

Kaete Hildegard von Gumpfenberg

Below is a contemporary account, something between a diary and a letter, of the first five months of 1942. It was written by Kaete Hildegard von Gumpfenberg when she first went into hiding during WWII. It was written in May 1942, in Macon, which at the time was in Vichy France. It was probably written at the Hotel de L'Europe in Macon, where she initially stayed.

She was born 15th November 1906 into a Jewish family in Reichenbach, Germany (now in Poland). Her father Wilhelm Fleischer owned a textile mill. Kaete Hildegard married Max Hildebrand, Freiherr [Baron] von Gumpfenberg, a Catholic. Hilla and Max had two children: a daughter, Claudia (8th Feb 1930) and a son, Johannes (16th August 1931). They lived first in Berlin and then in Dusseldorf.

The document was found in an attic in Switzerland by the son of a man who worked for the border control near the town of Chancy on the Swiss border. He found it in about 2013, but only became aware of the contents and importance of it some years later when a friend translated some of it. (The original document was in German and his first language is French.) In May 2017 he located her family and shared the document with them.

In addition to the account below, Hildegard also wrote a memoir (in German) entitled "*My Life as Mme Ducaret*" in the late 1960's. The later memoir describes the same period in 1942 and, while in less detail, mirrors the same events exactly, and then goes on to describe her encounter with border guards on the Swiss border and the remainder of her experiences, in hiding in France, until the end of the War in 1945. So if you want to know what 'happens next', this is also available in both the original German and in English. The later memoir has been in the possession of members of her family, as well as in Jewish archive collections in Germany, the UK and the US, some of these since 1970.

The document below, written in German, was translated by Gerda Loosemore-Reppen, and edited by Ruth and David Geall in May / June 2017. The memoir "*My Life as Mme Ducaret*", written in the late 1960's, was first translated in May 2015, also by Gerda Loosemore-Reppen.

(Untitled)

Macon, May 1942

Since I believe that it might be interesting for some people to listen to the story of my case, especially for my husband and my children, I am sitting down today to start this account. I think my escape is a miracle and that an act of God must have been responsible for helping me. My intelligence alone could not have been responsible for it. I very carefully tried to consider each step I took and never wanted to force anything, which would have been my normal manner. There were lots of obstacles that had to be circumvented and they actually started in the antecedents of my escape.

In Dusseldorf we had a very nice maid who joined us in October 1941; it had been approved by the Labour Exchange. At the end of January 1942, the girl was asked to report to the employment office and to the Arbeitsfront, the 'voluntary' labour organisation. She went to both and it was suggested to her to stop her employment with us on the grounds that I wasn't Aryan. It was said that 'It wasn't right that many German women, mothers, didn't have any help, and the well-being of the State was such that she shouldn't help a Jewish woman'. They gave her eight days to think about it. After eight days she was summoned again to the labour exchange and, since she refused to give notice, she was told that she was conscripted to work [somewhere else]. This sudden conscription was rather surprising for us. My husband used his contacts, and the forced labour organisation didn't pursue the matter and dropped it. So we thought everything was fine, as we believed that the co-ordinator of this action was the Nazi labour organisation. My husband therefore went to the labour exchange and said that he had participated in the War and was wounded and there was no law that prevented him from having a servant. To his surprise he learned from the labour exchange that it was not them, but the Nazi organisation that had started this action, because the family had been denounced by another resident [in their apartment building].

My husband succeeded in getting a delay for a further eight days while he talked to the regional command of the Nazi party. He did not succeed. They told him that possibly he had the right to have a servant, and the legal position might be correct, but that that law had been superseded because the

command of the SS wanted to realise their racist political goals. He was also told that it was not acceptable that hired staff attended people of mixed race. Whatever he did, it didn't work and our servant was taken. She left us on the 6th of February 1942, then visited us briefly and left finally on the 9th of February, one day after Claudia's birthday.

I thought now that I had to get used to the new circumstances and occupied myself with work. Then our friend Hensel arrived to consider this matter further. He advised me that I should leave my home immediately because, as there had been one denunciation, there would be more in the future, and 'you really should not let it happen as the consequences would be irreparable'. There were cases in mixed marriages where women had to wear the Star and that meant it would be impossible to do anything. He also advised me to urgently change the school for Claudia, since the daughter of one of our co-residents went to the same school. Another instance also came to our attention. We heard about the difficulties of a gentleman who was of mixed race and lived with his Jewish mother, and the Gestapo had made them do something similar to us.

In order to protect Claudia from any difficulties, I immediately registered her in a different school. Initially they were quite reluctant to help, but they did it, and Sister Angelica, who had helped me before, assisted me, not insignificantly here. Then I made preparations to re-home Claudia with Frau Hiddermann, where she moved on Sunday 15th February 1942. This was a precondition for my departure because I needed to have someone who could look after the child. So I prepared for my journey on Thursday the 19th of February. On this day, I left my apartment. I visited during the nights of the 28th and 29th March in order to pack my last items for my escape.

I had the intention to go to Berlin to stay with friends in their home to continue my language studies and perhaps to be with good friends until the possibility arose that I could return to my family. I thought this could happen if we were able to move house. I initially went to Cologne, as the last few days had been exhausting for me, having to do everything without a servant and I wanted to recover for a few days. I also thought that a [house] move would not work without me, as my journey had started so suddenly and my husband would initially want to ask me questions [about the move].

In Cologne, while I was unknown in a big city, I was still contactable. I took a room in a small hotel. This was not difficult because I had a forged identity card. I arrived in the evening and I immediately tried to reach Frau Bäehnisch. Frau Bäehnisch is an old acquaintance of ours, who is a very intelligent and practical woman. She has very good connections and is always well informed. She told me she would be away for the whole week but that I should try to contact her, and true enough, she was at home. She told me that she had just arrived and was going to leave the next day, but I could meet her and then we would have to decide on some sort of future [arrangements]. She thought that my plans might be unfounded on the grounds of her information, and suggested that I should go back home as soon as possible. But she also told me, against her better judgment, that maybe I should try to leave Germany, and that there was a gentleman who could arrange trips of that nature. Before her departure, she recommended this gentleman to me who would know about these things, and I contacted him the same day.

This was Mr Bornheim. He and his wife, and also his son and daughter, became very good friends during my stay in Cologne. He was Mayor before 1933 in a small town in the Rhineland. Since he was a member of the Central Party, he was unpopular with the current regime, and had to leave his post. He returned to Cologne where he came from and set up a large [legal?] partnership. He lived with his family in a small house on the Marienburg, where they had a very nice flat and a harmonious life. His wife was a real lady, and it would seem, more intelligent than he was, and they were very good with their children. It was the ambiance of a patrician Cologne family. Bornheim told me that the trips were leading to the unoccupied part of France. He was still a bit reluctant to let me know this because it was dangerous for him. There were other opportunities to go to Holland or Switzerland also. He was interested in these matters because of his Jewish clients. He was going to make some enquiries later, and then learned that these trips had stopped because of the cold weather, but that after the snow had melted when it got warmer they might resume.

I thought about this and requested my husband to meet me in Cologne the following Sunday. We went together to the Bornhein's and my husband thought this plan was good. We thought it was quite harmless the way Mr Bornhein explained it. We got to know the whole family well on this day. It turned out that the son of Mr Bornhein had been in the same student organisation as my brother-in-law and knew him. We had rather similar views on many issues, especially politics and got on well with each other. My husband and I therefore decided that I should stay in Cologne, not draw any attention to myself, and start my preparations for the escape.

Initially I tried to find a room with a family in Cologne. I knew the family Schulz, where the husband was Aryan as the wife wasn't. They didn't have a maid at the moment, but had a large house, and I thought that I could live there and help the wife with jobs. I went to them and suggested this, but they were very rude and declined this suggestion. Mr Schulz was a businessman and as such he was very efficient, but all other aspects of human nature and life had been underdeveloped. He was very one-dimensional. His wife was much more likable and pleasant, but was totally subjugated by her husband. She was not independent of her husband in any way whatsoever. I considered the question of my living arrangement with the Bornhein's and they thought perhaps I could get some work in a Cologne artist's workshop.

In the meantime I continued to live in the hotel, which was extremely boring for me. I had to pretend to the hotel that I had things to do, so I went out in the morning and the afternoon. In the morning I tried to get sweets for the children by queuing for a long time. In the afternoon I went to the cinema. The rest of the day I spent in my little hotel room. I had cleverly changed the furniture around so that I had a little sitting area in the corner. There I knitted some socks for Johannes and for Ava Hiddermann I made a slip, or I read some Dostoyevsky, which I particularly enjoyed at that time. The question of where I should live did not make any progress, however. It was very urgent for me to leave the hotel, where I was registered with the police, and finally go underground. It was, however, very complicated, without registering with the police to get a proper apartment for myself, and I was dependent on a recommendation from acquaintances. The Bornhein family couldn't find anything, and also Mrs Bähnsch couldn't or wouldn't help me. So I felt I had to rely on my own ideas and I tried to find a room through small ads in the paper. I got hold of the Cologne newspaper *Point 12*, still warm after its appearance, and looked for the addresses. There was a huge demand for furnished rooms and you were only likely to be successful if you contacted the vendor quickly. I did not like any of the rooms. The conditions were not transparent enough for me. If I thought I could get on with the landlady, there was always a man in the background who might have caused difficulties for me. I placed a lot of importance on their political attitudes because I didn't want to live with Nazis. However urgent this matter was, I did not want to make a hasty decision, because it was so important for the next period, how I started at the beginning.

Mr Bornhein suggested I go to the university and look on the noticeboard there to see whether or not there was a room. I went there but there were no ads. The porter told me that such announcement wouldn't be placed on the noticeboard any more, but were now dealt with by the Nazi student union. So I took courage and went to the student union. I told them that I wasn't a student but had studied in the past, and I had some business in Cologne for a few weeks and needed a room. They gave me three addresses. Two of them were rubbish, but the third was something like what I was looking for: a single woman, divorced from her husband, who she wanted to let two rooms which were furnished and clean. The price was a bit higher than I wanted to spend, but everything else according with my aspirations. I therefore moved on Monday 1st March 1942 to Frau Schneider and I remained there until my escape.

Frau Schneider was a lively, slightly elderly woman from the Rhineland, not very educated, but interested and quite clever. I got on quite well with her during that period and her easy-going vivacious manner suited me well. We spent many evenings chatting to each other and I remember that period in Cologne fondly. I didn't give her my proper full name, but I identified myself as Frau Gumpfenberg and told her that I had to do some business for my husband, who was a merchant, and I had to stay in Cologne for that reason. I needed to dissolve a large warehouse, which my husband wanted to shift in

order to protect the goods from air raids. Because of difficulties with transport, I told her, you had to deal with this matter yourself. My husband was busy and did not have time and his underlings could not really sort these matters out. Since I had done similar things during the War and knew what was important. I succeeded in telling her this tall story.

Right at the beginning of my stay with Frau Schneider we talked about the matter of my registration with the police. I told her that I was not going to be in Cologne for long and I was registered at home and therefore it was not necessary to register here. Since this lady from the Rhineland wasn't too conscientious or informed, and was not in awe of the bureaucracy, she accepted that easily. The question of my background I hadn't cleared up and I wasn't sure how I should resolve that so I put it aside. When she asked me I told her I came from Silesia and she said, "Oh, you live in Breslau, don't you?" and I said yes. We once experienced a heavy bombardment [In Cologne] and my landlady worried that she did not have an address, in order to notify my husband, if something happened to me. So I gave her my address in my address in Breslau, Hohenzollernstra 78, the apartment of my friend Suse.

It was now necessary that I had a regular occupation to fool my landlady. Mr Bornhein had in the meantime recommended me to a lady in the Hohen Strasse, who had a dressmaking shop there. He had said that I wasn't Aryan and gave her my full name. He thought that Fraulein Schmitt was totally reliable. She hated the Nazis and couldn't tolerate the system. Also her colleague, Fraulein Martha Driessen, had the same outlook. Nonetheless, she was not very keen to progress the matter. Mr Bornhein suggested therefore that I should personally go to meet her. She told me that she had to be careful with her staff because of the labour exchange. Her concern, however, disappeared when I arrived because I didn't look Jewish. I suggested to her that I would sort out the matter with the labour exchange. She was very surprised at this. I told her it was very easy. I went to the labour exchange and did not tell them my name. I said I was a housewife and mother of two children. My husband had temporarily gone away and that I wanted to work at the dressmaker's who was an acquaintance of mine, as I wanted to improve my sewing skills. I said it would be really useful for me while I could not buy anything for the children any more, and there was a shortage of dressmakers and I wanted to help myself. They did not obstruct me; on the contrary, they felt the self-help approach of the German woman was laudable. I told them that I wanted to work for myself, but in the meantime I needed to learn how the business worked in the workshop and, should there be an emergency, I could help them out. I said I just wanted to let them know I would be working there. They told me there was nothing against that suggestion and such an approach would be viewed as neighbourly help.

Therefore, I had everything that I needed for Fraulein Schmitt and could start my work with her. I wanted to go there every day regularly and stay until half past two. At three o'clock I wanted to take a language lesson and then at half past four to return to my landlady. The only days that were different were when I had to go to the dentist in Dusseldorf. The thorough treatment of my teeth was part of the preparations for my escape. I had sorted this out at the beginning, that there would be some days that I couldn't go to the workshop. I was particularly busy for my landlady's benefit, because I left half an hour earlier in the morning [than I needed to].

Fraulein Schmitt was a very educated and clever woman, but she didn't like work and she would far rather chat and talk about politics. Her background was that of a bookseller, but in the 1920's she could not succeed, and had opened the sewing workshop with a Jewish girl friend. She had no idea about sewing, but looked after the business side of the shop as she had some experience in bookkeeping. She did not make a lot of money and gave most of it to the Jewish friend, with whom she had to part [the business partnership], in 1938. She lived in a rather bohemian set-up. The ambiance was to my liking because it was stimulating and civilized. Colleagues or her staff looked after the business.

Fraulein Martha looked after the business. She was about 30 years old and in no way striking, but you got to appreciate her from her work. She was very knowledgeable and worked hard. She was very intelligent, educated and I was surprised that she didn't have another sort of occupation. So I became friends with those ladies. I didn't speak about my reason for being in Cologne. I would have liked to tell

them, but it would have been too difficult for both parties. I only told them that things had become difficult at home and I needed to disappear for a while. Fraulein Schmitt often discussed with me the problem of her Jewish girlfriend and from time to time I hinted at the fact that she could flee, but I didn't want to tell her how, in order to protect myself and not jeopardize my own escape.

Fraulein Martha introduced me in the workshop, and from the first day a good relationship was created. There was no friction with my colleagues, who had been employed there many years. Ellie was rather robust and capable of dealing with any situation and had good life skills, but she was a bit basic. She was an opinion leader in the workshop. Gerta was much more sensitive, very accurate and capable in her work, a bit nervous and not very civilized. Maria was the worst of the workers, scatty, chatting all the time, very pale and looked ill and not 100% mentally. Mariechen was best, the most sophisticated of all of them. She had difficulties at home and was very diligent and quiet at work. She was a bit repressed and committed to the Nazi ideology. Liselotte was the apprentice, a sleepy and not very nice girl. Later, Gertrude joined us. She was useful and pleasant, a proper average person. I worked initially on my own things, those things that I needed for my escape, a skirt and a dirndl. After she saw that I could make something, Fraulein Martha allowed me to work for a client. I prepared the dress for the fitting and then came my debut with the client. I had to deal with the fitting. I was very nervous beforehand because the whole business was a little strange to me, but Frau Beermann was delighted with me and wanted to have lots more work done. Her concerns were the smallest that you could imagine and were in contrast to what I was planning.

From my landlady's point of view, my life was totally predictable. I went punctually out of the house, came back at a reasonable time and was a very pleasant lodger. Luckily the Bornhein's had tried to visit me, also Herr Schloesser; our friends from Munchen Gladbach had passed by and there were telephone calls, so I wasn't totally cut off, something that would have been noticeable to the landlady. Herr Schloesser, I used for my purposes and said that he was arranging the transport [for the business I was doing] for me. I did not, however, get any letters and I explained that they would normally be sent to my office. I had almost completed my preparations by Easter time. My dental treatment had been completed, clothes which I needed for the journey I had sewn, and I had gone back home to pack my last clothes. I told my landlady I had gone to Dusseldorf to visit an aunt there.

In Dusseldorf I went to see Aunt Tussi. In the evening, at half past ten, I left her in order to drive home. At home, my husband let me into the flat and then I had a few hours' work. I completed everything and my husband was left to organise sending the suitcases to Herr Schloesser in Munchen Gladbach. There I wanted to leave the suitcase for a few months and I could then repack them there at a later date.

I thought it would be proper to get together with a gentleman, a young Jewish solicitor, and contact him as he was organising the so-called Thursday trips. Herr Bornhein notified him about me and I learned how suspect the whole matter had become. A man without regular abode, who might be searched by the police, would occasionally ask if there was somebody ready for the trip and as he could stay in Cologne very briefly, as in any other area, 'the trip' would then happen the following day, via Holland to Belgium and Brussels. This would cost 2,000 marks, or it was possible that the man had increased his fee. In Brussels you would stay with Polish Jews and then you had to make your own arrangements to get down to the South of France. The Polish Jews organised everything, and while it was difficult to get to Brussels, it was much easier to depart from there, but you would have been dependent on these people. You were supposed to take as little as possible by way of luggage and as much money as possible. The description of the people [in Brussels] was abhorrent and the trip more than adventurous. It surprised me that the solicitor would get involved in something like that. The plan really depressed me and I wanted to speak to my husband about it at Easter.

We invited the Bornhein's to a nice wine restaurant on Easter Saturday. Claudia was also with us. She gave me a little bowl, which I was to take on my journey. It was a very nice and successful evening. Next day I talked to my husband about these Thursday trips. He also disliked the matter very much. It was so very different than when I heard about it first.

He also thought there was too much risk involved, and advised me to travel as soon as possible to our friend Hilde Jacoby, who lived in Eupen¹, which is near Belgium. Our friend Hilde is a very intelligent but nervous woman. Her sensibility makes her occasionally quite clairvoyant. She always had a very good nose for things in the future. So for several months she had told me, at a time when I was not thinking about it, that I should try to go to the south of France. She took me to a previous servant of her mother, Kaetchen Bartholemy. It was a journey of more than an hour. Kaetchen's house was directly at the border and she knew every path. At the moment she was ill and was looked after by her sister Gerta. Kaetchen was very intelligent and cunning, her sister was a bit more simple. Both were typically border people. The man also appeared, a French type, very fine limbs, good-looking and much more agreeable than Kaetchen. Kaetchen wanted to arrange the matter from her bedside because she was part of an organisation which was a network for people who helped people in difficulties, primarily French prisoners whom she helped get to the South of France. I told her that I could leave within two weeks. She needed to find out the price of the journey and if it was possible to do it. We agreed that I would come back on the following Sunday with the suitcases for the escape, when Gerta would take across the border. Then we would agree the actual departure date. I was pleased with this conversation: Kaetchen told me the about the journey in a way that I thought I could do. You did not need to get into a sinister milieu, as would have been the case with the first possibility. I liked her and I was also pleased that I could take some luggage with me. So I returned to Cologne feeling less worried.

The week after Easter was the most exhausting time for me because I had to prepare the last elements of the escape. The workshop was closed for the week after Easter anyway, so it wasn't suspicious that I didn't go. As I left my apartment earlier and returned later than normally, I appeared particularly diligent to my landlady, as I tried to get my tasks finished. I went to Dusseldorf for a consultation with my husband about Eupen and I met him at the Hiddermans. There I informed him of the plan, which he agreed with and thought was better. He also gave me the money for the first installment of the journey, which I had to give to Kaetchen the following Sunday to change into Belgian francs. I saw Claudia again on this day for the last time.

I wanted my husband to go to Berlin the following week to get a letter, a commendation from Dr Baeck, which could have eased my journey. He also wanted to ask our friend Kuenzer whether Frau Solf had written from Switzerland to François-Poncet² and Claudal. I was very sad that I could not go to Berlin myself. With the very strict surveillance of the trains, I could not risk the journey, which could have jeopardized my future plans.

In Dusseldorf I also went to Sister Angelika. Claudia had made an appointment for me. She had become a good friend and advisor in the last few years. She was the headmistress of a girl's school in the last few years, which the State had absorbed in the meantime. She was a very clever observer of the period with political judgment and had helped me in the months prior to my plans for immigration. In her very sophisticated and clever manner, she always gave me the impression of what medieval women might have been like. She was less German and more European. I told Sister Angelika about my plans and she supported and agreed with them. Also our Berlin friend, Dr Hensel, approved them. I asked her particularly for an address in Belgium and she told me that there was a nunnery of her order in Brussels where I could definitely live if I used my contact with her. That was terribly valuable for me. If I was deserted by the [escape] organisation and couldn't carry on, there was always the convent as a back-up for me.

On the same day, I visited Hagedorn, our physician. I asked him for a certificate of good health, but it was difficult to tell him why I needed it. I asked him therefore not ask any further questions because I

1 It was and is again Belgian, but had been annexed by the Nazis.

2 (?) André François-Poncet (1887-1978), former French ambassador to Nazi Germany, who was arrested by the Gestapo in France and imprisoned for three years.

couldn't tell him. Since he knew me for a long time he accepted my request, examined me and gave me the certificate.

The next day I went to Herr Schloesser, who lived near Gladbach, as my belongings had finally arrived. A suitcase was there and another one got there also but should have been across the border, having been sent from Berlin. My husband had sent the suitcase from Dusseldorf to Gladbach and the most difficult thing was that all the good clothes that I had were in my apartment in Cologne and needed to be sent to Gladbach. In order to hide this suitcase from my landlady, I told her that I had put on my best and most elegant clothes when I visited my friend in Eupen, and she had argued with me, saying that I should not keep my good clothes in Cologne because of possible bombardment. They had sent away all of their good clothes and I should do the same, so I had immediately packed all my clothes and sent them home to Breslau. Frau Schneider found this very sensible and approved of my plan. She thought this was a good plan for herself also, and started to pack her good clothes to send them away too. I was therefore able to get my clothes away without arising suspicion.

Herr Schloesser works as a beer representative. He takes beer to the airports and the army and therefore is a very good source of foodstuffs, and above all else he is a great hater of the regime because of its attitudes, which is why we were very close to them. His wife is a very plain, honest, very Catholic woman, not very clever in contrast to her husband, but she has a good heart. With them I spent a whole day packing five suitcases. Three were to be sent on at the appropriate moment, two I wanted to take on the journey. One of these contained the most essential elements of clothes, shoes and underwear. The other one was supposed to contain only foodstuffs, including a long sausage, tins, and Frau Schloesser cooked a few hard-boiled eggs for me. I wanted to take a few tins of fat [lard]. I completed everything and returned to Cologne late in the evening. I showed my landlady a very heavy roast and told her that it had taken me a lot of time and that is why I was late.

The following day, I was able to return to the tailor's workshop, which was officially still closed. I made a dress for Claudia for the summer. The next day, Saturday, I worked in the workshop and then I travelled to Muchen Gladbach in order to collect the two suitcases that were destined for the escape and took them to Eupen. I told my landlady this time that I wanted to visit my aunt in Dusseldorf, and that my work was probably finishing soon, and if, that was the case, I would leave her on the 20th of April.

I arrived late in Eupen and left the suitcases in the name of Frau Berg in the hotel in the vicinity of the tram stop, and said a young girl would collect them. Hilde had expected me on the Saturday and was pleased I had arrived. On Sunday I walked to Kaetchen, this time without Hilde, as I knew the route. Kaetchen was still ill and was in the sun in front of her house. I pretended to make a visit to the sick lady since a neighbour was passing. She had established that the journey would cost 700 marks. A worker from the neighboring Belgian factory would collect me from her in the evening. I would be staying overnight with him and then would be taken to by a woman to Dolhaine. This woman would accompany me on the journey to the South of France. At one or other of the borders, a man disguised as a priest would receive me.

We became unable to speak very well as we were interrupted in our walk by a strange person who was going on an outing with a guitar and sang like a young bird. We had to consider him now, and Kaetchen was fantastic: she winked at me continuously. Finally I requested that Gerda should talk to the walker, so that I could carry on talking to her sister Kaetchen. I told Kaetchen that I was keen to leave as soon as possible and gave her 1,000 marks to change into Belgian franks. I gave Kaetchen 100 marks, as I had agreed with Hilde, and I promised her a further 100 marks if everything worked out alright. Kaetchen asked me for two passport pictures that would be needed for the forged passports; one would await me in Brussels and the other at the French border, in the unoccupied area. She also told me my dates. I left Kaetchen in good spirits as I thought this would work, parted from Hilde and bade her farewell, as I did not think I wanted to see her on my day of the escape, in order not to endanger her.

Now that I had organised everything, I decided that I should really have a quiet week. I went daily to the workshop. I made some nightdresses for Claudia and a rattan bag for my journey. I also made a little suit for the little Beermann boy, which I had promised his mother. I notified my husband, who had departed for Berlin, that I would be leaving on the Monday. It seemed high time. In Cologne, the mixed race people had to register with the police and were moved and collectively accommodated all together in joint accommodation. Herr Bornhein, to whom I said farewell, showed me the decree of the Cologne governor, that if you live in a mixed marriage, two of your five children who had been baptized, would be declared Jewish. Even Frau Baernish, who had returned from Berlin, knew that the security service, the top Gestapo organisation, had decreed the wearing of the Star of David for Jews in mixed race marriages, and they were also working on divorces for mixed race marriages. She advised me to leave.

I was feeling very insecure with Frau Schneider as well. Politically we had agreed very well and she was also an opponent of the Nazis and we jointly did not like the regime, but she did not like Jews, and found it difficult to understand that servants could work for Jews and do everything for them. She had looked after me for six weeks in a very kind way and I did not want to have to test fate further. I told her definitively that I would be leaving the apartment on the 20th.

At the workshop, I also announced my resignation. I told them there that I was feeling very insecure. The bombardment didn't help and I was afraid that somebody might soon find out that I was living under false pretenses. I said I first wanted to visit my son in Gmund and then a friend at the Starnberger Lake, and then, during the long school holiday, I would go to Waging. In the autumn I would possibly return. They had started to value my work and I asked for reference from Frl. Schmitt and rather than give an accurate time that I had been there, they gave a fictitious one of seven years' employment. I am sorry that I had to lie everywhere: only with the Bornheins was I able to be honest.

Then I met my husband at the Hotel Excelsior. He came especially to bring me more money, a recommendation letter from Dr Baeck, and a bag from Frau Hidderman that I could use for a long time. I was missing a few things and wanted to meet him in Muchen Gladbach. I could give him a few things, the tailored things for Claudia and sweets for both children.

On Monday I said goodbye to Frau Schneider and took my suitcases to the train station, addressed to Dusseldorf. I only took the little bag and the bag from Frau Hidderman to Muchen Gladbach. There Herr Schloesser received me. He also had received money from my husband, which he wanted to change into Credit Bonds from the Reich. I asked if he had done that, but he hadn't succeeded. He did not have the money on him and he was surprised that I wanted the money now. He managed to get to the bank before it closed and arrived with lots of little notes. I had to ask him to change them into bigger notes, which I was going to put in a little bag and sew on my person. This gave me quite a lot of money. I changed at the Schloesser's into the nice new clothes that I had bought for my emigration. We took leave of each other in a hearty, but not sentimental manner, since I have always avoided any form of sentimentality. My husband met me at the train station and brought the last bits and pieces I had missed. He put me in the train to Aachen in a terribly depressed state.

I arrived at 6 pm in Eupen. I took my two bags, the fur coat and the red handbag and thus loaded, I went to Kaetchen. At Eupen, I saw the regional train to Dolhaine ready to move. Before, I had not been not sure I should take the train, but lately I decided that if the train was about to go, it would be alright to use it. I only traveled one station, to Membach. The rest of the journey I had planned to walk and carry my luggage. However, I had only walked for five minutes when Gerta approached me on her bicycle and took bits and pieces. Kaetchen had sent her, in anticipation, to meet me. I was punctually at 7pm at her house and she told me that everything would be fine. My suitcases had already gone to Dolhaine. Visitors, who were curious when they saw me, stayed a very long time at Kaetchen's, frequently interrupting us. I got very nervous. Kaetchen got the money from underneath her bed that I had asked her to change. She had put the francs in a small bag and advised me that should I be caught, I should throw it in the meadow and they would look for it the next day. She was not very happy with my two bags because the rattan bag was too light coloured for the night journey. Therefore, I only used the bag that Frau Hiddermann had sent me, at the last minute, reduced my luggage and gave the rattan bag to

Kaetchen. Packing and repacking took place in the kitchen like everything else. After we had had supper and there was no danger of further visitors, the worker would arrive. Kaetchen gave me a black bag of hers to use for my light camel hair coat. She suggested I should wear my best fur coat during the escape because it was black. All three, Kaete, Gerda and Herr Bartholemy were rather nervously excited. That made me a little suspicious as I am very cold-blooded, and I only got restless because of them.

We were expecting the worker from the neighbouring factory, who was expected to take me across the German border, at 10pm. Since the evenings were very light he arrived at half past 10. He was very agitated and said a lot in French, which I didn't understand. I didn't like him because he was agitated and because he was dirty. Since he had made sure there was no custom officer in the vicinity, we could start the walk. I had to go across the meadow near a little stream. The meadow was secured by barbed wire and I had to throw myself in my good coat on the ground in order to get myself underneath the barbed wire. It was not very far, perhaps a quarter of an hour, very quiet and you could hear the rustling of the birds and the animals in the neighbouring forest, so it was a bit spooky. We arrived easily at the factory and the worker's flat. He took me into his kitchen. In contrast to his appearance, the kitchen was spotless. I breathed a sigh of relief, as the worst border I had surmounted safely – and on the birthday of 'our leader' [Hitler].

We sat down in his kitchen and talked, until I explained that I wanted to go to bed. I was taken to a reasonable bedroom, which adjoined the bedroom where the worker slept. I slept reasonably well and stayed in bed for a relatively long time as I did not have any other commitments. Then I washed in the kitchen where the worker had put out on the chair, a washing bowl, towel and soap. On the kitchen table there was breakfast. He had boiled me an egg and made coffee and kept it warm on the stove. In the flat I had to be very quiet because the walls were quite thin and the neighbouring washerwoman could hear everything. I read a bit and mainly spent the day playing patience. The day was beautiful and I regretted that I couldn't go out.

From time to time the worker came to look after me and in the afternoon his 12-year-old daughter, who lived with some sisters, arrived and prepared the evening meal. I could hardly communicate with her. After supper, I paid the worker his well-earned salary of 170 marks. Then it was time to move to Dolhaine. Everyone carried some of my things, father, daughter and I myself. I was introduced as the aunt of the little girl. On this trip the worker told me how terribly dangerous the escape was. He was only going to relax when I had arrived in the South of France. I think that it was not only about my safety - he was worried but about the organisation helping people across the border as there was also danger for them. I remembered his words very well.

In Dolhaine we went to the house of a couple, the van Brackels, where life again revolved around the kitchen. Herr van Brackel, by trade a mechanic, was home alone. He was a good-looking man, very muscular and tall with a very light gait. He looked very bright and was very polite. His politeness was what you find only in uneducated people. His wife did not please me as much, as she didn't have the open and clear expression of her husband. She appeared to me a little bit imprecise and too stupid. But she wasn't a bad person, just a petty bourgeois. I think my initial poor impression was because of her mother, who also belonged to the household. I didn't like her at all. She didn't have the kindness of old people and she seemed terribly nose. I did however find my suitcases there. The next day I was expected very early to leave Dolhaine and go to Brussels, where I was to stay for a few days and was then to be collected by Frau von Brackel. This journey, however, could only take place on a Monday and it was a Tuesday. [This meant that there was a wait to escape of six days.] I suggested that it might be better for me to stay another day in Dolhaine so that we could get to know each other better before the journey. [It seems that they waited an extra day see below.]

Then I took courage and said that I did have some money on my person and I would like to have it changed. It was a very risky affair to speak about this and I knew that well, but I risked it. Frau von Brackel said she would change it the next day in Vervier. Then she told me, as the worker had done, that the agreed sum of 550 marks did not include the costs of the trip and I would still have to pay the

cost of her journey as well as my own. I didn't like that very much; however, I couldn't go back and I agreed reluctantly. Had I known this earlier then I could have taken more money because what I had on my person I expected to use for my expenses and not for those of the journey.

The next day Frau von Brackel went to Vervier where she planned to change the money with her contacts. She told me correctly that one would get a better exchange rate near the border than in Brussels, where the people could not use German currency as much. She left at noon and expected to be back at 4 pm. I did have a radio now and my patience cards for entertainment. The day passed very slowly; it was a terrible strain on my nerves, since almost all of my money, except for some francs, which were changed by Kaetchen, were now with this lady in Vervier. She did not return at 4 pm, but at around 6, and instead of giving me my money back, she kept it. She said she was keeping the money because she could not change the money in one go and had to wait for the rest. I didn't want to become too anxious, and I certainly didn't want to show my nervousness, but then lost my temper and demanded my money. I got everything in a large mountain of notes, which was very inconvenient. [It would have been difficult to carry these notes in a concealed fashion as there were so many.] My relationship to these people was difficult; on the one hand, I was dependent on them; on the other, I showed them that I was different from them. I realised, however, that the relationship depended on reciprocity, because I could also denounce them. That comforted me somewhat.

Herr von Brackel took me on the following day to Brussels. His wife was going to visit me on Saturday, Sunday or Monday in Brussels. In eight days, she was going to do the journey on the Monday, depending on whether or not there was an obstacle. In Brussels I managed to get to Sister Angelica's monastery, where I called for the mother superior. She spoke fluent German and I was able to communicate perfectly with her. She was a very similar type to Sister Angelica, but not so worldly, open or clever. I was concerned that I didn't have a recommendation letter from Sister Angelica with me, because the Mother Superior was slightly suspicious, but that was appropriate behavior for her as the conscientious head of an institution. I showed her my papers and I said I had to flee because of my Jewish background. That made it clear to her. I didn't tell her that I hadn't been baptized. Everything that I mentioned was already difficult enough and I didn't want to add to her inconvenience and her worries. Despite her politeness she was a little reluctant, and wasn't sure there was an empty room and whether she could feed another person. I told her that I had a few provisions with me and that I would be satisfied with soup, and otherwise I could live from my provisions. She became more trusting in the course of our conversation and proceeded to sort out the room. After a short while, another nun, Sister Philomene, came and guided me to a nice room. I was entrusted to her, as she was looking after other guests, both of whom were German and I was well looked after. I liked being in the nunnery. I relaxed and felt I had more support. The sisters of course weren't all that pleased because I was German and spoke German, but they were not that bothered that I was not Aryan. It didn't find it easy in Belgium because they were a German Order and they had to be especially careful in order not to cause offence to Belgians, who were quite against Germans.

I stayed there for four days, during which I decided to view the city. I especially liked the church of St Gudule and the Grand Place. The Bornheims gave me a recommendation to a Herr van Schendel who they said I should visit in Brussels. He was not in. What I found out, after a lot of effort, was that he was particularly helpful with regard to changing money. Now I was pleased that I had already changed mine in Dolhaine. On Saturday, I was expecting Frau von Brackel, but she did not appear. It did not unnerve me since she might come on Sunday. But Sunday morning also passed without her appearance and I started to get nervous, but she did arrive in the afternoon between five and six. She told me that we would travel on Monday at midday, but couldn't tell me which train nor the station from which we were departing. On Monday morning we were going to take my money together and change it into larger denominations. I was not able to change the money at the National Bank, but they suggested a large shop, which did complete the transaction. Frau von Brackel was going to arrive at the nunnery at 9 am, but only came at 10. This imprecise behavior irritated me very much. It was not very encouraging to have a guide for the journey who was inferior to me in every respect. I returned to the nunnery with my money, packed my bag and said farewell to the Mother Superior and the sisters generally, especially Sister Philomene, who cried when we parted.

Frau von Brackel collected me, this time accompanied by a youth who was supposed to carry the bags and accompany us on the journey. I cannot classify this young man, as he was unbelievably dislikeable. He was tall, looked pretty good, but had an unpleasant look in his eyes and a nervous manner which irritated me. He had the terribly haughty attitude of some young people and awful manners. Nonetheless, I gave him all my money and papers on the advice of Madame [von Brackel]. Parting with these valuables, because of the possible need to give people at the border crossing [money], made this more terrifying than the danger of crossing the border or arriving in a foreign country without permission. We arrived at the station, but had to wait for some information from a young woman who had telephoned to the border to check that we could pass. It was only possible on Mondays and only on Mondays if a particular official was on duty who was bribable. She gave us good news. She was a rather large woman with very ugly large-rimmed spectacles, but with beautiful hands.

We travelled by train to Tournay, a place that had suffered a lot in the War. After two hours there, we set off for Lille by tram, making a large detour via Roubaix. First, we travelled to the border and passed it with all our luggage, at a particular area where we had to rush terribly, as the particular official was likely to be replaced soon. He snuffled around in my suitcase and asked me if I was French, to which I said yes, and I crossed. Across the border we continued on the tram and travelled via Roubaix, where we had to change to Lille. So I arrived dead tired in Lille. There I was taken into an unbelievably dark hotel, which reminded me of the worst Dusseldorf old town pubs. It was a very small house. At the front was a bar area, behind that a kitchen, which could only be reached through a shed-type structure and was separated from the so-called toilets. The staircase went up in dreadful twists and turns, up five floors. On this the highest floor you could still smell the kitchen. It was very dirty. I was glad that this stay was only supposed to last a night. First we ate in the bar area and then we went up to the fifth floor. The unpleasant youth made identity cards for Madame and me. My [identity card] name was Helene Rouillard and I lived in Roubaix near the train station. Then part of my money was changed for French francs. I got all the money that the youth had taken across the border and my papers were returned to me. He asked if I had an identity card relating to me and because I didn't think anything bad, I passed him my [first fake] identity card. Madame had told me firmly that, in respect of people in her organisation, I should be Aryan. Now they told me that the identity card had to be kept [by them] for my security and it was not safe that I had two different passes on my person. Even though I had my real identity card as well, on me, I started to get anxious when I heard that. I thought that the papers in the youth's hands could be used to blackmail me. It was very dangerous in case this organisation might be exposed by the Germans. Therefore I resolved that I was not going to fight for the papers that I didn't desperately need. It got late and even though it was so awful in the hotel I slept the night because I was so tired. I had to get up at 6 am in order to catch the train to Paris. Luckily the hotel was near the station.

Having arrived in Paris, we first went to a pub near the Gare de Nord. The youth returned and took us to a hotel near the Bastille. This wasn't first class either, but better than the one in Lille. They said, however, that we couldn't stop the night there. Possibly the police were already looking for people who were not expected. The youth disappeared again and returned after a few hours. Madame and I ate something - the organisation did have enough food coupons. Madame told me while we were eating that we had to travel without the suitcases because it would be difficult to travel with them. I thought of the words that the worker [who took her across the German border] had told me - that he would only rest peacefully if he knew I had arrived safely in the South of France. I told them therefore that I wouldn't go to the South of France without my luggage. I said, 'You know I went to a convent in Brussels, and I could go to a nunnery in Nantes and stay there for an indefinite period'. Sister Philomene had told me that they also had a convent in Nantes. Of course we had not talked about whether I could live there, but I said this as a fact and noticed immediately that I had anticipated this correctly, and the suitcases were transported to Lyon. I could see later how important any sort of luggage was in the South of France, because there was almost nothing to buy, as in Germany, and I would have been very unhappy not to have anything with me.

We then went to a woman where I was supposed to stay overnight. She appeared to be the head of the organisation. She lived in an apartment near the Champs Elysees, which was the only thing I saw of Paris. This woman was a lady, as she seemed quite educated. She could speak German, could translate from German and appeared intelligent. She was an older person, quite bohemian, and had an intelligent face with a very energetic chin. I also noticed her gray pallor. In the flat, I was quite happy because it was a bit more passable than the kitchens which I had experienced so far. It was also pleasant to speak with a more educated person, even though this lady, whose name I do not know, just like that of the youth, wasn't sympathetic. I had to pretend that I had accommodated French prisoners of war and supported them, and therefore I had myself courted danger.

It was now the right time to argue for my [first fake] identity card. I told her that I really needed it urgently for my stay in France, since I had been recommended to a number of people who didn't know me and who required the appropriate identity card. I told her it had been decided that Madame should keep the piece of paper during the journey and not me.

Early the next morning we started our journey to Dijon, followed by the youth. Then we took a bus to Chalon. In Chalon we didn't quite know where we were going and reached a mechanic's workshop where Maurice arrived, stretching his arms out to us. I had heard about Maurice already in Paris. I liked him. He had a pleasant manner, a nice face, wore tortoise-shell glasses, and had he had better clothes on one would have thought he was an educated person. We also took a seat in his kitchen and discussed matters for a long time. There was another man with Maurice, who I liked best of all these people. There was something peasant-like about him and I liked him. All of them thought that we needed new identity cards and we shouldn't use the old ones, and they made new ones for us.

At 6 pm in the afternoon, I was first taken by car to the border [between Occupied and Vichy France]. Madame was supposed to follow and the youth stayed behind. Behind the car seat was a luggage space and I was pushed into this space. It wasn't easy with my height and I had to crouch and then they gave my belongings to me and the seat was put back on top of the luggage area. Then we could start the journey. I had to laugh about this manner of crossing the border. It isn't exactly what you would do as a lady of society. The whole journey was born from a worker's spirit, and I said to myself often how nicer and smoother we could have had the same effect, but with greater elegance. Behind the demarcation line, I was brought to a house and again in the kitchen, I could freshen up, because my appearance had suffered a lot in the dirty car. Madame was taken across the border at a different place and after she had arrived, we were taken by car to Sennecy-le-Grand where we stopped in a country hotel. I had to part with my money and my papers for these journeys. This time I was able to give them to the pleasant man and I didn't feel as reluctant as I did with the unpleasant youth. I got everything back in Sennecy, only Madame kept my identity card, 'for my security', but it had come along with me.

In Sennecy we had to leave quite early. They had agreed in Chalon that we had to take the bus to Lyon. We walked a little while towards Lyon, because in France a bus could be stopped on the way. The bus arrived with a little delay and we boarded it happily. A gentleman got up and I thought he just wanted us to take a seat, but he asked us for our identity cards. He saw immediately that our papers were forgeries and arrested us. This was the first time on this journey that I felt low. I could not tell whether this was a French or a German initiative. At the next station we had to get off and were taken into a little house where we had to wait for the departure of the next train. The man spoke with Madame, who said we were French. I said nothing and just gestured to Madame. I knew that the matter was not sustainable. Madame had always whispered to me, 'You are French'. I wanted her to lie long enough until she could see that this wasn't the right strategy. The first interrogation didn't last very long, but we were put on the next train and returned. On this journey I was extremely anxious. I thought I was going to be delivered to the Germans. But when the train stopped for a second time, before the demarcation line, we were told to get off and I was more relaxed as we had arrived again in Sennecy-le-Grand.

There was a place there where the police were stationed. We went together with the man who arrested us. Three police officials and another one, who also spoke German, joined them. We were interrogated

again. This time in greater detail and I let Madame carry on lying and said nothing. Since I knew that she would not get away with these lies and that as they had searched us thoroughly, my various papers would be revealed, I thought the best way forward would be to tell the whole truth. That had to happen at a time when Madame realized that you could not go further with lying. When they asked me directly and wanted a response, I said immediately that I wasn't French, they thought Belgian, but I said German. Then they asked me for my identity papers and to Madame's surprise, I took my own card out and it was looked at thoroughly and considered to be correct and then taken. I explained now that I had fled Germany because I was Jewish, and explained that the 'J' on my papers as well as the 'Sarah' was the proof of my Jewish ancestry. I was asked about my family circumstances, and showed my papers. I had in total three interrogations, and was always asked whether I left with the agreement of my husband. I explained the situation in Germany and that I hadn't just left with the agreement of my husband, but especially for him, while the primary reason was to save my life. An intelligent official who had a certain understanding of the politics at the moment, and who understood my case immediately, led the interrogation. He and all the others therefore looked after me very well. Nonetheless, everything I had was searched very thoroughly and I had a body search. Madame was treated differently. They wanted to know everything about her. Where the forged papers had come from etc. I was asked the same questions about the papers, but now I lied. I said Madame had given me the papers in Paris. Because I had been honest initially I had some leeway with lying. If I had said that the papers had been given nearby in Chalon, then the organisation would have been lost. I did not want to tell on the people who had helped me. I carried on lying, namely that I had not given any money to Madame, only paying for the costs of the journey. Madame was depressed, cried and was very upset. There was more danger for her than for me, but I noticed when the police were interrogating her how stupid she was.

Now, with a report, of this interrogation, we were taken to Macon. There was a kind departure, with a shaking of hands between the official and myself, and I asked at the end, "Will I be imprisoned or delivered [to the Germans]?" They said "No". So I was happy and relieved and travelled to Macon, where we were taken to a hotel, and were required to go to the police station at 9 am the next day. The report that had been written at Sennecy was read and they thought that they could leave us in the hotel. I mentioned to Madame that I wasn't willing anymore to pay for her travel costs. The original agreement was that she would receive travel costs in addition to the money that it was agreed that I would pay for the journey. She was so stupid that she went to the police to tell them that I didn't want to pay for her anymore. She succeeded in that I paid for the hotel and costs, but it made me say that I had already paid for the rest of the journey, mainly 700 marks in Germany. I feared that this explanation by me might lead to the end of the organisation. The official who was leading the investigation in Macon was less intelligent than his colleague in Sennecy. He seemed a dutiful person, almost Prussian in appearance. He seemed somebody who would live and die with his paperwork. Politically he was very unsophisticated, which is why he didn't believe me. His knowledge of human beings was poor. I made a mistake and in Macon lost the ground that I gained in Sennecy. So I had to start right at the beginning again and could not get the trust of this man. He wouldn't believe me that I was a Baroness nor that I had been recommended by Claudel and François-Poncet. I showed him a letter written by François-Poncet. The letter said that I could use him as a reference at anytime and he would be prepared to answer all questions. From then on the official started to take me more seriously, and the relationship and treatment I received was excellent. This investigation closed with the words, "You are free", and he gave me a document with the following text. [The following paragraphs were typed in French at the bottom of the document.]

*French Ministry of the Interior
Directorate General
of the
National Surete
No. 644
Subject: Notification
of an administrative decision*

*Republique Francaise
Liberte - Equalite - Fraternite*

Proces-Verbal

*in the year one thousand nine hundred and forty-two
on the first of May*

Business:

Von Guppenberg
Catherine

Hemart, Andre

Commissioner of the National Police, residing in Macon, a judicial police officer, auxiliary to the Procurator of the Republic, given the decision of the PREFET of Saone and Loire dated at Macon, May 1, 1942, requiring the person Von Guppenberg, Catherine Hildegard, Sarah, nee Fleischer, born on November 15, 1906 in Reichenbach (Germany) of Willi and Klestadt, Helene, Jewish of German nationality, domiciled in Dusseldorf (Germany) to reside in Macon, and not to cross the boundaries of this municipality without first obtaining authorization, under penalties of the sanctions enacted by law.

And to be aware of it, have requested the name of Von Guppenberg, Catherine, to sign with the present proces-verbal, of which a copy has been left in her possession.

Done and closed at Macon, in four copies, one of which shall be left to the person concerned, the second to the Commissioner of National Police, Chief of the Public Security Service at Marcon, for the purpose of close supervision, a third at M: the PREFECT of Saone et Loire (Cabinet) as a report, and the fourth in our archives.

Signatures

of the taxable person

Hemart

Von Guppenberg