

An Archive Puts Faces on Nazis' Young Victims

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN

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PARIS, Dec. 17 — It was just over 40 years ago, on the brilliant spring morning of April 6, 1944, that two trucks and two cars belonging to the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied France arrived unexpectedly at a children's home in the mountain village of Izieu, a few miles east of Lyons.

Within minutes, the Gestapo rounded up the 44 children and 7 adults who lived or worked in the home, sending them the next day to a deportation center in Drancy, on the outskirts of Paris, and then to the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz, where every one of the children perished in the gas chambers.

The story of the 44 children, how they came to Izieu, how they lived there, how they died, and most important, exactly who they were and what they were like, is the subject of a detailed and highly-personalized chronicle that was published here today.

Called "The Children of Izieu: A Jewish Tragedy," the 128-page, large-format book covers a tragic event that has been known in outline since the end of World War II. But it adds a richness of detail — photographs, letters, birth certificates, accounts of daily life — that gives each of the victims a concrete identity, removing their murder from the realm of abstract evil to that of the wrenchingly particular.

A Prayer to God

The document, for example, contains a letter found at Izieu from 11-year-old Liliane Gerenstein. It was in the form of a prayer to God, who, Liliane avowed, embodied an infinite kindness that rewarded the good while punishing the wicked.

"It is thanks to you," her letter said, "that I had a good life before, that I was spoiled, that I had pretty things that others did not have."

"I only ask you one thing," Liliane again. Protect them (even more than me) so that I might see them again as soon as possible. Let them return one more time.

"I have so much confidence in you that I give you my thanks in advance," the letter concluded.

Collected by Lawyer

The materials were compiled over a 12-year period by Serge Klarsfeld, a Paris lawyer, who said he timed the publishing of the book to coincide with the beginning of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah on Tuesday evening. Mr. Klarsfeld said the document was intended to fulfill several purposes, both moral and historical.

First, Mr. Klarsfeld said, the account is intended to provide evidence of one of the crimes against humanity attributed to Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo chief of Lyons, whom Mr. Klarsfeld and his wife, Beate, were instrumental in finding in refuge in Bolivia. Mr. Barbie was extradited in 1983 to France, where he is expected to stand trial within a few months. Mr. Klarsfeld accuses the former Nazi leader of direct and personal responsibility in the deportations and the deaths of the 44 children.

In addition, Mr. Klarsfeld said, the materials published today are intended to provide identities to the victims of Izieu, to give them faces and, where possible, personalities. In every case, the families of the children are identified; their places of birth, their ages, the fate of their immediate relatives are provided.

The photographs alone — most of them taken by a non-Jewish volunteer, Paulette Paillares, who often visited the home — are in themselves unusual. There are almost no photographs, for example, of the 4,000 Jewish children who were deported from Paris in 1942 at the roundup of Jews at the bicycle stadium known as the Vel d'Hiver.

All of Victims Were Jews

Mr. Klarsfeld's book reveals that the single non-Jewish child in the Izieu home at the time of the Gestapo raid was quickly released.

"It was unthinkable," Mr. Klarsfeld said today, "to hold the trial of Barbie



Rapbo/Peter Turnley

At a news conference in Paris announcing publication of "The Children of Izieu: A Jewish Tragedy," a woman displayed photos of her children who were killed by the Nazis. Above: Serge Klarsfeld, who spent 12 years compiling book.

without having the names of his victims. It was unthinkable not to restore to them their identity as Jews."

Mr. Klarsfeld said that the book, which is in French, will not be distributed for sale in bookstores. Copies can be obtained from the Association of the Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported From France, whose address is B.P. 104, 75722 Paris, France.

The book contains a narrative history of efforts made by Jews and non-Jews alike to save children during the Nazi occupation of France, including the creation of homes in remote French villages that, it was hoped, would escape the attention of the Gestapo and their many French collaborators.

Former Catholic Summer Camp

This was the case with Izieu, where in 1943 a former Catholic children's summer camp was converted into a home for Jewish children 5 to 17 years old. In most cases, their parents had been deported earlier, or the children had been sent from major towns and cities for safety.

At Izieu, as the reproduced photographs show, the children led something close to normal lives. But their letters, such as that of Liliane Gerenstein, also reveal an awareness of the enormous tragedy that, despite efforts to protect the children both physically and psychologically, was to engulf them.

"Mother, dear mother, I know how much you have suffered for me on this happy Mother's Day," Jacques Benguigui, who was deported to Auschwitz on April 13, 1944, his 13th birthday, wrote in one letter that has survived.

"I send you my best wishes from the bottom of my small child's heart," Jacques wrote to his mother, who survived Auschwitz and today lives in France.

Telex to Headquarters

Among the documents reproduced in "The Children of Izieu" is a telex to Gestapo headquarters in Paris declaring that the "children's colony at Izieu" had been removed and arrangements made for the deportation of its residents. It is signed Klaus Barbie.

The telex, which is expected to be introduced as evidence in the trial of the former Gestapo chief, existed only in photocopied form, the original, presented as evidence of Nazi crimes during the Nuremberg trials, having apparently been misplaced in 1946.

Declared a fraud by Mr. Barbie, the telex in its original form was rediscovered in 1982 after a long search by Mr.

Klarsfeld.

The full text, which contains mistakes about the children's ages and apparently counted three of the oldest children among the adults arrested, reads:

"This morning, the Jewish children's home, 'children's colony,' at Izieu has

been removed. 41 children in all, aged 3 to 13, have been captured. Beyond that, the arrest of all the Jewish personnel has taken place, namely 10 individuals, among them 5 women. It was not possible to secure any money or other valuables. Transportation to Drancy will take place on 4/7/44."