, it even got close, close people. But, in general, you trusted—even your family, members of your family. You had to trust, but a certain way, like a little hesitation, like, maybe I shouldn't say that because, if they were arrested, they'll talk. They'll talk. People talk. You just can't be beaten up for hours and not talk. Forget about the idea. They show you people here, in movies

and everything, but they find a way, with the pain, to make you talk. Anybody can make you talk.

TH: So it's best not to know.

SD: It's best not to say anything to anybody. So the conversation was always very light. Even at a picnic, I remember that nobody would go, "I'm against the Germans, and I hate their guts." In your in your heart, you thought; in your head, you thought about it. But you knew—my parents never said to me, Don't say anything—but you knew you couldn't say anything. You automatically sensed it by your parents' behavior. I'm sure that's what it was. I mean, I was a young kid. I remember when my sister would smash the cigarettes from the German. You know, my mother looked at her and said, "Oh my God." I knew in her eyes. I know my mother didn't say a word, but I knew by the look she had that it was a bad thing to say.

TH: She did what with the cigarettes?

SD: Well, we were sitting on the stairs of our apartment where we were. And, of course, a German lived in the other apartments. They were right there, the offices. One night, my sister was 14, very good-looking girl. You know, 13, 14, nice looking girl, and he was smoking a cigarette outside, on top of the stairs. As you see, they were always near us. So we couldn't say very much. We couldn't say anything. And he offered her a cigarette, and he insisted. She said no because she wasn't smoking, "No, thank you," and that's all we said. But he insisted. And so, she took the cigarette, put it on the ground and smashed it with her foot. And my mother was sitting right there. And her look, I knew my mother got very scared for a moment. But he didn't. He was a very intelligent officer, I would assume. But she did it automatically like this. And my mother, afterwards, I know she must have given her a good talk. But that was the attitude we had to have. This was the way we were living, on the watch all the time, afraid to say something. It's a life that, well, we all lived, and it was very strange.

TH: So there was really no light at the end of the tunnel at that time. Because you didn't see any hope or—? (both talking)

SD: At that time, no. No. we thought that the Germans would take over the whole Europe at that time. My father would come home at night. I mean, that was in '43, '44, and he wouldn't say anything; we never knew anything from Dad.

TH: Were the Germans curious what he was doing and where he was?

SD: Well he was in a police officer's uniform. He wore the uniform. You've seen the picture. So they thought he was a policeman. And most of the police, they had in their pocket.

TH: Okay, so—

SD: My father said, "Good night," "Good evening," if he was in a corridor with them or something. That was it. He didn't speak German. I don't speak German.

TH: But he was he was still a policeman for Poitiers?

SD: For Poitiers, yeah. He carried his underground work by being a policeman at the same time. That's the way we worked.

TH: So he had, like, a double—

SD: Exactly. I told you they had a third floor on top of the building, and it was condemned because some of the bombings we had had earlier, smaller ones, and a part of the roof was off or something. So they had condemned the third floor. But, in reality, they had rooms up there where they used to put the fliers from England that were picked up when they were shut down or something.

TH: The room in the apartment or in the police station?

SD: No, no, no, no. In the police station. That was a double secret, like you said. It was funny because they knew which ones were working with the Germans. They knew guys—

TH: They knew which police officers were working with Germans?

SD: Oh, yeah. They were working—that's where he was, there. They did take care of them afterwards. Some of them got away, but they took care of them afterwards.

TH: Some police officers worked with the Germans, and others worked with your father in the French underground.

SD: Yeah. So they had to keep secrets, even at the police station. My father used to say, “This is too funny because they're walking there,” and he said, “I can't hear them from my office.” And he said that they obviously didn't see anything, but they were watching them. If they had said something, they never would have had a chance to say anything to the Germans. Because they were watched by good French policemen.

TH: You mean the policemen that were—

SD: Part of the German feelings were watched very carefully, but they were kept working.

TH: So, I wonder, how many, like—was most of the police with your father, in the underground?

SD: I would say yes, the majority, 75% of them.

TH: And then a few of them, a handful of them were pro-German.

SD: A handful, yes, pro-German because—

TH: And you had watch them.

SD: Yeah. But they were. He says it was it was exciting, you know—

TH: So go back—

SD: —very exciting. I think my father enjoyed that part of the war.

TH: The thrill?

SD: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes.

TH: So up in the top floor of the police station that had been bombed.

SD: Two rooms.

TH: Two rooms had been bombed.

SD: Well, not bombed. Well, the bombing had taken part of the roof off of something. So they condemned it; nobody could go upstairs because it was dangerous. But, in reality, they had two rooms where they could keep the fliers in.

TH: Downed allied fliers, they would—?

SD: Yeah.

TH: Okay. (laughs) This is all new.

SD: You have no idea what you had to do to survive. It's just difficult because you're looking at it—Americans are looking at it—with the eyes of the GI's that came in first. They don't know what the underground—all the little things that were done in order to survive, even in Hungary, even in anywhere where the Germans were. And we were not for them. Like the Italians, same thing. The underground it's just beautiful work there. Those people never gave up. Eventually, we would have had something, an uproar or something or kill Hitler or something. Something would have happened because Europe couldn't stay under his command.

TH: His thumb.

SD: No, no. Because, even his army, his officers were not for him, so.

TH: Later on.

SD: Well, yeah. The little group he had around him, of course, they brought him up to that position. And, of course, they adored him because he did exactly what they wanted him to do. But most of his officers, I mean, the ones that grew up properly, did not respect the man, did not. So they would have done a coup or something eventually. Bad to look that way, awful, very awful. But he wanted to get rid of all the Jews and the gypsies. The gypsies took a grave beating there.

TH: Did you know gypsies?

SD: Yeah, we knew some gypsies here.

TH: And they disappeared, too? Or they were toted away?

SD: The ones we had survived because of this thing with the underground, in our area.

TH: In your area, the Jews, did they stay with the underground in your area?

SD: The Jews from our area yeah, but they would have left the country. There were all in England or in America or in—

TH: Palestine?

SD: Palestine, maybe not.

TH: That came later.

SD: That came later. I don't think you hear Jews going to Palestine. They were able to, maybe, hide somewhere. I don't know. I don't know their story, really. I know the story of the people that we passed through.

TH: Did you have friends, Jewish friends, in your town?

SD: I don't think—my father could have had. My mother, no. Maybe we had some Jewish neighbors. You see, in friends, religion is very important, but any religion. Here in America, you mark the person the minute she moves into the neighborhood. She's a Jew, or she's an American, or she's an English, she's Italian. We don't do that in Europe. We're a mix. You know, we accept all. So I never heard my parents speak about Jews, except during the war, when this family came to our house. He made me this Christmas tree. To me, was a regular guy, and Jews were like anybody else. So I never knew my parents speaking about, He's black, or, He's yellow, or, He's green, or, He's Jewish, or, He's Episcopalian. We didn't care.

TH: That came out recently in some sports comments about the French—

SD: Yeah.

TH: —World Cup team. The French, it was no big deal to the French, but some commentators made a big deal about the race of some of the—²⁴

SD: But, to us, you could see the team together. Did they steer apart from each other? No. We don't have, you know—even at my age, I knew very many people in the army or, you know, friends of my parents, married to a black woman or married to a black man. The babies were adorable. I love the babies of mixed colors. But we never thought it was, or it was good; it was just normal. That's the first thing that shocked me when I arrived in America, the difference. We still had, in the '50s, we still had the black schools; white children going to school in the South—

TH: Segregation?

SD: The segregation. I thought it was horrible. I thought it was so horrible to have those children walk with police around them, going to school and then being insulted for being black. To me, it was so sad, I would cry. My husband would say, "You have to learn a lot about our country. It needs to do a lot of work before it's black friends." Even in England, it's not that much. Maybe they make a little more difference, but no. I don't remember any French and English people making fun of the Jewish or the Christians or I don't know. This was my shock thing when I arrived here. That was the most shocking.

TH: Now, you love this country. But that seems to be, that's one of the things that you're not comfortable with.

SD: No. Not at all.

TH: Good.

SD: I love this country, and I wouldn't go back anywhere else, but this is so wrong. It is so wrong. God—if we are a God-believing country, God made us all. You know, what the hell is wrong with us? I'd love to be able to dye my face blue. Let's see what they would do.

²⁴Howard and D'Addario might be referring to a controversial incident in which *Daily Show* host Trevor Noah made a joke suggesting that Africa won the 2018 World Cup, not France, because so many of the French team's players were black.

TH: Thank you. When you finally learned that the US had come into the war—

SD: Yeah, we knew they were coming. And we were waiting for them.

TH: Did that gave you a light at the end of the tunnel? Did that give you hope?

SD: It gave to adults, and, to us of course, automatically, the excitement with the parents goes into the children. So when I heard, my mother went, “I think the Americans are coming.” And she was so happy. And Madame Prud'homme was very happy, too. So the two of them used to talk every morning.

TH: Madame who?

SD: Madame Prud'homme.

TH: That's a friend.

SD: That was a friend of *maman* during the war, yeah. Her husband was a prisoner of war. Yeah he was. Philippe was my little friend. So the two—

TH: Philippe was the one that went into the army base with you.

SD: Yeah.

TH: (laughs) Okay. He was your buddy. Well, what's Philippe doing today? Do you know where he is?

SD: No, I don't, we never kept—. After the war, you lost track of people. We started moving and doing other things, you know. But Philippe became a nurse, very good nurse. He was a good student at school. He was a good student, yeah.

TH: Okay. Tell me about your uncle. He was a farmer.

SD: Okay, *Tonton*[childish nickname for uncle] Benjamin was very young.

TH: Now, is he your mother's brother?

SD: My mother's brother. He was very young. He was my godfather. And he married very young, too, maybe 18, 19 years old. And *Tante*[aunt] Marie Louise, his wife, was pregnant and he was working on the farm. He was farming—

TH: Did he own the farm?

SD: No, no, no. He was a worker at the farm. And the German picked him up. They picked up all the workers in the farm that. They estimated that the farm needed one person. And so, they took the rest. Okay so, he went to Germany, and he became a farmer—I mean, a prisoner at a farm. He worked with a family to keep the farm going because all the Germans were at the war. So they brought our people there, and some Africans, too, some from Africa. That's how they did it. In Africa, they came in Africa and picked up all the people, all the men in the villages. That's what they did. So anyway, all those young people went to Germany to work in a farm. All the farmers, the people that knew the earth and what to do. And so, he was there from 1942. He left *Tante* Marie Louise pregnant she was pregnant, and they were just married.

TH: Did his wife go with him?

SD: No, no, no. They just took the men. So she had a baby while he was a prisoner. And then, at the end of the war, when we thought he was coming home, and he didn't come home, my father started looking into it. Going to the war, you know. Officers that were up and just for that purpose. They were looking into it, also, because, all the boys that they had taken to Germany to work the farms, all the ones on the west of Germany—east of Germany, East Germany. All the east—the west part of Germany, all the boys were coming home. The East boys were not coming home.

TH: The eastern part of Germany.

SD: The eastern part of Germany. So we started looking into it and what's happening. And so, father used to go to the office quite often, with the name and everything. You had to give the name of the information, you know. And they were looking, and eventually, they realized the Russians had taken them prisoner. So what they did, they took them to Siberia, most of them, to

work there. And when my uncle came back, finally, in '46 or '47, '46 I think he came back, his son was already my age because we were the same age. So anyway, with—well, maybe he's a little bit younger. And he told us the story. They were working at the farm—

TH: In Germany.

SD: —and when the Russians took over that part of Germany, they were told, We're taking you home, you're going home. So they all got gathered together, all the farmers in the area, and they picked them up in a truck. And they took them to a railroad station. And my uncle realized that the direction was not France. We're not that dumb. And he said, "We're not going on the right way," and then they did this travel with the train. Then they stopped at a place—

TH: Did they put them in cattle cars?

SD: Oh, I'm sure. But I don't know. He didn't mention it. He never said very much. I mean, except for that boy that was killed next to him.

TH: What boy was killed?

SD: I'll tell you. So anyway, they get off the train, and more kids are there, more young men. I mean, they're now in their 20s. More young mens [sic] are there, waiting, and some are Ghanians, some black people, some from South Africa. And they start talking to each other, and they're fed once a day. That's it. And given water once a day. And they start walking. And they always tell them, We're going to take another train. But they never did take another train. They were walking. And some of them have been prisoner for so many years, had no shoes, no good shoes. Some of them were barefoot. He remembers, *Tonton* remembers putting newspaper and tying a rope around the shoe because the sole of his shoe was coming off. So he would put newspaper, if he found something in the area, and put his foot in it, and then put a rope around, so the sole would stay there because the walk was not an easy walk, I'm sure. And they ended up there, walking. I don't know where they walked or what they did.

He never really talked about it, and he was a wonderful person. All I know is, every time we talked to him and wanted to know something, he would start crying. And he did, until he died. Everything that was a little sad, he would cry, all the time. And he died of a tumor to the brain. So, did that happen then? I don't know. He was fine. Marie Louise died, and he was fine for a while. And then just went back down. He had changed a lot. I remember when he was young, and we would go on vacation and see him. And he was no longer a kid anymore, I guess. But he was—he said it was quite an experience. But, for us, we were, on our side, looking for him and trying to find out where he was, actually.

TH: So tell me about the young man that was shot.

SD: Well, they were walking. They were walking towards Siberia, I would assume. I mean, whenever they walk days, they would sleep in the woods at night, that sort of thing. And they were walking, and they had the little backpacks that they had gotten the farm when they lived there, shaving cream and things like this. And this young guy was walking next to him, and they had become fairly good friends talking because they were in rows, you know. And he had a little alarm clock in his backpack, and it rang. It started ringing and the Russian soldier came and shot the poor kid and the backpack, thinking it was a bomb or something. I mean that's how intelligent those Russians were. My uncle says they were so dumb, the army that they had going up north, they were so dumb. There were young kids taken from the countryside, I would assume, because the Russians had taken a big beating too, so their army was pretty much—

TH: Decimated.

SD: Yeah. And they shot the young boy just like this because the alarm clock was ringing. So my uncle was quite shocked by that. And that's all he mentioned about his trip there. It was very cold. They had no shoes. He was he was very unhappy and thinking he was going home to begin with, and then the disappointment of, so I guess—

TH: Did he talk at all about when he was in Siberia?

SD: He may have talked to his wife, but he didn't come to my mom or to us.

TH: And how many years was he in Siberia?

SD: I think two and a half. Oh, total, after the liberation, he came back in '46, '45, '44, '45.

TH: Did the Russians just decide to let him go?

SD: He said one day, they got into a train, and they were taking a new—they were going down with the sun. They came with the sun, you know. And he said, "We knew we were going home, but it took a long time." And the minute he was able to—it landed in Germany again, of course, and was passed through, I guess, the East and West. And he said the minute he got to Germany, he sent a letter, but he got home before the letter arrived to us, to his wife. But it was good for

him to come home. But I don't think he was the same man when he came back. So if he spoke about his adventure, or whatever it was called, it must have been to Marie Louise and not nobody else.

TH: That would be his wife.

SD: Yeah. And she died in Châtellerault.

TH: Now, tell me, tell me about this pillow.

SD: This is completely out of the story we've been doing, covering. This is current. Saturday, entered Home Goods to buy a bottle of olive oil. I love certain olive oil. I'm on my way to the register. And in a chair stands this little pillow with a beautiful flower. Little rectangle, nothing much of anything. But, on the bottom of the pillow is a name: Mme Boilève. And I'm going in the line to the register, and I think, But I know this name. So I go back, and I look at the pillow again. And under the pillow, under the name. Mme Boilève, is *trente-huit rue Bourbon, Châtellerault* [38 Bourbon Street, Châtellerault]. I, after the war, moved into this city about 38 miles from Poitiers, and my mother opened a little grocery store. And we stayed the rest of our lives there. My parents died there. And my daughter lives very near there, on the outskirts of the city of Châtellerault. And here it is, 50 years later—60 years later, actually, because Mme Boilève was there when we first opened the grocery store. And here I find this pillow.

TH: In Jensen Beach?

SD: No, here in Stuart.

TH: Stuart, Florida.

SD: And I'm standing in front of this. I remember thinking, This is a message. I have been all shook [sic] up all weekend, but I bought the pillow for \$12.99. And this lady was at a little flower shop in the street, the same street my mother had her grocery store. That was the main street of the city, anyway, at the time. And it's *rue Bourbon, Châtellerault* and it does, and it's spelled properly and everything. Where did that come from? I don't know. But it's on my bed right now because I can't believe it.

TH: (laughs) Okay.

SD: This is my story. Current. Isn't that strange? So many years later, and here it is to remind me that, maybe, I belong there. I don't know. Isn't it something?

TH: It is something. How do you spell—?

SD: My uncle.

TH: Your uncle's name? Benjamin, Marie Louise.

SD: Marie Louise is his wife. Louise.

TH: Marie Louise. Okay. And—

SD: You need a French course. I've got to start teaching you French.

TH: And his wife—

SD: Marie Louise. It's like Louis, with an E.

TH: And last name?

SD: Migné. M-i, G as in George, n-e, with an accent. *Voilà*.

TH: That's it?

SD: Migné.

TH: Migné

SD: Migné. That was my mother's family name.

TH: Simone. Tell me about, just being married to an American did not grant you citizenship.

SD: Absolutely not. No.

TH: So tell me about your—

SD: I was given a green card when I came to America. So we were married. We were married civil and religious. I mentioned that in another interview. We were very well married. And I came to America with him. He wanted me to come with him. He did not want me to come later, like so many did. He wanted me to. So we got married very quickly. Not quickly, but. So I arrived in America. My son was born, my daughter was born four years later in 1962, and I was still a French citizen with a green card. And it was up to me to decide if I wanted to be an American or not. I was reluctant to give up my French citizenship. And I think everybody should be reluctant to give up their citizenship of any kind any country.

TH: Now, did you have to give it up? Could you not have dual citizenship?

SD: Well, for a woman, at that time, yes. I had to give it up. That's what bothered me the most. The law is now changed. You don't have to give it up. You understand? Okay. So when I decided to become an American citizen, I was giving up my French citizenship.

TH: Your heritage.

SD: And it was very difficult for me, and very upsetting to my father. I didn't want to upset him. He was a good Frenchman. And so, I waited a little bit. My husband never urged me to do anything. I myself decided one day—and, again, it comes back to my way of growing up, I would think—one day, I had a son, and I had a daughter. My son was, then, 10 years old. So it must have been '68 because he was 10 years old. And I said to myself, If, one day, they have to take all the young mans [sic] 18 year-old and older, would I be willing to give him away to the my country? Would I be willing to give him away to America? Because, when they were born, they were American and French. My children were registered at the French consulate.

TH: They had dual citizenship.

SD: Yes. So automatically Americans because they were born here. But I went to the French consulate in New York and had them also obtain their citizenship. So they have dual citizenship

the rest of their lives. Although I have a funny story about my son. But I'll tell as I go here. So, anyway, in my heart, was I ready to give up my son? Would I be ready to give up my son? Because I could always run away and go back to France. You know, he had both citizenship. Would I be ready to give my son to America?

TH: You mean in drafts, be drafted into the army?

SD: Yeah. Considering that's what happens to you, you know.

TH: Because that was during the Vietnam War.

SD: That's right. So would I be willing to do that? And I said to myself. And then, I thought about it for a couple of years. And in 1968, I decided, He is 10 years old; I'm a good American I'm a good citizen; I was not a citizen yet, but I considered myself a good citizen. So I said, "Okay, I'm going to become an American citizen." Discussed it with my father in one of my trips with the children, "What do you think, Dad?" He said, "You know you will lose your citizenship." I said, "I know. I think I'm ready to say yes to the army for my son." It's always like this. I mean, I consider me a citizen. If they need me in the army, I'll go. I'll defend my country. Same thing for my son. I give him to the country. I don't know how you feel about things like that, but, to me, that's what it is. You're willing to give him up to your country. You sacrifice your children; you sacrifice yourself to save your country. That is always the way I was brought up to believe.

So, anyway, I decided to become an American citizen, went to the library, and, at the same time, I was at the University of Bridgeport. I was taking a course in English to help myself to become more fluent. And belonged to—the French would call it [speaking French]. It is a group, *Alliances Française*²⁵, in America. They were Americans or French, and it's called *Alliances Française*, headquarters is in New York. We have two major theaters. My daughter was the house manager of those theaters when she (inaudible). Now, this is a group of French people in America, well educated, and we used to meet and discuss books, reading books. So they really directed me on what books I should read and [what] I should do for becoming an American citizen. And so, I read the books, and reading was no problem. Speaking was a little more difficult.

TH: Were they history books or civics books?

SD: They were civics books.

²⁵*Alliance Française (AF)* is an organization that aims to promote French language and culture around the world.

TH: Political science.

SD: Exactly. So I read some of them. Some of them, I didn't read them all completely because that was the most boring thing I've ever read in my life. But you had to learn the government, you know, how it worked.

TH: The balance of power between the legislative or congressional, the courts and the administrative—

SD: All the courts, their workings, and the administrations, and what Washington does or doesn't do. Those things, you know, at least—

TH: The Constitution.

SD: Yeah. The Constitution. I didn't learn the Constitution by heart, no. But I understood it, and I read it. And so, when I felt that I was ready, I mentioned it at one of our family gatherings, a cocktail party. And there happened to be a friend, a lawyer, there that said, "Simone, I know somebody that does give this test, if you want." Because, at the time, at the time, they were not doing groups, you know. They were doing individually.

So I made an appointment with the judge. And I can't remember his name. I'm very sorry, and I can't find my papers. But I am a citizen. So I met the judgment. I made the appointment. And I said, "I would like to become an American citizen." So he said, I had to—he told me what I had to do. I mean, his secretary, I'm sure. And I did everything. I filled out the papers I needed that day, and I went. And he made me come into his office, huge office and quite impressive.

TH: Was he a federal judge?

SD: I don't know what it was. Federal—

TH: Or a state judge?

SD: It was a state judge. I don't think it was a federal judge. I have no idea; I can't remember. I was a little excited, too. I was nervous, I would think. I didn't want to show it, of course. So, anyway, we started talking and asking questions. He had a questionnaire in front of him. I mean,

he was going through the rules, you know, and regulations. Well, he lost interest of the rules and regulations very quickly, and we started talking. And I was telling him how I felt and, of course, the war. He wanted to know about the war, like you do. And we talked, and I spoke about, you know. And I said—he didn't ask me what my husband was, but I told him he was a Republican, and I agreed with his feelings, but that sometimes I would split my ticket, if necessary. And he loved that idea, I think. He just loved the idea, I think. I said, "I cannot agree with everything. So I will decide on the man or the woman that really fits what I feel like, then I'll go for them." I said, "They could be Democrat; they could be nothing"—

TH: Independent.

SD: Independent, whatever. And so, he liked it. We talked for a while, and he says, "Well, I think you know more about this United States than most of the kids your age." I was fairly young, again. And I looked younger than I was, in reality, because one day somebody came to my door during an election; they came to my door and said, "Can I speak to your father?" And I said, "For that, I could kiss you." But, actually, he was running for something in the town, I guess. I don't know. But it was fun.

And, well, that's how I became an American citizen. He made me swear. We did the whole thing, and I got out of there. I didn't get the paper right away. They sent me the big thing, you know, afterwards. But I felt very good. I felt good, and I burned my green card. That bothered me, and it didn't bother me at the beginning, but, eventually, during the years that I was thinking, it did bother me that it had to have this green card every year. So I came home, and I said to my husband, "My green card is done. I'm an American citizen. So give me a big kiss." And I felt more at home. Just a little piece of paper can do a lot. It was like getting my driver's license. That was the same way.

TH: Well, I'm curious if you could regain your French citizenship as well.

SD: I regained my citizenship.

TH: You did?

SD: That's the rest of the story.

TH: Go ahead.

SD: I think in 1969 or '72—I'm not really—really, don't mention that. I mean, I don't know the date exactly, but the law in France changed. And they did change that the woman did not have to lose her citizenship. And I found out, just casually, and I went back to the French consulate in New York. I used to work in New York, so it was easy for me to access when I was in town. So I went, and I said, "I want to be a French citizen again." And they agreed. I mean, I was given, right away, the papers.

So, now, I do have dual citizenship, as well as my children. But the funny part of this dual citizenship, my grandson became 18 years old and, in France, at that time, they were still doing 18 months service to the country. So he was recruited in France for military service. They served my father with the papers. He calls, and he says, "What's going on?" I said, "Well, I told you he was a French citizen as well." He said, "What do we do?" I said, "Don't worry. I'm going to call the French consulate in New York, and see what we can do," because Christophe was in college. He was very young when he entered, when he went to college. It was before 18.

TH: Now, this is your son's son?

SD: My son. No, my son.

TH: Oh, your son.

SD: My son, Christophe. So I talked to the consulate, the consulate in France, and I said, "He is in college right now. He can't report next week to Montpellier." He was supposed to report in Montpellier, France, for his service.

TH: But he was in college in the United States.

SD: But he was in college in the United States. She says, "All right, don't get upset."

TH: He was at West Virginia.

SD: He was in West Virginia, at Marshall University. She said, "Don't get upset. He doesn't have to report. Just send us a letter that he is a student at a university." She said, "The only thing is, until he is 25 years old, he must not visit France. Otherwise, he will be automatically picked up to do the 18 months of service, military service." So Christophe could not visit his grandparents from the age of 18 to 25.

TH: For six years.

SD: For six years, he didn't see—well, he saw them because he came here. But he wasn't able to go to France.

TH: And your mother and father came to the United States?

SD: Twice.

TH: What did they think of the United States?

SD: Well, they didn't speak the language, so it was just to visit family, really. My father loved the barbershop. My father had short, very short hair, and always kept it, every two weeks, a haircut. And, at the barber shop here, they used a massage on his head. So he loved that. But they loved it. They saw the World Fair in New York. They were there that year. And they had their best friend living in Long Island. So they went and spent a week with him. So, from Long Island, they visited the World Fair twice, I think. So they had a good time. And the second time they came, we took them to Mystic Seaport²⁶ in Connecticut. It's such a beautiful area in history. Father was very interested in history. I think that, in the last visit, I think he went to West Point. He was invited to the honor guard²⁷.

TH: Who invited him to the honor guard at West Point²⁸?

SD: Well, the army. The West Point army. My father was a fencing master in the army. He was asked to come to West Point to teach fencing.

TH: But how did they know, years later?

SD: And my mother refused. Well, a friend of mine, her husband was a doctor at West Point. And he mentioned that his wife had refused to come years before. So that's how he got the invitation.

²⁶Mystic Seaport Museum is a maritime museum located in Mystic, Connecticut. The largest of its kind, the museum is known for its expansive collection of historical wooden ships and sailboats.

²⁷A guard of honor is a military guard who is assigned to ceremonial duties.

²⁸The United States Military Academy, also known as West Point, is a prominent military academy located in West Point, New York.

TH: That's quite an honor.

SD: Yeah.

TH: Cool.

SD: I saw my father cry there. But we won't talk about it. Anyway, so we did West Point, I think, in the last trip. Yeah. We were at the farm, at the time.

TH: Sounds like a magical—

SD: So we rode the horses, and he enjoyed it. And we went to the racetrack. We had a horse at a race track in the north part of the United States—Massachusetts—in training, so we went there. And mother didn't come to West Point. She knew it had to be just for him.

TH: Oh, your mother didn't go with him?

SD: To West Point? No.

TH: Well, she was here in the country, though.

SD: She was here with us, yeah, but she didn't go. She said, "I'll pass that one," and she knows that she made a mistake. So I think he never forgave her for that one.

TH: So he rode your husband's horses?

SD: Oh, yeah.

TH: And he enjoyed that, I'm sure. And you had a horse that was a race horse?

SD: Yeah, my husband had two race horses—

TH: Did they win much?

SD: —from babies. No. They were in training. And one of them raced in Massachusetts at the fair, Boston fair or something like this, and he broke his two legs.

TH: Oh.

SD: They had to shoot him right there. My husband stopped doing the races.

TH: After that?

SD: Oh, yeah. He came back. He was such a—we trained that little horse for two years, and he was perfect. He was a two-year-old. It was beautiful. Good lines, and he broke his legs. Both legs. He fell in one of those holes. It was not a place for—they always run those races every year. They always have problems. And somebody told him, “Don’t take him there to start.” But he did, and whatever.

TH: So your husband brought home an elephant.

SD: Oh, yeah. That was—

TH: You told me about this.

SD: Mrs. Shirdle, a friend of ours, was running for something in the state of Connecticut. Mrs. Shirdle, I cannot—I can never get her name. (inaudible) She was running for something. And we had a parade. And John wanted to do something for her a little different. And he had acquaintances everywhere. He was quite a horse trader, you know. And he bought this very young, little elephant that I could sit on. You could sit on it. It was a cute baby. It was really cute. So he brought us home an elephant.

TH: Did the elephant have a name?

SD: Oh, I guess they must have given him a name. I can't remember. I was so mad. I had no idea. He had so many things at home, goats and cows and sick horses that should not have been, but he saved them, but anyway—a monkey. He bought a circus guy. He bought a guy that had lions

and tigers and had no money to feed those animals. So he kept the guy with money. I mean, he forgot to pay his telephone bills, but he bought the meat for the animals.

TH: He had lions and tigers?

SD: He had two lions and a tiger. The poor man had no more money; he was doing those small circuses, you know? The man had no money to feed the animals, so Johnny bought the meat for the guy—for the animals. But the next day, they had to be fed again. So that kept on for two weeks. Meanwhile, we were broke at home. I was not working yet. Oh my God—I thought that was the end for me. I was quite upset. So when he brought the elephant that was—you know, we needed things in the house, and he goes and buys an elephant for a parade. Come on. There's something, you know, you never grow up. So anyway, he brought the elephant. He came with the children to tell me the news because, I guess, they brought the elephant, brought him in the stable. And he came up to the house with the two kids.

TH: For protection.

SD: For protection. And said, "I did something for the parade." I said, "What did you do?" "Oh, Mom," they said, "she's so cute." I said, "What is it?" "An elephant." I didn't believe it. They had to take me down there to see the elephant. Now, we had to buy lettuce for this thing. I mean, she had to be fed every day.

TH: Cases of lettuce.

SD: You have no idea. And bread, buying bread. Day-old bread, we used to buy—truckloads—just to feed this little thing. Well, anyway, we got the elephant. The parade was a big success. And then he donated the elephant to the zoo in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Same thing with the lion and tiger. He donated to the zoo in Bridgeport.

TH: Funny.

SD: But it was funny, and the kids and the ride, and they had fun for a few days. But he didn't keep it, thank God. But that was for the Republican Party; he would have done anything.

TH: One other thing; your daughter lives in France now?

SD: Yes.

TH: She moved from New York.

SD: From New York, yeah.

TH: Does she have a family abroad? Is she married?

SD: She has a son. She was married and has a son. She's divorced. And she has one son, and he's in law school.

TH: And he's the one that came to visit you last summer?

SD: Yeah.

TH: And where is he in law school? In France?

SD: Yes. In Poitiers.

TH: In Poitiers. Oh, cool.

SD: Oh, I went to see him this year when I was there in March. And I saw his university; he showed me his place. And my daughter teaches at a private school there. It's not a private school. It's a university.

TH: Does she teach dance or French?

SD: No, she teaches English to the university children. And I spoke to the class, one of the class. I was invited to speak.

TH: What did you speak about?

SD: On World War II.

TH: On World War II. Is there anything in that talk that we haven't covered here?

SD: No, there were—well, most of them are from parents in the in the political arena, political science school. It's a political science school. And they had a lot of questions about America. Very much so. And it was a pleasure to speak to them.

TH: You answered questions and all.

SD: Yeah. They wanted to know why I was not living in France. And, at the same time I'm speaking to them, I'm looking at a major window, and right there is the *marché* [market]. It's the area where, as a child, I used to go to the market with *maman*. And there is an old church from the tenth century, Roman. And I heard Tino Rossi, a big singer in Europe at the time, during World War II. He was singing the “Ave Maria” for Christmas. And I can remember listening to him and being—

TH: In awe?

SD: Really beautiful. He was a tenor.

TH: That face you made does not compete to the recorder.

SD: He was so beautiful. That voice was absolutely beautiful. So I was talking to the children, and I was remembering my years. And I know, at one time, when I was speaking about the war, my voice changed. My daughter says, “Oh-oh, you got emotional, Mom.” And I was telling them some things that they questioned about. But they were mostly interested in America, not in Trump, definitely not. Although I'm sure some of them are supporters of Trump, I mean, their parents. Those are kids that are, for the future, they will be serving—they could be working in the French consulate in Paris or in London—

TH: In government.

SD: In government, yeah. Most of their parents are out there looking for positions of that sort. So that was an interesting thing. They had some questions about very simple things Americans do that we don't do in France.

TH: Like?

SD: I had a young man that had an awful lot of questions. How I felt about my transition from French to American life. I said, “I slid right in. I was very happy. It’s much easier. You get more reward in New York,” and I told them that I love my country, and I consider America my country. And I love France, and I could never forget France, but. And my daughter is sitting right there in a desk, and I could see that she was a little upset about me saying, you know, that I don’t want to—. They wanted to know why I was not living in France now that my husband is gone and all that. I said, “I still have a son there, and I have a good life. I said, “I have a very good life.” And so, I guess she got the message. Since then, she doesn’t want to talk to me. She’s not talking to me very much.

TH: One other thing, and this is what I’ve—. My first question to you was why you are so enamored with sports. You love the French Open, you love the World Cup, you love US football, college football.

SD: Yeah. I love, first of all, I think, competition and the *esprit de corps*²⁹, you know what that is?

TH: *Espirit de corps*, I do.

SD: I like that. I enjoyed it when I could play, when I can, you know. I love that. And, while you're doing that, you're not thinking of sad things. Your mind is to good things. Sports brings you a good feeling. To me, it's just—listen, I spent four weeks watching games that, some of those soccer games were awful. But it was just the idea that this country was against the other country, and they were fighting for their country. I love that. You're fighting for something. I don't know why.

TH: It's not deadly fights.

SD: No. It's a fresh, healthy—

TH: Competition.

²⁹*Espirit de corps* is a French term, which directly translates to “spirit of the body.” It refers to a feeling of pride, fellowship and loyalty shared among members of a group,

SD: You saw them kissing each other, some countries, afterwards. Some of them played in the same professional teams in England, or leagues. They're all over the world. But once, every four years, they are in the national team. And they represent their country. There's no money there, just glory. The rest of the year, they're making millions. Some of them are very, very good players.

TH: Professionally.

SD: They make millions and millions. But then, once every four years, they do something for their country. And that's important. I come back again to that theme of this (inaudible). Respect and (inaudible) the love of, I don't know.

TH: Was it Alabama and Georgia that played, the colleges, in the NCAA?

SD: That was when—

TH: This last year.

SD: That was in November. The game was in November,

TH: December.

SD: But I worked Saturdays. That's what bothered me. For seven years, I've been working weekends. And so, I miss Saturday college football. Now I'm back, and I'm not working anymore. So I can't wait for August to start.

TH: After that game, wouldn't you say it was a great game?

SD: It was a beautiful game. And both of them should have won. Don't you think?

TH: Yes.

SD: They all deserved to win. They deserved to win that game. You could not see why one was better than the other. Their heart was in it. They both won.

TH: And they were the best in the country.

SD: They were the best.

TH: So what did you do? How did you spend—

SD: Four weeks.

TH: —Sunday, a week ago?

SD: Sunday a week ago. Well, for the last four weeks, I've been getting up at seven-thirty to do the work in the house because, at eight o'clock, we're—in Russia—watching the games. In Russia—that's eight o'clock in the morning for us—it's the afternoon for them. So, at eight o'clock, we started. I found a little channel somewhere, 766. Nobody knew I was watching all those games. Not all of them, I missed a few. I mean, I had to miss a few of them. They were not all televised, of course, every day. But I saw two games a day. One at eight o'clock (TH laughs) and then one after lunch, until four. From eight o'clock in the morning to four, four-thirty, depending, because we had some tremendous games that needed extensions. But I watched two games every day for four weeks. I did nothing in the house. I'm ashamed, but that's all right. The house is clean now. Then came the better teams, and that—(both speaking at the same time; inaudible)

TH: The final four. Who were the final four teams?

SD: That was England—what is it? Croatia. England, Croatia, Belgium and France. And I said, from the beginning, "Watch Belgium." They beat the English, beat the British. But Croatia was the best team of them all. That was the one that made me very (makes whooping sound). I had my doubts.

TH: So the final two teams?

SD: Croatia and France. (telephone rings) It won't stop? So Croatia and France.

TH: I'll just make it stop.

SD: Yeah, you better. It won't stop.

Pause in recording

SD: I wanted to be there.

TH: We're back on the final game of the World Cup.

SD: In 1998, I was taking care of my mother in France. And with French soccer game, the soccer, they won. So, with her, I saw that one. And, this year, I saw my French people win this game, and it was a good game; not our best game. They were very—the Croatians were very strong, very good players, and very tough.

TH: So it was France and Croatia.

SD: France and Croatia. France has a young team, very young. It's the first time they're all together. And so, we were a bit concerned about, you know, their strength because, on the other team, they had some beautiful and international players that are very good. But their coach—what was the name? Deschamps³⁰ was one of the players in 1998. And he's been training this team.

TH: The French team.

SD: Yeah, the French team. And so, because Deschamps was there, and he's the one who's been training them, France was really ready for anything. They really were. And they had, at the beginning of the series, they had a very easy time. And so, it was it was touch-and-go. And mostly, that one of the *but* [goal] that the Croatians got, we really gave it to them. That was a gift. And so, our first *but* against Croatia was also given to us.

TH: First goal?

³⁰Didier Claude Deschamps (born in 1968) is a retired French soccer player who began coaching the France's national soccer team in 2012.

SD: Yeah. The first goal. And so, it was very touch-and-go for the difference between the two teams, apart from those two gifts given to each other. That nullified that one. And then, we had good, young boys that wanted to win so badly, and you could see; you could see it in their attitude toward each other. And, I mean, you saw the end of it. It was beautiful. And it was a very good game. I loved it. I loved the whole series, really, and I think America should give a ready for 2026, when they come here. One of them, one of the group, will have to be around here. I would say that Washington will have a group, maybe Boston or New York. They have to have special stadium for this because I don't think Americans realized until Russia, and they saw the competition, that's four weeks with millions of people.

TH: From all over the world.

SD: Business should be booming. We should be getting ready now, for this. And here we are, we're giving this poor guy in Miami the run-around about building a stadium for soccer. This stadium is being built specifically for 2026, but Americans are not interested. Well, I've got news for you people because there is a sport that everybody practices all over the world. And, when they come, they come by drove. I know that we could rent—I could rent my bedroom. In 2026, I can rent my extra bedroom for two or three guys; they'll pay thousands of dollars. Everybody's going to be looking for rooms. They don't—I don't think Americans are realizing that this soccer is a very important sport.

TH: I think that—

SD: Did you see a fat one on—?

TH: I think Americans are beginning to see.

SD: I mean, did you see a fat guy playing this game? No, man. That's insane because they work, they work out for 90 minutes. That's a workout. No fat guys on this thing on the field, nothing. So Americans, you're missing the coach—the boat—if you're if you're not doing something about this because that stadium will be perfect for this. And so, we will get at least one group or two. And it's Florida, beautiful weather, and they're giving in the run-around.

TH: In Miami.

SD: The zoning.

TH: This is in Miami.

SD: What jerks. They're delaying the construction. I don't understand people. We need to make money.

TH: Two thousand twenty-six. Okay. I'm going to wrap things up. Anything else you want to add about anything?

SD: No. Any questions, you can come back, and we can try to get my head to work, here. It's hard, you know. It's hard to remember things. They just came back a few years ago, for me, so. And I get exhausted every time you come here, and you—I have to have a nap afterwards. It's hard. I didn't ever realize that it would be that hard.

End of interview