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been "ripened by too much experience," and to know that the child was her own. Her rationalization, though, was that the pain had been unavoidable. It was better that they should be separated, and all alive, than together in a camp. It helped that she and her husband were constantly on the move for the Résistance. She preferred no house at all to a silent one, empty of her children.

Sadly, for me, Élisabeth Zerner was not one of the women I was privileged to meet. If I had been able to look into her eyes, though, I am certain that I would have seen a proud woman, an Austrian Jew who risked her life for her adopted country, France. I wonder, had she been able to look into my eyes, if she would have wanted me to understand that, above all, she was a mother.

FRANCOISE PÈNE

When Françoise Lévy-Neumand married her husband, Pierre Pène, in 1925, little did she foresee the many adventures they would share. He became a highly-respected civil engineer, later a diplomatic ambassador, and she would follow him to Madagascar, Abyssinia, Germany and Monaco. She possesses every quality that entrances a listener-- warmth, intelligence, wit and an endless supply of anecdotes.

Mme Pène is also a distinguished painter, no mere dabbler, but one who has exhibited both in France and abroad to critical acclaim. She studied with André Farcy in the twenties, a man who later made the Musée de Grenoble one of the finest collections of modern art in France. Mme Pène showed me some of her own canvases when I visited her that day. I would describe her work as a collage of styles -- Fauvism,

Cubism, Surrealism-- much as her life has been a collage of different cultures and experiences. For Christmas, Mme Pène sent me a card with a photo of one of her paintings on the front, "L'Enfant" it is entitled, "The Child." It pictures a mother wearing white, her figure soft but, at the same time, as substantial as a mountain. Her arms cradle and completely encompass a baby son, clearly protecting him. This is a true image of motherhood, one far removed from the cloying sentiments of Nazi posters. The expression of serene joy on the mother's face could have only been painted by a woman who has loved children.

Mme Pène has four children of her own, two girls and two boys. The girls, Annette and Florence, were ages fourteen and eight when the war began. Didier, the eldest boy, was four years old; Olivier would be born at the beginning of 1943. She admits that this last child was not entirely planned but, nonetheless, "a blessing." Both she and her husband had joined the Résistance organization known as O.C.M. (Organisation Civile et Militaire) in 1941. The Pènes had lived in a small town in the Pyrénées, but they moved to Paris in 1942, for the greater anonymity that the large city could provide. At that time, most Parisians wished to head in the opposite direction -- south to escape over the Pyrénées, but the Pènes were committed to their cause. Eventually, Pierre Pène became the head of a united Résistance in the Paris area, an important but hazardous assignment, for, as one of his children told me, "No one lived very long in that job."

Mme Pène was his most active and devoted agent de liaison, until she became pregnant in the summer of 1942. "Children are beautiful, but they have the worst

timing!" Mme Pène laughed. It was frustrating that she was no longer able to help her husband. "How very difficult it is to be pregnant when food is rationed!" she added. Yet, at the same time, she knew that she wanted her baby. "You will understand if you ever become pregnant," she told me. "Here there was a life struggling to be inside me, and, perhaps this sounds a little melodramatic, but that struggle seemed equally as important as the struggle taking place outside."

For someone who had two confrontations with the Gestapo and was eventually imprisoned by the Nazis at Fresnes, Mme Pène is remarkably composed when recalling the war years. She relishes that she was frequently able to out-smart the Germans. For example, she told the concierge of her building to say that she was a tall, heavily made-up brunette if any strangers asked questions. In reality, she was a petite blonde who needed to wear little make-up at all. When the Gestapo did finally come to arrest her, she quickly snatched some unimportant papers, mostly shopping lists, and ripped them into tiny pieces to throw in the wastepaper baskets. The Germans spent hours gluing these tiny pieces together, trying to decipher "the code." The real papers she had already shredded and flushed down the toilet. However, this did cause a rather comical mishap when one of the Germans went to pay a call of nature. He flushed, and the toilet overflowed, flooding the bathroom. The Nazi officers, formerly so stern and imperious, were on their hands and knees trying to clean up the mess!

As to why she joined the Résistance, Mme Pène states that it was a "very natural choice" for her. Her husband was not Jewish, but she, herself, was of Jewish origin. Many of her relatives also came from the Alsace region of France, which gave them a

second reason to oppose the Germans. "Historically, Jews have been a nomadic people," she explained to me, "but when they settle in a country, they become more patriotic than the patriots." The réseau (Résistance sub-network) to which Mme Pène belonged was called "Bourgeois" because most of its members lived in the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris, but she was "far from being the classic bourgeois housewife," according to her daughter, Florence Rosenberg. Mme Pène's youngest daughter lives in the United States today, and she spoke with me about her mother. Admiringly, she cites a "fiery and rebellious and artistic temperament" as her mother's additional motivation to resist.

Pierre Pène was arrested by the Gestapo on April 4, 1944, although they had mistaken him for someone less important than he really was. The "nightmare period," as Françoise Pène terms it, thus began for her and her children. The oldest boy, now age eight, had been placed in hiding long ago. Initially, he was somewhat disappointed to be left out of "all the excitement" that he perceived his parents' resistance work to be. He was at the age at which children are talkative, trusting, liable to blurt out anything on impulse. The Pènes thought it would be too dangerous, for himself and for them, if he remained in Paris. The older girls, however, insisted that at ages twelve and eighteen they were old enough to stay. To an outsider, it may appear as if the Pènes were placing their daughters at undue risk, but there were several factors to be considered. First of all, the children wished to remain behind. "Life goes on," as the youngest daughter, Florence Rosenberg, told me. Also, the girls proved to be very helpful to their mother during her pregnancy, especially in collecting rations. Winter and summer, in bitter cold and stifling heat, they stood in long food lines for the family, a chore that could have

caused their mother to collapse. In addition, the oldest daughter, Annette, was preparing to pass her baccalauréat and certainly did not want to abandon her studies at that time. Finally, not all people agreed to hide children out of the kindness of their hearts. Placing a child in a safe family often cost money, and the Pènes were not that affluent.

After Pierre Pène's arrest, Mme Pène and her daughters became habitués of all the Nazi prisons in the Paris area, trying to learn his whereabouts. "No one named Pène is here," they were told at each place. One of the prisons they often visited was Fresnes. Little did Mme Pène know that she, herself, would be imprisoned there a short time later. Eventually, the Nazis did discover the real identity of Pierre Pène and scheduled him for execution on July 10, 1944, but he and one of his comrades succeeded at a daring escape the night before. Liberation for him, though, provoked a trap for his family.

On July 10, at 4:30 a.m., the Gestapo descended upon the Pène household, arresting Mme Pène, her three children, her sister-in-law and the maid. All were taken as hostages to Gestapo headquarters. "When the Germans arrived, I felt complete despair for the first and only time in my life." She thought they had come to tell her that her husband had been executed. To her relief, she learned that he had escaped. Next, she shamed the Gestapo into releasing her children. Terrified at the time, Florence and Annette remember hearing their mother yell at the Nazis from behind closed doors. "Savages!" she screamed,

How can you call yourselves better than the Russians,
when you arrest innocent children, when you send them to
their deaths in concentration camps?! Brutes! How can
you live with yourselves?



Françoise Pène and her youngest son,
Olivier, who was born during the war

Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis
Paris - Abteuil 1943

Fresnes, Gen. 28. 9. 44

Bei/Die *Pène Françoise* geb. am. 14. 9. 04

war von 10. 6. 44 bis zum heutiegn Tage in Kriegswehr-
machtgefängnis Paris-Fresnes in Haft.

Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis Paris
Geisel
Unteroffizier

the record of her internment at Fresnes prison

These reprimands, howled at the top of her lungs, had their effect upon the Germans. "They got tired of my voice," Mme Pène confides, with a smile and a slight shrug.

Her children were allowed to return home, but they were closely watched by the Gestapo for several days. The Germans still hoped that the children would act as bait to trap their father, but to no avail. Pierre Pène had given his children precise instructions about what to do in such an emergency, and the girls had inherited their mother's dauntlessness. Florence and her older sister escaped to the countryside, strapping the baby carriage to the back of one of their bicycles and pedalling the distance. Their father was never caught. Their mother and aunt were soon released from prison. "It was totally unexpected that we should all end up alive when the country was liberated," Florence muses, but they did.

Françoise Pène was named a Médaille de la Résistance, her husband honored as a Compagnon de la Libération. Ironically, when Pierre Pène served his ambassadorship in Bade, Germany, the family was accidentally assigned the black limousine that had once belonged to Hitler. In Monaco, the couple witnessed the private marriage of Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier. Mme Pène knows many fascinating stories, but, clearly, the proudest ones she tells are about her children and grandchildren.

Françoise Pène and Elisabeth Zerner, like so many mothers in the Résistance, were driven by the strongest and most basic of human instincts. They were protecting something much more important than their lives and their country. They were fiercely determined to secure a future for their children.