

## **The hard work of Memory : True memory needs names and faces**

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Greetings! I am sorry that I cannot be with you today. My message (in French) will be read by my friend Jeannette Brenner. It is a reflection on a past that is never really past but should remain in our memories of a century full of wars and other horrors. We must continue to reflect on it in order to learn to do better in the future. Those who lived through those times can help us to remember them -- but we must work harder to carry on their memories in younger generations. That will be your task!

The history of the Kurzweil family provides an occasion to think about specific persons who did not survive the Holocaust. True memory needs names and faces -- the sheer numbers are not enough. Let us remember them as they were in life: as you can see them in the photograph of the two girls playing ball, in front of the Children's Home in Montmorency, on the first day of the Second World War.



The one on the right is Adele Kurzweil -- she was my friend at the Children's Homes in France in the first few years of that war. I now know that she was deeply unhappy at the Children's Home because she was separated from her parents, who were living in Paris, and because she

was terribly homesick for the Austrian city she had left in 1938. But at that time, at the age of twelve and thirteen, I did not know she was unhappy. I learned it only in 1997 when I began to read the letters she had exchanged with her parents. They are part of the "Kurzweil Dossier" at the Museum of Resistance and Deportation in Montauban, assembled by Jacques Latu and Pascal Caïla.

After the Second World War, when I was living in the United States, I was told that Adele had not survived. I was not told the details and I think I did not ask. I knew -- but I did not really know. Forty years later, when I started my research on the history of my family and friends, I discovered the full extent of Adele's tragic fate. My research was sometimes unbearable but it was also indispensable. Here is an example of the hard work of memory.

In the spring of 1996, sitting in the archives of the Jewish Documentation Center in Paris (CDJC), I am looking through a volume about Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust. I see page after page of old photographs of children in old-fashioned clothes: all dead. Suddenly, turning a page, I see a picture of someone I know well: my friend Adele. She looks up at me like a corpse in an open casket. It is a terrible shock. My hands trembling, I hand the heavy volume to a young archivist, asking him for a photocopy of Adele's pages. Opposite her photograph, a page from a newspaper is reproduced: "La Dépêche du Dimanche" of 14 November 1993, with a story headlined "The Diary of Adele K." It tells me the name of the school she had attended in Montauban. Students of a history class, taught by Monique Lagarde, have won a prize for documenting her story. I know right away that I must find out more.

Not long afterward, I make the long trip to Montauban to start my research. Madame Lagarde welcomed me warmly into her own home. I wanted to know more, not only about the Kurzweil family but also about the larger group of Austrian socialdemocratic exiles who came there in the days of France's defeat by Germany in June 1940. Several hundred Austrian families found asylum in Montauban: some were able to escape from France, others, like the Kurzweils, were not.

In this complicated story, the Vichy government was one of the culprits. It refused to issue exit permits to persons of German or Austrian origin because Article XIX of the German-French Armistice Agreement (June 22, 1940) allowed Germany to ask for "surrender on demand" of people of German origin. Vichy wanted to keep them available for surrender, just in case Germany requested them. Illegal border crossings were the only way out of France. (That is how I got out.) The main culprit, of course, was Germany -- the persecutor of Jews and political dissidents.

The hard work of memory is up to you: CARRY ON!