

Suzanne's story



From the testimony of
Suzanne Rappaport-Ripton

Illustrated by
Carol Adlam

So that's where I begin, as a baby, in Paris ...



And by the age of six I'm fully aware of what's happening around me, because things are changing. You hear strange noises, aeroplanes overhead, or you hear a siren, a sort of wailing. But Paris, where I lived, northern Paris, I don't remember it being bombed, because according to history, Hitler, he loved Paris, and didn't want it bombed. It was too beautiful.

My mum and I would have lovely days out. The pavements and the boulevards—it was pretty and it was just a happy life, and we'd look at hats, and we'd buy madeleines.

I'm sure you've all heard of Proust's beautiful madeleines, the little cakes that you dip in your tea—they're delicious.




Marcel Proust
When from a long, distant
past nothing subsists, after
people are dead, still the
smell and the taste of
things remain, like souls,
ready to remind us,
waiting for their moment.

I recognize
madeleine
used to give me
Immediately the old
rose up like the scenery
of a theatre to extend
the streets along which
I used to run as
the country of



And those things disappeared.



And when you went to the Jewish shops to buy your bread, there were rows they used to hang them in — rows of bagels. Now bagels can be found in the supermarket, but that's a Jewish thing, it's from way back.

And they disappeared, and bread disappeared, and everything disappeared, and food was hard to come by, and if you had a tin of sardines, you were well off, really well off.

But it didn't affect my happiness, because my parents were there and they took good care of me. I was happy and they had fun with me and played games with me.

My father would sit at the dining table and would get a coin.



And those are the sweet memories of laughter and music and people playing pianos and lots of happiness. And my mum used to take me to the theatre, or to a little bistro, and she'd buy me lemonade and grenadine, and I'd feel very grown up. Little girl, pavements, I was sophisticated!



And then. After this. Things really changed.

We were told, apparently, to go to the police station and report ourselves, where they took our names and they gave us yellow stars, to sew on our clothes, because it said 'Jew' on the yellow star.



And therefore, we couldn't go out, there were curfews, you could only go out at certain times. And then it changed again, you heard different noises, they were sirens, and the car sirens were very different. A bit like today.

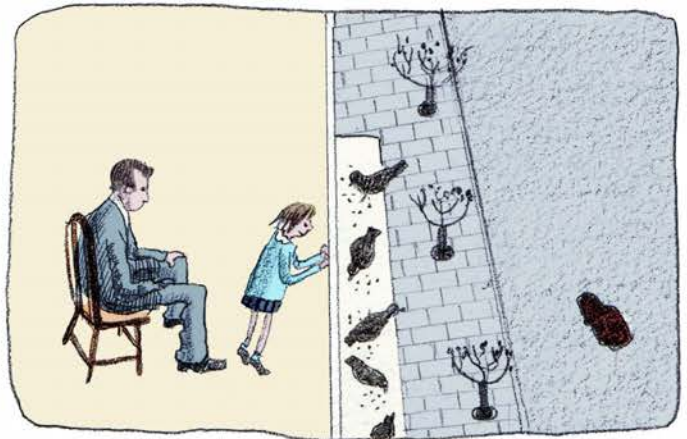
And that sound was horrible to me because then came the Rafle, and they rounded people up in 1942.

And that was the year that stays with me, because it was a normal day, it was sunny, and the sky was blue, and the pigeons, and things were just normal.



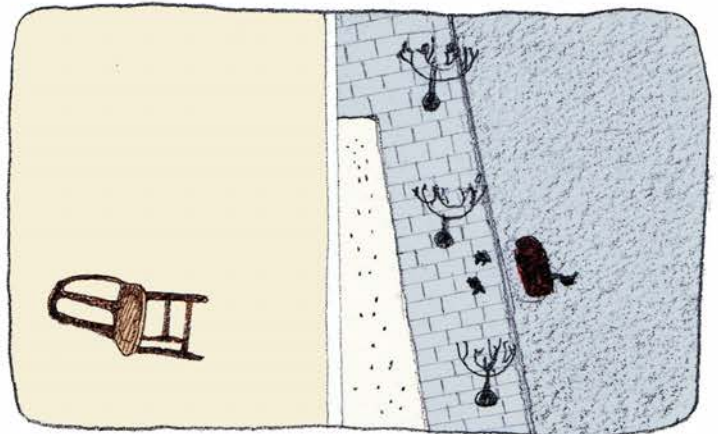
Cooing.

I was looking out of the window that day, with my father, he was sitting on a chair and I was standing, and he was looking out of the window, and he said, 'oh, they're here.'



I didn't know what he meant.

But immediately, my mother, my father, myself, and my grandmother, all went into the little bedroom next to the dining room. And we locked ourselves in there, my father locked the front door, locked the bedroom door, and my mother pushed me under the bed. And we waited.



And we heard the heavy noise of boots, the stairs were made of wood, when you looked down it looked like a spiral staircase up to our apartment, and the stairs were made of wood and they didn't have carpets, and you could hear these heavy footsteps on the wood, and then they stopped.

And then there was banging on the door, and the banging stopped because we weren't answering, and then they took an axe to the door and they broke the doorway in. You could hear that, the wood breaking.

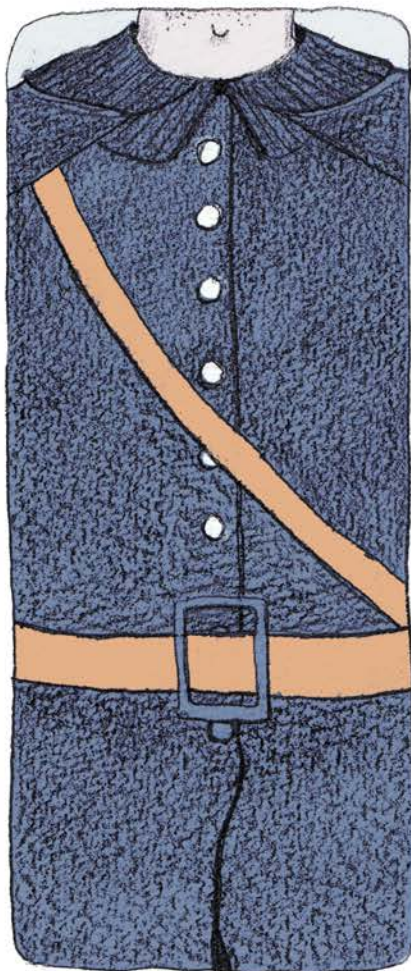
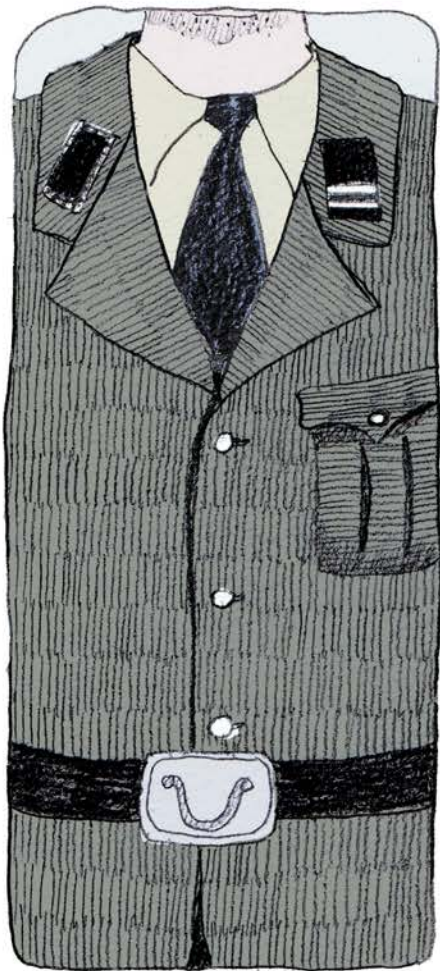
They don't knock politely, when they come to get you.



And I didn't know what was happening, and all I could see under the bed was my mother's feet pacing up and down, and she was tearing her hair out and it was falling in front of my eyes on the floor.



They eventually got us out of the bedroom, and there was one SS man, I know that because when I looked up I saw the SS on his collar, I call it a lightning flash. So there was the Gestapo, one French policeman, and one SS man.



And they told my parents to pack a small bag, and to hurry up, and me to 'shut up' — I was crying — 'shut up, 'cos you're giving me a headache!' I'm lucky he didn't do more.

Because at this point, I don't know what happened. But the neighbour came in from the next-door flat, and because the doors weren't on she walked in and she was horrified, and said, 'What's my child doing here? How on earth did this happen?'



And she took me by the hand and calmly marched me out into her apartment and immediately put me underneath her dining table, and she put a big chenille tablecloth over it, and I lived there for probably three weeks, in hiding, in the dark, on my own. It was really scary.

So that's the day my parents were taken.

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