

MEMORIES

Translation sample of:
***SOUVENIRS*, by Marie Rameau**

Translated by Allan MacVicar, Ph.D.

Foreword

A few years ago, during a trip to Auschwitz, I found myself in front of those piles of objects amassed behind glass: eyeglasses, clothes, dishes, combs, prosthetic legs and arms, shoes, prayer shawls, brushes, hair... asking myself what my camera could do with any of this. No persons remained, just the mounds of objects that serve as traces of the victims of Nazi barbarity. Piles of orphaned objects. Piles of dead.

I was accompanied by a friend who is an illustrator. She sketched a picture of a small notebook covered in burlap and embroidered with flowers. Set apart like that on paper, it became more fragile, more delicate, but also more real than the notebook in the window. This individuality, rediscovered through a drawing, helped me to realize that this notebook was real and used to belong to someone. You could almost open it and read what was written on its pages. This tiny object made of paper and cloth restored someone to life.

For many years, I have been photographing women who resisted during the war of 1939-45. I arrange my schedule so that my path crosses theirs as often as possible.

These women have constructed a life for themselves that agrees with them, just like an artist would do with their work. They fought against the worst of humanity, and yet generously allow us to believe that the best is yet to come.

As time passes, I see them disappearing. The void they leave behind is immense, but fortunately, I find it filled with their constant presence. I have the unique and comforting feeling that they are still here, that one hand is resting on my shoulder, another is supporting my arm, and a third is holding my hand.

I try to meet as much as possible with those who can and still want to talk. I seek out the most truthful way to preserve the memory of their story. I use different types of media, record their voices, film them, photograph their faces, objects, important documents...

I sit, listen, and hope that my memory will be enough when speaking is so difficult for some, when filming, recording, or taking photos is impossible. I no longer try to set any rules but just let myself be carried along.

The women to whom the photographed objects in this book belong were all arrested for acts of resistance. They were deported to

Ravensbrück, Mauthausen, Auschwitz, or Bergen-Belsen and were often sentenced to forced labor in the kommandos that depended on these camps.

Upon arrival at the camps, everything was taken from you: luggage, clothes, personal effects. Everything. Most of the time your hair was shaved off. The smallest trace of your former life had to disappear. You were given clothes but they usually did not fit.

The dehumanization process had begun. On your sleeve, you had to sew the identification number that became your identity within the confines of the camp and which you had to know by heart in German.

As the Nazis worked to make any trace of their humanity disappear, these women fought to establish another form of resistance within the camp. Sewing, embroidering, drawing, writing, acting, thinking, dreaming, of elsewhere, of later, of after... As they tried to survive in a place that lacked the essentials, they endeavored to leave room for what was “non-essential.”

To do so, they used a thousand different strategies. Women were able to preserve a few objects when they arrived, which became all the more precious since they were the last link to their former lives. When they had to sew on their number, they were given a needle and thread which some managed to keep. They slipped into the blockhouse where the Nazis sorted and stored the goods stolen from the deportees when they arrived. They refashioned the material they were being forced to manufacture into parts for the German war machine. An electrical wire became jewelry, the rubber for gas masks was made into handbags, shoes, and notebooks, the fake fur for helmets they made for soldiers sent to the Eastern front was transformed into teddy bears, which they would bring home to their children. They created hats for St Catherine’s Day, made little blue-white-red flags for Bastille Day, acted out plays in costume, organized choirs, and celebrated Christmas with next to nothing.

The women presented here conducted themselves with humanity and courage, going beyond their beliefs or political persuasions. They also comforted their companions who suffered the most, pouring out the warmth of their friendship until the end.

The objects photographed in this book, mostly very small because they were forbidden, are often real works of individual and collective art. They use of all the resources the women were able to mobilize: their culture and imagination along with the creativity of

some, the manual dexterity of others, and the courage of all. These objects were an integral part of the lives of the prisoners and played a role in the solidarity and social networks that structured life at the camp. The women arranged to acquire the necessary materials, banded together to hide them, offered them as gifts to each other, or used them as currency for trading with the guards or the German civilians they interacted with in the work kommandos. They wrote to each other, and the words written on the tiny pieces of paper they sometimes managed to obtain passed through the camp from one block to the next, allowing for news to be exchanged with a mother, sister, or friend.

These notebooks, pieces of clothing, belts, shoes, rosaries, jewelry, toys, letters, and drawings were their most precious items. For many, this is still true today.

When I ask them to tell me about these objects, their story becomes less historical and more personal. They insist on recounting a particular moment and talk to me about their friends that did not return or, if they did, died many years ago.

They open boxes to show me the treasures they have kept, and I photograph them with the feeling that this is what makes my practice of photography meaningful.

These objects embody the solidarity that allowed them to survive, the threads of friendship Germaine Tillon said tied the camp together. All have a desire in their heart to tell the story of those who died in the camp. They promised they would recount it.

Showing these objects and recounting the stories that go along with them are ways to both talk about those who returned and preserve the memory of their friends murdered by the Nazis. It is a way to show the traces of the life force that rose above the barbarism.

A photograph brings one face to face with the real world, with the reason why a story is being told. I therefore seek to give concrete form to the memory of an open notebook resting on someone's knees, which is then put away in a cardboard box made especially for it. I seek to bring to life the trace of a series of tiny objects organized into precisely annotated envelopes. I seek to take into account the care that went into making a piece of openwork embroidery, incredible finery created in the most hostile environment ever.

These objects testify to the history of these women and continue to provide a strong link between them and those that did not return. They are also a possible link between them and us, because their memory is also ours.

To photograph these objects, I had to hold them in my hands. When I did so, I often felt a lump rising in my throat, even to the point of tears. These incredibly fragile treasures bore witness in their way to the strength of the women who had made them, and I felt I needed to make them live on. I had to find the right way to arrange each object, to look at them so that others could also see them. How could I transmit my fear of seeing them become dust? How could I provide a measure of their value? The feeling that they had become so essential to their owner affected me much more than I ever would have thought.

Solidarity, life force, resistance, indignation... these women are so resolute. People continue to talk about the executioners, monsters, barbarians, and of the evidence of the absolute evil they faced. It is very difficult to talk about the “absolute good” of these women. Such an idea makes them roll their eyes or laugh because it seems so crazy. They are well aware of the blackness of the human soul... “You have to be very careful not to arouse the little SS who is sleeping inside all of us,” exclaimed Michèle Agniel. Listening to them, you understand that no one is safe from become a terrifying being. But listening to them and seeing them, you also understand that everyone has the potential to not become that kind of person!

The story of these women and their commitment is an essential safeguard against ordinary hate and misanthropy. It does not allow us to give up on our capacity for solidarity and fraternity.

Ten years ago, I was deeply affected by a meeting with one of these women. Her commitment was so right, so intense, and so rigorously necessary that I found myself unable to shrink back from what she was or from what her friends are.

At that moment, I knew that I owed them something, and I knew that we all owed them something.

They often say that what they experienced is unspeakable. And yet, it still needs to be told. It needs to be said and resaid that this cannot be tolerated. It takes a colossal effort for these women to testify. My effort, our effort, to listen to them is insignificant by comparison.

In the light of these remarkable women and their remarkable lives, I tell myself that my life as a photographer is fulfilled by trying to show their life.

And while sometimes I cannot sleep, I know that their nights are still filled with the raw and inescapable reality of their history and memories.

To create

I have escaped from having to go to work. The morning is open to me. What should I do? Hide out somewhere or go to soup duty...I will have to do that anyway. But I can't sit around doing nothing. I have to keep my mind and my hands busy. I have to create. Don't you feel a need for intellectual or manual activity? Complete inactivity is proof of death.

You have to invent what you desire or set it apart in order to make it into an activity. Even here, even unconsciously, we have a need to create.

From the first day in quarantine, we have been suffering from total and forced immobility. We arrived stripped of everything: one shirt, one pair of underpants: nothing to do. Piled one on top of the other, we haven't been able to organize anything. All we are asked to do is create silence; it's impossible. The day we had to sew our numbers, we had the pleasure of using a needle and thread! We had to return them or we wouldn't get any bread, so we returned them. Intellectual games are difficult when you can't even move your foot. Solos are allowed, and a few shed pitiful tears. I am too young though for that type of sentimentality.

Later, we benefited greatly from work; but productivity had to be as low as possible. At least they provided us with raw materials: needles, thread, straw mats, shirts, electric wire, papers, toothbrush handles, tools for carving, cutting, writing, drawing. The joy of using mind and hands brings us out of the nightmare, especially due to the small miracles we enjoy: we invent, perfect, adapt, polish, start again. We carefully keep and hide our precious treasures. "Thinking with hands."

We create concrete memories we will be unable to leave behind. If we lose them, it's a real tragedy, which doesn't make any sense and is almost grotesque when we take stock of our past and future fate.

Christmas is an opportunity to do things for others. We come up with a thousand tricks to find time and material; there's a great deal of ingenuity. We are still alive. Here, creating is resisting. Some continue to write down their recipes, while others created the Croix de Lorraine press, whose handwritten poetry collections distract those who are sick.

Serenity and the joy of creating. The choir gathers as best it can and we put on new songs. At information meetings among friends, people

talk about the Balkan countries, the Russian Revolution... To fight against death, being neutral is not enough. Work wears us out but also perhaps saves us: sabotage takes cunning but gives us joy, and we delight in imagining and telling tales. We have to leave this place behind, so we think about another life and get together to imagine "after" in all of its details and many projects.

To create, especially here, is to fight, to hope, to want to live.

Denise Vernay, called Miarka, wrote this text in 1946, after her return from deportation.

Denise Vernay

Denise Vernay, née Jacob, was born in 1924. When the war broke out, she was in her final year of high school in Nice. She typed out leaflets and scattered them in the streets. In the early morning, before the other students arrived, she would write out the news heard on English radio on the school's blackboards.

In the free zone, an increasing number of German Jewish refugees were being arrested. Denise belonged to an association that took care of these emigrants who had no papers or ration cards. She brought families or children whose parents had been arrested to people who received and hid them in the countryside around Nice.

Yvonne and André Jacob had four children. Denise's father was an architect, but because he was Jewish, he was no longer allowed to work and could not meet the family's needs. For a year, Denise taught classes to children, her older sister, Madeleine, worked as a secretary for some friends, her brother, Jean, was a photographer's assistant, and the young Simone, who was still in high school, was hidden at the home of one of her teachers.

In late July 1943, Denise and her sister Madeleine were at a girl scouts' camp. Nice, which had been under Italian domination until November 1942, was then occupied by the Germans. Roundups of Jews were increasing.

André Jacob wrote to his daughter: "You know, they are starting to arrest people. You risk being arrested if you come back. Try to find somewhere to hide." But Denise wanted to take part in the clandestine fight against the Germans and refused to hide.

With the help of a friend in girl scouts, she joined a resistance network that published a newspaper and was the liaison for Lyon. In the Resistance, she became Miarka.

Her mother, father, brother, and two sisters were arrested and deported. She no longer had anything to lose so decided to take up arms, where she became Annie.

Her network moved her to Annecy. One day, she was sent to pick up transmitters in a maquis in Cluny. There was a roadblock along the way... She was arrested and taken to Fort Montluc in Lyon. There, she was interrogated and tortured but revealed nothing.

On June 21, 1944, Miarka “celebrated” her twenty-first birthday in prison. She danced in her cell. The Germans did not learn that she was Jewish and she was deported under her false identity, Denise Jacquier, to Ravensbrück in the so-called convoy “of the 46,000” and then to Mauthausen on March 2, 1945.

The camp was liberated on April 23, 1945. Her mother, father, and brother died during deportation, but her two sisters returned from Bergen-Belsen.

Denise Vernay passed away on March 4, 2013, a few weeks before her 89th birthday.

Each time I visit Miarka, she has prepared a book, article, or photograph for me, which she always shows me without making any, or very few, comments, in her very economical way with words.

That day, a cardboard box was resting on the coffee table. Silently, Miarka began to open it and lifted out a rough object made of burlap, unevenly and crudely shaped.

In that apartment, where everything is beautiful, so perfectly beautiful, this unrefined object stood out. It was the notebook she had made at Ravensbrück. On the cover, the words “La victoire en chantant” [Victory in singing] were embroidered in blue and red wool. In the center is a V, embroidered out of a cotton canon wick.

Miarka flips through it, closes it again, turns it one way then the other, opens it again. It fills the space. She tilts it towards me and I am able to read the words carefully embroidered on the cover. “You see... It’s fading now... It won’t last much longer than me.”

She opens it, the inside cover is made of a navy blue cloth. On the last page, she embroidered “Ravensbrück” in white and below that “1944.”

She smiles at me and rests it again on her knees. This notebook was her only escape from the camp, a momentary return to a kinder life. It contains poems, songs, series of words that she remembered with friends to survive, to hold fast. It contains that friendship, that fraternity...

She closes everything up again and raises her face towards me.

Miarka was tall, beautiful, and her great reserve intensified her striking personality. As a result, I was never able to ask her any questions, and that day I felt neither the need nor the desire to. I asked nothing more of her and did not insist. She showed me and told me what she wanted to show and tell me. Without any special expectation on my part, this was how eventually she told me most of her story.

I did not ask her if I could photograph her notebook. I was not yet thinking about photographing these objects, and I would have no doubt have been unable to do so.

In Ravensbrück, Miarka had made another notebook for her friend Violette Maurice. She gave it to her for Christmas 1944.

“On Violette’s, the cloth had flowers on it, small little flowers, I can’t remember the color... On the cover, I had also embroidered a phrase....”

“Life is beautiful, always beautiful” was the phrase Miarka had embroidered on the notebook made for Violette Maurice.

I do not know whether it was her look or her response that impressed me the most when I asked her if she still believed it: “Yes... of course... I will continue to believe it as long as I am able to take stock of what I am experiencing...”

Miarka was one of those people who lived and breathed resistance, a person who kept it alive in the camp. In addition to her demanding will, she was young and full of strength.

She testified little of her experience, given that it was so painful. But in November 2011, the *Concours national de la Résistance* (French national competition on the Resistance) focused on resistance in the camps. Annette Chalut recounted how she resisted in the kommando in Hanover, and Miarka agreed to testify with her friend:

“Every morning before roll call, there was the call for the canisters. The canisters were large, 50-liter containers used to get the coffee. Everyone took turns carrying the canisters, two by two. For the oldest among us, it was very difficult. You had to get up before roll call, at three in the morning. I tried to establish a ‘turn for young people’ to replace the oldest ones, but I wasn’t very successful... I got up every day and had to decide whom to help – because I only had two arms. But I had to choose. We were always having to choose. If we were able to manage to not go out to work or not go

to a difficult kommando, we knew that someone else would be put in our place. It was thus a constant debate. These choices were essential because lives depended on them. I do not wish for anyone to have to decide which person she will help survive.”

This scene with the canisters is one of the scenes immortalized by their friend Jacqueline Richet in the notebook Miarka gave to Violette.

Violette Maurice

Violette was born in 1919. She was the youngest of five girls. Her father, an English teacher and poet, and her mother were a very unified and learned couple. They taught their children to be tolerant and instilled in them the values of the Republic and love for their country. They found capitulation to be intolerable and shameful. Hope was restored when Robert Maurice heard General de Gaulle on Radio London.

From the beginning of the war, Violette distributed leaflets. The team of young people that passed out these clandestine writings became a very solid group and they began to think about creating their own newspaper...

In late 1941, based on an idea from her father, Violette suggested that the group adopt the name "93," in reference to the revolutionaries who defended France against the risk of invasion. They distributed newspapers from national movements such as Combat, Franc-Tireur, and Libération, and those from the Saint-Étienne group, Espoir. The first issue of their own paper came out in May 1942, with a print-run of 25,000 copies. Three issues followed in June, July, and August. But the printer was reported and the fifth issue was seized. In the meantime, Jean Moulin, having learned of Group 93's reputation, met with them and invited them to join him.

Little by little, the net grew tighter around Group 93. Violette, who felt she was suspected, left Saint-Étienne and joined the Mithridate network. But Robert Maurice and his daughter were reported and arrested on October 9, 1943. Violette was imprisoned at Fort Montluc. She was deported to Ravensbrück, block 32, which was used to house NN prisoners (Nacht und Nebel, night and fog, the designation given to political prisoners who were meant to disappear in secret). Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz was in the same block. Violette was then transferred to Mauthausen in March 1945.

Violette Maurice-Boquin died in 2008.

In summer 1944, in Ravensbrück, Violette Maurice met Miarka, imprisoned in block 15. They immediately became friends.

Miarka talks of Violette's height, her already thin body (she had been there since March), and her insolent courage. Violette

constantly defied the camp authorities, but always did it with a smile.

Violette was a volunteer for the line of railway cars, which contained all sorts of objects stolen by the Nazis. Each morning, at 3:30 AM, she went and stood for roll call in the icy cold of the Mecklenburg, wearing only her striped dress. Ravensbrück is located a hundred kilometers north of Berlin, and in winter the temperature drops to -30°C. In spite of the risks (25 blows with a stick and 30 days in the Strafblock, the disciplinary block), most of the time she managed to return to her barracks in the evening, having “organized” a piece of clothing camouflaged under her dress for a friend that had nothing.

Throughout her deportation, Violette wrote poems, which cover the pages of the notebook her friend Miarka gave her at Christmas 1944. During their rare free time, they recited poems to each other that they had transcribed from memory into their notebooks: Louÿs, Ronsard, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Vigny...

“This little notebook, crudely covered in burlap, that my friend Miarka made me in Christmas 1944, had an embroidered Cross of Lorraine on the cover, above which was the inscription – which can hardly be seen today – ‘Life is beautiful, always beautiful.’ It was a girl scout song that Miarka and I sang on occasion due to our strong will not to lose hope....”¹

Violette, Miarka, and five of their friends swore to each other that they would return together. On March 2, 1945, a “black convoy” left for Mauthausen. The selection by the Germans left no room for doubt: older women, Gypsies... Miarka, who was not part of the selection, managed however to join the column and leave with her friends.

“In Mauthausen, the block was led by Gypsies who sometimes tried to take what belonged to us. Our two notebooks disappeared one day, as well as some clothes. We were desperate not to lose our most prized possession. When our guardians were absent, we took advantage of the situation and went into the room where the stolen objects were piled up. I told my friend, ‘There’s no chance we’ll find our notebooks!’ She replied, ‘Well, let’s see....’ She pulled a pile of rags towards us, and our two notebooks appeared side by side... That was how we were able to preserve these echoes of memory.”²

¹ Violette Maurice, *Les voix de la mémoire* (Lyon: Éditions lyonnaises d’art et d’histoire, 2000).

² *Ibid.*

On March 20, 1945, they were conscripted for clearing work at the Amstetten train station. Allied airplanes bombed the tracks where the deportees were working. Violette and Miarka were separated from their five friends by the “Zu fünf” when they were lined up in the morning. That day, Mag, Micheline, H el ene, Marianne, and Fr ed erique all died from the bombing.

“The bombing went on for four hours. The earth was scorched and we were suffocating in the smoke. There was nothing left of the road, just strange machines with their paws in the air in the clouded atmosphere. The proud city was dead and not a single house remained standing. The factories were burning in the distance. A savage joy filled our hearts. Here and there a sign was swinging from a half-demolished fa ade, and survivors, dazed by despair, were looking for who knows what in the ruins. We walked in columns along the road and the desire to sing overcame us in front of that immense German cemetery that seemed to emerge in the twilight. A medical car suddenly passed us. ‘There are twenty dead here!’ yelled an SS officer to a nurse. We knew that he was talking about our people, and we no longer wanted to sing. An oxcart passed us, with our injured friends lying in the straw: festering faces bleeding in the smoke, sad smiles, nightmarish visions. Two carts, three carts, then the one with the dead.

When I saw Fr ed erique with her disheveled hair and hanging dead hands, I realized that my intuition had been right and that none of them would return to France. Night invaded the road where all of the bodies were lined up in a row; the groans of the injured mingled with guttural cries. Unassuming Mag, Helen with her blond hair and full cheeks, Micheline with her smiling eyes, and all the rest, who had been so happy that morning, my friends were now no longer there.

Piled into a freight train, we waited for the bodies to be loaded. Miarka succumbed to fatigue and sorrow. In the railway car where strangely grotesque shadows were decomposing, mournful and chaotic images combined with my hallucinating mind. Did I really understand, that night, what friendship was and what I had just lost?”³

The poems by Violette Maurice and her writings about the camp, like the writings of Charlotte Delbo, have been with me for years. The words used by these two women to describe their history are the ones that have affected me the most. Those that I understand the best.

³ *N.N.*, Violette Maurice,  ditions Encre Marine, 2009.

In February 2012, Miarka sent me *Rencontres avec Violette Maurice* – she had participated in developing this book which was particularly dear to her. The book was accompanied by an invitation to go listen to the reading of some of Violette’s poems at the Jean Moulin museum and these words: “Violette would have been a beautiful figure for you! She was a colorful character. We were friends.”

I have seen Miarka pay homage to her friends from the deportation several times; she does not talk about herself but of others. That day, she was recounting how at the camp, Violette was talking to her for hours about her “life before” in her parents’ house at the top of a hill. Violette’s scout nickname was Nuage [Cloud], and the family home was called “Chasseur d’horizons” [chaser of horizons].

Like in the past, Miarka could for a moment let herself go, elsewhere, dreaming of her friend Nuage, the chaser of horizons.

Violette said that she owed her survival to friendship and poetry, which she asserted was an act of resistance.

Germaine Tillion

Germaine Tillion was born in 1907 into a family of Catholic intellectuals. Lucien Tillion, her father, died in 1925 and Émilie Tillion raised her two daughters by herself. Germaine studied ethnology with Marcel Mauss and graduated in 1939. In 1939 and 1940, she made several long trips to Aures mountains in Algeria to study the Chaouia populations.

Her first act of resistance was to give her family papers to a Jewish family, who were thus protected until the end of the war. Beginning in 1940, Germaine Tillion resisted with Colonel Hauet, then came into contact with other groups, including that of Boris Vildé, her colleague from the Musée de l'Homme. They collected information for London, organized escape networks for prisoners or aviators that had been shot down, created false papers...

This group, harshly suppressed by the Germans, was decimated in 1941. Members of the network were brought before the military court on February 17, 1942 and sentenced to death. On February 23, 1942, Anatole Lewitzky, Boris Vildé, and five other members of the network were executed at Mont Valérien.

Germaine Tillion was denounced and arrested on August 13, 1942. She was an NN prisoner (Nacht und Nebel, night and fog), a status given to people that had committed offenses against the Reich or occupation forces. Held in secret, she was imprisoned for fourteen months in French prisons, then deported to Ravensbrück in October 1943, bearing the number 24588. She would be joined there by her mother Émilie. Émilie had been responsible for the correspondence of the Musée de l'Homme group and was arrested the same day as Germaine. She was part of the convoy of 27,000 that arrived at Ravensbrück on February 3, 1944.

Germaine Tillion was liberated by the Swedish Red Cross and cared for in Sweden with several of her friends, then repatriated to France in July 1945.

Upon her return to France, she worked as a historian. She studied the Resistance and the Deportation and worked on the institutional recognition of the members of her network which she called the "Réseau du musée de l'Homme Hauet-Vildé" [Hauet-Vildé network of the Musée de l'Homme]. She documented the memory of the camp and was assisted by her friends from the deportation who chose her to represent them at the trial of the leaders of Ravensbrück in December 1946.

During her imprisonment at Ravensbrück, she viewed everything through the eyes of an ethnologist and researcher. In 1946, she published the first edition of Ravensbrück, which was both a personal testimony and a sociological, economic, and political analysis of the concentration camp world. This reference work would be re-published and supplemented twice in 1973 and 1988.

The Fonds Germaine Tillion, which contains all of her work from that period, is now located in the Museum of Resistance and Deportation in Besançon.

Germaine Tillion passed away on April 19, 2008 at her home in Saint-Mandé, a few weeks before her 101st birthday.

On February 6, 1943, Germaine Tillion had already been imprisoned for 6 months, when the interpreter for the Fresnes prison gave her a copy of *The Imitation of Christ*. She made this tiny prayer book into her journal.

She began by noting key points related to her first 390 days of captivity by writing the date (initial of the day and month, and a number) next to the page numbers; the following years she used the bottom part of the page with the corresponding monthly dates, but added a letter for the initial of the day.

In it, she noted everything that happened to her, as well as the events she heard about in the prison. It was always very succinct, and she used tiny handwriting because of the medium, with a pencil lead. It is hardly legible today: Th/13/8/42, 1st inter – Heart like a stone, so heavy. F. 14 August around 7am – 2nd inter. Very brutal... Sa.22 August – In the morning, I fought against the bedbugs and killed a hundred. In the evening we sang the Marseillaise, in memory of 17 of our friends who were shot this afternoon, Su.29 August, killed bedbugs...

On October 11, Germaine received a letter from her mother dated August 20, 1942. That week, 80 executions took place at the graves of Vincennes... She was subjected to her third interrogation in one of the prison offices. That evening, men who were going to be shot the next day sang the song of farewell. Then she left for the Fresnes prison on October 13, where she experienced filth, misery, and cold. A female guard gave her a book; the next day was her sixth interrogation. She could not sleep due to a fever and unbearable headaches... 48 hours passed and she underwent her seventh interrogation. She was put back on a normal diet. She heard a woman calling her husband who had been sentenced to death in the

morning... She was finally given some bedsheets, she slept and dreamed she was eating with her dead friends. When she woke up, she was given two pieces of paper and for the first time, she wrote to her mother. On the second sheet, she wrote to the commandant for permission to work on her manuscript... She received a care package and with a heavy heart she realized she was alone and could not share it. She divided it into seven smaller packages and asked the captain to give them to those who had nothing. She took a walk, a shower, did some laundry, took another walk, and four days passed... Her mother was also being held at Fresnes, and Germaine managed to get a message to her...

The days passed and, page by page, Germaine recounted their slow procession spent in solitude using very few words. Two months of prison take up a few lines. She would spend fourteen months in French prisons cells.

On Thursday, October 21, 1943, without any verdict being rendered, Germaine Tillion was deported to Ravensbrück. She was among a group of twenty-six women deported directly from the Gare du Nord in Paris in a passenger train, to Ravensbrück. On the train platform, she met a young woman who had been imprisoned for months with her, "Hello, I'm Danielle..." Danielle was Anise Girard. It was a beginning of a wonderful friendship. In the camp, they shared the same bunk and Germaine gave some of her bread to Anise, telling her, "Take it. You are young. You'll return and you'll have eight children!"

When Germaine arrived at Ravensbrück, the prayer book and the two theses she had been able to work on in prison were taken from her. Anise Girard (today Anise Postel-Vinay) told me that Germaine, who was determined to recover what belonged to her, went to the warehouse where all of the goods stolen from the prisoners were being kept, "When we arrived, I was wearing a sky-blue wool sweater, very thick. Because we arrived together, our things were kept together." While Germaine was unable to find her work, she was able to recover her precious journal... and the sweater that would be a godsend for Anise. Winter was frigid in the Mecklenburg, the part of Germany that is called little Siberia and where the temperature drops to -30°C. When the good weather returned, one of Anise's friends found that this sweater was not very elegant and took advantage of the warmer temperatures to unravel it and make her a new one.

At the camp, Germaine Tillion was a *verfügbar* (available) prisoner, meaning she was not attached to any particular work

kommando...but exploitable at will. Germaine chose this status out of patriotism: she refused to work for the Nazis. Her friends hid her and for several months, she managed to avoid working. She knew that there was no risk that she would be reported. There were no snitches among them; the French women were in solidarity with one another.

She used her skills as an ethnologist to analyze and understand the concentration camp world and insisted on sharing the results of her considerations with her companions.

Germaine had been at the camp for four months when the convoy of the 27,000 arrived at Ravensbrück on February 3, 1944. Regrettably, her mother Émilie Tillion was among them, as was Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz. During her quarantine, Germaine paid regular clandestine visits to her. Through the block window, she explained to her and her companions how the camp worked. A large number of the 27,000 would be sent to work kommandos, but Émilie Tillion was among those who stayed at Ravensbrück.

On April 23, 1945, the camp was liberated and the Swedish Red Cross was responsible for caring for the NN prisoners. Due to the risk of typhus, they had to leave behind everything they owned. But a few personal objects escaped the searches and the prisoners managed to pass them on from hand to hand. While Anise did not bring back her sweater, she hid Germaine's precious journal in her pocket and returned it safe and sound. Jacqueline d'Alincourt brought *Le Verfügar aux Enfers* [*The Verfügar in Hell*] out the camp, the operetta written by Germaine Tillion during the hours she spent in hiding.

In order to be sure not to forget them, Germaine brought back the names of the camp directors, camouflaged as the names of recipes in acrostics (Suhren, the camp commandant, SS director Dorothea Binz, Dr. Gebhardt, creator of the medical experiments carried out on the prisoners at Auschwitz and Ravensbrück...), and an undeveloped roll of film.

To preserve traces of the injuries inflicted by Gebhardt during his experiments, one of Germaine's companions had been able to "organize" a camera and film from the railcar kommando. Germaine would keep the film until her liberation.

She also kept this letter written in blue turquoise crayon for her mother Émilie, and it never left her. Today, folded in three, it is kept

in brown color paper serving as an envelope in the flowered cloth used as a book cover to protect *The Imitation of Christ*.

When Germaine was very sick, she wrote this letter from the Revier, the infirmary and place where people died at the camp. She did not know that her mother, Émilie Tillion, had already died.

During her illness, she received small notes sent by her companions to “Kouri,” her nickname at the camp.

On March 2, 1945, while Germaine was sick, a general selection took place. German Communist Margarete Buber-Neumann was able to hide Germaine under a cover. She replied to the questions of the doctor-selector Winklemann and the two SS doctors that accompanied him. The three men then left and Germaine was saved. In spite of the danger and their condition, the two women burst out laughing.

But that selection proved fatal for Émilie Tillion. Anise Postel-Vinay tried to convince her to hide in the block’s double roof. But the old women refused such gymnastics and desired “to face her destiny, her greatest wish being to see herself die.”

Anise and one of their companions surrounded Émilie Tillion with their great height and youth, rubbed her cheeks to make her look better, and hid her white hair under a purple scarf. But it was in vain.

Anise told me that Émilie Tillion was probably gassed that same evening, in a small makeshift gas chamber close to the crematory ovens.

That day, the other women from the block were deported in a convoy to Mauthausen. It was the same convoy that included Denise Vernay, Violette Maurice, and five of their companions.