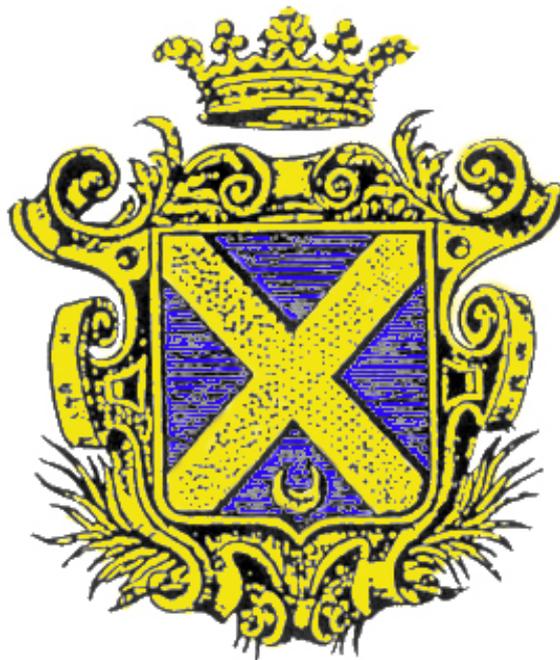


JACQUES
de CHAZAL

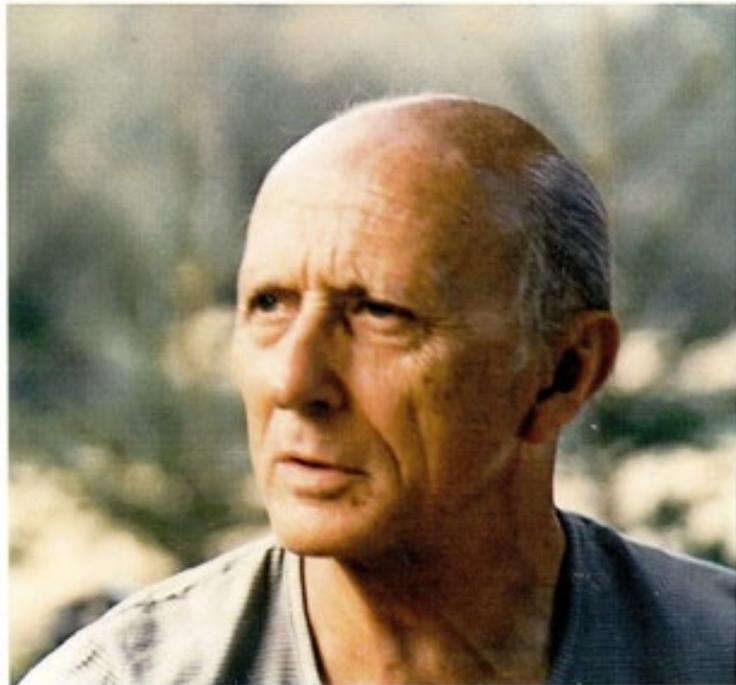
Memoirs



Volume 1
1920 to 1950

JACQUES de CHAZAL

MEMOIRS



JACQUES de CHAZAL---

HIS MEMOIRS.

Translator's acknowledgement:

I immediately admit that this is not all my work. I had an assistant: brilliant in some respects and useless in others. It has shown me the way to go, has a great vocabulary, endless patience and does not argue. In a way this is infuriating, it has its faults: its English grammar leaves much to be desired and many times I have had to consider its ideas very carefully. Its name; Microsoft Word Translate! Microsoft Translate has saved me weeks of slog and anguish; the words are translated, but usually in the original order, hence making no sense in English. My French may have coped with the translation but I would not have tackled it at all if I was to do this on my own, Wikipedia has more than once come to my aid; all the footnotes which I have added are usually from this source.

Without Tristan's work in typing the whole French text from the original hand written version this translation would not have been possible.

Jacques is the architect, cement mixer, and bricklayer of his text. Microsoft Translate demolished the edifice; I have tried to reassemble each brick in its place and used a little cement to get the structure to stand, I fear it wobbles.

Microsoft and I cannot pretend that the poetry, and erudite scholarship of Jacques writing has in any way been replicated, but Jacques' story will stand on its own. He has led an interesting, varied, emotional but rewarding life.

Jacques entreats us to "enjoy the journey". I can assure you; you will.

Christopher C. de Chazal.

August 2015 to December 2015

Jacques de CHAZAL

MEMOIRS

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An Exhortation:

Nine decades, two religions, four names and a hectic life, but a single wife and one son, All this is of little historical interest, but seemed enough to put my natural laziness aside, and make a serious effort to gather together my most significant memories. I would do this primarily for myself, but also possibly for a small number of relatives and friends whose affection will transcend the difficulty of reading about my life.

It exists neither as a curriculum vitae for the family, nor an exercise in style, hoping to attract an editor, they are simply notes thrown on paper as reminiscences, generally in a natural chronological sequence, but not necessarily, that is to say, with necessary inserts to complete, to clarify, and try to succeed in conveying my humble thoughts.

There: if while reading this, you are tempted to pass judgement I only wish that it be limited to events; perhaps to the quality of the text, but without extending it to the author. I'm not concerned about criticism of my person in general, but I am sensitive of criticism from those few who are important to me. Be patient and understanding. Enjoy the journey.

Part I: 1920 – 1950

BARBIZON

December 23rd, 1923.

Snow mixed with rain, fog, a grey-white landscape, sad and beautiful. On the road to Melun in Barbizon, which would become familiar, we drove, or rather skated, in the old upright Ford, the only taxi available in Chailly owned by Ms. Delorme, the wife of the farrier. Held tight by my mother to warm me, I watched the paved road roll by, fascinated by water-filled potholes seen through the disjointed floor of our conveyance.

Daylight was gradually fading on this dark winter afternoon although it was only four o'clock. We arrived in Melun from Paris; Madame Delorme was waiting for us at the station. With the help of a porter she managed to load our luggage; the hand luggage next to her, smaller items in the boot and heavier cases on the roof covered with a tarpaulin. Despite a few groans, the old Ford coped well. We crossed Chailly and joined the little road which leads to Barbizon. To the left was the edge of the magnificent Fontainebleau forest and to the right the plain made famous by the paintings of J. F. Millet, 'l'Angelus' and 'The Gleaners'. Barbizon nestled between the plain and forest.

We climbed a small hill and on the other side we could just see the first houses of the village about 1km away. We had no time to make out all the features, the car turned left, through open wooden gates onto the drive which encircled a large lawn covered in snow. On the opposite side, facing the road and more gates, was an imposing building which, by its Isle-de-France style with interesting carpentry, fitted perfectly in this rural setting.

This vast and beautiful house was called 'The Marmosets'; two old English ladies, twin sisters, were the owners, and had made a comfortable and homely guesthouse. As we arrived the coal-man who had discharged some of his load from his imposing delivery cart was leaving. Alas, the cart wheels were deeply imbedded in mud and the two strong cart-horses failed to move forward despite all their efforts; despite also, the lashes their master inflicted upon them with such unbearable violence. The two ladies proved to be strong characters and roundly castigating the coalman and with the help of two servants, finally helped the two horses free the cart. We were greeted with a lot of kindness and efficiency, in a large room with a window overlooking the forest and another towards the village.

I immediately spotted, in a corner of our room, a small hole in the floor ("like Madame Delorme's car ", I said to mother) through which came a glimmer of light from the main drawing room, but it also conveyed the voices of those beneath. For me it would be a comfort during those evenings when "children go to bed early",

We went downstairs again to the drawing room where we had a delicious tea and cake and felt completely at ease. Leaving my mother to agree with our hostesses the conditions and the duration of our stay, I approached the large fireplace where the flames of a superb fire were crackling merrily.

Near the hearth two gentlemen with white hair, in their deep armchairs, were lost in their reading. At a small table with little indentations their wives played backgammon. Seeing me, all four addressed a kind word to me in English, in the stupid way adults speak to children, accompanied by big toothy smiles showing their imposing dentures. Why should adults feel always obliged to act like this and also tut-tut young children? At 3½-years old I was able to speak both English and French and thanked them with a few well turned and polished phrases. I think I heard that I was exquisite, which delighted me anyway. Then I ran to the safety of my mother to whom I related the circumstances of my meeting. With her I had sensible conversations.

Returning to our room mother set out our things which would be necessary during our stay. I understood this would be for, more or less, one week. She woke me to go down to dinner. Understandably after this hard day I had dozed off on the bed. A wipe over with a flannel and a bit of cologne revived me. Downstairs we found the four we had already met, and a family that had just arrived by car: two girls, one of my age, the other 5 or 6 years old, and their parents. They were Russians. Our two hostesses introduced us. I was very interested in Olga and Natasha the two young Russians, but clearly they wished to ignore me. I did what I could to keep, my dignity. Jacky de Chazal wished all White Russians to disappear from the Earth. I didn't then know that the younger who was my age, would in a few months, be my first childish love.

At table conversation was unbridled but the children were silent, I just listened and I soon came to realise that speaking of Mauritius and Madagascar produced a magical effect. I was thankful to mother who knew how to impress everyone present.

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Mauritius! It was in this small beautiful island of the Indian Ocean (formerly île de France) that Suzanne de Chazal my mother, was born in 1879; into one of the oldest families of this distant land: François de Chazal de la Genesté emigrated there in 1760. Suzanne was a British Subject, because the island became English in 1810, when the small French garrison was forced to capitulate to superior British forces.

Suzanne was born on January 24th, 1879, one month before the death of her grandfather Antoine Edmond, founder of a large sugar estate called St-Antoine. She would live there with her father Evenor, her mother and her brothers and sisters until 1888. They then moved to Curepipe, second city of the island after the capital Port-Louis, in a beautiful house newly built: "La Sablonnière", the name of a castle in the Loiret belonging to the family. In 1896, as a result of bad business dealings and a few disagreements, Evenor took his entire family to Madagascar, in the region of Fianarantsoa. He started a sugar cane estate and at the same time took a gold prospecting concession; however he died two years later, at the age of 60 years, exhausted by a life of unrelenting hard physical effort. The following year in 1899 Suzanne, my mother, then married an engineer Jean Lecomte, from Lyon, France whom her brother Chamarel had met while traveling in Antananarivo. She remained a British subject but also then acquired French nationality. They settled in Lyon where they had two sons: Maurice born in 1900 and Roger in 1904.

The couple divorced in about 1915. It was wartime. Suzanne became a nurse in the French army, and subsequently a senior nurse at the military hospital of Epinal. Mutual friends introduced her to a young gunner Jean Poutet, a lieutenant, with whom she lived in a loving relationship which concluded with my birth on June 7th in 1920 at Toulon in a pretty White House on the slopes of Mont Faron.

I was an “accident” that my mother had the courage to go through with on her own. — Jean Poutet was left out of it — which was not at all clear at this time. The problems to be faced were going to be difficult and painful, starting with being ostracised, and the absence of friends and family. Some of those standing by her, bringing essential moral support were:

- Aunt Marguerite, sister of Evenor, my grandfather
- Adrienne (Aunty Ada) and Yvonne, my mother’s sisters
- Chamarel, her brother
- Tommy Perron, a cousin who had always loved her
- The Bart family ; faithful family friends
- And a few others.

Of course there were also financial problems that Suzanne was unprepared for and had not really foreseen until much too late.

She had certainly had a reasonable sum of money from her parents as well as from her divorce but this was not inexhaustible. Nevertheless for two years we both had to live off love and fresh water as two grasshoppers that “sing all summer”. We lived at first in Porquerolles — a dream island where life is good (which probably influenced me), we then lived in Carquairanne, Cavalaire, Sanary etc.

But one must eventually face reality. For a year Suzanne took up employment in an important sanatorium in Ris-Orangis. To keep me away from all risks of infection I was housed (looked after) in a friendly family of a nearby village: Maniville. I hated this separation, so mother made other arrangements and that is how we arrived at Barbizon two days before Christmas 1923.

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24th December.

It snowed all night and everything was wonderfully white. It was also much colder. Downstairs we found a large fire in the fireplace. In a corner of the large room stood a beautiful fir tree, our two hostesses had already begun decorating it.

A wonderful day was being prepared and I would have the undivided attention of my mother. But in my little head a problem remained and worried me. Why were we here? What would happen now? I was both pleased and anxious. Would we be separated again? I dared not speak about it, we were happy as we were. But why do people worry? A ray of sunlight appeared, coming to illuminate and beautify this fairy-tale landscape. Olga and Natasha’s parents decided to visit the unknown village, and we decide to accompany them. The road was relatively clear and we were warmly dressed and this stroll made everyone happy. A few snowballs had broken the coolness between the two small Russian girls and me, and had sealed our friendship. Our parents chatted about things that seemed irrelevant to us; a serious error. We arrived at the crossroads which marked the entrance to the village. To the right was “Farm Road”, actually lined with beautiful and large farms which disappeared into the plain. Before us the road continued towards Macherin, still between plain and forest. On the left was the 'High Street' that ran through the entire length of the village. We took it, and Mother served as a guide, because she had already been here "to see people", she told me. Quite suddenly we saw a succession of beautiful houses, without doubt, large and rich mansions. We passed in front of the ‘Auberge Ganne’ where formally several painters had lived, some of whom were to become famous and form the “Barbizon School”: J. F. Millet, Corot, Dias, Théodore Rousseau, Ch. Jacques etc.

A little further on we passed the front of the small church or rather chapel, so often depicted in etchings and paintings. Nearby was the cottage and workshop, in a lovely green setting, that Théodore Rousseau had managed to acquire, which then became Millet's house and studio, with its park. It was now, with the Auberge Ganne and Rousseau's workshop, a very popular museum, visited especially by American tourists. All along this street, paved with large uneven and disjointed sandstone slabs, ran the rails of the little train that connected Barbizon-Chailly-Melun twice a day. The line ended at the edge of the forest before a wooden hut serving as the station. A turntable and short length of double track allowed the locomotive to be lined up for the return.

We now came to a luxurious hotel the facade of which was embellished with beautiful woodwork. Its clientele of famous artists and well known characters fully justified its reputation for quality and service; it was known as the "Bas Breaux". Opposite, mother pointed out (presented to us it seemed) a large mansion called "Les Glycines"¹. The name seemed to me to be sweet and wonderful music, like the flowers already admired in the garden of Maniville. But I was wide-eyed, because this she said was where we were going to live. I kissed her with fervour "just the two of us?" I asked. No, of course not and mother explained quickly, because the conversation with our Russian friends seemed important and lively, that she would open it as a family guesthouse. What a shock! Like Marmosets? Not quite no doubt, but yes, that's it, as the Marmosets.. The father of my two little friends then turned to them and told them what I had just learnt, and asked them if they would like to live here with us, instead of the Marmosets. Time went by in what seemed an eternity in the possibility of a negative reply. They exchanged looks, then cried with joy in which I joined. What emotion!

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We had a very nice family Christmas in Marmosets. Toys for the children; among my gifts, I loved a yellowy-gold coloured teddy-bear, quite simple but firm, whose glass eyes seem to express bear-like emotions when looking at me. My bear and I made up a team for more than ten years, even when I deprived him of an arm. Very soon we moved to Glycines. In the first few days we were more or less camping in two or three rooms with very little furniture or heating. We slept in the vast workshop whose roof allowed us to receive the cold light of the moon and the stars. To heat us we had a small cast iron stove on which my mother warmed my nightshirt before putting me to bed. Delicious! One evening, as we prepared for night, I thought I would do this for myself. The nightshirt caught fire and I cried out. Mother rushed in and smothered the fire with a blanket. No damage was done to me or the house and furniture. Phew! We could have died there, or seen the end of the guesthouse project at Glycines. Mother's immediate reaction was to give me a good telling off and a spanking; only half a spanking, because she stopped very quickly to hold me tight and cover me with kisses. She hugged me, and we always laughed aloud when this story was told.

The house took shape rapidly. Furniture and decorating materials arrived from Fontainebleau, eight kilometres away, and put in position, supplemented by the arrival of many storage boxes which had been stored by Uncle Cham (Chamarel). I was obviously much more in the way than helpful in this confusion but I tried to join in whenever mother took the risk to entrust me with such or such an object. All of this gave me a joyful excitement until the day when a couple came that mother had been impatiently waiting for; Elise and her husband Victor. These were the two "domestic workers" (as we would call them today) who would constitute the essential core staff, supplemented as needed by a seasonal recruitment.

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Barbizon

Until now this delightful village had fortunately been preserved from any unsightly, poorly designed building. Today it is a conservation area, and one would hope that nothing is likely to come to destroy the typical rural and forested character of this region. Discovering this wonderful setting for the first time one can be overtaken by joy to the heart and spirit, this rare emotion, can affect each of us more intensely according to how we view things. As a boy of barely 4 years old in 1924, I was lucky to have a sense of wonderment that beauty can bring. At an early age mother had shown me how to recognise things of beauty and this stayed with me. When it seemed justified I would shout aloud: "it's beautiful," and mother would approve, at other times I could shout: "it's good" if the meal on my plate pleased me. Mother would join me in this delight, and if some disapproved of us voicing our pleasure, we were even more delighted.

In front of Glycines, next to Bas Breaux, a big and beautiful house drew ones gaze. It was there that the painter Charles Jacques was born and had lived with his family. The House continued to be occupied by one of his sons "X" Jacques, his wife and five of his seven children. It was an ingrained instinct that these children, ranging from about 15 to 25 years, drew and painted. 'The Father' (that is how everyone addressed him) had inherited a real talent from his father, and it forced everyone to work. He was feared because he was authoritarian and had a terrible temper. At least it seemed so because really he had a heart of gold; anyway, among his team, he had to be o. At the beginning I was very afraid of him because of his great beard, his stentorious voice and his wrestler's physique. Although his appearance was not very pleasant, it was indeed impressive, but with his wife, "The Mother", he was just a little lamb. Soon we became very good friends but events were to bring us closer. Just beside the 'House-Jacques' was the wonderful pastry shop owned by Mr. and Madame Cheddeville. This was one of the highlights of the village, well justified, because all the products were of the highest quality. We paid frequent visits and "les Glycines" also had an account there. I soon realised that if unnoticed I could cross the street and obtain one or two cakes by stating confidently: "on Mother's account". My mistake was to abuse this nice find and the ruse was soon uncovered, with the inevitable reprisals. But that is another story (as Kipling would have said).

The neighbouring property to Glycines, in the direction of the forest, was named "Vertes Feuilles", a very beautiful and important place, as much for its park and garden as the main house and the annexes. It already had its name and was for sale. After a very short time a rich American tourist was captivated by its charm and bought it. The buyer was named 'Greenleaf '! This neighbour was a charming, strong, handsome young man. He was very solicitous towards mother, and I felt a confused jealousy. This was completely unjustified, because he was "dedicated" to his gardener whom he had also brought over with his luggage. This relationship was completely alien to a boy of my age.

Continuing towards the forest, adjacent to "Vertes Feuilles" was "la Clairière" which was also a large and beautiful property. Mr. and Ms. Charlot were the owners. She was a cabaret singer-dancer and had managed to marry this "businessman", a somewhat ambiguous and mysterious man. They had a two-year-old girl with them: Odette. She was actually the daughter of Madame Charlot's brother, the owner of a bistro-restaurant in Orléans, a boorish and rough man who was quite pleased with this agreement with his sister and brother-in-law, entrusting his daughter to them, but actually getting rid of a problem; a solution that satisfied everyone. They wanted Jacky and Odette to get to know each other. What an idea! She was too young for me. Mother did not push the matter but perhaps a childish friendship would come out of it and even a little love.

Spring 1924.

The winter had been harsh. On many mornings we found footprints of deer in the fresh snow, The deer and their fawns, emboldened by the cold, came to the village at night to find warmth and to scavenge food. Deer have a hard life during winter.

It was also hard on the little train. One cold and icy morning, the locomotive was derailed in front of the war memorial at the entrance of the village. Many came to see all the activity.

Since our move to "Les Glicines" in early January, things had moved on quite quickly. In February the first guests arrived, strangers for the most part, mostly English or Russian. The first attracted by painters and the beautiful scenery, the latter due to the quietness of the place and also the proximity to Paris (52 kms). One should not forget that it was in Barbizon that Trotsky had lived, in a beautiful estate on the edge of the forest (on the Boundary Road). He then had to flee in the United States where he was finally assassinated.

Quite soon our 'friends' the Russians arrived, those we had met in the Marmosets at Christmas time. The parents stayed only a few days leaving us with Olga and Natacha. They came to see them from time to time. All three of us became a small close-knit team, sometimes mischievous and sometimes well behaved. We became well known in the village where everyone took to us. Natasha and I were inseparable and always supported each other whatever happened. Olga, the eldest by two years, considered herself the bossy sister. We bowed to her superiority while rebuffing her when necessary.

But events were overtaking us: my brothers Maurice and Roger were due to arrive. Maurice was 23 years old and had completed his military service as a second lieutenant under the command of Lyautey whom our mother knew well during the war. She had treated one of his seriously injured relatives with dedication and competence. He remained grateful and an exchange of correspondence had been established (I could unfortunately find only a few letters written in 1945). Maurice was now an engineer for Terrot, the famous motorcycle constructor of the same name. They came on a super sports model which was much admired by the young people from the village. Maurice (known as 'Yo' by family and friends) was a very handsome young man of 1.98m well-built in relation to his height. He was much admired, and we were very proud of him; sweet natured, modest, strong, good and firm at the same time, culminating in a beautiful voice. He found everything to be easy. His catch phrase was: "in life one should not be..." He loved his mother and his two brothers, with a particular affection for "the little one".

Roger was very different. Not always easy; nervous, active, fast, mind working ceaselessly, versatile, courageous, angry, hating the unknown and unjust. I always considered him my big brother who gave good advice and affection. Yo the elder, would unfortunately leave us at the age of only twenty four.

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Easter

The House was full. We even had to make a few 'rearrangements' to our rooms to ensure that the guests had all the comfort that they deserved. We had wonderful weather; nature began to revive after the winter. Mama, my brothers and I lived together, without knowing that it was the nicest, happiest, most joyous days that we would know.

Summer approached. The forest was beautiful and we often went for magnificent walks, often in the company of our residents. Most had become good friends. Maurice and Roger had left. "Yo" had returned to his motorcycles. Roger had begun his military service. He was enrolled into a Spahi unit equipped with the burnouse and superb red sash that he proudly wore. 'You'² and I were proud of him and the admiration that he attracted by virtue of his splendid uniform.

Andrée Jacques — known as "Dany" by her family and now also by us, often talked about him, and even I had to understand that there was something between them. Dany helped You at les Glycines. She was active and efficient and always cheerful and smiling, and funny. Oh, how she could be funny! I had the annoying habit of going around with a load of pieces of string which I would leave all over the place. No admonition, despite my quite sincere promises, could cure me of this mania, nor Rip, the adorable house dog, which aided and abetted me in this little game.

One morning Dany and You called me with wide-eyed expressions. Mother told me seriously that Rip was ill due to all the bits of strings that he had swallowed. And while she held Rip by the collar, Dany lifted the tail of my dog. In her hand she had deftly hidden a ball of string, with the other hand she began to unroll a small length of twine, it grew in length to one metre, then maybe two. Both put on a serious look, almost sad, which I also saw in Rip's face as a sort of reproach for being an unwilling accomplice. For a long time I kept the pieces of string in hand.

Summer came. I had to be reasonable and not interfere with the hectic activity prevailing in Glycines. While doing my best to keep out of the way I did what I could to take part. I managed pretty well, polishing the silverware and weeding the terrace. As a reward I would sometimes be allowed to cross the street to Mr. and Madame Chedeville, the pastry chefs.

Every day of the summer of 1924 was a day of joy. And this one in particular, when my two brothers were with us, as well as Uncle Cham (Chamarel) and Aunt Hélène his very pretty wife. Uncle Cham was not only fond of TsF³, he also enjoyed beautiful cars. He came with a nice "Torpedo". Yo and he had lively conversations about engines and their performance. I envisage us around a large table in the garden. Quiet and happy, I would watch everyone I loved and I was filled with wonder — it was an absolute certainty — they were all were beautiful; without exception. My mother You, of course was beautiful, but as far as I as concerned Yo and Roger, had a similar beauty although very different. Everyone agreed that life was wonderful. Uncle Cham impressed me greatly. He seemed to know everything in all fields; he answered everything like a distinguished professor. My brothers seemed amazed and this confirmed my admiration. His charm and encyclopaedic knowledge was what emanated mostly from Cham. In addition he was beautiful, but old also (for me, at least, he was then 47 years old). How could he be that old and beautiful at the same time? This question eluded me.

Aunt Hélène was sweet and pretty. I liked her perfume and I just closed my eyes with rapture when she kissed me. I had but a small reserve in its regard, because it seemed to me that she was a little jealous of the great affection that Chamarel and his sister, Suzanne my mother, had one for the other.

At the end of this time full of joy and sunshine, we quaffed champagne to celebrate this exceptional reunion. My wonderful brother Yo took me on his knees and made me soak my lips in his glass; just two small sips, the first of my life, which I will always remember. To general approbation I showed that I enjoyed it. I had only recently turned four years old. So what?

The summer went by happily. You and Dany, assisted by friendly and efficient staff, worked hard because there was much to be done, the house was full. But I never felt left out. We took every opportunity to have a hug. And then together with Olga and Natacha we were a good gang, we never got bored. Also we had the opportunity, if they offered to take us, to accompany different guests in woodland walks. So this is how we spent our time and the summer came to an end. Yo spent a few days with us, and it was a great pleasure to hear him sing, to see him live; beautiful and strong and always energetic. One evening however, he went to bed early because he said he had a riveting book he had started and wished to read. The next morning as soon as he heard our mother getting up, he called out. He complained of severe abdominal pain that came upon him without warning and had kept him awake and that he had endured during the night without wishing to wake anyone. Mother quickly diagnosed a serious problem and persuaded him to go to the hospital in Fontainebleau. He was hospitalized immediately. It was acute peritonitis. You, with her vast experience of nursing, knew that the chances of recovery were slim. The days that followed were agonizing. You spent all her time at the hospital. I did not understand what was happening; they hid the terrible truth from me. One morning You took me with her and I saw our Yo in bed, pale faced and covered in a cold sweat. I threw myself on him and he kissed me with special tenderness which surprised me and delighted me at the same time. When I recovered, mechanically, awkwardly I wiped the back of my hand against my cheeks to wipe off his sweat. It made him smile, a smile full of goodness and sorrow. This last smile and this ultimate contact of our two faces will forever remain part of me.

Two days later, after a grey and rainy day, night had fallen on Barbizon and Glycines. All was quiet in the House. The majority of clients had left at the end of August. Olga and Natasha came with me to the kitchen where Elise and Victor told us about their trip to Brittany. The large clock in the hall struck nine. The large, heavy door opened and closed noisily. With despair and anger my mother shouted in a loud voice: "it is finished". This occasion will also always remain engraved upon my memory.

This August 29th evening would be a defining moment.

Throughout the month of September an atmosphere of sadness and fatigue prevailed. You, usually so cheerful, courageous and enterprising, became silent and indifferent to everything. Dany gave her much affection, attention and assistance in any way she could. For my part I think I took on an even more important role for them both. I was spoiled more than ever, while enjoying great freedom. I had the impression that I had passed the stature of a four year-old boy, to one who must participate with more seriousness and responsibility in the life of the house, and especially to try and watch over You as a man should. In these few days I had in fact changed a lot. My mother's immense grief had reinforced, if that were possible, our bond. Yo, having gone, we had to take heart and be strong. Every evening we prayed: 'my God, let Yo be happy in heaven and watch over us in our grief'. And I added 'let me be a good boy and may mother have a long life for me '. Not forgetting, of course, Roger who was fighting the Rif War in Morocco. Mother dared not consider that he may be wounded or even killed in the fighting of that special war. And yet a few months later, while on a scouting patrol he was ambushed and seriously wounded. Of his group of Sipahis, the majority would fail to return.

Olga and Natasha were still with us. They were very kind to me and often made me play with them as before. Their parents returned, stayed a few days at Glycines and then all four left

permanently. Maybe they would return the next year. This hope somewhat softened the sadness of the separation.

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Our Russian friends arrived. They brought with them their puppy, Dimitri, a lively and intelligent terrier that played with us and especially with Rif, the house guard-dog. Sometimes I was a little embarrassed by our childish fun which seemed indecent next to the sorrow experienced by You and I.

Three or four days after their arrival, Dimitri's owners, and also the rest of us, saw some strange behaviour by our companion. He became silent, seeking quiet corners and sometimes growled quietly. He was not aggressive, but avoided any petting. When he started to bite the furniture legs, his master understood he was suffering from rabies. The diagnosis was confirmed by the veterinarian. With caution my young friends' father managed to gently bundle him into an old empty jute coal-bag. He took it to the bottom of the garden where we soon heard two gun shots. He returned with misted eyes that still held tears. Olga and Natacha wept their hearts out for the companion that they had loved so much.

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That evening important decisions were taken, In full agreement with the village doctor, Olga, Natasha and I, who had played a lot with the dog, had to be immediately vaccinated against rabies. It was considered that the adults, who had not had the same contact, did not run the same risk, so vaccination would not be necessary.

The very next day, our Russian friends set off for Paris. Mother and I would follow them in the afternoon. We didn't see him them again. Our doctor did the necessary with the Pasteur Institute. Vaccination consisted of twenty one subcutaneous injections in the abdomen. It was painful and each injection was more painful than the last, especially for a child of four years old. We stayed at the Hotel Pereire in Place Pereire. Mother had good reason to know Madame Emilie, the owner. She owed You an eternal debt of gratitude because she had cared for Ms Emilie's father with dedication until his death at Epinal hospital during the war.

Every morning, for three weeks, a taxi took us to the Pasteur Institute where I suffered, with less and less fortitude; the inevitable sting being more painful every time despite the ministrations of my torturers. One morning when I felt the matter unbearable, I found a way of gaining more confidence and reassuring the attending adults. I spoke out with a firmness, which I did not really feel in my distress, declaring that "I will not cry so as not to upset mother" It was a surprising statement, and everyone was moved and somewhat impressed. That injection and the four or five following were much easier to bear.

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Since our unfortunate episode in Paris, time had passed. We were back in Barbizon. In our absence, Dany and the staff at Glycines, sometimes aided by one of Dany's brothers, had ensured that our enterprise continued to work well. The Jacques family were wonderful.

I looked for Rip but could not find him. It was finally admitted that as a precaution he had had to be put down. I was grief stricken. Rip was more than a dog to me, he was my companion and play-mate. I will not forget him.

We learnt that a tragedy had taken place before our return. A servant girl working at Lower Breaux Hotel was run over by the little train just in front of our home; carelessness or suicide? We will never know. She always spoke kindly to me; I liked her look of sadness. We returned towards the end of autumn, the forest was beautiful with its foliage of a thousand hues. You succeeded from time to time to overcome her infinite sadness and give me the attention I had previously known. We had great excursions in our beautiful forest, sometimes in the company of Dany or Madame Boffo, the owner of the Bas Breaux. I understood, overhearing certain conversations, that a significant change in our situation must take place within the next few months; this did not upset my natural innocence; the important thing was that You be by my side, nothing else mattered. The Jacques family, Dany's parents and brothers, invited us to spend Christmas with them. Everyone worked diligently and with great delicacy and affection to give us a happy time. 'The Father' spoke softly in a voice that we did not imagine he was capable of. It came from the heart of this gruff but talented painter. I was allowed a taste of Champagne from You's glass; this was the second after that which Yo had given me that summer. My heart welled up.

January 1925

It's snowed in large flakes. Our fairy tale village was incredibly beautiful. Les Glycines was almost at the end of the village. The edge of the forest was only 100 meters away. One morning many deer footprints appeared deep in the snow. I suggested to mother that we should put two bowls of the good mash Rip seemed to appreciate on the pavement. She smiled and explained that deer do not eat the same food as dogs. In this case, for once, I was not sure that she was right.

March 1925

I finally understood the meaning of the snippets of conversations that had surprised me some time ago. We were on the move. Our destination would be nearby, almost in front, across the street, to the right of Bas Breaux, a little closer to the forest. Mother and Dany would open an antique store in a nice house with a garden. We had to leave Glycines which we were renting. The owner had decided to sell. Our budget did not allow us to buy the place, so we were on our way to a new episode in our lives. I felt as if I would like this change. The residential part was quite rustic but in perfect condition. It was an old farmhouse that had been well furnished by our painter friends, Charles Jacques. The shop would be located in a large room open to the joists in the ceiling, there was also a spacious side room serving as store.

Thanks, especially to the Jacques family, but also to other well-wishers in the village, You and Dany managed to achieve everything necessary that it would take to open the shop as soon as the following month. The bulk of the stock was made up of many paintings, some canvasses by well-known painters, assorted antique furniture, all sorts of old things, in short stocked with everything that an antique shop worthy of the name should have. Many of the more valuable items had been acquired on credit. This would be quickly paid off.

Indeed it was the good times when the US dollar was exceptionally strong against most European currencies, when Europe had been impoverished by the war. If the busloads of American tourists were much less numerous than they are today, their passengers nevertheless represented an incredible windfall for any business that interested them. Their considerable purchasing power, known to all, doubled and even tripled the price of the goods for sale. I can still hear the laughter of You and Dany in the evening after the passing of such a hurricane. The word is not too strong; it often happened that one article was coveted by two or even three buyers. Without any intervention by You and Dany, they then started bidding wars between them. This was the good fortune and delight of the business.

Throughout the summer trade continued to be successful. Sales were incredibly easy, too easy. Everything went well, restocking continued without difficulty. In most farms and houses there was a lot of what was termed "junk"; families readily agreed to part with it for reasonable prices, which would be tripled for resale. To find them, Dany's brothers worked wonders. Everyone in the area knew them and loved them. Trust and contacts were easily established, so success was quick and easy. Everyone found their place of course. For my part, in the middle of all this activity, I had a lot of freedom. I was certainly still the subject of much love and attention, but at the same time I was very free and took full advantage of any opportunity. I had two friends with whom I spent all my time, most often in the forest, where, despite our young age, we would go off on our own. Marcel, the nephew of a young pilot, Rossi, who would in a few years' time fly in a series of famous rallies around the world with his companion Cados; and Jacques, the son of the village doctor. We are a trio known all over the area. Not always for the best reasons, because we happened to visit a few orchards as scrumping was an irresistible pastime. You scolded me only because she had to, because she also enjoyed my ill-gotten gains, obviously without knowing where they came from, at least that is what she said.

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Autumn 1925

Did stability bring forth monotony? Business had been good, You recovered somewhat and regained some joy in life. In early October all three of us went to Carqueiranne, a pretty fishing village near Toulon. We were accommodated in a big house beside the small harbour in the centre of the village. It was an Earthly paradise for us. However like all boys of my age I had to go to school. I was surprised to find that I was immediately at ease. On the one hand my classmates accepted me without difficulty despite my Paris "clipped accent". Because my escapades in the forest had given me strong legs and a robust constitution, they accorded me some respect. Also in Barbizon I had got into the pleasurable habit of every morning "being lazy" in You's bed. There she taught me to read the daily newspaper "le Journal" which came very early, and gave her much pleasure in reading every morning. I had made rapid progress in a pleasant and effective way and now I took advantage of this at school where our teacher, who had appreciated my reading ability, had taken me under his wing. This first contact with the school was therefore all positive, and my first doubts were quickly dissipated. The pupils formed a tight knit, small, restless band always looking for new amusements. The climate was mild and sunny which favoured our activities. My accomplices and I learned to fish, and my catches brought home, were often welcomed affectionately with congratulations followed by a meal of fried food and fish soup. I, on the other hand, taught them to climb trees and lead them on adventurous walks in the countryside. There were occasionally some scratches and bruises, but nothing very serious

Of course there was also the joy of my outings with You and Dany, most often along the shore. One day we walked on a thick carpet of algae which gave off a strong smell of iodine. I began to run ahead of them to express my happiness. A very aggressive change in this odour of iodine assailed my nostrils. This should have alerted me to slow down. Why aren't young animals as experienced and careful than adults? If that were so, life would no longer have the same meaning, and I would not have fallen suddenly up to my neck in pit full of algae and rubbish that gave off foul stench. I flayed my arms with difficulty and avoided the worst thanks to the rapid and cool actions of Dany who held out a stick to me that she had picked up nearby thereby avoiding the risk of joining me in this infamous trap. Out of this mess, I presented a pathetic spectacle, arms and legs all over the place, screaming and crying with anger, upset and furious all at the same time. I soon realised that the others had great difficulty not to burst out laughing. The last straw was that neither one nor the other wanted to come anywhere near me. The term 'untouchable' took on its true meaning.

Fortunately the house was not far away. Washing my body was laborious and was augmented by a good rub with cologne. As usual, it all ended up in laughter good humour; ever since I have always felt a great distrust of seaweed mats.

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The House was a happy place.. Roger returned from Morocco. He was wounded in the Rif war and wanted to complete his convalescence with us having obtained a exeat for 15 days. Mother was only told about it a long time after he was injured during an ambush, where he was one of the few survivors. After several days between life and death he was out of danger. This delay at least spared our mother from living with days of anxiety such as those experienced in relation to the death of our elder brother.

Roger arrived wrapped in his superb red burnouse which emphasized the pallor of his face. He would be well looked after which, by the end of his stay with us he would be back in full shape. Dany and he often went for long walks leaving us, You and I, alone together. But we saw in them so much happiness that we felt no jealousy.

One morning, we left early for Hyères, where we embarked on a boat to Porquerolles. We spent a wonderful day in this dream island far from anywhere. These days it is invaded be hordes of tourists. You was happy, but sad and silent. Much later I would understand what this day meant to her; here in this place where she had spent many hours of pleasure with a Lieutenant of Artillery: Jean Poutet. It was in Porquerolles, I would learn later, that I was conceived.

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December 1925

Our stay at Carqueiranne came to an end. We returned to Barbizon shortly before Christmas to find a cold that contrasted sharply with the sweetness of the air we had just left. The first thing to do as a matter of urgency was to heat the house and store, whose walls, after this long absence, had become very cold. We had to warm the place for ourselves no doubt, but also because we expected to get many visitors during this holiday period.

Once again we spent Christmas with the Jacques clan, always extraordinary. Paint and kitchen smells make for a curious mixture; one has to like it. Marcel, the fourth brother, nicknamed "AK", liked me and told me all kinds of funny stories accompanied by comical gestures that really make me

laugh. He is just as happy as me. He was Dany's 'favourite brother' and she got him out of scrapes and awkward situations that this inveterate womaniser managed to get himself into. Some of these situations almost turned into nasty dramas but that's another story. The important thing on this day was that there were two pheasant that he and Roland, the youngest, had been poaching in the forest. The Rangers had always suspected them of their reprehensible activity, but they had never been caught.

Christmas without snow this year, but it will be there two or three days later, abundant, pervasive and cruel to our friends, the animals of the forest.

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1st January 1926

This week has brought me both joy and anxiety. Joy in finding my band of restless and faithful comrades again, despite the snow the forest is ours. In the area where we go most often the trees are our friends. Seeing us again they seem to greet us, spraying us with of a fine shower of snow with the slightest breeze, The rocks that we climb on without thinking are less welcoming. We quickly learn to treat them with caution and respect: they can become very slippery and we can end up with nasty bruises. This is a joyous reunion but in my heart there is a certain anguish which becomes more and more prevalent at the approach of the third of January, a cruel date when I will have to accept the hard fact of my first internship. Indeed, I have to enter as a boarder at the Collège St-Aspet in Melun, run by the Marist fathers. The idea of this separation from my loves, You and Dany; to be isolated among a unknown rabble and be the butt of all sorts of tortures, really frightened me, and I relapsed into despondency. You did her best to reassure me. It only did half a job and the other half only augmented my pain.

Ms. Charlot and her "daughter" Odette visited us at the shop. They were our neighbours at « la Clairière », a beautiful property located across the main street, a little farther towards the forest. Despite my young age, I am struck by the vulgar snobbery of this former dancer-singer "caf-conc"⁴ who had convinced herself that she had acquired a real distinction by virtue of her marriage and the money she had married into As proof of this she said that she gave bridge parties to which she was able to invite "quality people ». But for her "clubs" will always mean "sorrel". But Odette was different—and that is all that mattered to me, as well as to You, — she had become a pretty little girl of four years; still too young to mingle with our games for boys, but after all... pretty nice to look at. Later, on the fringes of the bridge parties, which luckily for us took place more and more elsewhere, « la Clairière » became our regular meeting place for our young troupe, in fact until the eve of the war.

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3rd January 1926

Arriving by taxi at St-Aspet in Melun a thin icy rain was coming down. It was as dull as the grey walls and somewhat leprous look of this old and famous religious institution. My whole being filled with anxiety and I also felt sad. The Father Superior's office was cavernous but beautiful. The clean smell of wax gave me a little confidence but it was a false impression and an error of judgment, because the situation would develop such that grief, despair, and anger all conspired to suffocate and overwhelm me. After a short quarter of an hour of discussion to negotiate the terms and conditions of internship with You (internment would be more accurate), the father brought two young residents whom he said, would accompany me to visit the institution (classes, dormitory, refectory, Chapel), after which I would come to say 'goodbye' to my mother. Anticipating spending the following Sunday with her, You said to me: "shows them how well you dance the Charleston". It is true that Dany had had success in teaching me the basics of this dance then very much in vogue, which sometimes I used to great advantage.

Here I was running around with my new friends of whom I would discover with great anger their duplicity, but too late. I would soon find out the intricacies of these huge buildings: long corridors, stairs, classrooms, dormitory. It all seemed quite pleasant. Our section, for the little ones, was clean and not too dark. We went to meet one of the sisters responsible for linen, the nursing sisters, those who maintained our clothes. They were fairies in the middle of purgatory. 'Hell' seems a bit much to me. They were very nice to me, pointed out to me my bed as well as a locker where, she said, she would arrange all my things.

We went down into the courtyard. It' was still raining The students played games, most of which I had not played before, under a huge covered area a long way from our wonderful times in the forest. I heard them say "here is a new one". It was me they were talking about. My two guides introduce me and immediately gave away that I was a good Charleston dancer and I was obliged to dance it. It helped to have me accepted especially by the smaller ones, those of my age or younger. The elder ones wrongly thought that their prestige may be compromised. As a result I suffered some taunts and jostling. But now I had only one thing in mind, to find mother and say my farewells. I was disappointed. I was told that she had to leave, because the taxi, because of this... and that.

I cried hot tears only finding a little consolation when one of my classmates, full of kindness, tried to comfort me by telling me: "you know, your mum, will be crying as much as you..." I would learn that he is an orphan and had only an Aunt to act as his single parent. Arnaud would become my friend; my friend in our incarceration.

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Easter 1925

The term at St-Aspet came to an end. I had not stood up well to these three months of boarding, away from mother. The umbilical cord is decidedly not cut. In addition it was well known that the Marists did not promote a family atmosphere among their residents which, of course with a certain required discipline, promotes confidence and creates a good team spirit. The few hours spent with You every other Sunday of which I dreamed all week, just made parting more difficult. What a joy when I learnt that I would leave St-Aspet for ever, and that while waiting for a better solution I would spend my last term at l'Ecole Communale de Barbizon, it may not be the best panacea. A little stupidly I

disliked the idea of École Communale, but there at least I'd be at home in Barbizon with You and Dany, and I would join some good comrades from our forays in the forest.

During these Easter holidays I was reinvigorated. I returned to my usual routine, my places, and my friends. We invented a game giving us much enjoyment. It was to choose a young flexible tree of five to six metres in height, no more for the moment. We'll see later. One climbed as high as possible, i.e. until it started to bend. One then hung there suspended by the hands, body in the air, thus accentuating the movement of curvature that gently set us to the ground. Gently in principle — because it can happen — but it was rare that we chose well. If our chosen tree boke our return to the ground would accelerate, with sometimes unpleasant consequences. The eldest (those about 12 or 15 years old) would tackle the taller trees of 8 to 10 meters, by not only climbing singly, but two or three at a time in order to have sufficient weight to bend our forest friend. Often it started to bend after only a short swing from right to left until we achieved our aim. There we would hang by the grace of God, our feet high in the air; what a wonderful feeling! We had only a single glitch, perhaps actually two; firstly a broken arm by a beginner; and secondly a serious problem with a forest ranger. Everyone assembling at the police station 'Father' Jacques intervened and sorted it all out without further consequences.

The Easter holidays when I found my place in Barbizon again came to an end and it was thus that I completed these last three months of the school year being taught by the teacher at the municipal school of the village. Monsieur Carré, a plump forty year old with goatee beard and moustache, he looked stern in his checked suit with white waistcoat and polished gaiters on impeccable boots. He was in fact a man of great kindness and an excellent teacher; always looking for the best way to enable us to better assimilate his lessons. He had no need to raise his voice, he knew how to keep our interest and if necessary, to make us obey him. He was a teacher whom we loved and that made us good pupils. With him a cuffed ear never became red but we quickly learnt; my two best friends and I, who supported each other well, that we should not exceed certain limits under penalty of immediate sanction.

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One day, at the other end of the village a circus came to town, setting up at the edge of the forest. After lunch, without previously obtaining permission, we went there with the intention of watching all the preparations for the evening performance. In fact little by little all of us fully realised that for the first time — this was the only one that would occur — we would be guilty of the very serious offence now called 'hooky'. The practicing jugglers, tumblers, and acrobats repeated small sections of their numbers; it was a show that was well worth the risk of incurring the wrath of Mr. Carré. But our truancy itself failed. The father of one of my classmates, warned of our absence, had been searching for us and soon found us where he thought we would be. Our return to school was not triumphant. We receive a very humiliating dressing down in front of all our classmates some of whom would have liked to imitate us, but had not got the courage to do so. The penalty fell like an axe on wood: cleaning the yard, banned from the circus and our parents notified. So at the end of the class, under the eyes and the somewhat mocking goodbye of the other students we were equipped with brooms, shovels and rakes by M. Carré, who gave us firm orders of how to go about it. We applied ourselves to the task and after an hour we managed to leave a very good looking courtyard

Very soon after, we had our "general interest class". Mr. Carré seemed to be in a good mood. We had only one thing in mind; our ban from the circus. Our teacher seemed to be a little less firm in his position. In this general interest class we found unsuspected resources in ourselves to mollify his attitude. Marcel, who had inherited his father's genes of a businessman, had an idea of putting forward

the argument that such punishment would deprive the circus of a dozen spectators: the three of us and our parents. Mr. Carré understood the value of Marcel argument although not convinced of the logic. The punishment was lifted, but on the other hand we had to faithfully promise to lead blameless lives in future. Phew! At last we could afford a smile.

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July 1926

The term had come to an end and my results had been good and the long summer holiday began. I turned six last month and felt more important; especially with my first bicycle that had been given to me as a birthday present. At home, I tried to make myself useful; I liked to be part of the team, and now and then hear someone say that I was helpful. I have many flaws; I know it, and do not always admit to them. I should really recognize that taking pleasure in giving pleasure is actually a form of selfishness?

Once again the busloads of American tourists returned. Business was brisk, You and Dany were very busy and our band of rascally kids resumed our activities in full freedom.

We now had at our head a young American whose father was a diplomat. Gordon was much older than us as he would soon be eleven years old. But he revelled in his role as gang leader and he carried it out with aplomb. He was extremely nice and patient with us and we accorded him our admiration. His parents encouraged him, from a very young age, to partake in many sporting activities which further enhanced his reputation among us. For his birthday we were all invited with our mothers to a right royal birthday tea, at the magnificent family residence on the high street. Each of us brought a gift carefully chosen with the help of the parents.

I set my sights on a magnificent book that Uncle Cham had given me: a richly illustrated edition of *The Jungle Book*. It was brand new and You agreed. What she didn't know is that one of the beautiful pictures really upset me. It showed a huge boa constrictor "Kaa" suffocating the monkey "Banderlog" in its coils. Secretly and with the utmost care not to damage the picture in any way I found a scraper with which I managed to erase that awful part of Kaa crushing poor Banderlog; the result which, for anyone but me, would obviously be quite surprising.

Confusingly I felt, even if my intentions were well meant, my intervention on this gift should not be done. Gordon had no time to inspect our gifts but his mother looked at them and thanked us each in turn while we tucked into the food. Suddenly I heard muffled laughter and understood that my *Jungle Book* was the cause. A quick glance was enough to confirm the fact, and my heart strings tightened, I was both confused and angry. Quietly, without a word Gordon's mother rose and just embraced me.

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During our outings with Gordon, as requested and as he wished, we would try to improve his very poor French. But sometimes with the words and expressions that we taught him we would slip in some slang which gave us a malicious pleasure to "help" further. This game could not continue for

long because his parents soon tumbled to it when their son returned home using unacceptable language. It was not very naughty but he did acquire a much more complete and savoury vocabulary that he might have done elsewhere. Unfortunately Gordon was not to stay with us for any length of time. He disappeared suddenly together with his parents without anyone having any clue that they might be leaving. This left our gang somewhat lost and sad. A few days later we were horrified to learn that Gordon was responsible for all the fires that had sprung up in the fields over the last six to eight weeks, much to the detriment and anger of the peasants and the people of the village.

We would never have imagined that our friend was an inveterate arsonist and we were filled with sadness. The American Embassy took the decision to return Gordon and his family back to the U.S.A. because the Parisian press had begun to take an interest in the matter. We never heard from our friend again.

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We had a hot summer which put a strain on us humans but the forest also suffered from fires which were often difficult to extinguish. We tried to join the many firefighting volunteers, but they did not have sufficient firefighting equipment. Usually we were unceremoniously rejected. We were not much use and sometimes reckless. Sometimes we manage to do a little, furiously hitting the still smoking ground with twigs. We became angry and really desperate when some of the trees which we knew intimately through climbing them frequently, suddenly flared up despite all the efforts of those who were fighting with courage against the fire. The feeling of helplessness was unbearable. The forest suffered greatly and the authorities decided to ban hunting with hounds. The fire dislodged many animals from the areas where they had lived, killing and wounding some of them. Survivors lost their bearings and it would take them some time to adapt to a new environment. This prohibition was therefore entirely justified and welcome. It gave us a period of calm after all the difficulties

In the full heat of August a film crew came to shoot a scene in this chaotic landscape, in the middle of impressive rocks, where we played imaginary games of pirates and bandits. Of course we three friends were present on the set being told to go away when our curiosity overstepped the mark. The star of the film was a young woman, about twenty years old with smooth complexion and fine body. We were amazed by her grace and kindness and really amused by her fear of lizards, of which there were many in this hot place. She was required to run barefoot on the sand for some twenty meters between boulders, but she stopped abruptly at the sight of a lizard. The shooting was obviously halted every time this occurred, and after four or five breaks under the same conditions the crew began to show signs of frustration and being nervousness.

My friends and I had the idea of catching one of these lizards, which had been terrifying our starlet, and try to get her used to it by showing her that it could do no harm. Very suspicious at first, little by little she ended up being brave enough to stroke its back. She had a charming laugh and thanked us with a few words in French with a cute American accent. She then kissed each of us in turn so that no one should be left out. We felt very proud of ourselves. The crew also had some kind words for us and they were finally able to get their work done without any more difficulties. It was just as well that my first encounter with this young star, whose fame was spread to the world, was so successful. She was called Joséphine Baker.⁵

Forty years later in Abidjan, when I was Director of the Airline UTA, I meet her again at a cocktail party given by the French Embassy when she happened to be travelling through. When Ambassador Raphael-Leygues introduced me, I replied: 'but Ms Baker and I have known each other

for ages”, and, apologizing for bring up old memories, I briefly related what had taken place in the summer of 1926. She remembered it very well and seemed very pleased and quite happy to expand a little more on this happy episode, but the Ambassador was quite insensitive to this revelation, and it was he who decided what could, or could not, be of interest to Ms. Baker, and they moved on to someone who had just arrived. One has to bow to diplomacy and authority.

FAMILY

Our family were few in number and we had no real family relationships. I was the unpardonable "fault" that my poor and tender You would have to live with all her life. At that time in Barbizon, I was a loving son but an only boy at the time. Loving Mother was 'my all' and I couldn't imagine that any part of her heart could be shared by any other than I, or those whom I knew and approved of. I would not have tolerated an intruder coming to usurp my place, forcing me to share the love You lavished on me. She knew this only too well, and even today I admire her self-denial and her ability to ensure that our complete happiness was not marred in any way.

The small ice cube, detached from the great iceberg of the de Chazal family, who had retained their affection and interest in Suzanne, my mother, and also acknowledging my birth, was reduced to the following small group..

MARGUERITE

She was my Great-Aunt, sister to Evenor, my grandfather, 13th of the fifteen children of Edmond de Chazal and Claire Rouillard. Aunt Marguerite was born in 1926 an “old lady”, sixty-seven years old, good looking with a beautiful face beaming with kindness, sometimes mischievous, but imbued with some sadness in her pretty smile. She had married a French Officer, Charles Tuffier with whom she had an only son Maurice Tuffier, a young second lieutenant, who was to be killed in the hard fighting in the Ardennes on August 30, 1914 at the age of twenty-two,

Much later, when Simone and I lost our son Olivier, I remembered and even began to understand my Aunt Marguerite's sad smile.

She lived in Paris in a beautiful apartment in the Rue de Siam near Avenue Henri Martin in the 16th, where she welcomed one with pleasure and a natural generosity. She loved You, daughter of her elder brother. She loved to walk with us in the woods or even accompany us to the Galeries Lafayette department store which she enjoyed, but did not wish to go to on her own.

Much later, in December 1939, she put us up for a whole month, before my departure to the Air Base of Avord, where I was assigned as a student as a result of my call-up which came as soon war was declared in September. On my return from Austria at the end of May 1945 I immediately went to Siam Street with heart full of joy at the idea of seeing her. I was very sad to learn, from the concierge, of her death two years earlier,

ADRIENNE

"Aunty Ada" was You's elder sister. I did not know her well and only saw her four or five times between 1923 and 1928. I do vaguely remember someone, an older person it seemed to me. She was twelve years older than mother and I naturally thought of her belonging to the older generation.

She was very deaf and used a large ear-trumpet into which it was necessary speak so she could hear. She had a high monochord voice which is a characteristic of some deaf people, and this made me uncomfortable. This gave me the chance for some indiscreet and too expressive mimicry, not very courteous in truth. She and You enjoyed each other's company too much for my liking. However, I remember Aunty Ada as a good and generous person, full of tenderness and concern for her little sister Suzanne, my mother. That was enough for me.

CHAMAREL

I have told of the admiration and affection I felt for Uncle Cham, he may have been my mother's favourite but he was the closest to his sweet Suzanne. During our visits to Courbevoie, I liked to listen to them speak on all sorts of subjects, many of which were incomprehensible to me. But they were usually animated cheerful, serious disagreements alternated with passion. They were both very strong in their opinions, and their genuine mutual affection did not prevent them from having a few clashes. I remember with regret a late rainy afternoon when a slight dispute, on what topic I cannot say, had degenerated into an argument. Afterwards, they were both quite shocked like children who had done wrong. That night at bedtime, they kissed more tenderly, and for longer than usual, with a chuckle that spoke volumes about their relationship.

My lovely Aunt Hélène was somewhat ignored when these two chattered away ten to the dozen. It was not very tactful, no doubt, on the part of her husband and her sister-in-law, but she understood and did not seem upset in the slightest. Her rare interruptions during a pause usually fell flat, perhaps signifying that serious things belong to serious people. I think that culture and spirituality were not matters that Aunt Hélène thought about. She would then take me by the hand and we would play games she had a gift of improvising. We understood each other well.

In the large drawing room there were always two or three or even four posts of TFS⁶, one of the passions of Uncle Cham, there were many trinkets and paintings of quality which showed the interests and tastes of Cham for Art in general. At Barbizon he brought back two beautiful paintings by Charles Jacque that Dany and Father Jacque had given him on reasonable terms. He had hesitated on a nice Millet, reminiscent perhaps of 'The Gleaners' He said he regretted not buying it; and he was right.

Many of his artistic objects came from Madagascar: masks, carved ivories, various sculptures, and also some very beautiful engravings, representing characters, animals, and landscapes. But it was a beautiful large Meerschaum pipe towards which I was always drawn. Despite all the explanations that I was given regarding this beautiful mineral (magnesium silicate), quite alien from sea-foam, I was amazed by what I considered a miracle of nature. My passion for this pipe amused Uncle Cham. He explained to me that it was acquired by his grandfather, Edmond de Chazal, who had placed it in his office in St-Antoine. After his death it was bequeathed to Evenor, Chem's father, and subsequently Chem himself inherited it.

YVONNE

Aunt Yvonne was the last of the eleven children of Evenor. Born in 1890, she was eleven years younger than You. They were nevertheless very close, since the two brothers lying between them had gone in other ways: Ravenel had chosen a way of life which had unfortunately alienated him from his family; the other, Guy, went as a very young man to South America,

Yvonne was very lively and cheerful, when with You it was always noisy, with their loud chatter punctuated by laughter and bursts of loud voices, those in the vicinity had to take notice and were generally amused. She had married her first cousin Norman Mayer who seems to have had a somewhat difficult childhood..., but this is another story. He was, however, a pastor and seemed to exercise his priesthood with conviction.

Yvonne and Norman had five boys (they had lost a girl in 1926). I knew only the first three: the elder Paul (Polo), Jean (Jeannot) and Georges (Manu). I don't know how it transpired that I never met Jacques. It was only in July 2002, at a small family gathering in Paris that I got to know Francis (Franck), we reminisced about the hardships incurred over the last eight decades. I wish I had known him sooner.

I really liked joining up with my cousins; we were very active, always finding new things to do, not necessarily appreciated by our parents. Uncle Norman wanted to impose a certain discipline among us, and he was certainly right to do so. His beautiful strong, operatic voice impressed me, but I was not sure he possessed the required qualities to keep urchins such as ourselves in check. He required that we arrive at table on time, well dressed, hair combed and with clean hands. We felt that this was justified and we even competed to see who would be best, so the outcome was positive. However his orders that we should spend two hours of study every evening before dinner quickly fell by the wayside. Our unwillingness to comply aided by the lack of enthusiasm of our mothers, led him to give up. but, not wanting to give in too easily, he tried to spend those two hours reading to us and giving us a commentary on a passage from the Bible. It was a very modest success that in fact lasted only two or three sessions. However the breadth of my uncle's knowledge was considerable and I was flabbergasted to hear him answer all my questions. You also, who had a great curiosity and was always in search of knowledge, had some impassioned debates with him as she had with Uncle Cham.

I was very proud of the cultured education of my dear mother. I later found out that during the fifteen years she had lived in Lyon, married to Jean Lecomte, she had continued her studies which had been curtailed in Madagascar, and that is why she held her own in these debates

I really liked Aunt Yvonne, Uncle Norman and my three cousins. After the war I was unable to resume contact, not knowing what had become of them. I'm still full of regrets that I didn't make more effort to find them.

Of Aunt Yvonne I still have the memory of a 'mother hen' blissfully peaceful, revelling in her position among her boys and her husband, while Uncle Norman looked on impassively.

I need so much to talk about it with Francis at the next family meeting; but when will I see him again?

*
* *

Autumn 1926

During the month of September we received a visit from a gentleman. He was well built and alert despite being a little overweight. I did not like his moustache much although it was very neat. I find all moustaches and beards ugly. But his personality pleased me; he observed things about him and showed a discrete interest in us which I admired. While You and Dany spoke to him, I inspected the Mathis

sports car in which he had arrived. I was soon joined by Mr. Boffo, the patron of the "Bas-Bréau" who, as any good Italian, was passionate about fast cars. As he ask me intrusive questions I escaped into the shop, but You called me and to my great joy told me that we were invited for a spin with our visitor,

The forest was beautiful and all three of us expressed the same wonder. It was a good point for 'him'. We went to Samois, a pretty village between The Seine and the forest, to stop in a lovely Inn on the village square. Drinks were ordered - grenadine syrup for me. A weird silence settled upon us which was very unusual. I eyed them both with puzzlement. Mother took her courage in both hands and told me "this gentleman is your father; he wanted to find out about you". Everything she said then got lost in the scramble in my mind mingling surprise, painful thoughts, emotion, anger and anguish. I could foresee major events and unbearable changes. We are so happy as we were; You, Dany and I, with Roger and Uncle Cham

In only three seconds everything turned upside down in my young head. But there was no question of crying or letting any emotion show. I replied "Ah Ok.Hello Sir" And hugged You to show that she was mine and nobody else's. He suggested that we have a fancy pastry and then visit the Abbé Rousseau, great-nephew of the painter, and priest of Samois, whom we liked and who visited us on his frequent visits to Barbizon. I jumped at the opportunity of settling my thoughts at my leisure, and I understood that You and my father had to talk about serious things. I told the whole story to Abbé Rousseau, who was actually very interested.

We returned to Barbizon by the attractive small road sandwiched between the trees and fields, which passes through Désert d'Aprémont, La tête de Chien, La Caverne des Brigands, etc.

At the base of the Côte de Sully, near the great oaks so loved by painters, a large deer, a beautiful male with impressive antlers, trotted, with a quiet purposeful step, to cross the road only fifty meters ahead of us; one of nature's marvels.

My father continued to expresses his strong enthusiasm until our journey's end. What is so extraordinary about seeing a deer? For us it was a fairly common sight. Why don't we appreciate the fact that we have the opportunity to see such exceptional beauty?

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After the amazing visit of Jean Poutet, my father, You explained to me that both of them had to take many decisions concerning my education and my studies. Seeing my worried look she reassured me "No, nothing immediate". Nothing would change for the next year or two. When one is only six years old, two years seems an age. We would therefore take advantage of the present, our current lives were well organized around our loves... the beautiful forest, our friends (each to his own), a shop which was showing a good profit, Barbizon our dream village where we were so well-established... for ever, it seemed.

But already an event, very important for all of us, was going to take place and change our stable relationships. At the same time it involved so much love and joy that, naturally, we rejoiced with Roger and Dany; they were to be married. It would be a beautiful village wedding bringing everyone into the heart of the Jacque family. The parents and all the siblings were very happy for their daughter and sister, but so moved and sad to lose her that it seemed as if they were losing her to a closed religious order,

After this memorable day, the newlyweds left for Lyon where Roger was required to present his wife to his father Jean Lecomte and his family, they would then settle in Le Mans where Roger had obtained work with Mutuelles d'Assurances.

Mother and I therefore realized that everything had to change. We were alone together, but for how long before again being separated? For her, who knew more than I, this situation must have been particularly agonizing. But she made sure that my usual 'don't care' attitude was not affected. My thanks are due to You. And I should keep on saying it.

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On the advice of Uncle Cham and Roger our first separation came quickly, You decided that I had to start doing serious studies in a private school chosen for me in Fontainebleau. I found two village friends there but the school didn't take external students so I found myself boarding with the housekeeper, the curator of the Château; returning to Barbizon each evening would be out of the question. I would however return to Barbizon every weekend. Mr and Madame Lhéliteau and their daughter welcomed me with kindness and did their best to ensure that I was not too disoriented. He was a well-built army man with a great love of his château and knowledgeable concerning its history. This passion would become mine when he showed me round on historical tours, I knew the marvels of my forest, and now discovered the outstanding beauties of architecture; richly decorated rooms, beautiful furnishings, gardens beautifully designed with magnificent ponds and water: the carp were favourites of mine.

The pleasant environment of the Castle and the Fontainebleau family ended up erasing the worst pangs of this separation. As a result, my school grades were positive and if I needed it, the weekends in Barbizon recharged my morale.

Fontainebleau is an attractive small town, worthy of its castle. The 'Bellifontains', as the inhabitants were known were proud of their city and were always willing to share its attractions. It was also a garrison town consisting mainly of the artillery, but it also had other units, particularly the Senegalese riflemen. We children were fascinated by these black faces, thick lips, bright white teeth and rolling eyes. We wished to approach them but did not know how, we felt uneasy and keep our distance; you never know.

Some of my classmates, having no real idea, confusing Mauritius, Madagascar and Senegal persuaded me that due to my mother origins I was the most qualified to establish contact. Not very enthused by this mission, but grabbing an opportunity to shine, one morning I took my courage in both hands and assuming a confident air I approached a large dumbfounded guardsman, saying 'Hello Bamboula', as I was advised by one of my know-all mates. My rifleman was fortunately not offended and, returned my 'hello' with a big smile that terrorised me, saying "I am not Bamboula, but Mamadou", and shook my hand. Emboldened, my friends also wanted to shake his hand which he did with obvious pleasure. Two or three other Senegalese were attracted to our small group and lots of handshakes, laughter and blah – blah followed. A climate of trust and understanding was established between little white kids and the big black ones; the news of our contact spread, and friendly relations became more established, and these brave riflemen came to be better understood by the city and its people.

*
* *

1927

The school year at Fontainebleau went well. I continued to discover the city and its castle, either on my own or with my mates, always with the same enthusiasm generated by curiosity no doubt, but also that of freedom and independence, which had been instilled within me, and which I tried to use as wisely as possible. I learnt this in Barbizon, in the plain and forest, to come and go freely, encouraged early on by You, Roger, Dany to recognize the essential benchmarks: good, bad, danger, beautiful, ugly, etc. without which we cannot aspire to higher things or even take our first steps; and then come the days which cannot conceive, when things become so different. Formerly it was rare to suffer from any crime, traffic was light and we ate biologically without knowing what it meant. Dyes, preservatives, frozen foods, fridges, artificial insemination, pesticides, etc., did not exist. "Petit Fontainebleau", the wonderful white cheese, wrapped in a thin muslin and placed in a small box made of thin strips of wood to fit, all would change. Pollution was non-existent, it would appear little by little with technological developments and the race for profit; an inevitable evolution, with possibly fatal consequences for our planet.

In cities we were lit up willy-nilly by gas lights, leading to the employment of the famous gas-lighters. Horses drawn cars were more numerous than cars and trucks, horses were used in many ways: pulling passengers, various consumables, heavy materials etc. Wooden setts that paved a large part of the streets of Paris were so slippery, especially in the rain and in the winter, that they were a constant danger to these brave horses. Sometimes animals with broken hips had to be put down. Electricity was used for lighting homes and offices but was of only 110 volts at 25Hertz producing a flickering light that tired one's eyes.

The telephone in a wooden box on the wall consisted of:

- a crank to turn to call the switchboard that would put you in touch with your correspondent, often after waiting for many minutes.
- A fixed trumpet into which one had to speak loud and clear.
- A mobile listening piece at the end of the wire.

All this is quite unimaginable in today's world.

Paris-Marseille by train (P.L.M. = Paris-Lyon-Marseille) took fifteen or very often 18 hours with locomotives using coal (using one "driver" and only one engineer) whose smoke particles got into the eyes of those who poked their head out of the window. We also had wireless telegraphy (radio), i.e. radio, the only way to receive the 'News' (other than by newspapers), listen to music, etc. The reception was still very poor, nevertheless it was a luxury, as was T.V. when it came out.

As for the duration of the working week, it was in general closer to sixty than fifty hours. "Holidays" did not exist until about 1936, not really accepted, or granted, by the ruling classes and the bourgeoisie, it must be said; but that is another story

This has been a long digression distancing us from our subject. I am pleased to clarify the context of the environment and times in which the early years of my childhood took place, compared to our current era some things may seem quite amazing, even unbelievable.

As the summer holidays arrived I found my true bearings again in Barbizon. "Returning Spirit" might be appropriate words as my feeling of being a 'child of the woods' is, in a way, close to those of Mowgli in the story that I loved and dreamt about.

I was now faced with a problem that I absolutely needed to resolve quickly, at the risk of immediate conflict with You.

The problem was called 'Djinn', a pretty white goat of which I became the owner through the generosity of Mr. Leclerc, one of the few inhabitants of the village who willingly came to chat at the shop, a friend, as well as a client when he discovered some rare object he liked. Mr. Leclerc was a former clown who had experienced a real notoriety during a long career in major circuses and important music halls. He was now an old man, alert, funny and a talented part-time poet, writing some pretty good poems, which he liked to recite to us.

In Rue Diaz which leads to the cemetery (it is for this reason I mention it), he lived with his wife (herself a former tightrope walker) in a rustic farmhouse, furnished very simply but comfortable and welcoming.

Around their House, they owned lots of land, a sort of mini-park where many semi-wild animals lived, leading a type of Noah's Ark existence: dogs and cats of course, chickens and rabbits, goats, sheep, as well as a small rescued doe which was quite tame. It was an amazing menagerie, shown at its best at the end of day at a specific time when two or three squirrels descended from their trees to scavenge a few food scraps and quickly returned to disappear in the high branches.

One evening my friend Marcel and I were scrumping in the small orchard with no fencing, at least that was our excuse, opposite the Leclerc 'Circus', across the street. Among these trees were the best apples I have ever tasted.. Suddenly we heard the voice of Mr. Leclerc angrily shouting at us, in fact saying "pick some for me". We felt guilty at having been found out but being reassured by Mr. Leclerc attitude we quickly descended from our apple tree and gave him a dozen of these exquisite fruit. Seeing our young curious looks into his garden and its animals, he asked us in and introduced us. As I showed a great interest in the white goats he gave me gift of a pretty kid whom we call Djinn. Marcel was given a rabbit which his family would surely allow him to keep.

I very soon found that my kid was anything but an easy pet. Playing with it was fun, but its sharp horns started to hurt. Feeding it was not easy either as it preferred rose leaves and young shrubs from the garden rather than that which was given to him. It sometimes managed to get into the house where it made a mess and had to be unceremoniously thrown out. Not really very surprised, about ten days later, when returning with my friends from an expedition in the forest, I found instead of Djinn two beautiful kittens that Mr. Leclerc, very understandingly had given to You as a replacement for our white tornado. These two kittens have their own story, but it has no place here.

In the course of the summer of 1927 we were visited by a lady with the somewhat austere appearance, wearing a large veil which covered her head and fell fully onto her shoulders and back. This stranger was my father, Jean Poutet's sister; Renée Pelle des Forges. She lived at Versailles with her husband, a naval officer, with their two daughters. She came to an agreement with her brother, to find a solution that would allow me to separate gradually from my mother, after which I would go and live with my paternal family to continue my education and studies. I'd move to Versailles in the care of my Aunt for the first half of the following year before joining the Poutet family in the South for the summer. During this time You and I would see each other quite often. The idea was that life in the family with my two young cousins (ten and thirteen years old) would allow me to make as smooth transition as possible. You was as anxious as I, but nevertheless convinced that my departure to my father's home was the best solution for my future; she therefore accepted it, which seemed reasonable.

After the departure of "Aunt Renée" there were long silences between us.

It was during this summer that a love of aviation was born within me which would remain with me for life. First of all I met, at Marcel Roy's, his uncle, Maurice Rossi, then a young pilot of twenty-seven years old but already known in the world of aeronautics. He would be synonymous with Costes, the Brix brothers, Codes, Bellonte, Mermoz, Doret, Détrouy Assolant, Lefèvre and many others, French aviators that between 1920 and 1940 would take French aviation worldwide, undertaking rallies, aerobatics and various other exploits. Rossi spoke readily of his craft, his training, the career ladder, but also of the many difficulties, not allowing me to think that it was a profession where prestige could be acquired without suffering, and above all of having to be responsible for one's own actions.

He spoke common sense, the same common sense as a few years later Henri Farman, the great aircraft manufacturer and himself a pilot would give me. He owned an attractive villa on the road to Chailly from Barbizon where he frequently went on holiday with his wife. He travelled in his personal plane to 'Villa Coublay' landing across the road in a field that belonged to him. It is difficult to imagine it happening today. I was fourteen when one fine day, I had an irresistible desire to go and see this major figure in aviation.

I was feeling nervous as I rang the bell at the gate, but there was no question of turning back. Madam Farman received me very kindly, and after consulting her husband introduced me to him in a vast room with antique furniture, walls covered with countless books on bookshelves which also held many aircraft models. Sitting behind an imposing desk, Henri Farman without inviting me to sit, questioned me about my family, my studies, my motivations relating to aviation, and eventually asked me what I expected of him. A little taken aback by this questioning, I lost the thread of the fine plan of attack that I had painstakingly developed. I improvise as best I could, which was not very well, due to the haughty appearance, slim and tanned, of an unsmiling, greying, sixty year old gentleman who gave no quarter leaving me standing there like a lower rank before his general. A small bright spark came to me in a moment: perhaps behind this rigid, apparently unfriendly exterior I was simply being tested. My own love of aeroplanes then came to the rescue, like a kick in the back I found the confidence to explain the various reasons which I had harboured for a long time, eventually leading to what seemed to me be a real vocation. I asked for his advice on what I should do to become a professional pilot. I saw a slight smile, an easing of tension and I was asked to sit down. Over a quarter of an hour he impressed upon me that even if I had a vocation and perhaps because of it, nothing would happen unless I worked hard, even if the work was difficult and sometimes in adversity or discouraged, one should never lose sight of the object of one's dreams and the ultimate goal would without doubt become reality.

Then studies and yet more studies: I should have to pass the baccalaureate, study mathematics and join an aero club, then do my military service or join the Armée de l'air (depending on my future career), I should try everywhere to do my best and never, ever, be discouraged whatever the setbacks.

This was the set agenda, the Farman secret, for anyone who claimed to have vocation. That was the price to pay to attain one's goal.

These ideas had within them a lot of common sense which would keep me going but coming from this character whose enjoyed worldwide fame filled me with enthusiasm and energy, and its author little by little began also to take on some of my infectious enthusiasm, so much so that I almost wanted to cheer. "Come back to see me in two years' time" he said as he showed me the door to his office. The time would soon pass.

While remaining faithful to my classmates, I spent more time in my walks with You because I felt that they would come to an end and we needed to enjoy them while we could. We did our best, with all our heart, all our strength, alternating between laughter and serious conversation which always

concluded with tender hugs. Doing this I learnt to appreciate the flat plain, the magnificent plain celebrated by Millet with his "Angelus" and his "Gleaners". The light, the colours, and the smells were very different for a child familiar with the woods.

The summer of 1927 went by without any incident of note. Our gang continued its wild expeditions through countryside and forest. We were not always popular with the forest rangers but the rural policeman whose son Denis was one of our gang could sometimes smooth things over. We took full advantage of this to come up with all sorts of monkey business, when his father, having several times warned us of what could happen, doffed his official bicorn hat and proclaimed in front of us all: "let all the people hear..." This was the usual precursor followed by a ticking-off ordered by The Mayor or by the whole Council; the lecture always ended with the ominous words "Thus it shall be" followed by even more dire warnings. But You knew how to convey her feeling for this place to me, make me see and feel the wonder that emanated from this place, even if it was just a flat plain. It is through You that I came to understand the flatlands.

Twenty years later, crossing the Argentine pampas I would re-live this emotion, this exaltation. When the Andes chain of mountains came into sight, contrasting with the expanse of the plains I had the feeling that You, who had died three years previously, was in communion with me

Sometimes during our walks, to break a long silence, I asked You to whistle one of our favourite tunes, which she could do beautifully. Whistling like singing, by any standard, was an art which had its interpreters. The most numerous and the best were English, sometimes Italian but mainly English. Was this a benefit that England bestowed on Mauritius, at that time an English colony? Was this where You derived this talent she used so well to delight and sometimes surprise those of her loved ones, family and friends, who took a real pleasure in listening to her? Sacred music - Schubert's Ave Maria and Gounod, Handel's Largo and other many beautiful works - as well as tunes in vogue at the time; she had a wide repertoire. One should be aware that if her interpretations often enraptured the audience, it could sometimes happen that a somewhat sour reaction would come from a stuck-up spoilsport. This was the case when Jean Lecomte, her husband, presented Suzanne, his young wife, to his Lyon family. Madame Lecomte, Jean's mother, had gone to great pains and had gathered, all --and they were many apparently -- members of this great family, or clan, together in the mansion inherited from her parents. Suzanne de Chazal, due to her origins, was not impressed by her husband's family, and if she had kept to the reserved demeanour expected of a young wife presented to her in-laws, at the end of this solemn dinner, it would have been considered that she had passed the examination with distinction. Both sides would have been satisfied.

It was then that Jean Lecomte, everybody having taken their place in the drawing room, wished his family to appreciate the whistling talents of his young and beautiful wife. The idea was probably not the best, but being encouraged to do so, Suzanne, despite an understandable reluctance, was obliged to concur. First it was "La Norma", followed by a rendition of 'Ave Maria' and finally a tune popular at the time "Ay-Ay-Ay". Little by little, the atmosphere softened, and Suzanne gaining in confidence, at the end of this mini-recital received considerable applause, especially on the part of the gentlemen, who, it must be said, came to congratulate her on her performance. In the silence that followed however, a high, icy voice delivered in a reproachful tone was heard to say: "this is the first time I have heard whistling in a salon". Of course not a voice was raised against Aunt Amélie whose authority and fortune demanded that all her words were gospel, and heaven forbid that she be contradicted. Everything considered Suzanne would not have cared if Jean Lecomte had supported her, but he adopted the same flat attitude as the other members of the family, keeping quiet and embarrassed in front of the unthinking, autocratic, sour old Aunt. This lack of support was perhaps already there, a germ of nascent misunderstandings. I am able to write these lines only with the passing of time.

Towards the end of summer 1927, mother having a day off, went to Fontainebleau to visit some friends who owned a large antique shop in Rue de France, I was also present. Mr and Madame Salmon were very old and in poor health since the death of their youngest son in a motorcycle accident, He had been a friend of my brother Maurice, who had arranged for him to buy a beautiful Terrot Sport motorbike; their passion for motorbikes had naturally drawn them together. The death of Yo, and his friend just one year after, had brought You and the Salmons into a friendship where they could talk about memories, probably painful, but helpful because of the mutual understanding.

Our hosts wanted to meet You to propose that she look after their shop until next spring. On their doctor's advice they would go to live in their apartment in Menton where the climate was more favourable

Business was very quiet in Barbizon once the summer was over so You gladly gave her assent to this proposal. We would thus be able to live together in Fontainebleau, for the next three months in the best of conditions before my departure for Versailles and the Poutet family.

It was thus that I was able to resume my studies in my school in Fontainebleau as well as joining You every night in the apartment which was lent to us at 77 Rue de France. We were aware of the imminent prospect of our separation but experienced three months of great happiness there. Those three months remains one of the highlights of my life.

PART II

VERSAILLES

January 1928

You and I had just spent the first day of January together at Henri and Renée Pelle des Forges' home in Versailles.

On a cold but sunny winter's day my father Jean Poutet's sister, Aunt Renée, had striven to make as pleasant as possible, in order to help soften the separation that You and I felt so apprehensive about. Mother set out my things in a pretty little room prepared for me. Mitchou my teddy bear, given to me for Christmas 1923, was placed on my bed.

The time had come for us to separate. You would telephone within the week; from Aunt Marguerite's in Paris where she would stay for a while. We would also meet again in two weeks' time. Aunt Renée went with her to the station and I saw them disappear into the cold night into the fog that had fallen on the grey and sad city. It was one of two or three turning points in my life that had just taken place. Why are "the big people" unable to understand the despair of little boys?

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x x

The Pelle des Forges lived in a beautiful old building at N°1 Boulevard du Roi, one of the finest roads in Versailles; in a luxurious, large, beautiful apartment, at the junction with Boulevard de la Reine. My Uncle Henri was a naval officer, actually a corvette Captain, waiting for a command. He was alert, slim and short, resembling a fawn, bright-eyed, always active. He had a strong reputation for integrity and severity. His tempers, which were quite frequent, were not specially directed against his family or relatives but more often concerned professional and political issues. They manifested themselves in a very particular way. Without any warning he would start pacing up and down wringing his hands more and more vigorously, walking faster and faster. He could sometimes walk several kilometres expressing his anger. At the end of this demonstration he would rush to his office and write; usually several pages of angry, almost illegible text but pleasing to the eye. We would never know the cause of this process. The written pages would more often than not concern a review of the Navy, sometimes, if it was a political matter, they were posted to Colonel de la Roque, a friend and head of the "Croix de Feu"⁷

Uncle Henri had a very patriotic strain which he was unable to moderate under any circumstances. This caused him some difficulties when on certain assignments as military advisor to an Embassy abroad. At the declaration of war in 1939 he was captain of a ship in Toulon and, after the armistice, in an office working for the Naval Ministry in Vichy. In addition to his work at the Ministry, he collaborated with two newspapers. The "Gringoire"⁸ was widely read. As it was considered a collaborationist paper it placed him in an awkward situation with regard to most of his friends opposed to the German occupation. He no doubt suffered. Actually the articles he wrote contained encoded information destined for the Resistance and the Allies. He was denounced, arrested and deported to Auschwitz from where he would not return.

Uncle Henri had a strong personality and a strong penchant for pretty women. His wife was accommodating; herself being very attracted by good looking men. I often heard her discuss with

delight the beauty of Serb officers, memories of a stay in Yugoslavia. Uncle Henri took on an absent, indifferent, detached air, seeming for the moment to be out of it, like a seagull swooping over the ocean.

My Aunt Renée was a strong woman with a complex, strong personality shown as much by her physique as by her character. Her megalomania was poorly hidden and sometimes led to uncertain behaviour or even immorality, which came to the fore in the aftermath of the war. This came to a head in an incident against her brother Jean Poutet, this dishonest episode will be related later.

The history of the surname 'Pelle des Forges' is more amusing

Uncle Henri's father was in fact Mr Desforges, who had married a young lady Pelle, originating from a village of the Hautes-Alpes: Aspres-les-Corps. My dear Aunt managed to persuade the administrations concerned, with all the trickery and stubbornness that she possessed, using every opportunity and shenanigan, eventually allowing him to manipulate the name to 'des Forges' and precede it by 'Pelle', thus creating a suitable name for a great career in the Navy, as well as obtaining acceptance into aristocratic circles.

The qualities of this woman's intelligence were real. She possessed a strong general cultural sense. She prepared her eldest daughter for her baccalaureate in philosophy, enabling her to achieve a 'good' mark. This is probably anecdotal, but I've also seen her effectively helping her husband draft some tactful writing. Knowing the requirements and the attention to detail that Uncle Henri brought to everything he did, this was not easy.

Aunt Renée was first and foremost a frustrated musician. Her piano performances of the classics clearly indicated a near professional talent. She also had a beautiful contralto voice with a wide range, encompassing an extensive repertoire. She was a soloist in the chorus of the Ste Chapelle. With her friend Madame d'Aboville, they enjoyed musical afternoons that enraptured me. In truth, Aunt Renée had a real feeling for acting, something she acknowledged and willingly confessed to. There is no doubt she could have been a great actress of tragedies or an excellent Tosca. Drama was, I think, embedded in her nature.

As for my two cousins, they were older; Monique by three, and Anne by six years; they were more familiarly known as Monette and Nany. They were, the one as much as the other, very kind towards me, as were their parents, helping me to integrate into this branch of my paternal family. Until the war we would always maintain a loving relationship. Later they proved much less sympathetic, as issues of interest will become clear. But this is another story.

x
x x

From the day of my arrival at their home, my Uncle, Aunt and cousins made every effort to distract and interest me in other things so as to stop me thinking of the sad thoughts that troubled my mind. It was thus that little by little I was gradually introduced to the wonders of Versailles which finally captivated and enchanted me.

Bizarrely, although I felt some respect for the splendid Louis XIV castle, I viewed it with some hostility because I could not bear that it be compared to that of "my" castle at Fontainebleau. It was explained that they were actually two great masterpieces, very different in style and scale and therefore not comparable in their magnificence. This suited me perfectly as both castles could be considered as equals.

Another comparison would come to my Aunt's my mind to which I was not able to find a satisfactory answer. At Versailles I discovered Louis XIV, the great Sun King, but up to now I had always considered Napoleon as the greatest historical figure, and Fontainebleau the greatest building. I therefore had to make a decision. The obvious question was, who and which was the better: Napoleon or Louis XIV? I asked myself and others this question frequently, without getting any clear response, my question was rebuffed. As I saw things, I was sad to discover that adults seemed to lack the knowledge and courage to face this dilemma.

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From the early days of January I was enrolled in a private institution, Le Course Gufflé, to continue my studies. The two sisters Gufflé, ladies of an uncertain age, seemingly BC - BG⁹, were really clever; one in the sciences, the other in the literary field, great assets, much appreciated by the affluent families of Versailles who entrusted them with a large part of the education of their offspring. The open air, loose life I had led, made it difficult to adapt to this snobbish atmosphere, but I very quickly made a few good friends which helped my integration. In all modesty, I confess that my results very soon set me up among the best, which was much appreciated by my Uncle, my Aunt and my cousin Nany, who was also a very good student; not so much Monette whose studies did not go so well, and who was jealous of my success.

Every Sunday we went together to mass. The choir was great. I specially liked the male voices (which continues to be the case), I believe women voices need to be exceptional to be melodious.

Leaving the Church, a very pleasant weekly ritual took us to the "Three Tricks", the best pastry shop in town; so called because above the main door was a large painting of three monkeys feasting on various cakes. Well-off families were often seen here. It was an opportunity for a good gossip and to see the excesses of the ladies.

The winter was very cold, ice covered all the fountains and ponds. From the main façade of the palace one has a beautiful perspective of the Grand Canal, which although wide, maintained an average 20-30 cm thickness of ice which attracted skaters, however in some places it was much less thick, and some drownings or crowd related accidents had occurred. A large safe area was now marked out and my cousins and I took the opportunity to try skating. It was a wonderful discovery.

In February, I was to have the immense joy of spending three days with Mum in Paris at Aunt Marguerite's. I liked the warm and comfortable atmosphere of her apartment and above all, the loving serenity of our Aunt. My affection for her was even greater when I heard by chance in the chit-chat of conversation when she kindly told You that she should perhaps not have to live separate from me. But I had known for a long time that Mum had made this decision "for my own good", I could not doubt her or resent the fact.

During the night it began to snow heavily and the next day You and I went for a long walk, well dressed and shod. She told me lots of stories about Mauritius and Madagascar. I suspected that there was a little embellishment, nevertheless these stories thrilled me. You was a great storyteller and furthermore she expressed herself well, and spoke in a very pleasant way. Just as with "the big folk" that is to say adults, she used a wide expressive vocabulary, fair and precise terms well suited to the subject, and with intonations that enraptured me, I occasionally caught a little creole accent creeping in, with the same accent that Uncle Cham, Aunt Yvonne and Aunt Marguerite spoke with, and also Cham's childhood friend Alice of whom I will speak later.

Sometimes, instead of a story, You recited a poem. At Barbizon, at a very early age she had given me the taste for poetry. Even if I did not always understand the meaning of some verses (perhaps in some cases she deemed it not useful to linger), I loved the rhythm and music that it evoked. Usually we chose a poem at random from one of the three anthologies of French poets she liked best. They were mainly of the period 1860-1915 and had been given to her by Jean Poutet during their “blue” period.

Both had lightly noted in pencil their favourite poems with a silhouette of a bird in flight, and sometimes two, depending on the beauty of the verse. Subsequently I used these signs to indicate my appreciation of other poems.

And it is not without emotion even now, that from time to time I delve back into these volumes. They form part of the rare things that once belonged to mum, and were stored in an outhouse belonging to the Bard family at Sanary, which I retrieved after the terrible bombing of August 13, 1944, when You, Roger, Dany and Pouné their daughter, who had gathered there, were all killed.

My return to Versailles was less sad than I thought it would be, because my heart and spirit were recharged by the memories of these three wonderful days with You, our lovely Aunt and great-Aunt. If a little spleen came to fog my thoughts I would draw randomly on these memories and the sun would shine again.

Those around me ensured that nothing came to hinder my wellbeing.” I knew the Castle, its beautiful parks and ponds. We then went on to the Grand, and Petit Trianon. Whilst I could admire the first for its size and its beautiful forms, and also for its maze nestled at the bottom of the grand staircase, so full of mystery for the child that I was. But my favourite was the Petit Trianon, for its elegant setting, the charm that it exuded, and the history that permeated it

At Aunt Renée, when we returned, I stated that it was there that I wanted to live. She gave me a quizzical look which I took to be of affectionate surprise, which no doubt to her, was probably seen as a contradiction

At the same time, I did not hide the sadness I felt at the thought that a pretty Queen, loved so much, lived at this beautiful site before wicked people came to behead her. My little head had mixed thoughts, but I loved to linger there

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On a beautiful evening in the month of May, an important event took place, important for me at any rate. The Pelle des Forges were to host a large reception to which all their Versailles friends, as well as some civilian and military figures were invited. I was very quickly taken up by the preparations, and in particular by the setting up of an extensive buffet supervised by my Aunt supplemented by an imposing Maître d’hôtel assisted by three or four servers. My enthusiasm was somewhat curtailed when I was severely told off for taking a few samples of beautiful and tasty morsels from the loaded trays which I had not been discreet enough to hide. I was surprised also by the triangular shape of some of the canapés and had sought to improve their shape by biting off the pointy bits. Not a good idea!

Nany, my eldest cousin, lorded it over us, Monette and me, because her parents had granted her permission to participate in this gala evening; her first. Monette and I were allowed exceptionally, to stay up until ten o'clock, provided that we remain as discrete possible.

Among the first arrivals came my Uncle and Aunt’s closest friends: the d’Aboville. It was with Madame d’Aboville that my Aunt enjoyed the musical afternoons that delighted me so much. They were a family of giants, well known in Versailles. Their two sons Jean, twenty-two years old was the elder and Alain nineteen years. With their father they all three exceed one metre ninety-five and their

mother was one meter eighty, pretty impressive, but they were all good looking and charming. Alain, it seemed, was the darling of girls of all ages. His keen intelligence, his humour, his antics and his great kindness, made him a very attractive boy and some mothers thought him an ideal partner for their daughters. A few years later Alain took a decision which would cause many to shed a tear. He would answer to only one call; that of Our Lord, and he joined the Benedictine order to become a humble monk.

I was very impressed by the spectacular arrival of an Admiral displaying his best uniform flanked by several naval officers. My Uncle understood the courtesies required in this world of his but he gave nothing more. He would never be a “careerist”, and I always admired this trait in him. On the other hand my Aunt gave her all, paying special attention to the Admiral whose wife came to temper her enthusiasm

Among the guests Monette and I looked in the crowd for a distinguished, good looking boy, who, although very famous, had retained his sense of modesty and shyness and was surrounded by admirers. He had just completed a fabulous tour of the world by plane in the company of another famous airman Dieudonné Costes. His name was Joseph Le Brlx¹⁰, originally a naval man who later became a great pilot of world famous rallies. He was only twenty-eight years old and disappeared three years later attempting a flight from Paris to Tokyo.

Colonel de la Roque arrived and a great silence descended in the crowd. He had behaved in a remarkable way during the 1914-18 war and was a very good friend of my uncle. He was highly influential in the world of veterans and in political circles of the right. He would become President of the Croix de Feu, and then the OGP¹¹. It appears that he lacked that extra push which would have permitted him; with the popularity he then enjoyed, to defeat the Popular Front. This episode provoked one of Uncle Henri’s rages. Both of them resisted the German occupation, each in their different way. They were both deported. François de la Roque was able to return, but his health was severely impaired and he would die in 1946 at the age of sixty-one. His daughter Nadine was a great friend of Monette. I found her to be unattractive and was not very friendly with her. I very much regretted this stupid behaviour when she died of leukaemia five or six years later. I will relate later the circumstances of my encounter, and my friendship, with her brother Gilles forty years later.

It was now ten o'clock and my cousin and I had to go to our rooms as agreed; however the hubbub of voices reached us and this was soon replaced by music. I recognised the waltzes of Chopin, probably played by my Aunt, then her beautiful contralto accompanied by Madame d'Aboville. Finally we heard a beautiful tenor voice interpreting the Invitation to the Baudelaire Travels, with music by Duparc. I recognised the voice of the soloist of the choir of our parish.

The great silence that followed the departure of the guests woke us up, Monette and me, and we ended up barefoot on the threshold of the now empty grand salon now sad and full of unpleasant odours. Aunt Renée saw us, and while the staff were busy putting all in order, kindly allowed us have nibble of two or three canapés along with a drop of champagne. Her somewhat vague look and her high pitched chuckle took us by surprise. No doubt I have dwelt longer than I should on this evening, the first to which I was able to partially attend, a foretaste of many where it would be a matter of participating rather than attending. It was as a child of seven or eight years that I began to discover a new, altogether surprising, world. I believe that from that night my relationship with the adult world began to change. In some ways I began to perceiving flaws in their life, subsequently this grew to be more obvious, and I felt some disenchantment.

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One sunny April morning, I had the impression that the world belonged to me and I woke up with my heart singing for joy. I teased my two cousins who, I don't know why, looked sad. They had headaches, a fever and great difficulty in swallowing their breakfast. The doctor would diagnose scarlet fever, fighting it would be a slow process. Very contagious, catching it seemed inevitable but obviously we had to take all precautionary measures. The two girls were treated in their room, isolated from the outside world and especially their little cousin. At least fifteen days!

Elise, the maid from Normandy who had been in the service of the family for more than 10 years, took me over completely. She looked after me with admirable dedication, kindness, patience and above all efficiency. Morning and evening she gave me a rub over my whole body with a strong, high-dose of spirit of camphor. We spent all our time outside in the fresh air and Elise and I became great friends. I told her that in Barbizon at "Les Glycines" we also had an Elise, very nice, almost as nice as her, but not quite. She assured me that all Elises' were the same. Then, little by little, my little cousins gradually got better and I escaped, to the amazement of the doctor.

Many thanks are due to my marvellous Elise.

Two other notable events took place during my stay with the Pelle des Forges family at Versailles. Firstly the poisoning of the Swiss Lake, It was a beautiful body of water located below the Castle on the vast esplanade, at the bottom of a beautiful garden planted with orange trees, rightly known as the Orangery. Was it an act of malice or an unexplained natural phenomenon? The two hypotheses have their advocates with strong arguments, but without any evidence. The result, however, was very real. The surface of the Lake was white with thousands of fish floating belly up and emitting a stench that one could smell more than a kilometre away. Despite my young age, I felt as much sadness as a real animal rights protester of today. All Versailles was to be found around the Swiss Lake, thousands of handkerchiefs were shoved under noses to mitigate the smell. The crowd of people with handkerchiefs under their nose were as much of a show as the fascinating rotting object of curiosity.

For me, it was the faces and the handkerchiefs which took my interest. The thousands of grimacing faces, clown-like, that fascinated me and also scared me a little at the same time. I read in them many various feelings: curiosity, sadness, anger, infinite goodness, but sometimes also a kind of unhealthy pleasure, badly hidden, evidenced by some when faced by a more or less dramatic event. A further step in my discovery little by little, of the world of the "grown-up".

I came to like a gentleman with a disfigured face - a "broken jaws" who told me that faces do not necessarily convey the essence of a person, that beauty does not always express beauty. Just as Aunt Renee - whose ugliness disappeared behind her beautiful sadness, as if she had just lost a dear friend. This surprised me, but thanks to him I would no longer have any fear of disfigured people.

But what a sight these countless handkerchiefs in their variety were; size, colour, texture and their aesthetics. From the huge, grimy check or dark brownish handkerchief to the small, refined elegantly decorated and embroidered ones taken from an impeccable white case by a gentleman with gilded glasses and a cane surmounted by a precious knob, or by the infinite number of handkerchiefs of all colours and uncertain cleanliness of the general Mr and Madame of this world.

On the way back my mind kept thinking of rotting fish, grimacing faces and handkerchiefs of all kinds. That night, unusually for me, my sleep was disturbed and populated by bad dreams.

The second event that occurred in the month of June, prior to our departure for the Midi, was an absolutely magical show: the night of the "Grandes Eaux". On that night some of the most important and magnificent ponds and lakes of the Park were beautifully illuminated, in particular the fountains, some of which, such as The Dragon, rose to more than 30 meters. The play of light was expertly and

artistically designed, and the show made a truly remarkable whole. This was my first night out, and it was for me a very real wonder, truly enchanting. I had the opportunity to see this same show thirty years later, no doubt was it artistically more sophisticated and technically more advanced, but I didn't have the same poetry, the same harmony with Mansart and Lenôtre¹². These two, if they had had the same technical means and lighting, what could they have achieved; certainly something sublime.

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I was just eight years old! June 7th 1928, Mum came to celebrate it with us at Versailles, it was a great joy. After lunch we went for a walk, just the two of us. We spoke little but felt somehow happy and sad at the same time. Did we have an inkling that this was to be my last birthday with her? During this walk, in the magnificent and huge park, we suddenly discovered near to the Grand Trianon, a tennis court around which a few people crowded, apparently very interested. Once or twice at Barbizon I had had the opportunity to see some players engage in this sport which had not interested me greatly, the players that I had seen in action, it must be said, were probably not very adept. But the four that we now saw through the fencing I could see were truly exceptional. Their attitude, their speed, beauty and strength of their strokes impressed me and I could not look away, to such an extent that You, at my insistence, sought information from a spectator as to who these people were. They were none other than our famous French champions that the tennis aficionados had named the Four Musketeers: Borotra, Lacoste, Cochet and Brugnon.

Near the referee's chair two other players watched them and, from time to time, exchanged some words with them relative to the game. They were Boussus, known as the "left-hander", of the same standard as the first four, and a friend of them all and Alain Gerbaut, the famous navigator made famous by his solo trips around the world. He was an excellent player, but not at the same level of the others.

I was so fascinated by this exceptional performance, given by these great champions who had come to this quiet corner to train for Wimbledon and the Davis Cup, that You had some difficulty tearing me away from the fence.

This unexpected incident probably led to my great passion for tennis. Twelve years later the fortunes of life dictated that I should work for two years under Borotra, while at the same time I became great friends with Yvon Petra, who was then the better tennis player. Sometimes they used me as a substitute when missing a fourth for a scratch double. It was a great pleasure for me despite the abuse that I had to suffer. It always ended with a cold beer.

This birthday remains in my memory still. When it was necessary go our separate ways, I realized without doubt, that for the foreseeable future there would be a long 900 Kms between You and me. I became obsessed with these 900 Kilometres. It was the distance between Barbizon (Paris) and Roquevaire (Marseille) that Uncle Henri had told me it was when I asked him the question. I could understand 50 kilometres from Paris to Barbizon as we had many times made this trip. But 900 kilometres was immense and exceeded what my imagination could conceive. The 40,000 kilometres distance to Ecuador that my finger could discern on the map seemed unreal, but with a bit of thought I could understand it, but the actual 900 kilometres between You and me was a cruel enormity. This was the topic of my conversation with Aunt Renée returning from the train station where we had accompanied my dear mother. Not very convincing replies, true to say.

I had to revisit You early in July again in Paris, before the big departure, for the different world of 'La Provence'. Uncle Henri had an appointment at the Ministry and had taken me with him. You was waiting for me at the station, and we spent all day at her childhood friend Alice Rabah, Rue du Dr

Blanche, in their villa, now demolished. The beautiful houses in this street near the Avenue Mozart have been replaced with large buildings; the developers have had their way with them; what a shame.

Alice had a nice creole accent; more pronounced than You's, retained from Mauritius or Madagascar, I never really knew which. I never knew her maiden name, which would have helped to place her country of birth. She first married a Mr Hanning whom I never knew, with whom she had two children: Pearly, the eldest, whom I met twenty years later in Buenos Aires, and Gerald who belonged to the same scout group as me, the troop called 'Eclaireurs de Passy', from 1930 to 36. Divorced from Hanning, Alice then remarried Mr. Rabah who was self-employed as an inventor, which was a precarious profession. Rabah was however a talented engineer, he was creative, and exhibited his works widely in many shows. His success was erratic, but they lived well enough from his work. In particular, he invented a loom which was a real success.

From this second marriage Alice produced a son who was nicknamed Mouki (his real name escapes me) who was charming and at a very young age showed a real talent as a painter and sculptor. He obtained the 1st prize for painting at the great Rome exhibition.

At the end of the afternoon, we had to leave the friendly Rabah family to find Uncle Henri at the station at the predetermined time. In the subway, to overcome our confusion, we talked a lot, above all promising to write frequently to each other about everything, relating every detail as extensively as possible. We even managed to laugh by recalling some incident of no importance which helped to keep our composure.

At the station Uncle Henri, skilfully and tactfully shortened our goodbyes. On the way back to Versailles he paid particular attention to me with some skill, imbued with great tenderness. I was surprised and impressed to discover so much kindness and sensitivity in this naval man of rough appearance and cold temperament, so that my anguish was much diminished. I never had the opportunity to enjoy his company again as I did on this day. But I now knew that under this shell hid a heart of gold. During this half hour train journey I learned more about the Navy and sailors than I would learn in many years following, so he knew how keep my interest.

PART III

THE POUTET FAMILY

ROQUEVAIRE-STUDIES

Early on a hot and sunny July morning five of us alighted on the platform of Marseille-St-Charles after sixteen hours of a long and tiring journey which we had not yet completed.

We transferred our many cases with the help of two porters into the luggage van of the train with the engine already steaming, which was ready to take us from Marseille to Roquevaire which would take an hour to cover this final short step of 25 Kilometres.

I had almost forgotten the accent of the people here. I found it ugly and vulgar; I would soon learn that the southern accent varies significantly, depending on the region and the people; that of Marseille and the surrounding area being the most harsh. I noted later that the Midi accent can be beautiful when sung, for example in the Camargue or in Haute-Provence.

Our tortoise-like train stopped frequently: La Blancarde, la Pomme, St-Marcel, La Penne, Aubagne, Pont-de-l'Étoile – and finally Roquevaire.

On the platform, I immediately recognised my father who was with two well-built men who would look after the luggage. For the first time we embraced, he smelt of good eau de Cologne. People greeted him with apparent deference “Bonjour Monsieur Jean”, as one would address “The Boss”. There was some justification as he was the owner of the “Plâtrières”¹³, the family business that employed most of the men of the village. Everyone addressed me as “Monsieur Jacky”; which embarrassed me to start with, nevertheless, rather stupidly, gave me a little feeling of pride.

My father seemed to be in a hurry, everything had to be done quickly. Without delay we had to get into the two cars which were waiting for us, the luggage would follow. Midday approached, and ‘Bonne-Maman’ (it is thus that I and my cousins had to address her), my paternal grandmother, had prepared a celebration lunch which it seemed could not be delayed. Passing the Church Aunt Renée told me that it was a Poutet ancestor who had financed and managed its construction. It was a large, solid and quite beautiful building, of which the village was proud despite its poor acoustics, which concerned me greatly.

We stopped in Rue Longue so called because it ran the full length of the old village before stopping in front of a big, beautiful mansion, several floors high.

Bonne-Maman occupied the entire second floor. The building was owned by my grandfather and his three brothers who each lived on one floor. But all had died and the four widows had decided to sell. This is what I would learn little by little. Bonne-Maman was going to be the last to move out. She received me with open arms. At this moment I felt that I was the centre of interest for this united family, welcoming Jean’s son. All this is a bit of a blur and I am not sure of the facts but I am sure that after eating a meal that smelt as good as it was to eat, I felt much better: a ‘Bonne-Maman’ stew, her speciality.

But first of all I needed to “affectionately” kiss all the relatives who had gathered to meet me (I didn't like kissing people I didn't really know how). In addition to that of my father and the Pelle des Forges I was kissed by all with wet kisses. Well!

So this was “Bonne-Maman” (sixty years old?), small, sharp, with a natural authority, animated, with piercing eyes and goodness of character. She was charming. We would get on.

Marie-Louise, my father's wife for the last two years, was my “stepmother” (what a weird term!). She was known as ‘Louloute’. Not a very pretty lady but having certain allure and for me a bit of an enigma.

Aunt Berthe was Bonne-Maman's elder sister, a little larger and stronger. She must have been very pretty. We will see about that later.

Uncle Paul, her husband was a big handsome man (seventy years old?) with a white moustache. He was easily understood.

I took a little time to look around. Everything looked old, and attractive at the same time: furniture, carpets, tables, curios, smells. I looked on with a certain tension in my breast (why? I don't know) the decor, the atmosphere, the characters from an old Provençal bourgeois family. A wonderful meal served by an old lady who had been in the service of my grandmother for many years.

After lunch I was taken to the large house “le Clos”, where my father and Louloute lived, and they settled me in the pretty room which had been prepared for me. Someone with a throaty accent carefully arranged and put away my things.

She was a middle-aged lady, with an angular, good looking face, a fine silhouette and pronounced chin, sharp and precise gestures. She was of Romanian origin and had worked in a big German circus for fifteen years as a tightrope-walker (incidentally as Ms. Leclerc in Barbizon). I took to her immediately, maybe less so than my father it seemed to me. She was named Victoria Anca, but my father believed that the name of Antchka was more mysterious and Slavic-sounding, giving a sense of adventure. This is what we called her, and it seemed to suit her

I immediately felt at home at “Le Clos”. In front of the porch, separated from the terrace by a balustrade, was a good sized pond which would become one of my areas of interest. In particular I would rear tadpoles there and study their development. Grown into frogs I would use a dip-net and bucket to transfer them to the edges of the brook which ran along the bottom of the garden. This was necessary due to deafening night concert given by my amphibians.

Part of the garden was set aside as a vegetable garden. All was well maintained by a middle aged gardener, paunchy, but very lame. Roubaud had been a miner in the Plâtrières and his disability was the result of an accident which nearly killed him. They had found him this job that he liked, suited him, and allowed him to earn his living. He also had a more or less secret activity consisting in supplying us, from time to time, with fish.

The brook that happened to flow along the bottom of the property, and where I sent my tadpoles on their way, was also populated by trout. It is among these that Roubaud, who was also a great fisherman occasionally, had a “levy” to liven up our table and that of his family.

Louloute obviously ran the house with the help of Antchka, she also ran the garden by controlling the work of Roubaud, she ably oversaw the running of the chicken coop that was populated

by some interesting breeds, especially the “leghorns”; excellent layers. She took a lot of interest and looked after them with a passion. This was how I got my first serious dressing-down (they were few, I must admit) that I was to receive from her. I had found it fun, after making sure that nobody was around, to enter the henhouse and panic the hens. They ran in circles with fright, sending up clouds of feathers and cackling wildly. After several sessions like this I wanted to make it more exciting by using a stick, waving it about in a wild fashion, without really wishing to hurt them,

Little by little I got used to my new environment. I managed to overcome the apprehension that had plagued me ever since I had known about it in Barbizon. All the new things that surrounded me, all the discoveries I found every day, the ease and comfort in which I lived surprised me and these pleasures gave me happiness of sorts. Why then the impossibility, the unwillingness, to communicate with those around me? Yes, I was happy, even joyous, but I keep to myself much that I would have liked to express and share, things that I would tell You but was unable to discuss with others. It was impossible, with the exception of Monette and Nany of being familiar with anyone, including my father who, moreover, would never allow me to call him “Dad”. There was nothing to be done, and I continued to use the impersonal “vous”¹⁴ towards all members of the Poutet family.

I found moments of intense joy when, once or twice a week, I wrote to You; and even more when I received her letters. The sun shone. I admired my father for his charm and physical strength. Between the large entrance, with two great wooden doors and the famous chicken run, was the garage, quite spacious as it held two cars, one company car belonging Plâtrières, and the other a Renault Vivastella belonging to the family. The space between them had been converted into a gym, with bodybuilding and weightlifting equipment.

Jean Poutet had a justified reputation as a strong man. What child would not be proud of his father’s physical strength? I was amazed by his weightlifting ability, until the day when one of his calves gave way. I felt somewhat guilty, because I believe that he had just wanted to impress me... But it was specially his talents as a racing driver that I would enjoy the most. He had some success in local races which took place annually in the region; he had a tendency to road-rage which delighted me, as he behaved on the road as in competition. It was an attribute that he would pass on to me.

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When my father showed me around the “Plâtrières” I came back full of admiration for what I had seen. The entire “surface” organization (buildings, workshops, equipment, etc.) were impressive enough, but especially underground, the mine, all the galleries, trucks, the miners with white Pierrot-like faces, the noise of pics on gypsum, galleries where one was prohibited to go due to the risk of falling rocks and landslides, and from time to time a blast. It was an extraordinary world, impressive and wonderful.

Frederic, the foreman, accompanied us on this visit on which I was “tolerated”, and where I had to keep out of the way. The men greeted “Monsieur Jean” and team leaders gave answer to his questions. Those two hours spent underground made me see, just a little, but quite intensely, the harshness and nobility of this world of work which I had found with joy and pride.

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One day we spent the day with Uncle Paul and Aunt Berthe at the “Château”. It was actually a beautiful mansion of the 18th century located in the centre of an estate of 10 or 12 hectares, at the end of the village on the road from Aubagne. On the side away from the road (to the West) the property was bordered by a small beautiful stream, the Huveaune (in reality a river since it flowed directly into the sea, near Marseille). My cousins showed me over all the château and the estate. It was planted mainly with olive trees, vineyards and fruit trees the remainder in cereals. In passing we picked a few apricots to taste. They were delicious, they were the Muscat variety, recognizable by the small brown spots on the skin. The uninitiated could have thought them bruised but it was not so. The sun was warming them, bringing out the flavour

The large terrace in front of the Château was largely shaded by four big plane trees. Behind these were four large cedars, very impressive, probably over 100 years old. Continuing the visit between the boxwood bordering the wide path, one could see the immaculate tennis court of beaten clay, a beautiful ochre colour with impeccable white lines. My memory was taken back with emotion to the memory of the magnificent spectacle of the Four Musketeers that You and me were able to admire in the Park at Versailles. I promised myself that I would become acquainted with this aesthetic sport. What an exciting prospect!

Beyond the tennis court, to the southern boundary of the estate, was a large garage: one half for the two cars, the other part converted into a mechanical workshop. Uncle Paul was an excellent mechanic and maintained his two cars well: an old Renault high on its springs with a swooping bonnet and wooden wheels, and a well-known CV5 Citroën nicknamed “la trèfle”. It was on the latter that I would, for the very first time, take the wheel. “Chauffeur” was the term used at the time.

Uncle Paul was the sixth and last son of Armand Paul who was, with his brothers, the inventor of “Savon de Marseille”¹⁵. Antoine was his first name, however the Poutet family preferred to call him by his surname, I don't know why, they just did not seem to give him much consideration. The fact is that he never worked; at least he never took up a profession. His father Paul wanted him to study law. But after getting his licence to practice, Antoine gave up, considering study to be boring.

For a few years he was occupied in the family business but this failed to interest him sufficiently. His secret passion was cycling where he showed some talent. As soon as he could, he would without the knowledge of his father, take part in trials where, without obtaining any outright victories, he did get into the higher ranks. But another passion also earned him paternal wrath: his uncontrolled interest in the fairer sex. His many adventures and a pretty dissolute life had infuriated Armand Paul who hastened to encourage his marriage to the daughter of Bertrand Baudet, Director of la Vernarède coke plants, in the department of the Gard

Antoine and Berthe were also very much in love and the beautiful marriage ceremony was attended by “All Marseille”. With the agreement of his brothers, Antoine was endowed by his father with a good fortune that led him to “renounce”, certainly without any regret, the practice of any profession. He then became a very young annuitant quite at ease and free from want. Aunt Bertha, who loved her husband very much suffered greatly from his escapades which were not always discrete. To obtain her forgiveness he always offered her expensive and beautiful jewels. Those who were able to glimpse Aunt Berthe jewellery box were completely amazed by their quantity and quality.

If the Poutet family did not in the least appreciate Uncle Paul, his extreme kindness endeared him to everyone, and in particular to my cousins and me, the newcomer, to whom he immediately showed a real affection. On the other hand, those who despised him were quite prepared to take advantage of his financial advice because he had himself had done very well out of his investments.

Uncle Paul was perhaps not specifically an intellectual, nor a scholar, but he was a good, kindly man. He had, I think, a heartfelt spirit unintelligible to many, his look tinged with malice made him appear to see and understand everything. His first aim in life was to be happy; appreciating all good things and rejecting anything poor or bad. He was a knowledgeable epicurean.

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With considerable pride my cousins continued to teach me the secrets of the estate. Behind the château, and in an adjoining part; was the farm managed by nice Italians who farmed all the land with the exception of the garden maintained by a retired gardener who like Roubaud, had been employed by Plâtrières. The farmer was amazed that I was interested in the stock and that I asked a few pertinent questions about the operation. I explained that I had had a few classmates whose parents were farmers in Barbizon and that this environment was no mystery to me. Nany curtailed my explanations and I understood that these people had no need to know about the son of Monsieur Jean. I obeyed, but did not like it; why should anyone be ashamed of me?

Soon we came to a grove amongst the scrub dominated by three tall pines. A tiny cabin with thick old stone walls and a Provençal red tiled roof was hidden within the thick foliage. This was the “hide”, that is to say the position reserved for Uncle Paul where he came with one or two friends to conceal themselves very quietly before sunrise, on the day of the hunt, to wait in a pleasant way for thrushes or other birds. To pass the time which had to be in silence and could be tedious, the hunters would bring well stocked food baskets and lots of good wine, but were still careful to keep a keen eye and a sure aim for the moment of truth. I must confess that, if I don’t really understand what pleasure one can get from shooting small birds, I quite often enjoyed, without any particular qualms, hunting thrushes with Uncle Paul.

Looking around the château itself Aunt Renée and Aunt Bertha joined us. This château I found to be small, only twenty seven rooms in all including some which were unoccupied. I made a comparison, not without malice, with “my” Castle of Fontainebleau. I was quickly told that this was inappropriate and in poor taste and I gave way, a little miffed. I was interested in the stunning vaulted cellar, deep with a high ceiling; many bottles of fine wine were aligned on racks along the walls. Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha liked to entertain and as their guests would confirm, the reputation of the excellence of their food and wine was fully justified. The cellar also contained two large earthenware jars containing olive oil produced on the estate, as well as two beautiful oak barrels for the locally produced wine, a good Provence wine which would stand up to be compared with wine from Cassis or Bandol.

I enjoyed this day at the château very much. I felt that I would come here often to visit. I was in fact tempted to visit, with promises of delicious pastries made by Aunt Berthe, and trips by car (either one or the other) with Uncle Paul. An important detail that helped was that I got on well with Anna, the elderly cook whose secret recipes were much appreciated by all. Bonne-Maman and Aunt Bertha had a great affection for her and indulged her every wish, which was much needed to calm her prickly nature.

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Ten days after our arrival, a major event took place, certainly planned for a long time but nevertheless very important: the relocation of Bonne-Maman.

She left the apartment in the Rue Longue to re-establish herself at St-Joseph. This was a lovely small 13th century Provençal manor which also belonged to Uncle Paul. The property was hardly smaller than the château, and was separated from it by the Huveaune. The two actually formed one large property bisected by the river. St- Joseph had recently been vacated by the tenant, Monsieur Coulomb, the village notary, Uncle Paul had arranged to link the two areas by a footbridge spanning the Huveaune. Communication would be much easier for everyone and especially for Aunt Berthe and Bonne-Maman, these two having so much affection for each other. Although younger, Bonne-Maman influenced the elder with a natural ability, unassuming and easy for everyone in the household and family to accept. Bonne-Maman's personality was direct and simple, but quite remarkable. Uncle Paul probably struggled to admit to his wife the veneration he had for his "little darling" but it must have been the case. He knew that his affections lay with these two. He always held a very high regard for his sister in law. He who rubs up the wrong way will surely be badly scratched.

Many people were involved in the move from Rue Longue to St-Joseph. Most of it was done with a truck by the staff of Plâtrières. Farmers from St. Joseph, the Italian lot as well as the château staff, had hired a wagon pulled by a large and magnificent cart-horse. Angelin, son of the owner, a handsome chap admired by the girls of the village, led the hitch. My cousins gave enthusiastic assistance, but not very helpful. To thank us we were given a ride and as I did not like it I was put off riding for some while,

Angelin sat on this huge horse, as far forward as possible, almost on its neck, my two cousins comfortably behind him while I, the youngest, sat on the rump almost sliding off the hindquarters. When he began to trot to "make us happy" I had to hang on so hard to Monette to stay on board that her shouts began to panic the horse. Angelin did all he could to calm the animal. Despite my jitters and my anger I knew I had to keep this matter secret to avoid Angelin getting into trouble with our parents.

I liked the medieval, mysterious feel of St-Joseph, with two stories built along its length and two round towers. My father and Uncle Henri had tried to explore the cellar a few years previously but had been held back by a landslip impossible to cross. They had discovered numerous bones which encouraged them to continue their search, but without success. They did however discover a skull which my father kept in his office on a bookshelf, inspiring in me some fear and admiration.

Lots of things took place in this month of July. Little by little I installed myself; I found my place and got my bearings in this new family where all helped me, with great kindness, to facilitate my integration. The mail worked well between You and me. I told her the details of my new life, the routine of my days, my interests and distractions, but I was cautious and even kept some things back. My letters were not read which I appreciated, but you never know. The answers I got brought me sunshine and, at times restored my morale.

Uncle Henri returned to Versailles, but Nany and Monette remained with their mother. I got on well with them, especially with odd-ball Monette, always ready to make practical jokes, taking me with her using all strategies to annoy her elder sister. Nany spent most of her time reading, in a quiet area, away from the others, in silence and solitude. It took a lot of cunning and perseverance to break down her wall of kindness and patience. But when our victim, eventually succumbing to our harassment lost her temper, we had to quickly run away from the fury and posturing of our elder. This very exciting game reminded me of the much more dangerous one of playing 'chicken' with cars, in Barbizon, with the gang. We did not have any accidents but we laughed at the angry screams of the drivers until the police got involved. That was a long time ago. Ah! Barbizon!

Towards mid-August there was a great upheaval which gave my cousins and I much joy. We were going to Juan-les-Pins for a month's holiday in a villa belonging (yet again) to Uncle Paul. We were fully loaded, in two cars driven by Uncle Paul and by my father who would not be staying with us, as he would return the next day to Roquevaire while Louloute stayed at the 'Clos' with Antchka. We left in the morning, because the journey would be long and tiring, only 200 Kilometres, but what a road; narrow, tortuous and of poor quality. We travelled to Toulon along very bad roads crossing the moors, then along the better coast road. Only Jules Verne could have foreseen the existence of the present highway just fifty years later. Certainly it wasn't for lack of foresight, but we arrived to Juan, exhausted and dusty, after being forced to deal with two flat tyres and having to fill the radiators with water several times. Just as the passengers, cars also suffered from the heat: 28°C when we left in the morning, 34°C on our arrival.

We were greeted by Anna, the old cook, and Joseph, a young boy, a "handyman" sent as forerunners by train to prepare for our arrival. The villa "La Vernarède", named after the small village in the Cevennes from where Aunt Berthe and Bonne-Maman came, was right in the centre at the bottom of the avenue that leads to the railway station, 30 metres from the sea. It was surrounded by a beautiful garden hemmed in by four streets. The villa is still there, the only one in the city centre; unfortunately it is well hidden, surrounded by modern buildings, more or less fitting in but obviously not of this age.

We had a wonderful vacation in Juan-les-Pins, which we undertook every year until the villa was sold in 1938. Juan at this time was a very small town, but very lively in summer. The beach was crowded with people, easy-going and smart (paid holidays had not been heard of) where occasionally one could see well-known characters: actors, writers, politicians, etc. both French and foreign. Aunt Renée, who was a great snob could spot them easily enough and knew a lot about them; she would relate the latest scandal or story about them with relish; it was thus that we could stare, not without some cheek it must be admitted, before planting ourselves close to them.

- Grock, the famous Swiss clown whom we would be taken to see few days later at the small theatre in the town.
- Mistinguett, with her girls and boys, whom we would get to know eight years later at the Grand Hotel in Bandol, when they were on holiday at the same time that we were there.
- Ninon Vallin the best known French singer of her time.
- Michel Simon, the famous actor, whose fame would take off with the advent of "talkies". He was ugly and not at all nice to the children. But what an actor!!
- Some well-known political figures in whom we had no interest.
- We should mention Henri de Monfreid¹⁶, the great adventurer, smuggler, gunrunner and explorer of the seas, known around the world. His wife, who ran a nice shop in front of the villa, got on well with Aunt Renée so my cousins and I had the opportunity to be presented to her famous husband. He threw a quick glance on Nany, already very pretty at fourteen, and completely ignored Monette and me. Hate, and even more so when we saw the great sadness hidden behind the pretty Madame de Monfreid's poor smile, which was due no doubt to the long absences, but especially the many amorous adventures in all latitudes and longitudes of her wayward husband. I am however immensely proud of the dedication he honoured me with in one of his books. However we get ahead of ourselves.

On the beach at Juan it was mainly the discovery of swimming that I took up with two opposing results, one positive and the other negative. What a pleasure it was to be immersed in this absolutely clear 24°C water (remember it was 1928!). But learning breaststroke was another story and I drank a lot of salty water. I have to admit that I had serious problems breathing without mixing the

water and air in my lungs. Over the years I got better, but never achieved the ease that I envied in some of my fellow swimmers until the day when I discovered the fins/mask/snorkel equipment. The sea became my field and the greatest of my pleasures. At 'Club Med' I even made several dives with compressed air to more than 60 meters, with the help of the leaders, which health and safety regulations required.

Separated from the "Vernarède" by one of the small streets which surrounded it, and therefore very close, was a property belonging to Louloute's parents. This was a beautiful villa located in the centre of a pine wood. Mr. and Ms. Faucher lived there all year-round. They were very kind to me. Was I not the son-in-law of their daughter? She had a large humpback which was quite impressive; I tried to look away which was not very courteous. He was a technician and had recently retired from the PLM¹⁷; this railway company would later become the SNCF. He occupied an important position within the firm.

If these holidays in Juan provide me with much pleasure and many surprises I also discovered some unpleasant things. I soon learnt that seawater in the ears can cause a painful inflammation. This would be my Achilles heel for several years. Conventional treatment at that time was to apply warm oil, with little success.

Another ever-present danger was sea urchin spines. Joseph and I both suffered from this painful experience. In Joseph's case Aunt Berthe "explained" that he must remain "available". He did not like it and I had to console him. But it was the tar which left me with the worst memories.

If molten tar is little recommended for car tyres, it is still less for the soles of the feet of an eight-year-old child. More often than not Joseph and I went barefoot to the beach. In the morning, generally there was no problem. But in the afternoon the sun's rays were particularly strong. Too distracted and carefree to cross the street I once found my feet literally trapped in this boiling magma. Screaming with pain and anger, Joseph had to piggyback me to the villa where we had a cocktail of compassion and reproaches that made us feel quite guilty; while the adults were very concerned. Despite everything I was back on my feet quite quickly; being now told, not to leave barefoot was superfluous.

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Back in Roquevaire, after our sunny stay in Juan, I went with Bonne-Maman on a series of visits to members of the family to whom I had not yet been presented, those who were no doubt very curious about the "new kid on the block". First of all I was due to meet Bonne-Maman's three sisters in law, the widows of the three brothers of my grandfather Victor Poutet: Jules, Director of the Plâtrières before my father; Roman and Sylvestre who had always lived on their income from rented property. It should be noted that there were many of independent means in this family in particular, but also in middle-class families in general. A study deserves to be made of this fact, but this is not the place. Among these people of whom there were probably many living on fixed incomes, most were "small pensioners". Even in the so-called well-off families, people lived simply in those days. We were far from the 'consumer society' which now prevails. No car, no TV, no refrigerator or cinema (or only rarely), hardly any holiday; in short very few temptations, nothing superfluous to needs, and a restricted ability to pay.

So back to my Poutet great Aunts. Aunt Aglaé and Aunt Clara were the elder. After leaving the big house in Rue Longue, each of them had moved into a comfortable apartment in the village center, living in comfort with a devoted retainer, as old as themselves, as maid. I was equally welcomed by both of them with a lot of kindness.

Aunt Aglaé was very ugly, but intelligent, cultivated, and having a great heart. Aunt Clara was very lean, as dry as of body as she was of heart and mind. But of the four sisters-in-law she was by far the richest and also the most skilled and the most determined to augment her financial assets. Unlike Aunt Aglaé who had spoken to me with friendly interest that had immediately put me at ease, Aunt Clara had studied me for quite a long time, scrutinized me coldly, as she would have studied any interesting investment. Bonne-Maman was very conscious of this and made sure our visit was not prolonged. I was struck, in spite of the considerable differences in the personality of these two old ladies, how the interior of their apartments appeared the same. Same smell of age and wax mixed, same furniture, same sad darkness. I noticed with great satisfaction the cheerfulness of Bonne-Maman when we extricated ourselves from these two visits. She even hummed some of the tuneful songs from the repertoire of her youth on the way to Aunt Thérèse

This third sister in law was a very different character. She greeted us with a big smile and some kind words expressed happily in a clear voice and open heart which lifted my spirits. She bore a generous physique whose curves and noisy cheerfulness hid a big heart, a quick wit and a kindly character. The beautiful garden, the fine villa and the excellent titbits that were served to us as well as the unrestricted jollity of Aunt Thérèse made me think that I would be a frequent visitor to this Great Aunt. I observed an obvious reserve shown by Bonne-Maman, but my enthusiasm was in no way diminished. Put simply I learnt later that the many infidelities of Uncle Jules had frequently led to him receiving a dose of his own medicine and this behavior had been ill thought of by those who respected the family. I took no notice and would not be drawn into any petty squabbles

That day had given me new ideas and I reassessed them at length in bed at night; that is to say for a few minutes before going to sleep. I was becoming part of the family, but without any pleasure or joy. I had an obvious interest in this type of Provençal bourgeoisie but the Poutet family was very different to my de Chazal upbringing. I felt discomfort and a certain pride. Unease concerning tortuous human beings and their relations towards each other, and the unseemly things that were said, so much so that one had to be very careful to measure the expression of one's thought. The wonderful feeling of opening up one's heart and one's mind in absolute trust was just not possible. On the other hand pride for the social position of the Poutet family, the respect with which they were received, their material comfort, culture and so on. Of course I was seduced by some of this but in fact I was never really totally immersed in this environment. My classmates; and later my friends belonged to all social classes, all religions, all cultures; it was only the quality of their character that was important. Finally, as much as I could, I tried not to make any judgement and kept these thoughts to myself. However staying with me always, with a certainty, perhaps irrational but like an indelible beautiful thought, I stayed faithful to my instincts and followed the genes inherited from Suzanne my mother.

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The following days were also dedicated to more visits to family and friends, so that they should know the son of Jean, this young boy from "elsewhere". Even while walking there, respectful greetings were accorded to my grandmother, and even I was entitled to a respectful "Bonjour Monsieur Jacky" this simple act further tightening the bonds to my new-found caste. I started to take a certain pleasure, but felt confused by this vanity, this false pride, that You had taught me to hate, so I had to be very careful.

One afternoon we went to the Granat family who lived on the hill in a large, old, beautifully restored Provençal House. The heat was sweltering, and on the way, despite the protection of her delicate sunshade, Bonne-Maman suffered silently. Occasionally she wiped beads of sweat from her face with a pretty white handkerchief throwing a quick glance in my direction to reassure herself that I did not make fun of her. A little stupidly I thought it politic to also show that I was suffering which seemed to satisfy my grandmother. "Luckily you put your hat on", she said. She had insisted before leaving that I should wear a wide brimmed straw hat, much too big for me, which always hung on the old coat stand in the hall at St. Joseph. There was always a jumble of hats, parasols, umbrellas and shoes there for any emergency. She was probably wise to insist.

We arrived at last. Uncle Edmond and Aunt Marthe gave us a warm welcome, and with a cool lemonade served to us we felt more at ease. We moved inside rather than staying on the beautiful shaded terrace, indeed it was much better behind the thick walls of the old building and the barely open wooden shutters. The shade and coolness combined well for our comfort.

Marthe was the daughter of one of my grandfather's three brothers. She was therefore Bonne-Maman's niece and cousin to my father and Aunt Renée. Her high-pitched voice and fidgeting, interspersed with nervous giggles, unnerved me. I was flattered because she looked upon me with great kindness and found me charming. I began to think that she was less silly than her behaviour and voice made out. You's warning came to mind, to be careful of vanity. Once again the first impression probably proved correct.

Marthe had married Dr. Edmond Granat. Actually a doctor of medicine, he had never used the profession for the greater good of his potential customers. It was said the outcome of his few consultations and prescriptions were catastrophic. His large fortune enabled them to live quite comfortably from his independent income. Speaking of him Marthe always called him "Le Docteur". With good intentions, he was always ready to give "good advice" to any family or friend who might have some health problem, but I never heard of anyone who took the risk of admitting to him that they were ill. Sometimes, just to make him happy, we accepted some pills or lotion that he recommended, from the large stock of pharmaceutical products that he kept. These would be quickly "forgotten" or thrown out.

My cousins and I had some interest in Uncle Edmond and Aunt Marthe. Despite their pretty bland personalities, they were endearing by the kindness and interest they showed towards most people. Every year, late May or early June, they invited the family to a happy and delicious country-style meal in gratitude for cherry picking which everyone had to do during the morning; without forgetting of course, to taste a lot while working. The property was in fact planted with many fruit trees, principally cherry, apricot and peach on the terraces and also many olive trees covering the sunny slopes of the hill. A farmer looked after the land and was given the bulk of the produce for his pains, but the Granat family had a reasonable share for their use.

My Uncle and Aunt had three sons as different from each other as they were from their parents. Henri, the eldest, qualified as an engineer at the École Centrale after a distinguished career at school and university. A little later it would be he who would replace my father as head of Plâtrières in circumstances I will mention later. Rotund and sociable, despite his professional skills and competence, he was to find it difficult to give orders, which earned him the wrath of Jean Poutet.

James, the second son, was tall and thin and was at the time studying hard, something that much annoyed his father. It led however, to him taking over an important law chamber in Marseille, to the astonishment of the family. His personality probably did not go down well in this family. He was a

very nice companion for walks and climbing in the mountains. It was thanks to him and his wry smile that in a month I overcame dizziness, by a lot of hard work and willpower. I will get to this later.

Pierre, the third brother, was small independent and solitary, a genius, a remarkable but not very friendly, mathematician. He had a brilliant career at the Ministry of Finance where he rose rapidly through the grades, becoming Inspector General.

Uncle Edmond and Aunt Marthe surely had a great affection for me as they agreed to be my 'guarantors' in Marseille when I went to board at the Lacordaire School

Our next visit would be to Georges, yet another son of one of the four Poutet brothers and so another of my father's cousins. He was charming, a lover of East Asia, where he travelled once or twice each year for business and from where he brought back art objects and new things. Also of independent means, he devoted almost all of his time, when not traveling, to reading books and drafting studies on the regions visited. His black beard hid a smile full of goodness. We got on well and during my visits I encouraged him to tell me of his travels. I believe he enjoyed the telling as much as I did in the listening. He was a confirmed bachelor too attached to his independence to be persuaded to start a family. He decided once to marry a very young, pretty, smiling woman, much too "liberal" to deny the pressing tributes she received from elsewhere, even from some members of the family. But this should not be repeated here.

Their union lasted only three or four years. Cousin Georges did not appear to be much affected and took with equanimity to a single life and his travels in the Orient. He committed suicide when about sixty years old to shorten the unbearable suffering that he had to endure for several years, due to a tumour. I liked him. Sometimes I can see his look of an oriental sage and I hear his good strong voice suited to his attractive, pronounced Provençal accent, appreciated when spoken by storytellers, poets, and troubadours; musical, without vulgarity, very different from that of the Vieux Port (which I do not despise, but is no better than a 'paing' intonation).

Indeed at that time very few Provençal people spoke without an accent. It was said they spoke with a "sharp" accent. I only realised this when I left. Little by little I had taken it on, probably very moderately, enough however to deserve some teasing on my annual holiday to Barbizon. This accent disappeared altogether when at nineteen I was completely free from the Provençal environment.

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Baptism

September 1928

We were now less than one month before the beginning of the school year. I would be a half-board boarder in Marseille at the l'École Lacordaire run by the Dominican Fathers. In principle admissions to this college was from the Roman Catholic "upper crust" (sorry for the term). I was, as my mother You, a protestant, "sullied" as some would say, and of course I hated that. So it was that I would go through the "sacrament of baptism". A simple ceremony which would take place in the village church, Uncle Paul and Aunt Berthe would stand as Godfather and Godmother. They had not set foot in Church for many years, and seemed much more disorientated than I, who in Versailles as in Roquevaire, attended Sunday mass each week with the family. This transition from Temple to Church did not really concern me although I had no wish to let You down. In her next letter to me she

reassured me totally. On the other hand Norman, my pastor Uncle took it very badly. Aunt Yvonne had a devil of a job to calm him down.

My baptism was naturally followed by some catechism lessons so that I did not arrive at the Dominicans completely ignorant in matters of religion. This taking on of God by heart and faith¹⁸ annoyed me somewhat but I applied myself, and entered the school as a good young Catholic, suitable before God and his servants the Dominicans.

L'École Lacordaire was located in a commune on the outskirts of Marseille: St-Just. At the top of St-Georges Street, a steep path led to the large school gateway quite useless actually because the large area had no fence. It was a beautiful forged-iron gate with two massive stone pillars which one could bypass on foot. Imposing, it sat there a beautiful art work isolated in its natural environment. 200 metres after the gateway along a dirt road one arrived at the courtyard, the end of the road for cars. A beautiful sight was revealed.. In the courtyard was a large two-storey building housing the office of the Father Superior, the administration building, accommodation and other facilities for the Fathers, the dormitory, a large meeting room, etc. There were three other large, well designed, buildings, which we would soon enter; all were well decorated, creating an atmosphere of importance to the space.

My father, Bonne-Maman and I were received in a vast, plush office by Father Audouard, the religious Superior and Director of the College. He was a fattish man with a black beard and sonorous voice, serious and melodious, who gave us a friendly and warm reception that immediately put me at ease. After completing some business with my father and grandmother, he put us into the hands of the Abbot Simard, his young Secretary whom he was mentoring, recently graduated from the seminary, to show us around the college. First of all we visited my dorm, for the younger children because I was starting in the 8th. A worker showed me my bed, I was pleased with its position; she would put away my linen and clothes in the locker designed for this. Just as in St-Aspet at Melun, it was the domestic servants who ran the laundry and sick bay in this building. Bonne-Maman always very demanding seemed satisfied. She noted with pleasure the simple but nice crucifix of olive wood above each bed. Abbot Simard was very friendly, but he made quite a song and dance about it, anxious to please, giving himself to The Lord and proud of doing so, but making much of his background: his father was a well-known professor of medicine.

He had to find a roundabout way to let us know about this. In the end I found him to be a fine character on the right track, but had not yet been able to throw off his alleged social superiority. This reminded me of Alain d'Aboville at Versailles, the young Don Juan who suddenly, without any warning, became a man of the Church, to the chagrin of some.

Bonne-Maman sympathized with the five domestics; washerwomen, nurses, and multi-taskers who answered all her questions satisfactorily. One of them even originated from a village in the Cevennes near the Vernarède mines where she came from.

The other two buildings housing classrooms, studies, music; head teacher, etc. we walked through quickly and finished with the rest of the grounds, at least part of them otherwise it would have taken too long. I noted especially the two tennis courts, the football field, the area for gymnastics, the large vegetable garden, a field and small wood with its paths as well as the brook (or canal) which crossed the property. I should not forget the great wooden chapel with its beautiful marble altar and its smell of incense.

All three of us were enchanted by the site, the facilities, Father Audouard, the administration and Abbot Sumard, and quite reassured about my joining this new place where I would have to live for many years.

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So here I was already a few weeks in my new circumstances at l'École Lacordaire I made a few friends, some very nice, with whom I would live for several years a little like brothers, others as cousins, some more distant than others. Of some three hundred students (grouped in older, medium and young), the school boarded a good hundred who formed a distinct band apart from the day boys returning home each night. Between us, even with those we were not so friendly with, there was a particular solidarity, understandable as we were all within a single grouping, as comfortable and as tight-knit as any organization. After five o'clock in the evening and up to eight o'clock in the morning, boarders were at peace, isolated in the confines of the college with the Fathers, the supervisors, the masters and staff. Similar to a large ship with its crew and its passengers

It took me several days to get my bearings and equilibrium essential to this new life, which seemed to be even further from You. I remember one of the first evenings after my arrival feeling quite helpless during a long study period before dinner.

The eagle eyed and ever vigilant Mr. Bonnelli, our supervisor, did not fail to spot this. Coming down from his podium, he proceeded to cover the hundred paces along the central aisle, leaning left and right, asking questions, giving paternal advice. Having arrived at my level and looking at my tearful eyes, he asked me simply: "Ca ne va?" I had the good sense to reply that everything was fine; it was only my eyes that were painful, he smiled and moved away. I appreciated his gesture that allowed me to keep my self-esteem. This incident which occurred towards the end of the study period "brought me closer" - it is a fair term- to Mr. Bonnelli. Near the exit, our fellow student André Boyer, who was very short sighted, was given an individual desk with a lamp to help him in his studies. As I was passing, he politely asked me to take his lamp, and without thinking I did so. I immediately felt a big shock in the arm and my whole body, rendering me incapable of getting rid of that cursed lamp. Mr. Bonnelli, who was nearby, grabbed me, but found himself, like me, incapable of movement, a prisoner, and under deadly threat of electrocution, stumbling, the wire came away from the socket and stopped this painful nightmare that in fact only lasted a few seconds but could have had a very bad ending. Boyer, laughing his head off was quite oblivious to the seriousness of his stupid joke. He was about to receive a slap in the face, but Mr. Bonnelli regrouped and administered a harsh rebuke to all the students. He then explained that electrocution causes the contraction of the muscles and that is why I could not let go the lampstand, and that he himself was unable to detach himself from me. This was a serious lesson in electricity that we would not forget.

Mr. Bonnelli was also our history-geography teacher. One day I unwittingly, caused some disruption in his class on his teaching about the "rotation of the earth". While attempting to demonstrate an example that seemed quite obvious, having made a sign and obtained his agreement to intervene, I said that while it seemed that the clouds were moving, in fact they were fixed and that it was we who were moving. This vision of things was a gift to my classmates and all the efforts of our teacher to clarify things were not effective, for a while at least, to get our ideas sorted out on the subject. At the break, I noticed some laughter among the supervisors, and some looks in my direction, I understood with some anger that Mr. Bonnelli had been "put out". I was distracted just for the second it took for a ball kicked by a friend to hit me on the head. I was doubly cross.

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During my first weekend back in Roquevaire, I had to narrate every detail of my life as a boarder. I took some pleasure in telling them of those things that had gone well. Oh! Not too much of course, a little embellishment never hurt anyone. My father moreover had been given a report which seemed excellent in every respect. I was quite surprised. So far everything seemed easy to me and I had not experienced any particular difficulty, and found myself in the top rung of the class. The concept of

effort was pretty foreign to me as for most children of my age, and it was just as well that it was, as we would learn soon enough in later years. I sometimes ask myself, even now, why I have not been able to avoid making huge efforts during my life..

I had been very apprehensive about this first year of boarding, I need not have worried. The fathers, teachers, and coaching took place in a climate of confidence that enhanced the education and teaching provided.

Father Audouard, the Superior, ruled everyone with an apparent ease cleverly combined with the necessary firmness. He was feared and loved by all.

Father Tapin, a froth of white-beard covering his chin, was the “king of studies”. As this function indicates, he had charge of the organization of the curriculum and courses and the responsibility for the teachers. He was a person of great culture with a certain authority whom everyone respected.

Discipline was ensured by father Debeaune, a great Burgundian with a loud voice rolling his “rrrs”, with a ruddy complexion turning to scarlet with the slightest anger, giving him the nickname of ‘radish’. He knew this and was not concerned, as long as we remained discrete about it. We feared him but knew that he really had a heart of gold.

Father Bonneaud, fat, round of face and square of character, looked like a lectern. One would not have taken him to be a church man, looking different from the other Fathers in appearance but there was a culture and a spirituality about him which was much the same. It was said that he enjoyed a good meal, this was confirmed when the first class in the afternoon seemed to weary him. He taught French and history-geography to the juniors.

Father Baudwin was a great and wonderful man, an old “white-beard”. He had been a missionary in Africa and the opportunity to live here, in the best conditions, gave him a pleasant retirement with an activity that suited him. He gave religious instruction to all three sections. He was a theologian of great erudition much loved and respected by all, both for his imposing appearance, his considerable knowledge and great kindness. He was to become my confessor, then my guide and confidant. A few years later, during a doctrinal class, as his hearing remained acute despite his age, he heard a stupid joke about St. Joseph. He got into a real and wild rage about it and had to go to the infirmary where he was to die three or four days later surrounded by staff and Fathers who cared for his physical and spiritual needs to the end. Everyone at Lacordaire felt this loss greatly. Over several evenings following I cried softly for my old confidant, a beautiful page in life, for me at least, had turned.

Two others completed 'the team' of our Fathers. They were not Dominicans and belonged to the secular clergy. The Abbot Rombault was an “injured combatant” of the 1914-18 war. His face was seriously re-arranged, his jaw mainly, but it was not ugly and he even had a charming smile. He was the principal overseer, at the head of a group of young men, mostly students, undertaking more or less specialized studies in various fields.

Abbot Denis, had an ascetic face and a fine and elegant profile, he was a teacher of French and Latin. I still think of him as a wonderful person; primarily because of his humanitarianism, considering his goodness, his patience, his psychology and his common sense. He was characterized by his intelligence with a remarkable understanding as well as an extraordinary gift for teaching. He had a gift of being able to take obscure and difficult Latin and French texts and lighten them up and make them fun. On the other hand he demanded the highest standards making us understand that our beautiful French language, well written, and also well spoken, should give as much pleasure and emotion as the

most beautiful poetry. I think I can see, reading these lines, the leering smiles of those pseudo-intellectuals and mediocre artists, who murder our beautiful French language.

Ten years after leaving college, and having lost contact with him since then, Abbot Denis appeared to me one cold and rainy evening in December 1945 in a street in Avignon where I had gone to seek help and advice from an old friend of the family regarding the trial of my father at the Assizes. No doubt he had aged a little, but his beautiful fine and elegant profile had not changed, nor his penetrating gaze full of goodness. I had always been impressed by the leathery skin of his hands; they did not do him any justice. I was just happy to find myself in front of the teacher I liked, and who had given me so much, but was acutely embarrassed and pained by the deferential attitude he had towards me. I was no longer in his eyes, a pupil at Lacordaire, but a respectable adult – a young journalist at the time - before whom he should behave with the humility his position dictated. I was very sorry. Because of the bad weather and cold or perhaps the fact that we were probably both in a hurry or the gene that I could not get rid of, all this led to the sad failure of this meeting which should have been so happy. Having gone a hundred meters in the dusk, I had a strong desire to catch up with him. I hesitated too long; the large black cape and hat of my dear abbot had disappeared in the fog and rain.

Another notable person in the Lacordaire School was Mr Duscheneau. He was a Canadian getting on in years, neither ordained nor fully lay, since he was an Oblate. He was responsible for the harmonium, the choir and various administrative tasks. He was a fine musician and a good choir leader. We loved him and his funny accent amused us. When he started telling us about his native Quebec, it was fascinating to hear about the life people lived as trappers in the middle of beautiful lakes and forests.

A little later, when fifteen or sixteen years old, I would be pleased to be the soloist in the choir, under the baton and the instruction of M.Ducheneau,. Sometimes in the college chapel but also on some occasions I was very proud to sing in the famous Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde. This could have been a prelude to what might have been a career, but was limited by my father's disapproval, to a few songs or arias from operas, given by small groups, for friends. César Vezzani, the famous Corsican tenor of this era, had even proposed... but this is another story.

My first Christmas away from You was fast approaching. My father, Sam, and Bonne-Maman did their best to distract me by planning good things to do in this important holiday season. The highlight of these festivities would take us to Les Baux-de-Provence for the Christmas party. Les Baux was a beautiful old medieval village, a very picturesque semi ruin, lost in the Alpilles, a small mountain range between Arles and Cavaillon. Tourism was non-existent and the site was neither known nor visited, except rarely by the regional authorities. Despite its isolation, once a year people came from a long way off, upto 100 Kms away, to attend midnight mass in the old French-speaking Church of the 12th century, part of which was carved into the rock forming a cave. My father booked us in to the Imperator Hotel in Nîmes where we arrived for lunch. We then visited this city, very rich in Roman remains and stunning ancient monuments. With a knowledgeable commentary by my father, I found a real wonder in this visit but we did not have time to see it all and we promised to come back; everything in its turn. We knew that Christmas night was ahead of us and we had to pace ourselves.

After a short rest and a frugal dinner in the hotel, we went to Les Baux where we arrived at about ten o'clock, bathed in strong moonlight. Waiting for midnight and the three low Christmas masses, my father and I climbed up to the ridge overlooking the village. A huge moon illuminated the path, and the entire landscape, with an icy glow that helped us walk in the midst of impressive shadows that gave me the shivers, but with my father I risked nothing. Judging by the outlines and voices, seen and heard some other daring people were also doing this night walk. At the top we had an extraordinary sight before us that no imaginary scenery could match. The huge walls of the old castle and the large steep rocks of the ridge, lit in this raw but eerie light, rose as great ghosts dancing some

diabolical bacchanal together. Those who have not experienced the exceptional privilege of seeing such a unique show cannot understand the diversity of emotions that one can feel. This sight stayed engraved on my eight year old mind for a very long time.

On our return to the village where we joined Louloute and Bonne-Maman, we saw a small curious crowd of the faithful gathered outside the Church, surrounding a group of shepherds dressed in sheep skins as they would have done in olden times. Some came with their animals, as on every Christmas Eve, keeping to the old tradition of the Feast of the Pasture. These sheep represented the whole flock and were offered to the Lord, asking him to bless them. To support their petition - the tradition harks back to pagan times - they would sacrifice a lamb on the forecourt of the Church just before the beginning of the three low masses, the rites of Christmas celebrated at the time.

Bonne-Maman did not wish that I should see the sacrifice of the lamb. The prospect of seeing this cruel act did not appeal to me, and certainly the dislike was stronger than my curiosity, and even if I bragged a little, I was in fact quite pleased with the decision. All four of us therefore entered the small church, as some others not more willing than us to attend this needless killing - which was in fact to be the last, and in following years replaced by a simple mock sacrifice.

During the celebration of the three low masses, I couldn't help but imagine those of Alphonse Daudet, where the devil, in the guise of the sacristan-child in Garrigou's choir, had introduced the brave priest to the temptation of greed in describing the succulent Christmas Eve dinner waiting for him after his three masses. The latter, distraught by the bell that Garrigou shook faster, and more and more violently to get him to hurry up, finished by not completing the mass so as to get to the festive banquet more quickly. What a wonderful story, among the 'Contes du Lundi' that Bonne-Maman had good reason to make me read. But in this beautiful little Romanesque church we had no Garrigou, everything was well ordered and taken seriously

On the way back to Nîmes I fell asleep. I would have a great story to tell my classmates at Lacordaire

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It was with pleasure that we started school after the Christmas and New Year holiday reuniting with the other students and teachers. During the first term we had all, little by little, become used to the school atmosphere with its constraints and duties but also its camaraderie and even familiar routine. It did not take long for some of us to memorize the names and faces of the students and teachers, not only of our junior group but also other groups. Others however experienced much difficulty and took much longer to do so. Let's say that I was just a good average in this regard, no more than that. Over the eight years that I would be in Lacordaire I would remember a hundred names and faces, some still present today, a few for having been my friends but others such as Abbot Denis, for setting me the example of being of high integrity. I will not resist the pleasure to recall some of them here. First of all the teachers.

Mr Phat was the physics and chemistry teacher. He was a small, strong, lithe and muscular Eurasian, a young forty year old. His accent amused us, and we loved to imitate him. He knew this, but he didn't mind. His lessons, particularly physics was very lively and never boring. He was a good gymnast and had continued, up to a point, to maintain an acceptable standard. One day we tried to persuade him to give us a small demonstration of his talent and he impressed us with his ability on the rings and horizontal bar, our respect for him had been confirmed. He was aware of this but remained no less modest.

Father Tapin, already mentioned above, in his capacity of head of studies, also taught Latin and French literature. He epitomised strength of mind, accuracy, and discipline, at least in class. We discovered that this teaching stemmed from his membership of two literary societies of which he was head: "The Small Academy" for the less able, and "The Athenaeum" for the seniors. The aim of these two societies was to promote literature among its members. I had the luck and great pleasure to belong to one and then the other. During our meetings, three or four of the ten or twelve members had to present a reading they had studied, usually classical, with the appropriate intonations and accents. One could also be declaiming a passage from a play, a famous monologue for example, which had been prepared with the advice of father Tapin. Each delivery was marked by the other members by placing a ball in the centre of our circle a white one for excellent, green for good and black for a poor performance. Fellow members tried to be fair but it wasn't given lightly. Once a year, on the occasion of the college memorial day which was linked to Saint Thomas of Aquinas, the great Dominican and Doctor of theology, the Athenaeum even gave a show attended by all the students and their families. For us, it was the moment when we could indulge our thespian ambitions, illusory no doubt, but the enthusiastic applause gave us encouragement. Personally I remember having great fun playing the characters of Scapin, Chicaneau, a police Commissioner, and others and especially the wonderful atmosphere on stage and in the auditorium. The curtain has fallen on many memories.

Mr Bergasse was the history-geography teacher. A person of great culture and courtesy of whom I have some sad memories. During his first class when I had just started in the 3rd year, on return from the holidays, a certain lack of discipline by a few of us forced him to clamp down somewhat, which was inconsiderate, as it didn't comply with the serenity of his character. He had to give me a good telling me off together with a few other students. I felt quite ashamed, because since joining Lacordaire I had always had the reputation, without false modesty, of being a very good student, in respect of both studies and discipline. So, I was annoyed to have given Mr. Bergasse, on this first meeting, a poor opinion of myself. I was even more embarrassed when before the next lesson he called me to him to tell me that he had learned of my good reputation and apologized for reprimanding me so severely. To this day I am embarrassed. Subsequently I made sure that I behaved flawlessly in front of this teacher.

Then there was the extraordinary Greek teacher, under whom I immediately came under the spell of an ancient language, the literature and language to which we owe so much. Mr. Zénon Nestor Xenophon Zane-Tides was himself Greek, originally from Corinth, which he liked to tell us about and remind us of its prominent and important historical role. Small, dry and strong in body and mind, he was always dressed to the nines in a well cut suit, with white waistcoat and gleaming tie. His French was quite laborious, affecting a very pronounced accent. He had, as we did, a serious difficulty in fully understanding what was said to each other.. I remember the only confrontation we had, as he had a real regard for me, partly no doubt due to my good results, but especially my love of this wonderful language. One of my fellow students got stuck on the translation of a sentence, a word in particular. Who knows it? (*qui est-ce qui le sait?*), asked our teacher. Proud of my knowledge, I gave an immediate answer. I was immediately put down. I tried to explain that that I had answered his request: "Who knows it?" "No; I asked your classmate what is what the meaning of the word 'lé-cé'". Of course, it was not easily understood, I could not retaliate and gave a kind of grunt, in Greek, no doubt. It did not matter, I knew he liked me. It is thanks to him that when alone I would read some texts aloud, or write whole sentences, for the pleasure of hearing the music of the words, or to trace the subtle shape of the letters, I who was such a poor artist. Many thanks to Mr. Z.N.Z., as this was his imposing signature. We never knew why the X for Xenophon did not appear

Mathematics was taught by Mr. Calot, an elderly man with a great white moustache and also by Abbot Poli. Both were eminent mathematicians, Abbot Poli especially. He had thick book that he opened, at any moment, to add some figures and signs, replacing the more usual breviary which was the favourite reading of the other abbots. Some claimed that he sought to mathematically ally himself

to God. He was often seen standing on the rear platform of a tramway, immersed in the mysteries of his book. Everyone respected his isolation and left him to his thoughts.. The people of Marseilles recognized him in his black cassock, and were proud of him.

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Alas they had not been my teachers, because they taught the violin, this marvellous instrument whose shape and sounds had always delighted and fascinated me. A grudge had not yet grown between my father and me, but he would not listen: “the violin is ok, but the piano must take precedence” he said. Singing and now the violin, nevertheless in hiding and with the help of Louloute and Antchka, I would have a shot at singing and making beautiful sounds on my father’s old violin who, it was said, had played very well. Stored in the attic in a dust covered case, this beautiful instrument was a great temptation for me and its sterile loneliness saddened me. But I was ordered not to touch it, one more reason to ask if adults, and even if my father, was always in the right.

Getting back Lacordaire;

Mr Husson, wore a large, dark, slightly crumpled suit, white shirt, and floppy bow tie, this artistic look was already very obvious because of his long hair and his general appearance. He was a good violinist and played in various concerts. Each year, on the college feast day, he played “La Noce Bretonne”. It is a wedding march starting quietly as if from a long distance, it then gets louder and louder and back to diminuendo, as if getting lost in the countryside. His technique was perfect for the piece. Mr Husson got what he wanted from his violin, but did not give it life; however a violin does have a soul.

Mr Valentin, far more modest than his colleagues, was no less talented. He was a viola player. We often forget the viola, probably first cousin to the violin, but a little deeper in tone, just as magnificent, perhaps with even a little more resonance. He was a simple and good man who helped me a lot because of my interest in music. Sometimes between lessons I would drop in on him and occasionally if time was available he would play me some passages of Schubert (the trout), Handel (largo) or Paganini. These were wonderful moments. He was a soloist in the orchestra at the Opéra de Marseille.

At the age of seventeen or eighteen I often went to the Opera with my father and Louloute. I will speak of this later. I never failed at the intermission, to greet Mr. Valentin who was as happy as me to see each other in these too short reunions. I can still hear in my head the melodious, singing tones of my old friend’s viola.

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As for the students, at first they were simple comrades, then friends and also, when we were in small classes, those whom we admired, who were a bit like our role-models in the 'seniors'. Among these, I remember Maillebiau, a good-looking big boy, in the elementary maths class, having a beautiful baritone voice who Mr. Duchesneau often asked to sing solo in the choir. Everyone appreciated it and he was very proud of his voice.

Two cheerful brothers, of a large family from Marseilles had our approval, because they were always ready to help anyone. In certain circumstances they substituted our supervisors during breaks. They sometimes agreed to help out if we got stuck in maths homework. Amazing people.

Bernard Dastarac was an excellent student of philosophy who impressed us somewhat by his serious and severe attitude which he no doubt exaggerated to enhance his importance. He participated with the Fathers in the organization of the religious ceremonies and the two annual college festivals. He was himself to become Dominican, head of several colleges, including Lacordaire. Quite by chance we met again in the years 90-2000, in Cannes, where he was the chaplain of the Dominican order and we struck up a nice friendship. I will return to this much later, in the last part of this autobiographical account.

At Lacordaire there were many Corsicans that their families had sent to study “on the Continent”. Thus the three brothers Ajaccio from Bastia (sic); the two brothers and four cousins Luigi de Bastia, Jean Baptiste Biaggi, who at sixteen already had a passion for politics leading sometimes to impassioned arguments; Alfred Rocca-Serra, large and good-looking boy who would become an important elected official in his island. Maurice Canale, who hesitated to choose between the Police and “anti-police”. It was in the latter that he carved a career which was not at all in the ethos of the Dominicans teachings, often extricated from trouble by his elder brother The High Commissioner. Much later I got together with these two Corsican friends in their beautiful island, and I will have great pleasure to relate these circumstances further on.

Raoul Méritant became one of my best mates, after a severe argument which almost ruined it before it started. He had a natural authority, a somewhat precious way of speaking with elegant gestures, a certain laid back attitude seemingly being unaware of what was going on. In short I liked him. Until on the first period of the day from eight o'clock to eight thirty, Father Audouard, the College superior, came to announce in a grave voice the sad death of our friend Raoul from a heart attack the previous night. He was thirteen years old; he was my friend, a friendship of only two years, but time has no place in front of death.

André Turcat was a serious boy with an angular face, a little thin, slender profile, not very sporty and somewhat unsociable; he appeared rather lonely, but was excellent in all subjects, and was always at the top of the class. As I had the audacity to win a few prizes in competition with him our relations were fairly neutral. No one asking him for a little help in their homework had ever received any assistance. Nice fellow, but not a good friend. He must have had a special personality because he became a test pilot, and the first to pilot the French Concorde. Not bad!

Denis Blum, originally Jewish but now Roman Catholic, was also one of the best. We were closely linked and he was one of the few that I invited home. My father had difficulty hiding his doubts about my friendship with a Jew. He got used to it despite everything, because I had four or five good Jewish friends. He was even impressed by the mental agility of some. I had to defend Denis against the aggression of the twins from Ajaccio, Jacques and Albert, who had him in a hold. But as they got on well with me we managed one way or another to keep the peace. These two were terrible and were always telling tales that made one see red. It was really a joy to discuss everything with them in their big house on Cape Corsica decades later!

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Sport

In addition to the large area reserved for the gymnastics, running and jumping pits, the vast area also included a regular sized football field and two tennis courts. Very early on I was a keen player of both sports. In football, I was on the right wing due to my acceleration, which often allowed me to take advantage of the opposing defence. But my small frame and lack of weight meant that, when we had to play teams coming from secular schools, where they were a much tougher, I was often flattened or otherwise abused by the opposition. But the Fathers wanted us to have contact with the outside world and they were right. It was on the field that I started to understand that in certain circumstances it was appropriate to be forceful, in any case to try. Sometimes I elbowed an opponent's ribs or even used my studs on a leg if they became too aggressive. Not very goody-goody, but one could go to chapel twice a day and still refuse to "turn the other cheek". The referee might blow his whistle, but it seemed to me that father Tapin, who saw what was going on, was so not indignant. So what!

Tennis offered a completely different pleasure, and we didn't have physical contact with the opponent. There was, in the gestures, the framework, the equipment, the sound of the ball on the court, an aesthetic dimension which came near to resembling art which thrilled me. It was my passion at Lacordaire, and remained so for some forty years. Periodically we met players from other colleges, usually of the Jesuits and the Sacred Heart. On rare occasions our Dominican Fathers played host to our traditional rivals. The Lord must have smiled over the tennis court. Four of us, Richardson and Tapouni, the Jesuit's pupils and good friends, Lefèvre who was older than us and was the better player, and myself had great fun, as much as from the tennis as from the unbridled rivalry of our respective Fathers, letting down their guard.

Once a year, on 7 March, the day of Thomas Aquinas, our founder, Dominican theologian, doctor of the Church, instigator of boarding schools, was celebrated by the whole college. We would get up early to go out for the day. The program was generally as follows: we would go to one of the superb rocky inlets at Cassis, east of Marseilles and visit the snack bar on the seafront at about ten o'clock for something to eat, and then off to Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume where we were welcomed by the fathers of the Dominican monastery. We celebrated a Mass and sermon in the great Basilica, and also chatted with the Fathers, for whom it was as much a day of celebration as for us.

Our admiration was especially directed towards an athletic monk with a round, colourful face and deep voice. He was a well-known rugby international. Bombarded with questions, he was full of exciting stories, taking care not to talk about himself as humility requires. His vocation led him, at the top of his game, to put an end to his sporting career. At the convent, he was now responsible for the garden: trees and flowers, but also fruits and vegetables. He therefore claimed to be in training as a gardener... it could not be called a "lawn" but almost.

The chef, also a Father, made up a special menu for this day of celebration which we all appreciated. The blessing of the Prior at the beginning of the meal maybe even improved it. After lunch we didn't linger, leaving the monks and their convent to their usual calm and silence. We were going to Sainte-Baume, a huge rock situated between St-Maximin and Marseille. A long cliff culminating at 1200 meters dominated a wide plateau located 400 metres further down. At the foot of the cliff was a cave where Marie-Madeleine was reputed to have taken shelter, a place of pilgrimage little frequented at that time because of the difficulty of getting there. The guardians were Dominicans (again!), separated from their convent at St-Maximin. In this case, our visit was even more appreciated because we brought them supplies entrusted to us by the convent.

The cliff of Ste-Baume with the rocks of Cassis and Ste Victoire (among others) would, a few years later, be the theatre of operations for a small group of climbers of whom I would be a member. I have fond memories of this and will return to it later.

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I would remain a boarder at Lacordaire until my first Baccalauréat. I would take the Latin and Greek language A-level Bac and succeed in passing. During this period quite obviously many things happened in the world outside, in the Poutet family, Roquevaire and elsewhere, but also with my dear You whom I saw for only one month a year, during the summer holidays.

With apologies to the reader I now come back to tennis, I would often do well at it since it was a passion. At the château each year, on the first Sunday of May, quite early in the morning to avoid the midday heat, many tennis players met on the courts to trace the white lines with lime. It was obviously always the same people who did most of the work, and especially the better players because it was essential to apply the lime carefully to avoid smudging the lines, and the easy criticisms of advisors. But all this took place with good humour and happiness, everyone looking forward to anchovy paste sandwiches which would reward everyone, workers as well as “observers”. The good château wines soon made their effects felt. Voices and laughter become louder, the stories becoming more lewd. It was an important day for us, the nearby cherry trees made a pleasant backdrop and the excellent anchovy sandwiches will forever remain an imperishable memory of the ‘May Sunday’

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Two years after my “landing” at Roquevaire a significant change took place. At the end of difficult but amicable negotiations between the two parties, the Plâtrières (of Roquevaire) were taken over by a company carrying on business in the same field, the Vaucluse Plâtrières S.A., headquartered in Isle sur Sorgue about 20 kilometres from Avignon. This company operated from fifteen different sites, some, such as offices on the surface and others underground. The agreement provided for my father to become the Managing Director of the whole enterprise (i.e. No. 2 after the President), he had, as a result, to make his home in Isle sur Sorgue. As far as I was concerned, it was decided that I must continue my studies at Lacordaire and Bonne-Maman would be responsible for me. She allocated me a nice room at St-Joseph, in the beautiful manor house that I loved so much, so this rearrangement did not displease me.

My Grandmother and I would make up a good household for six years, before any new changes arrived alter our cosy arrangement. She made it her business to complement my schooling with both literary culture and artistic values, developing my taste for the finer things in life. With great discretion and kindness she introduced me to a magnificent past architectural history giving me an understanding and appreciation of Provence which was full of wonderful sites. Within 25 Kilometres we had the beautiful city of Aix en Provence with its ancient streets through which we strolled, admiring the beautiful old doors, the caryatids of some of the old rest houses and hot water fountains. We visited churches, museums and monuments of all ages. Bonne-Maman had considerable personal knowledge but before setting off she perhaps augmented this by reading about our destination from books borrowed from the library. It didn't matter!

With the help of guides, I discovered and got to know, cities crammed with history and art, giving me a passionate interest in this rich heritage, Aix of course, but also Arles, Nîmes, Tarascon, Avignon. Ancient monuments and Roman remains filled me with admiration and respect, both by their beauty and sometimes their size as well as by what they represented of genius, mystery, history and of suffering. I am unable to put all these wonders in any order. I just stand admiring in amazement, gasping before the exceptional work represented by the Pont du Gard. The Magnificent Romanesque Abbey no further than St Victoire Abbey, near the Vieux Port in Marseille with its underground prison dating back to the 8th century. So much suffering took place on this historic site before it became a House of God

We certainly got around Provence where there was no end of wondrous things to discover. One fine day in Avignon, after visiting, the imposing and superb Palais des Papes in the morning with such a lot of unique history, we went out to lunch to an excellent gastronomic restaurant on the outskirts of Hiely, (one went willingly from one type of art to the other provided that they were both of the same excellence), we looked around the streets a little before turning up. What a visit! The Countess of Flandrésy received us in her beautiful mansion (hôtel) with kindness, distinction and charm inherent to her great beauty. Without having warned me, Bonne-Maman had written to her, on the recommendation of her cousin Charles Maurras, to ask if she would receive us so that she could ask if a book of poetry she had could be dedicated to her by the author, l'Abbé Le Cardonnel. This eminent poet, had become very old without having sufficient to live on, he had not experienced the financial success that his reputation and the quality of his work deserved. He lived with the Countess who gave him a comfortable and quiet home, where he could, in the best of conditions, end his semi-saintly life of work. Madame de Flandrésy, rich, cultivated, relatively young at the time, and free from any matrimonial ties, "held court", to the great delight of cultured people and a few others, politicians in particular. Her reputation as a patron and scout of exceptional people was very real. It soon became apparent, even for me, then only thirteen or fourteen years old, that she and Bonne-Maman struck up a mutual appreciation of each other, and endeavoured to outdo each other. I was enthralled to see these two quick witted ladies having a lively conversation going back and forth.

L'Abbé le Cardonnel came in, supported by a strong and handsome young man, who, our hostess explained, did everything; servant, secretary, driver and as I understood later "escort" when necessary. Our elderly Abbot-poet was infirm and his voice weak. After a quick introduction, he was settled with care in the comfortable chair which was apparently there for him. At the request of Bonne-Maman, he was first asked to bless me by tracing the sign of cross on my forehead with his thumb. I was not expecting this and I must have had a silly look on my face that made him smile with a sort of grimace that impressed me, he followed with a few kind words of encouragement. I caught his eye where, through the fog of a cataract, I discerned a brief moment of alertness and passion that still lived in his old body. This "meeting", which I hardly believed had taken place, as it was so fleeting, led me to be wary of hasty judgments on those called "elderly". I realised that an old body can be animated with a still-youthful spirit. Then there is the soul, let's not go there...

The Abbot wrote a pretty quatrain as a dedication in the book of his works brought by Bonne-Maman, which pleased my grandmother greatly. Then, kindly invited by the Countess, he recited some of his most beautiful verse to us as best he could, using his broken voice well, to give the necessary intonation coming from heart and mind. This afternoon I could have been pretty bored by the proceedings, pardonable for a young boy of my age, but it was not so, quite the contrary. I applauded silently when on the verge of leaving, our hostess made a promise to Bonne-Maman to see her again, she made a point of saying that I should come too. I was proud and happy. Indeed, we renewed our visit two years later. My pleasure was then not as great, the Abbé Le Cardonnel had died a few months earlier, the good-looking young man had left the scene, Madame de Flandrésy, seemed sad and less pretty and furthermore it was raining. On the way back, my grandmother and I remained silent,

François, the Plâtrières chauffeur had to concentrate to drive his best in the pouring rain. As it was he always drove very badly which too often earned him the cruel admonitions of my father.

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Silence had become usual between Belle-Maman and me, it was a fact, and I must admit it was my fault. So it was absolutely essential that I expressed my feelings, sometimes excessively, to You, my mother, even the smallest of my joys, sorrows, bad moods, enthusiasm, etc. it was an obvious need. Within the Poutet family expressions of emotion had unfortunately come to an end. It was impossible to say or express my feelings; this was often very difficult before all these beautiful monuments, beautiful landscapes, architecture and nature that gave me real and pleasant emotions. It felt awkward, a few banal sentences, a semblance of enthusiasm was all I could do to externalize my feelings, while on the inside I could sometimes be bursting. It was because of this that Bonne-Maman occasionally lost her patience with me, losing her temper, telling me in severe terms, and in a tone to match, that my silence in response to all the beautiful things that she had assiduously put before me was disheartening for her, and she questioned my ability to enjoy it all. After a few kind words from me and looking disconsolate everything was forgotten and the bad moment put behind us. I believe in fact that my very nice grandmother was aware of the profound reasons for my attitude and she had, from time to time, in reality very rarely, felt the need to explode, and then return to our usual relationship; a silent relationship.

I wish today that I had been able, or known how, to be more expansive. But that was how it was, and maybe, at least in part, explains why I welcomed the declaration of war in September 1939 and jumped at the chance to get away and free myself from family authority.

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With my father of course I went on many beautiful outings. Before every one of them I had to “submit” (the word is perhaps a bit strong) to a precise and detailed itinerary showing an understanding of the visit to our destination. I had to do this in respect of the three beautiful Cistercian abbeys in Provence: the Thoronet, Senanque and Silvacane, the Benedictine Abbey of Hautecombe in Savoy (now abandoned) on the shores of Bourget Lake, the Roman Theatre at Orange, where we attended a wonderful performance of King Oedipus by Sophocles (I obviously had to study the piece beforehand) with Albert Lambert and Jeanne Delvaire, two “greats” of the Comédie Française.

I had no chance of taking in all the details of these “lectures”, and if sometimes I could curse these lunches, these dinners, during which it was necessary to show ones appreciation of the food (stuffed tomatoes and Louloute’s stews without any flavour), I nevertheless, on some occasions give a thankful thought to my father who often quoted Plato declaring to his son that in life: “one must first know, then make known, but also... know-how”.

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At St Joseph Bonne-Maman had assigned me a very lovely room at the southern end of the manor house, connecting with one of the two square towers placed at either end of the building. I loved

this tower full of mystery and medieval history. My grandmother, knowing my passion for this little room, had made it look nice with an old desk, a locker and a few shelves for my books. This was my private domain where I liked to get away to read, or write to You with all my thoughts, as promised. I tried hard to feel the mysterious cold air currents that Bonne-Maman liked to tell me about, insinuating cheerfully that St. Joseph could be haunted. This idea did not disturb me, quite the contrary; I even talked about it to some comrades to Lacordaire who were quite impressed, especially since I exaggerated things just a little. In fact, without being really convinced as Bonne-Maman seemed to be, it was not unbelievable that all the events that had taken place between these walls over half millennium, had in one way or another impregnated the stones. The thought of the underground passage discovered beneath the cellar and what could have happened in the olden days confirmed the case. After all, real or not, what could be more normal than a 13th century haunted mansion!

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Life at St. Joseph was very pleasant, especially in the summer. Behind the thick walls and barely open, full size, wooden shutters, the coolness remained pleasant accentuated it seemed by the half-light. To the front a beautiful terraced garden led to a large lawn gently sloping down to the Huveaune, a pretty trout stream with otters scampering on the banks. On the other side lived Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha in the Château.

Every afternoon at about four, crossing the narrow metal bridge which spans the Huveaune and connected the two areas, we got together under the great plane trees where the old Anna came to serve tea (French version!). After which Uncle Paul often took me for a ride in “trèfle”, and let me take the wheel on the safer roads, especially on the long straight between the Pont de l'Étoile and Gémenos. If we didn't do that I went for a bike ride on the dusty lanes running between the hills. I liked the effort of going up the hills just as much as the speed coming down. I came back all sweaty and happy from my rides. Bonne-Maman and Aunt Bertha were kept busy wiping me down and ensuring I was rehydrated. Uncle Paul would then throw me a complicit look of satisfaction, perhaps recalling the races he undertook, many years ago, without the knowledge of his father.

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Dominating Roquevaire was Gardy Hill, conical in shape, it rose some four to five hundred metres above the Valley. The whole south side belonged to the family, as well as the great old Provençal house situated half way up the slope, which itself was named Gardy like the hill. Two footpaths led to the top: one passing through the cemetery and along the ruins of the old Castle perched on its rock the other climbing through the old village passing in front of the old well-guarded by a large cantankerous non-venomous snake that I didn't like very much. A couple of old farmers occupied the small farm adjoining the house. They lived poorly on what remained of the vines and fruit trees.

From the large terrace, shaded by two big mulberry trees and two acacias, one had a superb view on the village and well beyond, to Pont de l'Étoile and Aubagne to the South, the massif of Bassant to the East and the Garlaban Massif to the west. The Huveaune flowed between these two beautiful steep mountains for five or six kilometers. With my cousins, and sometimes alone, we went for some fantastic walks. When we got to the top of Gardy after a good climb in the heat, we could slake our thirst with cool water from a small terracotta jug which always hung by a branch, put there by the Mulberry farmers. The jug was wrapped in a cloth which gathered the water seeping through the clay, the slightest air currents were sufficient to maintain its freshness. This was the traditional Provençal way, which everyone used, to have continuous fresh, cool water, at least in those days.

Behind thick walls Gardy was furnished in a rustic style, comfort was not too important, the house was rarely occupied, only when people came to live in it for a few days for a celebration, for a relative to come and sort out their problems or when they travelled through. We then rid the House of its population of spiders and scorpions, not the big tropical ones that have a fatal sting, but the reddish-brown ones, two to four centimetres long very alert and quick to flick their sting-in-the-tail when threatened. The howls of Monette, whose hand unwisely ventured between books sitting untidily on a dusty shelf, bore testimony that their sting was still very painful. The sting from one of these scorpions was similar to that of a bee.

At Gardy there was a magnificent tree judging by its size, foliage, and fruit. This was a “pistachio”. It was known to the entire village and became a “destination”. It was good to linger there in its cool shadow, and in season its fruits were delicious. Few people have had the opportunity to taste fresh pistachios, they are usually sold roasted. The pod is green, as is the nut. The taste is somewhat comparable to that of an avocado. There were other interesting fruits of the area to discover. Jujubes, small sweet olive shaped fruit, brown with firm flesh that all children, when the season came, chewed on all day. Grenadines also, with a whitish flesh inside containing a multitude of small red balls as large as a grain of corn, tasty and refreshing, which smother kids’ faces. Persimmons, these beautiful golden persimmon fruits that ripen in the autumn whose gentle and soft pulp, like a jam, is preferably eaten with a small spoon, rather than like some of my classmates who daubed their faces with it, like masks. One could also, with the risk of retaliation by our friends, use the fruit as we would a snowball. We could get hurt. I took part in one of these stupid and disastrous battles. Louloute and Antchka had quite a business repairing the damage. Oddly enough my father seemed indifferent to it all.

And then the delicious prickly pears, fruit of the cactus of the same name. It is a beautiful plant, the broad leaves bristling with spines that protect it from the clumsy hands of the greedy. The fruit itself is covered with thin thorns that should be removed carefully before getting one’s hands pricked all over; they were very difficult to get rid of. But if these precautions were taken, and if the fruit had ripened well in the sun, the flesh inside was colourful and deliciously sweet. To enjoy it one had to work at it.

Gardy contained within its walls a curiosity that could be found in a few old Provençal houses. It was a privy with two seats (not “as the Turkish”). Two bowls were arranged face to face so a conversation could take place while “working” Monette and I amused ourselves “pretending” with much laughter and the disapproval of the adults.

A few years later the estate would revert to Nany and her husband who would modernize the House and plant many fruit trees with my 'collaboration'. I will mention this later on..

At St-Joseph, apart from ‘gymkhanas’ on my bike in the garden that Bonne-Maman disapproved of, I had a few other interesting distractions. First at the corner of the terraced garden, overlooking the lawn, a big lime tree got the treatment, in its high branches. I built a tree-house the success of which was not without a few incidents and difficulties. I had to learn quickly as the branches of this tree are brittle and break easily as do those of the elder or even the pine, unlike those of the almond or oak, which one could work with without any great risk

Without success I invited my father to come and visit my tree-house, not without some ugly ulterior motives, knowing well that the high branches were unlikely to accept his weight of about 100 kilos. On the other hand Uncle Henri, lighter and quite agile would have come if my aunt hadn’t put her foot down.

I also had a good Meccano set with which, little by little, I became familiar, and eventually succeed in creating some models which I would not have previously thought possible. But the desire to

amaze my father had probably given me some ingenuity. I had even managed to set in motion some of these models with the help of a small steam engine, one of my father's old toys, when he was my age. I was happy to discover that I was better at this than I thought I might be.

The marvels of nature, in their infinite diversity, also gave me a thrill. I was interested in the beautiful cicadas the song of which could become deafening on hot summer days. Catching them wasn't easy, but I had learned to approach gently without scaring them away and quickly grabbing them in the palm of my hand, without harming them. This manoeuvre was more risky with the cigalon, male, smaller, noisier, and more suspicious. The game that some comrades had taught me was to stick a wisp of straw between the rings of the abdomen (no, not in the arse, as it was sometimes said) of the poor cicada and let it ascend in a squeal of fear and anger, perhaps also of pain. What a nasty thing to do!

My interest in this beautiful singing insect had given me a wish to know about its reproduction. I looked in the garden for a small disturbance in the sandy parts of the garden which might hold the unsightly chrysalis, with a thick shell about the size of a large beetle, coloured brown or beige, not very pretty. It would emerge awkwardly and slowly, but with an infallible instinct it would make its way to a tree trunk which it would climb with its claw-like legs, and climb up to a sunny branch. Motionless for two or three hours, the cicada insect would emerge. The back of its shell soon cracked a little, and this increased gradually to reveal the fragile insect. The emergence would be painful and laborious. The wings which were folded up and wet were all transparent and tender green. They would gently unfold and then slowly acquire the beautiful bronze colour that we see. Before taking its first flight, the cicada would repeatedly beat its wings, as if trying them out, as one would turn a new engine before starting it. Then after two or three chirps, like the cry of a new born baby, it ended up flying off to a short musical life of a single summer.

The Accident

This happened in the summer after my arrival in Roquevaire - I was then nine years old. Many of us were gathered on the terrace of the château, when Frederick, the foreman of Plâtrières, drove up, just before the delicious afternoon tea time snacks. My father had just had a serious accident on the three kilometre straight stretch of road between Pont de l'Etoile and Gémenos, on which Uncle Paul had given me my first driving lessons. At full speed, it was said at more than 120 Km/hour, he had to swerve to avoid a truck which, without warning, came out from the small road coming from St-Jean-de-Garguier. He had rolled over three times into a field after having ripped out a mile-marker. Gasoline dripped on to my father trapped under the car, but by a miracle there was no fire and no serious injury, only the Vivastella was a write-off. The telephone rang and on the line was P. R. of Vernejoul, a friend of my father's since childhood. Jean Poutet was in his clinic in Marseille with only a few bruises and would be kept in under observation, as a precaution, until the following day. Big relief all round. Everyone spoke at once. I decided that this was not adequate, so it suddenly occurred to me that it would be suitable if I express the prevailing emotion and I did what a good son should in such circumstances, I burst into tears. Everyone around me seemed relieved.

Even today I wonder about the deeper reasons for my reaction. It seems that my father, when he knew about it, was quite moved. Before this however, a little later he gave me a very serious telling-off for the following reason. Sometime after the accident, my father being quite recovered, three gentlemen, arrived one early afternoon, dressed in suits and ties, despite the sweltering heat. These were the insurers, who as far as I was concerned were just nice strangers, nothing more. Louloute settled them on the terrace until the arrival of my father, whom she had pre-warned, by telephoning Plâtrières.

Being left alone, these gentlemen spoke of the accident and as was nearby, I heard one of them say that “Mr. Poutet has the reputation of driving very fast”. Pride in my father’s driving skills compelled me to say: “it’s true, he drives fast but very well. Before the accident he was travelling at more than 120Km/hr”. All three looked at me and began to ask me nicely when my father would return. I then went to see my tadpoles to make sure they were well looked after. After the departure of the insurers, my father called me in an angry tone that he had never previously used toward me, and blamed me for my intervention with these three gentlemen. I quickly understood that I had messed things up and serious repercussions could result. Finally it was decided that “one cannot take into account words of a child who could say anything”, and that was the end of that. It was a lesson learned that in some circumstances one should “keep one’s mouth shut”.

On a more cheerful note I have great pleasure to move on to the evenings which Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha loved to organize at the Château. It was a bit like going back to the crazy nights of the “Belle Epoque”.

After one of the gourmet dinners, with excellent food and drink, which Uncle Paul, with the help of old Anna, knew how to organise so well, they began to dance. They were the dances of the era: the fox-trot, the one-step, the charleston, the waltz and the tango which had just become popular. From time to time they organized a quadrille. I was allowed to stay and it was a great joy, but I also had a little job because it was me who was put in charge of working the two phonographs, which meant of course ceaselessly winding them up. One of them was a “His Master's Voice” with a large horn from which came a strangled, high pitched sound, and the other more modern (!) that Bonne-Maman had bought for my cousins. I remember that the champagne corks popped most of the time and that the behaviour of all these great people seemed quite unusual. I can still see Uncle Paul, Uncle Henri and my father closely hugging Cousin Georges’ young wife; the lovely Simone, whose shrill, nervous laughter seemed to give them lots of fun. Cousin Georges, behind his Eastern theologian’s black beard, gazed at the scene without being particularly concerned, no doubt already aware of the precariousness of his marriage.

But after a little while I left this world to sleep on the sofa in the sitting room until the party was over, which was in the early hours. It then broke up in laughter and loud voices. I think that for some of our small group returning to St. Joseph, the small bridge over the Huveaune appeared narrower than usual in the lovely light of the moon.

From these happy gatherings I always learned some surprising new things about adults, some positive and some negative. I was surprised to find that women (some) could hold their own with men when it came to ‘bending an elbow’, fortunately without crossing a red line, some of course better than others.

Among our family group the best at hiding their over indulgence were Aunt Berthe and Aunt Renée, each with a different reaction. Aunt Bertha took an air of a Queen Mother becoming more and more serious, which brought a nice smile to the lips of her husband, but a disapproving look on the face of her sister, Bonne-Maman,. Louloute, generally very reserved and unemotional, took on a stronger and more assertive voice and her cheeks reddened markedly. As for Aunt Renée, her beautiful contralto voice came forth if she was acting in the theatre, but she insisted that the gentlemen dance with her, exhausting each of them in turn. Uncle Henri cared little, singing over and over a tune by Werther: “I have, on my chest, pressed the most divine and most beautiful creature...” in his off-key, nasal voice; to the laughter and ridicule of all present.

The family group was often joined by a few friends, always the same ones. Doctor and Madame Garrielle and their son Paul, were the most frequent. They were very friendly and cultured. Paul was a

handsome boy, twenty years old, a medical student, friendly and spiritual. It was he who taught me the first rudiments of tennis with patience and skill. We got on really well. He had a serious crush on Nany. It was clear that the attraction was mutual and there was a lot of talk about an engagement. Then came the day when Nany arrived in tears confessing that Paul treated her with “unworthy behaviour of a well-mannered boy”. The family felt obliged to break off all relations with the Garrielles, and I think that Nany thereafter regretted her outburst. Paul became an excellent doctor and settled in Roquevaire!

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Mr and Madame Moroz were both Russians, and like many of their countrymen, their respective families had had to flee the Soviet revolution. She had a real talent as a pianist, of which Aunt Renée seemed envious. He was tall and skinny and had a fairly impressive baritone voice. We never tired of hearing him sing the well-known “I love the sound of the Horn... “ ending with a serious ‘ut’ that he liked to prolong. A little puppy of a man, but charming

Mr Voullemier was a former Inspector of Taxes. He was exceedingly slim but very kind. His wife rendered him the sort of devotion that suited him. They had a mentally disabled son of thirty years old who could only speak in grunts which impressed me a lot. Guy had taken to me, and sometimes took me by the hand to admire and smell the beautiful roses which were his mother’s pride and joy. The Voullemiers lived more or less a cloistered life, at home with Guy, but received friends in the afternoon at their beautiful property just outside Roquevaire. We played petanque and were served refreshments.

The three “ladies” of Souchère seemed to come from a Somerset Maugham novel. They lived on the edge of the Huveaune in a beautiful old cottage that they had furnished with great taste and made it very comfortable. Madame de la Souchère was attractive, very gentle but a strong character. Her husband had died at an early age so she was entirely devoted to her two daughters. Marcelle, the eldest, about forty years old, had a beautiful face and a fantastic smile that I loved. I was then fifteen or sixteen years old. Suzanne was rather stout, less feminine, strong and nicely authoritarian. I said one day to Monette that I preferred Marcelle, she laughed in my face assuring me that I was right, and that anyway with Suzanne she would have more chance than I. I had some difficulty understanding because at that time this type of problem remained a family secret.

The Abbot Cabasson, would not have been out of place in a book by Pagnol. He was Priest at Lascours, a pretty town perched on the slopes of Garlaban, two or three kilometres above Roquevaire. He had a very strong Provençal accent, and despite some reservations of The Bishop, he continued to give his sermons half in French and half in Provençal, which appealed to most of his flock. He was also a good watercolourist; he therefore took the lead of a small group made up of some members of the family and our friends, of whom Louloute, Aunt Renée, Simone, Cousin Georges’ wife, Mr. and Madame Moroz, and some others all took part.

We went as a group, and I followed to help carry the equipment. The Abbot chose a site, and everyone settled down to paint. To his talents as a painter Abbot Cabasson added those of a poet. No doubt he wrote good poems, but he managed to convey his vision of life through poetry, maybe his relationship with God also. Poetry is everywhere, in the beauty of nature of course, but also in factory chimneys, Lecorbusier’s modern architecture, builders cranes and so on.

One day all our watercolourists were determined to do justice to the beautiful landscape that extended towards the village of Roquevaire, and the Gardy and Bassaut mountains, Louloute said that the railway taking up the foreground was in the way. Others agreed but the Abbot stuck to his guns and

assured us that the railway would enhance the aesthetic beauty and poetry of the scene by the contrast with the background. In the end with a charcoal-maker's faith, we complied, and found that the Abbot was right as the results were quite stunning. Even Leonardo da Vinci would have appreciated our efforts.

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Bonne-Maman and Aunt Bertha came from an old Cévennes family. Their father Bernard Baudet was Director of the collieries of la Vernarede, a mining village some 30 km away in the mountains north of Alès. The Cevennes people were rough as their country, as were miners. Mr. and Madame Baudet had two daughters, but also a son Vincent. Bonne-Maman and Aunt Bertha never spoke of their brother, because, apparently, he had from a very young age railed against any discipline, against his family at first but then against society. At Alès College where he was a boarder, he already showed up as a rowdy, unruly student. One of the things he did would become well known through a story that was going to be told a few years later in *le Petit Chose*¹⁹. It was he who threw an inkwell on the frock coat of the teacher's assistant, who was in fact Alphonse Daudet, a young "master of studies" as supervisors were called at the time. Monsieur Baudet had to buy a new frock coat for the young assistant. This is the only thing that Bonne-Maman wanted to tell me about Vincent. My cousins and I never got to know what happened to him. The absolute silence on the part of his sisters, Berthe and Marie, kept us in the dark and we liked him the better for it.

Every year, generally in the spring, Bonne-Maman received a visit from a distant cousin with a beard and greying moustache whose severe look impressed me. He came from Martigues, a pretty hilltop town in Camargue, wrongly referred to as "The Provençal Venice". He had the bad intonation and loud voice found among the deaf, which he was. We had to speak loudly and clearly to be heard. Colonel Victor Poutet, my grandfather was also as deaf as he was and when they strolled together in town or took a drink on the terrace of a café, those around them could easily hear their conversation, which might not have been to everyone's taste. Indeed some subjects could be literary or scientific, but also political. They swore a lot and the cousin's ideas could be unwelcome among people coming from all walks of life.

Another man of great culture and great intelligence who had started a periodical with very controversial views was none other than Charles Maurras, Director of *l'Action Française*. We knew where he was going, the quality of his mind and his writing, but also the serious repercussions his ideas would engender. From when I was ten to seventeen years old I saw him five or six times at St. Joseph. He was always very attentive and very kind towards Bonne-Maman. He directed two or three sentences towards me taking an interest in my studies, my tastes in books, sports, and arts. He was a great lover of food and enjoyed the dishes that had been specially prepared for him. Because of the regard they had for each other, a little later, surely with an ulterior motive, I had the affront to ask him a few questions. But let's leave this for now.

June 1935

An exceptional day which I will long remember was spent in the Camargue, with the herds of cattle, it was branding time when all the young bulls would be branded on the thigh, giving them an indelible indication of their owner; the herd owner. The Marquis de Baroncelli was one of the most important cattle barons. It was through Maurras, also from the Camargue, "Martegau" (inhabitant of

Martigues), that the Poutet and the Baroncelli came to be related. Every year Bonne-Maman and my father were invited, as well as a few friends, to attend the branding, which was an important ceremony in the Camargue. The invitation was often declined for various reasons, but accepted with gratitude this year to allow me to attend a show which is more than just folklore, it was wonderful

Louloute had gone to stay with her parents in Juan for a couple of weeks. This was fortunate because she didn't like this kind of thing. It would be just Bonne-Maman, my father and I who would go. From eight o'clock in the morning we were at work. All the people involved with the branding were already there. Mr. and Madame de Baroncelli welcomed their guests with a few simple words without loitering. They were both dressed as horsemen, like their herdsmen, simple but practical. We were directed to a barred off area in the center of which there were carts and other miscellaneous equipment. There were about a hundred of us including some notables of course. We stood on improvised benches around the arena in order to better see what was going to happen. The bulls had been penned in a vast enclosure a hundred meters away. We saw them arriving at a run between two ranks of herdsmen on horseback who directed them toward us. They were nervous, moving to the right and left, pawing the ground with their hooves, breathing hard through their wet noses, fearful and aggressive. We were on a farm of fighting bulls. Even now, although a few months old, behind a fearsome lot of muscle one could see their fighting spirit. After observing them for a short while, a group of five or six herdsmen ventured into the arena. One of them, a massive colossus, feline and muscular, set himself in front of a young bull. temporarily surprised it launched itself toward the man, who quickly and adroitly grabbed its horns with both hands, stepped back a few meters from the shock, managed to stop the animal and, twisting its neck made the animal fall on its side. It was then immobilized and the hot brand applied to the bull's flank. A roar, an attempted thrashing of legs and the crackling of leather under the branding iron burning the hide with a little smoke and a scorched smell, then the young bull was freed to escape through the same opening and join the herd of which we could only see the black silhouettes out there towards the Petit Rhône.

The same scene was repeated 20 times, 30 times, always so poignant, fascinating, impressive, and beautiful. The branding ended for the day and everyone, guests, owners and all the staff gathered in the great courtyard to freshen up with a good little white Languedoc wine. Yes, I had some too. We finished with a few well-chosen words from our host to his guests, but especially to congratulate and thank all his herdsmen; a Marquis no doubt; but also a much loved and respected employer.

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After the appointment of my father as Managing Director of both Plâtrières and the Vaucluse collieries, he and Louloute settled in Isle sur Sorgue, in a huge residence consisting of a garden-level ground floor with its entrance steps and two floors above. At the end of the garden that surrounded it flowed The Sorguette, one of the many tributaries of the Sorgue river; a river with clear water inhabited by trout and beautiful green banks which flowed gently into the Ouvèze shortly before it ended its journey in the Rhône, near the famous vineyards of Chateauneuf du Pape.

My father was a passionate bibliophile and frequented many booksellers in the area, some of whom had become friends. He had over the years collected many books which covered the walls of several rooms, from floor to ceiling; books on all subjects concerning especially classical literature (the Greek, Latin, French authors), history from ancient civilisations to the present, science, but also many other subjects. It was while rummaging in one of "his" Marseille bookshops that my father discovered a copy of "l'Histoire Généalogique de la Famille de Chazal" by René le Juge de Segrais (N ° 212), that I did not delay in offering to You, my mother, to her great delight. I went to find this book in October 1944 in Sanary at the Bard's house; it was one the few objects saved from the bombing of August 13th where You, Roger (my brother), Dany and Colette (his wife and daughter) had been killed.

Little by little this collection of books became very important by reason of the number and quality of the books it contained. In 1940 we had about thirty thousand volumes. My father was justly proud of them. In 1945, after the liberation this incomparable library disappeared in very sad circumstances which will be gone into later.

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Because my father and Loulote had gone to the Isle-sur-Sorgue, I naturally continued to be a boarder at Lacordaire in Marseille, depending on Bonne-Maman for any needs that may arise. But I shared my holidays between Roquevaire, l'Isle-sur-Sorgue and Barbizon where I spent a good month (the most precious of the year) with You. I will return to relate about these Barbizonnais holidays.

One summer day during lunch, there were long silences which was unusual; my father seemed uneasy, as did Louloute. I therefore made myself scarce because breaking the silence seemed inappropriate. I only understood that they expected a visitor. After dinner my father retreated in his office with a folder that seemed to me to be particularly important. When the garden gate bell rang I tried to go to open it but Louloute prevented me and opened it herself and I saw that our visitor was Mr. Durbesson, Chairman of Plâtrières. I was surprised that my father had not himself come to welcome him, he was always very courteous, and this was his Chairman. Louloute took Mr. Durbesson to the office where she closed the door. I only had time to see my father get up and shake hands across his desk. I turned to Louloute and gave her a quizzical look. She said simply: "fireworks will fly". Mr. Durbesson was a septuagenarian with a fine demeanour and a big man. He was a Jew of the Carpentras sect, a large and influential community in this city. He was intelligent and cultivated, influential in politics and the economic life of the Vaucluse, in particular by his membership of the Freemasons.

Louloute and I didn't eavesdrop, but it was impossible not to hear the rising tone of the two voices as the discussion between the two men became more lively. Little by little the voice of Mr. Durbesson became less strident, while that of my father continued to thunder. Then an impressive silence fell. A few minutes later my father was escorting the President (?) to the exit without shaking his hand.

Mr. Durbesson had signed his resignation, prepared in advance, due to a significant misappropriation of funds committed by him at the expense of the company. He did not attend the next meeting of the Board of Directors where my father was appointed to replace him.

Fortunately the majority of our visitors were people of quality, which does not equate to social status. They were thus peasants, farmers if you prefer, who came to see us to bring us fruit, mostly grapes, peaches or apricots, but also occasionally truffles. Indeed, the mines were operated by Plâtrières but above ground the land, although company property, was leased to farmers on generally favourable terms. These were planted with vines, orchards or even truffle oaks. So as to keep good relations between landlord and tenant, the latter, once or twice a year, made a friendly gesture toward my father. More often than not it was he that gave advantage to the tenant but I must say that we did enjoy the truffles.

Among these tenants, was one very particular character, who with his family made up an important group of Plâtrières shareholders. When I saw him for the first time at a luncheon at home he was a young poet of about thirty years old. His fame started to spread out from the Vaucluse and Provence. He was tall and strong, with a nice well developed bass-baritone voice and the beautiful accent of this region, the same as in the neighbouring county of Giono. He had a huge appetite to suit his size. A garlicy leg of lamb perfectly cooked by Antchka disappeared with ease with the help of a

famous Chateauneuf-du-Pape. Between coffee and Armagnac our guest would offer my father and Louloute his latest published work with a very charming dedication followed by his large and original signature: René Char. After his departure we all three tried to decipher the mysteries of these surrealist poems without much success I have to say,; nor did we much like “Le Marteau sans Maître” which would be the defining work of one of the great French poets of our time.

François Arnaud was about thirty years old when I was only fifteen. He was a great chap in every respect, an environmentalist before his time, a lover of nature in general and the mountains in particular. A water expert and forester, he came to settle in Roquevaire with his wife and their children. He was vaguely related to the “ladies” of la Souchère, so my cousins and I had an opportunity of getting to know him. We told him of our rambles in the hills of Bassant and Garlaban which we loved so much, and he suggested that we broaden our scope by gradually increasing the distance and difficulties of our walks. He had acquired fifteen years of experience with the French Mountaineering Club (Club Alpin Française) in various mountaineering skills, so it was with considerable confidence, and with the agreement of the family, that we started a wonderful series of diverse and exciting activities. I will always remember the first abseil from a vertical cliff he made us do as part of our training before taking us to the peaks and chimneys of Ste Victoire and Ste Baume. The extraordinary moment when one hangs fifteen or twenty meters high in space, entrusting one’s life to a rope wrapped round one’s body, trying to get one’s mind to transcend fear, and just get the exhilarating and wonderful feeling of the descent. We had to learn to master the danger, fear and doubt, by acquiring essential principles and techniques to achieve confidence. Arnaud, our leader had to inculcate a controlled confidence into us ensuring that it not be exceeded, he succeeded to do this with patience and lots of talent. I do not wish to go on about our guide and friend for too long, two or three episodes only.

In January 1937, hence in winter, and in intense cold, we decided to climb Mont Ventoux via the north face. Mont Ventoux rises to 1912 metres above sea level with its cone isolated in a little hilly area at the top. It is a beautiful mountain which can be seen from far off, a bit like Chartres Cathedral, in the middle of its plain, which is visible from 30 kilometres away. From spring to autumn the mountain is not particularly difficult for the hiker, or for cars starting from Bédouin along the very steep 22 kilometres long road which leads to the top. The rare cyclist needed a lot of courage and strength. At this time the road up the north slope did not exist.

In January, with bad weather and the cold that we could expect, no mountain is especially welcoming and we would have proof of it.

We arrived at the hamlet of Brantes at the foot of Mont Ventoux, where we left the car. It was six o'clock in the morning, as black as night. We were going to climb nearly 1600 metres vertically and expected snow and ice from 1000 meters. We would be on the go for five hours. The first two hours were no trouble. It was only the cold, and our torches gave a reasonable light. At eight o'clock the sun rose and we found ourselves on snowy ground, a soft snow alternating with icy patches. It became steeper and steeper with more and more snow and ice. My cousins and I had poor footwear: hiking boots with metal studs under and around the soles; not disastrous but bad.. Our other equipment was equally inadequate. Arnaud railed against our lack of foresight: “had I not forewarned you enough?”, and so on. He was about to order a turn-around but we managed to persuade him otherwise. Okay, but now the ice became very hard, and this particular pitch more steep and difficult with a risk, despite the assistance of ice axes, of a dangerous fall. So we had to tie on our crampons. For the three of us it was the first time we had had to do this, and the practice we had carried out in the garden had not sufficiently prepared us. Thus equipped, we roped up to our leader, Arnaud taking the lead, then Nany, myself, and Monette at the rear. A rope of four, which today would seem quite absurd but in those days was quite common. Anyway, only Arnaud had the necessary experience to see to our safety. All four had to be linked by the same rope.

The cold was intense, thick fog, the last fir trees covered in rime. There would be no more vegetation from now on. Snow, ice, fog, cold, such was our lot. And the wretched spikes which we had to adjust only too often. Arnaud fortunately had a sixth sense which enabled us, after some delicate passages between rocky outcrops and a few inelegant mix ups with the rope, of which we were not proud, to bump up in thick fog on a mass of concrete which marked the summit. It was the Observatory inhabited throughout the year by five or six astronomers or astrophysicists happy to practice their scientific activity in this hermitage. It was a little embarrassing but we were extremely tired and beggars cannot be choosers so we struck the solid metal door where no one, other than madmen such as ourselves, or wind storms, came knocking in this rough winter period. We were welcomed as aliens from outer space and they hastened to serve us a scalding hot coffee that was very welcome. It was midday; our climb had been more difficult and slower than expected. We took about an hour to recover and we took on a lot of food for the return. At least in this respect we had prepared ourselves but that was the easy bit.

Our hosts took us for a tour of their observatory. We were enthralled. From one thing to another it was a journey of discovery. There was too little time but we felt that these scientists were really new-found friends.

We needed to leave fairly soon. Arnaud had thought of bringing newspapers and magazines so that our friends would know more of what was happening in the world. This kind gesture was very much appreciated

Outside the fog swirled around and the wind increased. Despite the hour it was a glacial mistral²⁰, we roped up in the opposite way to our climb: Monette first then me and Nany with Arnaud in the rear the better to see what was going on. From the outset the descent was steep but in crampons, going down did not require the same effort as going up, but we had to give 100% concentration. I found that all this caution was a bit excessive, I loved the physical effort, my muscles were working well, and I was more balanced than the others... .. suddenly my crampons got tangled and I began hurtling down the ice slope. Nany who was behind me was not strong enough to take the strain and she fell in her turn. I was going to upend Monette - and quite obviously the whole group would slide into the unknown. Fortunately Arnaud immediately saw my mistake and positioned himself to hold us back. His weight took the strong tension of the rope and Nany and I managed to get to our feet, she was justifiably furious and I was angry and confused by my unforgivable over-confidence. Whoever said: "the mountain is the school of endeavour and humility"? What a lesson!

I hardly dared to point out that my knee was bleeding and my kneecap painful. I had struck it against a rock protruding from the layer of ice. A little bending of the knee fortunately revealed that I had no fracture, but a small open wound. A loose dressing would do the trick. I would have no problems until we got to the bottom. We did not talk, each of us thought of the danger from which we had escaped; all because of a sixteen year old too sure of himself, some would say "cocky".

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It was dark when we got back to the car but before getting in Arnaud slapped me on the shoulder and just said "You understand?" I repeated over and over to myself: "School of humility, humility school"...

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Vertigo

Arnaud, being the complete mountaineer, was a talented free climber. My two cousins were not gifted in this area, so it was my cousin Jacques Granat who came to complete our trio. They had quite quickly accepted me because I had carefully hidden the fact that when faced by difficult “tops” I suffered from uncontrollable vertigo. I always remember the little smirk of this beanpole, Jacques, when during a workout on the cliffs of Marseille-Veyre I could not hide, despite the reassurance of the rope, a serious hesitation during a dizzying climb of some 200 metres above the sea. He actually did me a real favour on that day, because of this I resolved that I would never be seen like this again.

Overlooking Aubagne and marking the southern end of the Garlaban chain of hills there was a good vertical cliff, approximately 150 meters high forming a semi-circle. Over fourteen days, every afternoon with Temitope, the pretty police bitch belonging to Monette, I climbed to the top using the hikers path, And there for an hour, I continued trying to get closer and even closer to the edge, beginning by approaching on my stomach, provoking furious barking from Temitope who believed without doubt that I was going to jump. Little by little I got used to rubbing shoulders with the void.

I withdrew and then tried again getting closer to the edge, and I was pleased to see that little by little my fear eroded. The first three or four sessions were not very successful, especially as a strong mistral was pushing me towards the edge. Then with a lull in the wind, I felt the first encouraging results. After eight or ten days the sensation of vertigo, which had kept me back and hurt my self-esteem had disappeared. I went three or four times again to confirm my “healing”, during which I stood with my feet over the edge, causing much barking from Temitope. Because of this I could be assured to look good before my two climbing companions who were much stronger, older and more experienced than me.

When, several months later, I told them of the anti-vertigo treatment that I had undertaken, they gave me with a smile that amply rewarded me for my painstaking efforts. The friendly slap Arnaud gave me on my shoulders blotted out the unpleasant memory that I had following our winter escapade on Mont Ventoux.

I have concentrated on this “simple case of dizziness” because this “healing” experience was subsequently of great importance in my life, specially with regard to my relationship with the mountains, training at the instructors school at Fort Carré in Antibes, and with the commandos during the war. I should however have been more forgiving and understanding towards one of the commandos of my platoon. In Alsace, on an exercise abseiling down a small cliff, this boy absolutely refused to follow his comrades, claiming to be afflicted with an uncontrollable vertigo. All my efforts to convince him to at least try were in vain. Under the pretence of anger I rather stupidly resorted to persuade him by appealing to his pride by saying in front of all the others: “You are not worthy of being a commando”. He took this very much to heart and the matter was put behind us. At least I thought so, because in the battles that followed a few days later, desperate to demonstrate his courage, which I had no reason to doubt, he continually took excessive risks. Ultimately in the fighting to take Pforzheim he was killed by a big mortar burst which took away part of his skull. My responsibility in the death of a brave fighter was quite evident and even today I do not forgive myself for my stupid attitude.

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At l'École Lacordaire the years rolled by, I had no problem in going from year to year until I got to the first year of the Baccalauréat which I passed in July. I was only sixteen years old but my father, to reward me, instructed Biava, his personal chauffeur, to teach me to drive. Unlike Francois, the driver of the Plâtrières de Roquevaire mines, whose clumsiness was too often the wrath of his boss, Biava was a fine driver. Under his expert instruction and patience I quickly attained a level of competence that my father deemed satisfactory. I had been well taught. He let me drive his car from time to time, a powerful Hotchkiss 20 CV which Biava always kept gleaming. But I would never have access to his personal car, also a Hotchkiss, but a superb white cabriolet prototype which was chosen by Hotchkiss to be driven by the famous French driver Raymond Sommer to drive at Spa²¹. I have no idea how this driver and car came together or how this racing machine came to be at the car dealer Vayssières, Avenue du Prado in Marseille. I will always remember that one day when with my father at Hotchkiss or Vayssières that he was there to welcome us with his big smile and Marseillaise manners, when we tried out that famous car.

He had been an excellent driver, and we had pleasure in checking out the difference between a professional and a good amateur; specially when, after having climbed the very steep hill on Boulevard Perrier at some speed, we reached 120 K/hour on the final hair pin. Great art certainly, but I had just time to see my dad completely tensing up. I did my best to remain properly seated in the small space behind the driver and passenger seats. It was a fascinating and conclusive test. Now that it had been decided on the road, we followed by a fine meal in a good restaurant near Place Castellane. Thereafter the white Hotchkiss became, and always remained, my father's exclusive possession which he fairly quickly managed to tame. I just had to accept that I did not yet have the experience or talent to be worthy of its steering wheel. But on the other hand--.

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At the beginning of 1936 I found myself as a boarder at the Lycee Mignet in Aix-en-Provence doing elementary maths. My father feared that in the graduating subjects of philosophy and maths, Lacordaire was not as good as in the other subjects. But above all one of his friends, Judge Burna, a judge at the Court of Aix, had given high praise to this Aix school where his son was a day pupil and where, according to him and my father, I had every chance of passing the second part of the Bacalauréat.

It was a bad choice. There was a very different atmosphere in the high school and I did not take to it. The different students and different teachers caused me to lose my bearings. The school supervisors, all Corsicans who spoke Corse amongst themselves, thought they were obliged to display a semblance of severity, probably not real, but that crippled my spirit. The dormitory was dismal and of questionable cleanliness. Then, little by little, I came under the influence of certain friendly boys, but not the right sort "on the other side" as one might say. A small door at the end of the yard which didn't close, led to an alley from which we could get to the Cours Mirabeau, where all Aix youth gathered. I was also taken in by the atmosphere of the coffee house 'Café des Deux Garçons', where there were as many girls as boys.

In short, studies were the least of things on my mind, and the results showed. And what had to happen happened: I was failed in my exams. Only just, but failed nevertheless. The same thing happened at the re-sit in October, despite a "cramming" during the summer at the famous "Bac-cram" Trémeau and Guastalla in Marseille.

My father gave forth on these bad days. At home the atmosphere was tense. There was even a question that I should not go to spend the month of August with You at Barbizon, as I did every year. We would not have allowed it, You and me, and I would surely have made a dreadful scene.

Fortunately Bonne-Maman and Louloute were against the idea, and especially Antchka, my “governess”, who often gave her opinion without being invited, and in any case always took my side. In this case she had arguments that perhaps I should not have heard, but which were not devoid of common sense. They should not have taken “the little one” from his environment so brutally, especially to board full time. It would have been different if he was a day boy, but then nothing can replace his mother. All this was said with verve, conviction and confidence. My “governess” was “punchy”, and also (sorry for the implication...) had good reason to have her say.

Holidays in Barbizon were not all joy and skipping. Further steps were taken for the next school year.

My father and Louloute stayed, as I have already said, in l'Isle sur Sorgue, headquarters of the company he chaired. But Marseille being the centre of economic activity in the region forced him eventually to set up an office there where he came more and more often. In the end it seemed sensible for them to have a second home in the city. When this took place I became a day boy at the Lycée Perrier, not far from our apartment, and therefore remained with the family. I was pleased about it so everyone was satisfied. Lycée Perrier was in a modern building on Boulevard Perrier, near the Avenue du Prado, in a very nice area, away from the activity of the city centre. The teachers were excellent and generally pleasant people.

The maths teacher was a strange character, not very sociable or smiling but very clever in his work. Always decked out in a long dark cape from which his pale and lean face emerged, he seemed to ignore us and lectured without interruption but with great clarity and skill. We nicknamed him “Nof”, because it was the way he pronounced the number nine (neuf).

I had returned to a good rhythm of work providing good results. This school year therefore started well, and nothing prevented me from organizing parallel leisure pursuits. For a long time I had been attracted by athletics. Our athletics teacher asked me to take part in junior (under 18 years) competitions in sprint and long jump, and with the training and advice he gave me, I progressed rapidly. At the end of the school year I became long jump champion of the Academy, with an average jump of 6 m 54 leading to articles and photos in the “Petit Marseillais” and the “Provençal”. My father looked at me as if he had only just got to know me, but I quickly realized that this success was relative and my small size limited me to a stage beyond which I could not improve.

I transferred my interest to a much more serious and exciting subject in the company of three other members of the household: the Opera. All four of us loved bel canto, and as the Opéra de Marseille, with Paris and Toulouse, fostered the most beautiful voices that one could hear on the French scene, we were well served. My father, who never did things by half, rented a box for the year. At least once, often twice, every weekend we would go and enjoy ourselves in our box. I was usually responsible for bringing the score that we had without fail, to study previously, at home. Going to the Opera with the score under one's arm, felt good, it was in principle for connoisseurs only, so I felt pretty proud. At the time the repertoire was relatively limited. Limited, it must be said, to the works of undoubted musical quality. Only the voice and the music thrilled the public, who knew how to appreciate them. If the scenery was often overlooked, to tell the truth not too good, it is today in contrast often overdone and of dubious success, far from the spirit of the author who might feel betrayed.

After the show some of us, singers, musicians, dancers, “connoisseurs”, all retired to the “Gaulois”, a friendly bistro near the Opera House. There was an easy relationship among everyone. My father quickly became one of the stars of the “Gaulois”. César Vezzani, one of the best two or three tenors of France and the star of the Opéra de Marseille, quickly became an habitué at our table, bringing his friends and acquaintances with him. Ferdinand Audiger, a base with a seriously low

register; Michel Dens and Valère Blouse, baritones; Giuseppe Traverso light tenor giving an enchanting rendition in “the Pearl fishers”, a very charming dancer, whose name I forget, but whose solicitations towards me amused everyone else, but exasperated me. I was really more interested in glancing from time to time at the two dancers who accompanied Caesar. I was seventeen years old, a few emerging urges, and soon I was to be dubbed “The Eaglet”. Oh well!

The “Carmen” that we heard and discovered there one night beautifully embodied the character of the singer. Young and beautiful with a warm and colourful voice and in the dynamic setting she was a huge success, as was her Don José who was none other than Vezzani. At the “Gaulois”, they both naturally made their way to our table. This was to be the beginning of the affair between her and my father, it lasted for a long two years during which my dear step mother had to endure much humiliation. But this was a problem for the adults, not me.

I also remember a sad evening that pained me for a whole week. We went to hear Lohengrin with a great Wagnerian tenor who was completing a farewell tour around the world after having enjoyed a long career and magnificent successes on all major global stages: it was John Sullivan

It was a full house, and one felt the excitement rising, as it does when faced with a menu in a three star Michelin restaurant. From the very start we enjoyed the ease and the 'professionalism' of Sullivan, a wide and flexible voice in the service of a great artist. The quality of the tone however seemed to me to be not quite as it should be. My father, being in a bad mood, did not agree. It is true that with age, tenors fail earlier in this area more than baritones or basses; this is generally offset by the singer's technique; however, as planned and hoped, the show was of high quality. When it got to the highlight of Wagner's work, “Haven of Peace”, where the tenor is expected by the whole audience, with near certainty, to hear him give at the end this great chorus, a unique “acute ‘re” which is optional, but that any great tenor is obliged to offer the public, it was, in fact, the first catastrophic 'lame note' that the dumbfounded audience listened to in complete silence. The orchestra recovered but the famous ‘re’ again stuck in John Sullivan's throat. They tried for the third time, again a failure; the concerned and compassionate public still remained silent. Marseille is more sentimental than Toulouse, there; there would have been an almighty booning. In short, the show ended without another hitch and the audience gave a standing ovation to honour this failed singer whom all knew, had had a glorious past.

After staying in the lobby chatting to Vernejoul, who had come to see this great artist, we retired to the “Gaulois” to calm down a bit. There was a surprising silence there that contrasted with the usual atmosphere. In a corner of the room, at a secluded table, two young people surround an old man with a dark hat pulled over his eyes; they seemed to console him with kindness and respect. These were two young 'fans' who strove to give hope to their fallen idol. Everyone stayed silent and tried not to look in their direction. This was the great solidarity of the musical world.

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Concerning Cortot²², I have two memories of him. The, first is of this exceptional world renowned artist who enthralled us by his remarkable talent. But also, just as impressive for me, was that he gave me the opportunity to meet my favourite actor. He was for a few days a guest of Prof. de Vernejoul, the childhood friend of my father, of whom I have already spoken, and his wife Madeleine. They all went together to listen to Cortot. We met at the exit and it was decided to take a jar at the Brasserie des Ternes. I was already full of excitement, because despite having only just met, the “3rd man”, he simply said “good evening” and I had recognized the tone of this unique voice, that of Pierre Fresnay. For a whole hour, mute before him, I had the delight of listening to him talk, something, to tell the truth; he enjoyed and knew how to exploit. He knew that he was charming, and he used this gift

and sometimes abused it, nevertheless everyone was taken in by his spell. I also realized that he possessed a real eclectic knowledge, quite comparable to that of my father and his friend, who gave me the vague impression to be a little, just a little bit jealous that they were outdone by him. But I was surely wrong.

Fresnay and Vernejoul could have been brothers. They were equally small in size (like my father incidentally), thin and slender, with a beautiful fine face which gave expression to their intellect and spirit. This evening was a great time for me, and I long remembered it with the pleasure of a gourmet.

Jacques de Vernejoul and Jean Poutet had at one time been educated at the same school. The fact that they went their different ways (physician and engineer) was by no means an obstacle to their friendship. According to information gleaned here and there within the family, they knew how to link their studies with the high life, which was quite remarkable. Fiesta type periods were sometimes succeeded by a mystical phase, which could result in a 'purification' period in a monastery. The Abbey of Hautecombe was, as already said, their favourite retreat. They fell in love with the same beautiful girl, but this rivalry didn't jeopardise their relationship. Madeleine chose Jacques the physician and finally married him. He would become the youngest Professor in France and died a centenarian. I knew him enough to have been charmed and impressed by his exceptional personality. His brother, the General, had great admiration for his elder brother. His natural seductive charm probably led him to few affairs during his married life. Madeleine, his beautiful wife, to console herself, accepted some admirers. No, I am not suggesting that my father...

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During the Christmas holidays of 1936 I experienced the joys of skiing with my cousins in Sestrière, a new Italian resort. The previous winter I had spent three or four days with them and Aunt Renée in Beuil, a small village in the Alpes-Maritimes at 1200m altitude, where I had discovered skiing. We had a poor hotel, poor snow, bad skis and a terrible start. From the village one needed to go by car or on foot to get to the Col de Valberg at 1600m altitude, where snow was abundant and of good quality. Today Valberg is a large resort with tall buildings, major hotels, shops, many lifts and a crowd of skiers. When we were there, there was only a simple wooden hut where we could rent or buy some equipment, and the mountain was wild and bare. There were shoes with seal skin soles to go up to the top of the Salari, 150m higher. This was where I discovered the horrible qualities of the snow-plough and stem-turn, which taught me to brake and turn, succeeding only half the time. I also had the opportunity to admire the elegance of the télémarché a technical turn in deep snow, a manoeuvre subsequently abandoned for more than fifty years only to return into vogue today as if it was something new. Skis were made of ash wood and the more expensive and modern, in hickory. Their length, for a standing skier, was measured by one arm raised vertically from the ground to the palm of the hand. That is about 2.20m for someone 1.70m tall, far too long for a beginner. Today we know that it is much easier to turn with shorter skis. It was an aberration and the source of numerous falls, often rendered more dangerous by the design of the bindings. These consisted of a spring holding a ski shoe (a big cloghopper of leather) and a solid strap encasing the ankle and reinforcing the strength of the whole. There was no security in case of a fall; bad fractures were a frequent occurrence.

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I was equipped with only an elementary theoretical and practical background concerning skiing with when I landed in Sestrière with Nany. Monette had gone before us for a few days to join her "fiancé", a young and handsome Austrian ski champion with whom she was madly in love. Hans Nöbl

was Tyrolean, as most of the instructors at the resort. The previous January he was the Olympic slalom champion, having won numerous other competitions. His fame in Austria and in the international world of skiing was considerable. Unfortunately he had had an accident in training and suffered a double fracture of his tibia-fibula which was likely to end his career. He strolled about on his crutches in the resort with energy and an athletic ease. Within three or four days he had to carefully test himself on his skis. The whole resort was looking forward to this with anticipation. Monette, was however one of the best female French skiers, and was in her element. With the guidance of Hans she had made significant progress and had a happy rivalry with her competitors in the Italian and Austrian teams.

Sestrière is located at 2000m altitude near the small French resort of Montgenèvre, on the Franco-Italian border. Two large towers blocks, luxury hotels, three or four buildings, two or three stores, a cableway was all there was in the resort.

Nany and I were lodged in the same building as the instructors and technical staff. It was good and the banter went on all the time. Nany was being courted by a strapping, enterprising, fellow of 1.90m. She charged me, and the housekeepers, with discouraging him in this courtship. Léo Gasperl was the world record holder of speed skiing then standing at 145 km/h; what was so remarkable, is that he did it with the help of an aerodynamic hump on his back. Today the record stands at more than 250 km/h. Leo tried in every way to charm me and to get rid of me. He even had the audacity to introduce me to a ravishing young Tyrolean of my age, an excellent skier with whom, he told me, I would make much progress, in skiing of course. Nany however clung firmly to me, she was engaged to a Lyonnais boy whom she would marry the following spring, and at this particular time, she wasn't ready for any romantic adventure. Leo was eventually discouraged, phew! When he showed off his athletic frame, I really thought it was better to stay on good terms with him.

On one particular morning the sun shone and the sky blue, all eyes turned to a point on the ski run where we all saw a wonderful dancing figure jumping with elegance and lightness from christiania to christiania. Every turn was accompanied by a "hop, hop" of admiration by all those who had recognized their star. This was Hans Nöbl who was taking his first skiing tests after his convalesce. To the aerial beauty of the movement was added the elegance of the outfit: a beige set where the fabric and leather combined harmoniously. The blonde hair of this beautiful champion blowing in the wind accentuated the beauty of the performance. Hans was one of those rare beings whose indisputable good looks seemed to radiate on all who looked upon him. Who said: "beauty exercises its influence on all those who approach it, even on those who are not aware of it"? Was this not Cocteau? Hans was casting his spell on everyone; to varying degrees and in different ways, of course. I had the evidence of it here in Sestrière, but it was confirmed to me on two other occasions. At Roquevaire where Bonne-Maman had kindly agreed to invite him to spend a few days, she was completely taken in, and also Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha, and all the parents and friends to whom he was introduced. He was moreover a cultured character with much academic knowledge, especially in literary matters, but also his eclectic interest in all the countries where his activity as a ski champion had taken him. He was knowledgeable concerning their geography and history as well as their economic and political regimes. He was also fluent in German, English, French, Italian and Spanish.

I would meet up with him ten years later in 1947, in Argentina, where he had contributed to the creation and the development of a ski resort in a beautiful corner of the Cordillera: San Carlos de Bariloche. The Argentines love it, but so did someone else. I will have more to say about this later.

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June 1937

Great excitement at the Château because it was Nany's wedding day, she would marry André Rousseau. There was a beautiful ceremony at the Church in the morning. The mass was celebrated by a Jesuit Father, a cousin of the groom.

André's family was from Lyon. Many had travelled from their city which had the unjustified reputation of being sad and grey because when one gets to know it one can discover that it is completely the reverse, with beautiful avenues, beautiful monuments, all in pleasant greenery in the middle of beautiful surroundings. While the people of Lyon are not particularly sociable or smiling, just as their city, you need to know them to ultimately find warm hearted people just as lively as any other.

Under the great Cedars of the Château, where the tables were set, the atmosphere was gay and lively, and the feast continued late into the night. I got on very well with my new cousin André, at least up to the 1960s when a little fog came to darken our relationship and it eventually fizzled out.

Nany and André received, among their wedding gifts, the beautiful homestead of Gardy, above the village, on the hill. They set up a comfortable home there and, a little later, I would have the opportunity to help in the development of the land. I'll tell you about it.

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Return to Barbizon

How can we not return to Barbizon which remained the basis of my existence with my dear mother 'You', that had been just too short. Since joining my paternal family I had spent every summer holiday, with You, more often than not in Barbizon. Obviously it was too short but that is the way it had to be. I dreamt of this month all the year through. For You and me it was thirty days of sunshine and light to live to the full, and savour the time spent together; time flies so fast when it is so valuable. We usually spent the mornings together, walking or cycling in the plain or forest, talking, singing, whistling and laughing. We built up a good appetite for lunch. You's cooking was tasty, not very healthy but generally well spiced, at least once a week mazaverou or curry. In the forest we had our spots to gather mushrooms, mostly chanterelles which she cooked with lots of fresh cream and scallops. We enjoyed being gluttons, even as much as some of the cannons of the church!

The afternoons were spent with the gang. We would meet Odette at "Clairière" before cycling or tramping through the forest, sometimes going for a swim in the Seine towards Thomery, about 10 Kilometers away.

Over the years the gang had evolved, but there was always a solid and loyal core. Odette, of course who had developed into a pretty girl, and was the cause of a few jealousies

Jean Homolle, a very handsome and attractive chap with his lovely blonde hair. All the girls were crazy about him, we couldn't stand it. He had everything going for him. Although very young he became a pilot and did well during the war during which he won many medals. Unfortunately matters took a turn for the worse and he died of an abscess of the liver at the age of thirty.

Daniel Raufast took after his father, a rich manufacturer of shoes, intelligent and authoritarian; his fortune made him difficult to live with. Daniel quickly learnt to play the piano and very soon we could listen with rapture to his interpretations of Chopin. At eighteen he drove fast cars; he was a good

driver and claimed that his mastery of the wheel would prevent him from having any accident. He crashed his mother's car and spent fifteen days in hospital. He would successfully take over the family business from his father, and around 1970 (we were then fifty years old) I came across him again in a TV show: he was President of the Shoe Makers Union.

Jacques Dalicieux joined us occasionally. He was a big, strong, heavily build boy with a slightly rough appearance. His father owned a wholesale butcher's shop; a little foolishly we found this to be not very nice. But Jacques himself was a great chap and when you got to know him he was very gentle. His inbred strength made him a little clumsy, but this was often useful during our walks. After the war I saw Jacques Dalicieux again, his father having died, he had taken over as head of the family butchery business, I now feel guilty at declining his invitations to renew our old relationship. What did I take myself for? This butcher was a fine fellow; I think I hurt his feelings.

Also at Barbizon there were one or two other groups, of which we were unaware, but probably just as good as ours. You, without wanting to take me away from my own group, wanted that I associate with the Giraudoux children. She knew Jean Giraudoux well, because she had nursed an old relative of his whom he often came to visit in a rustic villa on the edge of the forest. I had been introduced to him, and he impressed me by his stature, his ease, his voice, and, why not say it, a certain attraction that radiated from him. His son and daughter were that year, spending part of their holidays with their old aunt. They loved You very much and had offered to accept me into their group.

After having been 'on show' several times and not wanting to appear impolite, I ended up accepting an invitation for a long walk in the forest. There were five of us of about the same age: seventeen or eighteen. My companions, two boys and two girls, questioned me skilfully and politely, without any superior airs, with mundane questions about my studies, my tastes and my life in Provence. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed. Obviously they wanted to put me at ease, but I do not know why, perhaps stupidly I didn't feel comfortable. The conversation was very different from those I had with my other friends, much more serious, on literary and political topics. The language was erudite, well-articulated, natural, without affectation. We spoke about and discussed the latest books and literary prizes, successful French and foreign plays. I lost my way; it was obvious that my companions lived in a literary environment which, in this specific area, far outstripped my knowledge. As an insignificant "provincial" I was furious in front of these "Parisians" who seemed to know everything. A self-defence mechanism miraculously came to mind; just as I was getting completely out of my depth I angled the conversation towards Maurras and René Char. This was successful and I was bombarded with questions and I got out of the situation honourably, and they looked upon me with more respect; no longer with an accepting politeness, but being of more equal status to them. I scored more points by mentioning things with which I was more at ease, sport, Mauritius, Greek classics, the mountains and so on. Despite this I felt that I belonged to my own gang. I went out with the Giraudoux family only once more.

Returning to my group I saw that a newcomer had joined us. He was a cousin of Jean Homolle. He was older than us: twenty-three or twenty-four years old. Jean was blond, his cousin was dark, originally Italian, good-looking, and charming. Girls just ogled him, it was very annoying. Not only because of his obvious good looks and charm, but also because of his talent and fame as a violinist. He had given recitals throughout Europe, and would soon be one of the best. How could I forget his name? Alas, his career came to an end when he was only twenty-eight years old. He was killed in an accident.

If the bad weather made our usual walks impossible, we stayed with either one or other of us, more often at Odette's, but also at Jacqueline Houard, a charming, intelligent friend, not especially pretty, but very lively. Mr Houard was a severe looking character that intimidated us all somewhat. He was an editor of the great aviation newspaper "Les Ailes" which I often read because of my passion for aviation. I don't know why he took a liking to me; perhaps it was because of his daughter's interest in

me. When she told him of my visit to the great aviator Farman, he wanted me to tell him all about it in detail. He was astonished because it was said that Mr. Farman was not very approachable and it was very unusual that he should accept this kind of impromptu visit by anyone, yet alone me (?). Perhaps the audacity of youth was on my side. In any case it so pleased Mr Houard that he wrote an article about it in "les Ailes". I was very proud of this.

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Roger and Dany came to Barbizon for their holiday during the same month as I but not every year. The whole tribe was happy to be reunited and had many tales to tell. I then had to be careful how I divided my time between going out with the family and being with The Gang. I did pretty well really. Roger and I discovered a very nice trail, delightfully winding about, lined on both sides with a nice thick layer of moss, occasionally passing by holly bushes which it was better to pass carefully to avoid getting scratched. It was a wonderful outing to do by bike. So pretty, so pleasant that we called it "lover's lane". You had to be aware of a few large roots that crossed it and use a little effort go up a few short climbs. We were amazed to see how our You coped with this, apparently without too much effort, in this magical maze. But her squeaking pedal was one day joined by some bizarre crackling at the side of the saddle when she passed over a big bump. You tried to drown this out by speaking louder over our mocking laughter. So we nicknamed You and her horse "Peg-asus", the two syllables to be separated

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Going back a little, I remember the summer of 1930. Paris put on a magnificent "Colonial Exhibition". All the countries of the Colonial Empire were represented. I spent a whole day with You at this very large exhibition, lingering at length at some stalls or buildings according to their importance and the interest that they represented to us. It was as well that we spent more than an hour at the Madagascar Pavilion, wide and very well appointed and decorated. All the Malagasy staff, men and women, seemed to enjoy our company and would not let us go. You immediately spoke to them in creole, causing laughter and making gestures showing their joy and amazement. We had to speak to them and listen to their tales over and over. One of them, an old grey-beard, who came from the Fianarantsoa region, said he had worked in the gold mine at Betsileo run by Evenor, my grandfather and uncle Cham. He was laughing and crying at the same time, and clasped You's hands, almost crushing them. The scene intrigued other visitors, without understanding, but they were drawn in and smiled before this exuberant and simple joy. Once more, without really knowing why, I was proud of my mother. The rest of the day became unimportant. You stayed up late to tell me about Madagascar and Mauritius. I went to sleep with a smile of happiness.

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These years of separation were as painful to one as to the other, You combined her dual role as antique dealer and nurse as best she could, but was also a companion successively to two old American men and an old lady English. She was also able to accompany them on several trips abroad, to Italy, England, Egypt and other countries, I don't know which. I can only mention two of them.

I remember old Mr. Erstine who was a charming and cultivated man and also very rich. He was fond of archaeology and had invested in excavations carried out at Luxor. It came about that he contracted some disease that doctors could not diagnose but weakened him more and more. He died without suffering, lucid and charming to the end. He wanted to be very generous to You, but his

daughter and son-in-law, themselves very rich, went against his wishes. Very silly really because You had made it quite clear that she would refuse any generosity likely to cause any disagreement.

I barely knew Mr. Higgins whose talents of enterprise and prudent business dealings had allowed him to amass a considerable fortune in conditions and affairs that were said to be quite dubious. At sixty he married his second wife, a young woman 30 years younger. When You introduced me to her, she was a superb figure, 40 years old, whose smile and beauty could not hide the hardness and the authority of her character. Her husband found out that she was seeing another man. His feeble heart suffered doubly. The strong and hard man that he had once been, strangely seemed to fade away. The circumstances surrounding his death were the object of a police investigation, and You, his nurse, was interrogated, without any further repercussions. But the beautiful Madame Higgins and her “Knight” worried about it for a long time. It was not followed up, but You seemed to be certain about it but kept it to herself.

About the old English lady, I was introduced to her in Cannes Palace (a theatre and exhibition hall). They were staying in Cannes for two or three days before leaving for Venice. It was in July 1938; I was eighteen years old and was on vacation in Juan-les-Pins at “Vernarede”, with my cousins and their mother. Madame X..., who in fact was not so old, because You told me she made a “collection” of gigolos, had kindly asked me to spend a day with them at Cannes. We had breakfast, and then You and I spent the afternoon together, we were not too sad saying good bye because we would see each other again soon in Barbizon. When I said good bye to Ms. X... before returning to Juan, she made me gift of a nice cigarette case in peccary with a gold clasp. You told me laughingly that my youthful eighteen years may have not discouraged the old and charming Madame X. At “Gaulois” in Marseille was I not known as “l'Aiglou”?

The following month I was glad to join Roger, Dany, You and my Gang at Barbizon. Exceptionally this was a very rainy month, and Roger, excellent fungi forager, was able to enjoy this pastime. You, Dany, Pouné and I went with him sometimes. The foraging was obviously a great pleasure, but the smells and colours of the forest were equally so. Pouné, Roger and Dany’s daughter, was ten years old. They called her Pouné, but her name was in fact Odette. I was very proud of my niece who was charming and cheerful; she also loved her young uncle; only 8 years separated us. Roger was also a very good fisherman, and all five of us would sometimes go, in his Citroën C6, fishing on the banks of the Seine. What treats, in the evening with joy in our hearts, laughter, eating our catch, sometimes even with some beautiful music.

These wonderful moments spent together are part of my best memories. We joined up again several times at Sanary in the summers of 1941 and 1942. All four had gathered and lived happily together. How could I imagine, in this month of August 1938 at Barbizon that six years later they would be killed all together in the terrible aerial bombardment of August 13th 1944, carried out by the Americans, with a guilty lack of precision. I will return to this period and relate it at length.

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Returning to Marseille for the resumption of serious studies doing a year of add-maths, at the l'Ecole de l'Air de Salo²³. I graduate as second lieutenant pilot with the prospect of a military career. But I did not particularly like maths. 'Integral equations' were a nightmare. Bonne-Maman was perhaps

right, as she saw me as a journalist; in fact, I had a taste, and a certain aptitude, for writing. But, after much thought, my ultimate aim was to be in aviation, and I had therefore to accept the rocky paths leading that way. Eventually the academic year went by without problems, graduating without any particular difficulty.

Recreation was always oriented towards the opera, but as far as my father was concerned, it is fairer to say that he was orientated towards Marguerite Joye... and this despite major concerns at work. Vaucluse Plâtrières was the object of much interest by Lafarge Cements Ltd., their Board making insistent proposals to achieve a closer union, as long as an acceptable formula by both parties could be found. My father was passionate about this event but also had a wary respect for Lafarge. He made radical demands to complete the negotiations, but these divided the members of the Board of Directors of Lafarge. He demanded in fact that, on completion of the merger, the CEO of Plâtrières should be appointed Vice President of Lafarge Ltd. The negotiations were not successful, at least not before 1945. My future and especially that of my father, who must have known there had been a slip up, was jeopardised, eventually distancing us from Plâtrières and Lafarge forever. I will come back to this later.

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Christmas 1938 reunited all the Poutet family at the Château. Uncle Paul and Aunt Berthe arranged thing right royally, both in respect of the decorations, food, and wine. Joining these two were Bonne-Maman, my father, Uncle Henri and Aunt Renée, my two cousins and I. We were thus three representatives of each generation: nine in all; pleasant moments and a wonderful meal. We preferred to feast at the usual dinner time rather than after our return from midnight mass, the older ones liked to retire early, not admitting that they were tired. Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha were now octogenarians + three or four (as one would say today 'Bac+5) and visibly aged despite their strong independence. He would deteriorate the following year, and she two years later.

For the present gaiety reigned and lively conversation flowed, all topical subjects were discussed, and suddenly, in a surprising lull, Uncle Henri trumpeted in his nasal voice: “we are going directly towards war, it is inevitable”, and he began rubbing his hands with vigour, his face becoming flushed. Everyone knew that this was a sign of great agitation and visible anger. He continued and castigated the soft attitude most western nations showed towards the ambitions and behaviour of Hitler. My father, at first quite gently, disagreed with his brother-in-law’s opinion. From that point the tone of the argument became more heated, Jean Poutet argued that Hitler was the only effective bulwark against the spectacular rise of communism in Europe, and against the excessive influence exercised by the Jews and Freemasons. My uncle was convinced that our civilization and democratic regimes were in extreme danger. The arguments were put strongly on both sides, advanced with conviction, energy and talent.

The wonderful Christmas atmosphere was completely spoilt and everyone listened in embarrassment to the strong and well-argued points of the two debaters. For the first time I found myself open mouthed before my father. Uncle Henri amazed me by his knowledge; by the way he seemed to be so well read on any subject. I would learn later of his association with the world of intelligence, and that he would pay for it with his life, and that no one would know of it apart from Aunt Renée. This terrible argument was finally put to an end when Bonne-Maman and Aunt Bertha told them to stop it; these two fiery ladies with the blunt ways of the Cevennes were not to be crossed when they got together.

It was time to go to the Church for midnight mass. On the way, in the icy cold, moonlight and the night sky, spirits were calmed and we returned to Christmas and the God-child. We got back to the dreadful acoustics of our beautiful church endowed by the Poutet family, where the beautiful homily of our curate was, as usual, inaudible.

Returning to the Château we enjoyed excellent champagne with a few fine sweetmeats before thanking Uncle Paul and Aunt Bertha and returning to St. Joseph by crossing the small bridge over the Huveaune, the pretty small dividing river between the Château and St. Joseph. This Christmas Eve I went to sleep with a touch of sadness in my heart, bothered by this clash between my father and my uncle, that left me with many serious unanswered questions.

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August 1939

I was on holiday with You, no longer at Barbizon but at Fontainebleau, to where my dear mother had moved. She had found two complementary activities that allowed her to live more comfortably. First as a nurse, there was obviously significantly more employment there than in Barbizon. Membership of the Red Cross and its contacts within the medical community led very quickly to her being called upon. On the other hand You had, if we can say it, “inaugurated” the idea of Bed & Breakfast which has become so in vogue today. The apartment she rented in Rue de France, the arterial road coming from the forest and leading to the city centre, was large enough on the ground floor and had three bedrooms. So two of them were reserved for potential customers sent by hotels and restaurants with whom You succeeded in establishing good contacts. The results were satisfactory and she achieved a fair success, in a time when “bed and breakfast” was not the norm

I arrived to find You morally and financially buoyed up, raring to go and in good shape. I tried to make sure that we could enjoy each other’s company without compromising either of her activities. In the morning I tried to make myself useful: a sweep of the broom and some shopping in the city. Even now at ninety years old I “do” my best but probably not enough. The vacuum cleaner has replaced the broom, and I like to shop, especially in the market with the pleasure of soaking up the colours and smells; enough of that. Immediately after lunch, I used to go to Barbizon to join my friends, either by bike, or by taking advantage of a lift from Maurice Jacque²⁴ who lived with his very young wife Suzanne (nineteen year old like me) almost in front of us. He painted, but was also a photographer and owner of a shop in Barbizon. It was more profitable there.

I don’t find quite the same wonderful atmosphere within our gang. We were no longer the carefree kids that we were. The simple pleasure of walks in the forest had been replaced; some preferred to dance, others to play cards or chess. For me dancing was an insurmountable obstacle that I was not able to tame; it remains so to this day. Up to the age of forty I continued to make an effort. In Africa during many evenings being entertained and entertaining, I did what I could to try to fit in, but I will always remain a pitiful dancer.

Oddly in our Barbizon group no one played tennis, whereas for me it was an essential pleasure. In contrast, at Fontainebleau, mother had introduced me to some friends whose eldest son Michel was a pretty good player. We had a few good games together. Mr and Madame Junguenet, his parents, owned a large garage near the castle, in the great square in front of the “Cour des Adieux” where Napoleon bade his farewell to his guardsmen before his departure for the island of Elba. It was a beautiful and large family: six boys and two girls. Portraits of General Cherfis, Ms. Junguenet’s father, hung in several rooms, the most imposing above the fireplace in the lounge

This beautiful family would be hard hit by the war that was now threatening. Maxime (2nd) and Armand (3rd) become pilots in England and fell to their deaths with their Spitfires. Yvon (4th) only seventeen years old, but strong, would be tortured and executed. Their father would be deported to Buchenwald and, sick and exhausted, died two months after his return. The admirable Ms. Junguenet

would overcome her immense grief to devote herself entirely to the last four, all the while continuing to manage the garage. Michel went to Spain, like myself. We would meet, completely by chance, in the arenas of Málaga having been released from our respective prisons on the eve of embarking for Casablanca in an old tub, the Sidi Brahim. Of course I will return to this later.

One afternoon Michel and I arranged to play a game on one of the courts of the pleasant Bellifontain (Fontainebleau) Tennis Club, nestled in the countryside on the edge of the forest. I almost cancelled our appointment because I felt unusually tired, a feeling that was quite alien to me. After lunch, while I sipped my coffee, I noticed that You was looking at me intensely which annoyed me. She smiled, and I leaned towards her and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

On the court I was sweating and breathing heavily, much more than usual, to overcome my opponent who took advantage of my unusual condition to try to achieve a landslide victory. I didn't understand what was happening to me, and after an hour of unsuccessful and exhausting effort, I had to give up. Michel told me that my face looked an odd colour.

At the house You easily diagnosed a case of advanced jaundice. I had to recognise, facing the mirror, that it was longer the tan that I had obtained during the summer, but an awful lemon yellow complexion. The whites of my eyes were also an impressive yellow. I discovered that all my body was the same, I could no longer stand. Medicine then dictated the procedures to get rid of this jaundice. No one spoke of hepatitis, and the treatment was very brief, essentially consisting of a draconian diet. Very soon after I was diagnosed with a very serious hepatitis which would require 45 days in bed with the most dedicated and attentive care of my wonderful You, without whom I would probably not have survived. Two prominent teachers at the hospital, Malatre and Philardot, had discussed my case and were not at all hopeful. "Pessimists" You confessed to me later.

The declaration of war by France and England against Germany would intervene on September 3rd, when I had already been in bed for fifteen days. No one knew how this war would start, or if any arrangements had been made. Busy invading Poland and, subsequently strengthening their armies which, at the time were not fully ready, the Germans delayed launching their land and air forces against us until they considered circumstances to be favourable. Our intelligence services, as our political and military leaders, were sadly ineffective. If the former had been better informed and the latter more assertive and determined, a vigorous and well-coordinated allied attack, while the Germans used the bulk of their forces to the East, could have been very advantageous. In any case, we lost our best chance.

So for more than eight months nothing happened. Cold, and huddled behind our Maginot line, which we were told was impregnable, we spent the time more or less strengthening our defences; we expected to be able, when the time came, to give the enemy a bloody nose. We all know what happened.

In the Poutet household, which I had obviously informed of my health problems, they had to think about what would happen in general and in particular what would happen to me. At the time I could barely stand but I had made up my mind. As soon as I recovered I would sign up as a student pilot or in the "corps francs" (commandos and paratroopers did not yet exist). The l'École de l'Air could look after itself. The term had already started, and anyway, I had not sufficiently recovered to attend. Leaving aside all the difficulties inherent in my position, my admirable You helped me to overcome the disease with her love and expertise. The resumption of normal life would come very gradually. As I did not wish to waste my time without doing anything in September and the beginning of October I became a supervisor at the College of St Aspet de Fontainebleau, the antithesis of Melun, of which I had sinister memories.

This activity of supervision²⁵ was certainly not exciting, but it fitted in with my convalescence and gave me time to slowly get my strength back which I had to agree, had deserted me. In eight weeks, with the wonderful help of You and my determination to follow the recovery program that we had put in place, I built myself up, enough in any case, to sign up as a student pilot “for the duration”. My father gave me his consent without too much ear bashing, although he was not too pleased about it. At the end of November I was summoned to Tours for a medical examination that would be decisive in my application to become a pilot. The positive result was a big relief as I was afraid of not having sufficiently recovered. Shortly after this I received a ‘call-up’ for early January destined for the Air Base of Avord, between Bourges and Nevers.

Aunt Marguerite invited us to her home to spend the entire month of December in Paris. We accepted with joy. We were just the three of us and we really enjoyed this stay with our generous and charming aunt.

War was declared, but no one could really understand the reasons for this calm and silent first phase; it was obviously a time of concern and anxiety. It is well known that an abnormal calm foreshadows a period of storm and drama. However for me, these events and the commitment I had just made, although perhaps a little inconsiderate, gave me some pleasure in the inherent relief that independence would at last, be mine. I could hardly go to Avord without seeing my father and Bonne-Maman beforehand. It was thus, with some sadness that in late December I left my mother and my aunt. We had been all together, and very happily so.

I was very patriotic, something which is now frowned upon. Why have we become so? I was enthusiastic with the idea of fighting for my country, even more so as a pilot. Happy are the enthusiasts, with their illusions; specially those with illusions.

At Roquevaire, they were of course pleased to see me, but my new 'status' of independence, confidence, and the freedom that I felt, had changed my behaviour and my attitudes more I had thought. I caught questioning glances directed towards me, and I had to be careful not to hurt anyone's feelings or to show my new found happiness.

My father expressed a thought referring to my hepatitis: “you took a severe blow”, I understood then that even my physical appearance had changed. I had recovered my strength, but in four months a change had occurred, not only due to the disease; it was also probably a reflection of a change of personality on the “inside” that had undergone an evolution, besides, You had told me laughingly that I had “aged” a little, and I was delighted. When one is not yet twenty years old, to be told that one has aged, is amazing. In any case it was for me.

A few days later I had to leave and the family appeared to be more emotional than I was.

What a pleasure it was to engage in a life of adult responsibility, released from obligations which had become increasingly burdensome.

PART IV

ARMY--DECLARATION OF WAR AND COMMITMENT

Goodbye Family, goodbye Roquevaire, Hello France. In Marseille, at the military office in St-Charles Station, I made contact with seven or eight nice and determined boys of my age, who were going, as I was, to Avord.

On the platform a magnificent beige dog with tan markings was frantically running around aimlessly His collar held a short length of broken lead. I looked at it for a while and when it came closer I called it. It stopped in its tracks and came up to me, frightened, but wagging its tail. He suddenly stood on its hind legs and made a fuss of me as if he had found his master. I looked around and didn't see anyone who may wish to own him. The situation was resolved; this magnificent dog would become mine. On the spot I called him Caïd²⁶, after the beautiful greyhound belonging to the Jacque family in Barbizon. Our train, not leaving until later, Caïd and I retired to the station buffet with the rest of our little group. We ate well, it would be eighteen hours before we would arrive in Avord the following morning. Caïd wolfed down a big pâté sandwich and a bowl of water, he was now ours, he accepted it as much as we did, there was no doubting it.

We ended up getting on board and settling down as comfortably as possible, well wrapped up because of the cold. My dog spent the night without moving, his hindquarters on the seat and his head and ribs on my knees. After a change in Bourges, we eventually arrived at Avord. The first glimmerings of the day had barely appeared and it was cold; less than 5°C, we were told. We walked the 3 kilometers from the train station to the base.

We were greeted at the gate by an NCO guard who accompanied us to the canteen where we were given some bread and a hot coffee which was very welcome. But the dog was banned from entering the base. No argument could sway our sergeant. Rules are to be obeyed, this may be an air force base but it was first and foremost army discipline. We were heartbroken to have to give up our beautiful companion. We went to the canteen with a sad heart but also amazed to find ourselves inside this air base where we would become pilots. Well warmed and leaving the canteen, we were astonished to find Caïd waiting for us, as if he knew where to find us. With the encouragement of our group of student pilots, our superiors were very quickly taken over by the unusual personality of this dog and it was accepted as our mascot.

We were now about thirty committed student pilots gathered together. Our training took place as a squad quite separate from the others, somewhat ignored or even despised by all those who were already pilots or in the process of becoming pilots. We were quickly disillusioned because, in fact, we never set foot in an airplane. To summarize our only activity was a load of square bashing, specially the conventional movements reserved for the "squaddies", marching, about-turns, rifle at the port, who goes there, and so on. Of intellectual activity there was none; just a bit of gymnastics as a treat. All this

outdoor activity took place in intense cold and quite often slipping around in slush. Chief Warrant Officer Martinet, a wonderful replica of the stupid adjutant ridiculed in cartoons, reigned supreme over our small troop, not without a little sadism, to tell the truth. Only Caïd could cause this brute to show some vague affection, something I took advantage of to some extent, which irritated some of my classmates. We would have to endure more than four months of this uninspiring life, sterile and useless, while all our desires, all we wished for, was to participate actively in the fighting to defend France and win the war.

When we had a little leisure time some of us would stroll to the village where there was absolutely nothing, unless it was the single coffee bar, always very smoky and harbouring a pleasant enough rural clientele which did not appreciate our presence at all. For my part, with two other classmates, a Breton and an Alsatian, we decided to take advantage of the pilot's gym, where they put up with us, to learn the basics of boxing, taught by a species of muscled colossus, a sergeant on the administrative staff. The development of his brain was inversely proportional to that of his muscles, but he was an excellent teacher, endowed besides, and fortunately for us, with great patience towards beginners such as ourselves.

We soon discovered that this sport required the qualities of speed and reflex with much more precision than pure force, leg work was as important as that of the arms. Finally the main problem was to deliver the most effective punches while avoiding any landing on you, accomplished by continuous movement of torso and legs. This was of course well short of all the qualities essential to any boxer. I almost forgot another absolutely essential, that of "encashing"! Unlike my Breton comrade whose head was hard as nails, when I receive a hard punch to the face or an uppercut to the chin, I had bells ringing in my skull. Despite our teacher complimenting me on my attack and punching skills, I had to abandon learning the "noble art" after only two months instruction, however, I had learnt sufficient during this hard experience for me to discharge myself honourably in fights which would come later.

Time passed and we waited, the whole world waited. Finally on May 10th, on a sun-lit, blue-sky morning, the base was awakened by sirens. The warning seemed more urgent than the other few times. Without any urgency we went out to the "shelter", shallow dug-outs in a regular zigzag fashion near our barracks. On the runway the planes took off one after the other. Most were Dewatine 500 and 510 trainers which would try to get to another aerodrome, without much hope, because all bases in the vicinity would have been bombed. Four or five Morane 406, the only planes at Avord that could engage in battle, took off first with a stupidly optimistic short-lived noise, they were quickly put to rout by the enemy. We had no time to dwell on this hope. A rumble, becoming louder and louder was heard, it was a large formation of Dornier 17 training bombers which within a few minutes caused a lot of damage. The runway was practically unusable and many buildings were hit. By some miracle we had very few casualties in relation to the 2000 men on the Base. When the first wave had passed, we were, like everyone else, put to work seeing to the wounded, clearing, cleaning etc. until the next alert two hours later. This time the roar heard in the distance announced a larger formation. The impressive damage by the first bombing had made us all more circumspect and most of the staff, whose presence now was of no use, ran to the surrounding countryside. For my part, accompanied by Caïd, I jumped into a shell hole completely covered by the branches of a tree that had fallen over it. This was a reassuring shelter that suited me. But it was already occupied by three guys who certainly did not welcome us; the cook and his two assistants, who shouted at us and threw us out with kicks and insults. With no time to lose, we could already hear the whistle of the falling bombs, twenty metres away I plunged under a hedge where an "old" pilot (twenty-five or twenty-seven years old maybe) was sheltering. He welcomed us with a nice smile, pulling out his pipe with an air of nonchalance. His calmness was infective. I noted only that his muscular jaw must be chewing through his pipe stem. All around us bombs fell in a deafening roar. On several occasions we were sprayed by earth and stones. After an eternity of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, the deluge stopped and the Dornier fleet receded. We resurfaced and it was good to get back upright, to breathe deeply without tightening the

buttocks. My companion strolled away, pipe between his teeth, with a little grunt and friendly gesture of farewell.

I looked around me. The base was on fire covered in a huge cloud of black smoke. The fuel reserves had been hit. Suddenly I saw that the shell hole where I had wanted to shelter no longer existed. The fallen tree had been torn to pieces and the ground ploughed up. With a few other guys we approached to see what had become of the cook and his helpers. What we saw was terrible, especially for the very young men that we were. This was our baptism of fire, scattered limbs, a crushed head, clods of earth mixed with bloody flesh. Thank you, cook and your henchmen, for refusing to share your shelter with me. God rest your souls.

The base was totally disorganized. Fortunately the hut in which our group lived was not hit, we could sleep in it for the following two nights, everyone doing what he could to feed himself. Two days later we were put on a freight train. The floor of the wagon was covered with straw, the better for our "comfort". Our destination would be the Pyrénées Atlantiques. The entire staff joined Lescar airbase near Pau. Except for our group of student pilots without planes, we were housed in a large beautiful farm close to the village. We would remain inactive and superfluous but we held on to the hope, this commitment we had set ourselves, to fight for our country. For more than a month we followed the news and watched the advance of the enemy armies without being able to move, helpless, angry and sad, all at the same time.

To pass the time we went on some beautiful walks. The area was beautiful. One of us, despite his young age, was a seasoned fisherman. He found some fishing tackle in the village giving him the opportunity to fish the Gave de Pau, which was a good salmon fishery. We enjoyed salmon steaks watered down by the famous and delicious Jurançon wine, but our pleasures, our happy activities, when so many of us were being killed in resisting the advance of enemy troops, seemed insensitive and somewhat shameful. It was now obvious that the German advance looked more and more like a rout. Then in my mind, in my heart, the feeling becoming stronger and stronger and more and more urgent, I conceived the idea of getting to England, or at least North Africa to get into the fighting. With my best friend, Jean Mavet, and two other classmates, we put forward several projects. Jean would not be able to be with us because he had recently married and his pregnant wife was coming to join him. He had permission to live with her in a small house they had rented. Financially they were pretty comfortable, she arrived by car. We thought we might use it to get to Bayonne where we should find a way to embark on an old vessel destined for England. Such a decision had to be well thought out. It seemed to us to be our duty as patriots to do it, but if this leaked out to the military authorities it would be viewed as desertion and a court martial and the firing squad would follow. We needed to plan it all out and be united in our decision. This is actually what we did and did it well. Ultimately we decided to try the adventure.

On June 18th we learnt that General de Gaulle, from London, had made a demand on all patriots, that those having the ability, and the will to do so, should continue the fight by all means at their disposal. This was exactly our position: our ability was questionable, but the will was strong and unflinching. On the 19th in the morning, very early, we said farewell to the few good friends who were aware of our plan, and the three of us filed out with Caïd to have a good breakfast with the Mavet family. They were wonderful and, moreover, they accepted with pleasure to look after my Caïd. We were so attached to each other that I was devastated to leave him, Jean and his lovely wife reassured me that all would be well. We did not linger, and went on our way to Bayonne. The town teemed with people and everything seemed topsy-turvy. As Jean left us at the harbour he slid an envelope into our hands which would "see us through" for three or four days. We hugged him as a brother, we would not see him again; he was tortured and killed while working for the resistance.

For a short while we took in the scene before us. We had to be careful not to do anything silly, but try to find the best way out, without taking any risk of being apprehended by a patrol of the Military Police. We noticed a young lieutenant on the wharf who seemed to have quite a lot of responsibility, giving instructions to right and left, supervising the loading of three cargo ships that were docked there. There was also a Commander who seemed to be in charge, but he was an old “fart” of about forty or more, whose flabby and severe facial expression did not inspire us. We therefore chose the right time to approach the lieutenant. Before we could say a word, he barked “You want to go to England? You will have to return later, I can take several of you, it is becoming more difficult, beware of the Commander over there, he is a bastard”. We thanked him for the opportunity, and his good advice. He continued: “tomorrow morning at five o'clock you can board a cargo ship bound for England, be here at four o'clock”. He then led us to a warehouse at the end of which there was a small wooden hut which would be our shelter until our departure. “Don't move from there. Only one of you can leave to get some food, thereby reducing the risk. I warned the lieutenant that they may try to pick us up during the night and he reassured us that we had nothing to fear. “Good night, see you tomorrow”. We thanked him and slept like angels, or as the dead, the rest of the day passed by without any problems. The second lieutenant came to see us, being as pleasant as before. He gave us a newspaper where the catastrophic news confirmed that the choice we had made was the right one. Hooray, tomorrow we would be on our way to England. We sleep a bit so as to be in good shape for the morrow. By midnight we were pacing up and down like excited fleas. At four o'clock we carefully slipped out to the warehouse doors. Nearby a Military Police patrol was deep in conversation with some sailors. We flattened ourselves until they had gone. We looked around for our friendly lieutenant but could not see him. A little later we saw him descending from one of the cargo ships in the dock. With a disappointed and angry look, he came to us with bad news: absolute refusal of the captain to take us on board, instead he had taken on board several civilians who had paid him handsomely. What a bastard!

The Military Police were now all over the place, and we had to make another plan. Our friend told us that we might have a good chance to get a ship in Port-Vendres, near the Spanish border, but it would be bound for North Africa. We had no doubt he was right, but to get to Port-Vendres was no trifling matter. One had to follow the Pyrenees along their length from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. A walk, or hitch hike, of 400 kilometers at least would be very risky with the Military Police everywhere. Trains and bus stations were being watched so that was not possible. Before trying elsewhere we should try once again to get a passage from here, obviously taking every precaution possible. We deemed it only sensible and correct to tell our friend the lieutenant of our decision. He agreed that at noon, if no opportunity arose, we would make our way to Port-Vendres, and in the meantime he would leave the small hut at the end of the shed at our disposal. When the first cafés opened, we headed off to stock up with a solid breakfast, we were starving; we also stocked up with some sandwiches. So as not to draw attention to ourselves we took it in turns to hang around the docks searching for a possible solution. At about ten o'clock our lieutenant, very excited and very moved, came to tell us that the ship on which we were to have sailed had been torpedoed. He was as emotional as we were and we slapped each other on the shoulders. At the same time, how sad for the loss of life, but what incredible luck for us!

It was suggested that we embark on a Portuguese freighter bound for Lisbon, a proposal we stupidly rejected. Portugal being a British ally this would have been an excellent idea; however we did not then understand that. European politics were difficult and it is doubtful if we were the only ones to make a misjudgment of this sort. In Lisbon we would have been able to get in touch with the British Consulate which would surely have shipped us to England by air or sea.

How we regretted that decision while trudging along the Pyrenean roads hoping to get to Port-Vendres, our morale was sapped by the endless and exhausting walk. We would be on the road for four days, half walking and half hitching lifts. We are very grateful for those who kindly took us a few

kilometers or more. We are also grateful to those wonderful people who took us in and fed us and specially to the old lady in Arreau who forced some high denomination notes into our hands; it helped a lot. All were being touched by the unfolding history. Thank you to those who put faith in us. Shame, on the other hand, to the suspicious gentleman who stopped and tried, deceptively, to give us up to the Military Police in Tarbes. He stopped his car in front of the barracks where we saw him enter. Before discussing it among ourselves, we jumped out of the car with our suitcases and ran for it, nobody saw us or followed. We took the first small street on the left. It was pretty, lined on both sides with charming small cottages with their flower gardens. Damn! We had gone barely 50 meters and found ourselves at a dead end. If we turned back we would be sure to be cornered. We just had to hope that luck would be with us. We opened the gate to the last house, crossed the small front garden, climbed the few steps leading to the front porch and rang the bell. A pretty young woman with a babe in arms came to open up to us and pulled us in without even waiting for our explanations. We told her our story in the kitchen and took a while to restore our thoughts: she gave us sustenance, coffee, bread, butter and jam. We did not deprive her of anything as her parents were farmers and she had a good store. She had had no news of her husband and she was very worried, he was a gunner. We separated wishing each other good luck. She was the tops.

June 21st would be the hardest of our journey. We arrived at the bottom of the Col d'Aspin at dusk. The peasant who left us there was very nice, he had taken us a good 60 KMS in his old pickup truck, enabling us to make good progress. We had walked a lot and were very tired. We were now recovered and well energized, but not enough for what awaited us.

No question of spending the night here; it was in the middle of nowhere and we needed to move forward. We started to tackle the Col d'Aspin²⁷ singing, and relying on another hitch to take us up to Arreau across the pass, a good fifteen kilometers. In the last light of the day the mountain was superb, the dying rays making the peaks stand out against the dark sky. Darker than at first thought, the fact was, a super storm was brewing. No question of giving up, anyway what could we do? The last village had been left far behind. The walk became steeper and the weight of the suitcases and the accumulated fatigue was showing its toll. We walked in silence. Night had fallen and lightning began to criss-cross the sky. In a few minutes Apocalypse fell upon us, a storm of unprecedented violence, when rain pours down, and the incessant flashes of lightning seem to illuminate a waterfall. Between each thunder clap, we could hear the “flip flop” of our shoes happily squirting water. We stopped briefly, but more and more frequently, under the large pines. Our morale did not desert us. When we eventually arrived at the pass, the storm was at its height. It was impressive. Coming down we gathered a bit more energy. Gradually the rain decreased, lightning came less frequently. In the black of the night we almost bumped into the first house in Arreau. Without hesitation we knocked at the big door of a large building. A light, a shutter opened and a gruff voice challenged us. Not a good reception, but a little later the reception would be quite different.

We had come across one of the two young doctors of the village. He and his young wife would turn out to be amazing. Made to undress, we were given towels to dry ourselves. They revived the fire in the stove, (evenings and nights are cool here) and our clothes were laid out all over the place to dry. They improvised beds on which we could recover. We were dried out, put back to shape and restored. We resumed our journey after being very grateful to our wonderful benefactors. It was now June 22.

The rest of our journey went smoothly enough. We spent one night in a barn on straw and learnt the next morning that the armistice had been signed the previous evening²⁸. At Perpignan, where we arrived at about midday, we discussed the risks of crossing the bridge over the Têt. Our dithering was noticed and we were stopped by an air force patrol led by a big, tall, thin officer: Lieutenant Gouragne. He has no real business in our story, but it is a name I will never forget, although some are surprised that I should remember it. There are so many names, so many things, much more important, that I should have remembered but have now forgotten.

We were taken to a large farm on the outskirts of the city where the 129th BA (Air Battalion) has set up their headquarters. We were introduced to the head of this unit, Colonel Marquis de Puysegur. A large, good looking man with a stern and authoritarian air, he questioned us at length on the circumstances, and the reasons, for what must be called our desertion. Continuing our interrogation, we saw with some surprise that little by little the Colonel's severe attitude began to change. He ended up with a reassuring smile, shook our hands and congratulated us on the "courageous and risky choice" that we had taken. To show that he was not to be thwarted he sentenced us to three days of "coky" which we would spend in the best conditions in a small hay barn where we were very comfortable.

Our story did the rounds of the battalion and even went beyond. In recognition of this, the farmer's wife and daughter improved our rations with small tasty Catalan dishes. Meanwhile our Marquis Colonel, had regularized our situation, we were now officially transferred to the 129th BA. Despite our bad luck we had ultimately come out of it quite well.

A few days later, our battalion left Perpignan to settle at Istres, another large air base between Martigues and Salon sur l'Étang de Berre. I became the Colonel's secretary. It was an easy job. His driver, his orderly, and I were housed in a nice outhouse on a big estate. The colonel lived in the main house with the owners. I worked in the mornings from eight 'til noon, and was then free. All afternoon I spent on the beach at Fos-sur-Mer which was then a simple fishing village, one could have had no idea of its future role as a port for tankers, bulk carriers and containers. The beach crowd were a friendly lot made up of young people from the country, or holiday makers who very kindly accepted me.

A few days later later someone else came into our small group, he pushed his way in it must be said. He was a young Second Lieutenant on the base who had an annoying tendency to behave as if he was a General. He insisted on courting a girl who did not wish to have his advances and found it difficult to get rid of him. On an occasion when this young girl had had enough and could not hold back her tears one of my classmates and I deemed it necessary to intervene. The lieutenant reacted, particularly against me calling me "a shabby low-down second class ". I lost it, plucked him off and battered his face in. I gave him a bloody lip. This could have, should have, remained an incident between two fiery young people, but the fool complained to our superiors, bringing "his" version of our 'dispute' to their attention.

Assault against an officer by a simple 2nd class cadet, is obviously a court martial offence, and there was no question that it should have ended in a prison sentence. I know! I know! At the time I was a bit of a hot-head. They gave me cell number six in a row of eight. A second row of eight cells was separated from ours by a small narrow corridor, at one end of which was a washbasin and two toilets. Everything was in cement, smooth and bare, all cleaned by a power jet every morning. The area of the cell was 2 50 x 1 20m, with a hard cement bench 60 cm in width for sleeping. The doors were opened onto a courtyard from eight in the evening 'til six o'clock in the morning. Breakfast was a piece of bread and a small cup of coffee. The other two meals were the same as the rest of the troops.

I would be held in this three star penitentiary for forty-five days. Apart from two or three inmates who were not nice or interesting, we were not thugs and we got on well. We sang, we exercised and played cards. That is how we passed the time. I wrote a few poems to Tamara, a Russian girl in our beach group at Fos. I got a few ideas from the walls of my cell which were in part covered in pretty verses written by a well-known chap, who, due to his notorious indiscipline, had been here two or three times during his military service here at Istres in 1936-37. While he was here he had been called to sing in the officer's mess, he only agreed that he would do so in return for his release. It was well known that in cell number six I had the honour of sleeping on the bench where, three or four years ago, Charles Trenet had slept.

It was true that according to the regulations, my misdemeanour justified my punishment, but the length of my “stay” had not been specified. And, as time went by, I thought it was rather excessive. I tried once or twice to protest, asking for an interview with the officer responsible for discipline. At the third attempt, or one and a half months after the beginning of my sentence, a captain, with a disciplinary turn of mind, agreed to receive me. He was unworthy and should have seen that I had somehow been “forgotten”. There was no reason, according to the armistice agreements that had been signed by our armies, that I should remain in the force. The captain who seemed to be somewhat put out by this “mistake” pushed through the formalities concerning my discharge.

The following evening I turned up at Isle sur Sorgue. My father was furious at the unreasonable treatment that I had endured and wanted to send a written complaint to the military authorities, but he feared that I had not told him the whole truth and that there could something more serious behind it all. He therefore did not pursue this complaint. I took some trouble to assure him of the truth of my story but in front of his scepticism I didn’t insist. It is a trait in my character for which I could be justifiably reproached, because it comes perhaps from a false sense of vanity (a fault from which I think I am now cured): If someone passes a negative judgment upon me or simply makes an unjustified criticism, I consider it is not worth making a fuss about it, and will not do much to disabuse him. After all, is this so bad?

Part V

1940: DEMOBILISATION

A few days later I went to St. Joseph in Roquevaire where Bonne-Maman was pleased to see her grandson after him being absent for a year. It would take a little while to get used to some of my usual things; my room and my tower, visits to the Château, seeing the old uncles and cousins and various relations. I decided not to resume my studies, which was perhaps a mistake. I wanted to remain free, the idea of going to London did not go away. It made sense to lead an active life, with all the freedom of action it gave. Knowing this, my cousin Nany and André Rousseau, her husband, who lived in their property “Gardy”, on the hill above the village, offered me the job of helping with the planting of the orchards they had started. I would be paid as a farm labourer. I seemed a good idea, firstly because we got on well, and then it would be a little butter on bread while looking for a suitable job.

Just as at the Granat’s, the ground was tiered with terraces on the slopes of the hill. Three hundred young peach and apricot trees, which already been grafted onto almond stocks, needed to be planted. We had a specialist among us, Antoine Egea, a Spaniard who was a Plâtrières mine worker. With his elder brother, the “great” Egea, so called because he had been a well-known professional cyclist, he had fought with the Republicans during the Spanish civil war. They were both explosive experts known in Spain as “dynamiteros”. Antoine was going to prove to us that this was something which he knew all about. The soil within the terraces was dry, hard and stony, digging holes for our trees with pics would be no trifling matter. André was therefore charged with obtaining a good supply of sticks of cheddite (dynamite) from our cousin Henri Granat, then Manager of Plâtrières,. Using these, we would, with very little effort, get good deep holes, in which to plant our fruit trees, and the loose soil would give them a good start. In each of the three hundred chosen spots we dug a hole of 80cms to one meter deep at the bottom of with a crowbar we dug a smaller hole to take the stick of dynamite. A detonator was inserted into the dynamite (it had the consistency comparable to that of a candle) long enough to give us time to retreat about twenty meters and lie prone, so as to best avoid any earth and pebbles thrown up by the explosion. The operation was safe if one respected some basic safety principles. One had to be quite careful in the handling of detonators. Each of them, with a length of approximately three centimetres was made up of a small copper cylinder similar to a bullet case. Half the cylinder contained primer and powder that would set off the explosion. It was in the other half, the empty part, that one end of the firing cord was inserted; this constituted the wick which was held in place using pliers. It was an easy operation, but requiring concentration and a steady hand. The explosion of just the detonator would be at least sufficient to tear off two or three fingers. Our “dynamitero”, knowing it to be more simple and faster, instead of using the pliers, proceeded by using his teeth. This way of doing things appealed to me, and despite the strong opposition from my cousin I tried it over and over again, I quickly got the hang of it, and Antoine was satisfied. With his rough and callused hand he encouraged me with heavy back-slaps. Bonne-Maman and the family would only get to know about it when everything was finished, and my goodness, how they screamed. Strangely when I later told You of my experience with Dynamitero, she saw nothing wrong and applauded it.

What, since the effective date of the beginning of the fighting on May 10th 1940, had befallen my mother, my brother Roger, his wife Dany and Odette (Poune) their daughter? A large number of French had fled in indescribable disorder in front of the German advance, offering an easy target to the enemy planes which strafed and bombed the crowded roads mercilessly. These cowardly attacks on defenceless civilians caused many deaths and injuries.

Roger and his three ladies, brushing the armistice of June 22 aside, took the time to wind up their affairs and drove in the direction of the Midi. I don't know why, and neither do I know how they ended up in Chamaret (it is almost Chamarel!), a small village near Grignan Drome from which can be seen the famous and beautiful chateau where Madame de Sévigné lived and died. They settled in a small, pretty village house in the main street near the Church. A few days later Roger travelled alone to Sanary where a childhood friend of his asked him to take over an estate agency he had just opened in the port itself, while he returned to Lyon, where he had important business to see to. When he saw how the land lay, Roger would send for You, Dany and Poune to join him. They had all four negotiated their departure from Fontainebleau in the best possible way, without panicking, taking time to think it all out and making the right contacts.

At Roquevaire I was pleased about their safety and the future they had set out for themselves. I promised to take the first opportunity to visit them at Chamaret or Sanary.

I had just finished my work as 'dynamite planter' with André and Egea. We were very proud of the result, the planting looked good and the trees seemed happy. In early December, my cousin Monette telephoned from Vichy where she was an editor at the Service of Information and Propaganda attached to The Ministry of Youth and Sports. She offered me, with the agreement of her head of Department, a position of editor. I jumped at the chance, this job seemingly tailor-made for me. I had to be there to start in early January. The Department was divided into two Secretariats of State: Youth, and Sports which was headed by Jean Borotra, the wonderful tennis player, one of the four Musketeers, known as the bounding Basque²⁹.

What an opportunity for me to be part of this team where I would rub shoulders with great champions who were my heroes. At only twenty years old I would be in professional life with all the duties and responsibilities and also be free to organize and manage my personal life as best I could, no longer bound by family or military constraints. Take yourself in hand, my boy!

I had three weeks before starting work in Vichy. I used the time, with practical help from Bonne-Maman and financial help from my father, to set up my wardrobe, not to mention all the accessories needed for toilet, sewing, ironing, sport, tennis in particular, etc. whatever it might take for the single life that awaited me. With the wonderful weather which continued every day I also made a few trips to the nearby mountains. I particularly appreciated them thinking that this could well be the last chance, because of the uncertain future that I had before me. This turned out to be the case, I would never have the opportunity to walk again in the Bassan, Garlaban, Ste Baume, Sainte Victoire ranges. I would catch up with walks and climbing in the Alps, but I would still miss "my" mountains.

A letter from You, from Chamaret, advised me that she was living alone at Chamaret, Dany and Poune having joined Roger in Sanary. She asked me to come and spend Christmas with her. What a joy! The decision taken, I would break my journey to Vichy and make my way there at the end of December. My father and Bonne-Maman seemed a little disappointed, but kindly understood why I wished to go.

My reunion with my dear mother was wonderful. She had prepared a nice room for me; the house was well furnished and did not appear to be a temporary home. I would have loved to be able to dwell there longer, but we had only a short time to spend together and needed to enjoy it to the utmost. Warmly dressed we did some long walks. The area was flat, not particularly pretty, but never mind. We were, for a few days, the happiest people in the world. You took me to visit the small church where, in two days' time, we would go to midnight mass. It was simple, pleasant, and perfectly clean. There was a good smell of wax from the benches and wooden kneelers which had been carefully polished, as every year at this time. A lady practiced the organ for the hymns that would be played at the Christmas service. Mother knew her and went to say hello. As their chatter went on for a bit I looked towards them and realised that they were talking about me. Mother introduced me and then suggested that I sing the traditional Christian hymn at midnight on Christmas Eve. I was flabbergasted, but the idea grew on me. We agreed to meet two or three times for rehearsals. Everything was supposed to be fine. My companion and I will be ready for this important mass, nevertheless I felt a very unpleasant feeling gradually creeping up on me, it was stage fright. I had difficulty persuading myself that the rehearsals were any use and that this midnight mass would not be a disaster. Singing was Ok but at Notre-Dame de la Garde it was completely different; I had stage fright. I was on the brink of giving up. You reassured me, saying that all great artists suffer stage fright. It was true; César Vezzani had told us that he had terrible stage fright before going on stage. So, if all the great...

Finally it went very well; the acoustics were good and the church absolutely full. You had the measure of me. It was a big success; even the priest was very satisfied and had some very kind words to say to me at the end of the mass. At twenty years old one can be entitled to every indulgence

All good things come to an end, and I had to leave. My wonderful You shed a few tears. Leaving one another was difficult.

Part VI

VICHY 1940 to 1943

I was very soon in Vichy where I was greeted by a whole team: Monette, of course, but also Herman Grégoire, French writer and journalist originally Belgian, who headed up our service; Suzanne Meunier, Known as “Suzon” by all the world, was Secretary; and also Uncle Henri who was posted here in the Naval Ministry. Our State Secretariat for Sport was installed at Hôtel les Célestins, a large facility a short walk from the Centre de Cures. We had beautiful offices which were in fact the hotel rooms. In the evening our offices were transformed and made into comfortable sitting rooms. Our small department was particularly well housed. Other more important people eyed up our premises with envy, six months later they would eventually succeed in taking them over. In the first days of January 1941 Borotra brought all the staff together for a new year's party when some of the newcomers were introduced to him. Grégoire told him that I was an acceptable tennis player and he simply said “we'll see about that » He was a humble man both impressive and sensible. He was a polymath, then forty-two years old, it was obvious to everyone that he was a natural leader.

I settled down in the Propaganda Information team without too much difficulty. Obviously this was my first occupation and I had to adapt accordingly, but those around me helped me through. After some time getting used to it, I was allocated to different tasks for the two years that I worked for The Sports Commissariat. To begin with, I become the assistant to Georges Briquet and Pierre Brives, two prominent radio-reporters. My work was to help prepare sports broadcasts on the radio and radio-reports of various sporting events. It was very interesting. Eventually, I had to take on some of these missions on my own, obviously with the assistance of a technician and equipment. To begin with I broadcast, alone or together with Jean Augustin who was one of our top ten tennis players, the morning sports show. It took the five minutes slot preceding the 'Journal' and was the latest sports news, by and large, we obtained from the daily newspaper “l'Auto”. It was simple and not very difficult.

Radio-reporting and programming in the morning was obviously not enough to occupy all my full time. In between I wrote for ‘Auto’ or other sporting newspapers, bits of gossip and background articles on topics that were usually recommended to me, but also sometimes on subjects in which I had a particular interest. I started to get a real taste for writing, which would lead, five years later, to a foray into journalism. In our offices we often had people, characters and figures (for the nuances of these, refer to the dictionary) visiting us, many concerned with sport, and sometimes even champions for whom I had a genuine enthusiasm, especially for the really great ones.

I was introduced to

- Jacques Goddet, managing director of l'Auto, one of the greats of journalism. An knowledgeable man, with amazing culture.
- Marcel Cerdan, A famous boxer, World Middleweight champion. I bombarded him with questions which he answered with patience and a nice smile. I met him again six years later as a passenger between Orly and Casablanca on an Air France DC4 when I was the

boarding officer. “Ah! So it was you, the young man who asked so many questions” he said. And he insisted I join him with a glass of Champagne, it was no secret that he treated it like mineral water. He was to be killed three years later in a crash in the Azores of an Air France Constellation on the Paris-New York run, with about 100 other passengers including Ginette Neveu, a famous violinist.

- Great athletes: René Valmy (100 m), Lapointe (high jump), Bourron (weights), Bazennerie (discus).
- Racing car drivers: Wimille, Chiron...

And very many more but I wish I could remember their names.

The Ministry staff included some great champions Branca, Pontviane (rugby), Paul Peyre (University champion 400 m), Skavinsky (400 m), and others.

One day the best French tennis player and one of the best in the world came among us, Yvon Petra. We become very good friends. He was a large twenty-four-year-old boy (1.98m), born and raised in Saigon. He talked about it with passion and gave me a desire to go there. I did in fact find myself going there for my work with Air France during nineteen flights from Saigon to Hanoi. One gets hooked by these countries. I will come back to this.

Yvon and I were an odd couple not only by our obvious difference in size 1.98m against 1.65m, but also by our approach to life. My education (bourgeois and Dominican), seemed “stuck” even if it was only an appearance, (but that is another thing), whereas he appeared always to be in his element, displaying a big personality wherever he might be. Little by little we succeeded, without quite realising it, to complement each other to our mutual benefit, according to those around us and especially Yvon’s lovely wife, a Catalan with a strong but attractive regional accent.

The winter and spring passed without any significant events taking place. One interesting thing was a remarkable performance in the grand hall of the Hôtel des Célestins where the engineer and musician Maurice Martenot, after a press conference gave us, with his wife, an amazing interpretation of classical works on an instrument of his own invention called “Ondes Martenot”. It was a keyboard producing electronic oscillations with a surprising vibrato dependent on the action of the performer on the keyboard. It was a time before the appearance of electronic music, and the Ondes Martenot was for a fairly long period, a great success around the world, particularly with the virtuosity of the best interpreter, Madame Martenot herself.

In May Yvon Petra and I were sent to Antibes for a residential course at the Fort Carré with coaches from Joinville that due to “events” had been transferred to this place, a little rough but well adapted to their needs. For Yvon it was physical preparation for the various competitions which he would face in the coming months. For me it was also a physical preparation but also technical, especially focused on “adventure activity” or “natural method”, very fashionable at that time. At the end of the course I would qualify as an auxiliary coach and be able, in June, to take part in a promotional tour and demonstration about adventure activity and athleticism, with two other coaches and a back-up team. I will write about this later.

The time spent at Fort Carré is worth perhaps a little attention. School (because it was the Joinville National Coaching School) was run with an iron fist by Colonel Beaupuis: a colourful unique character. He received us unceremoniously, that we had been sent by the Ministry was of no interest to him, all he wanted was that we observe the rules and discipline of the school, that we worked hard, and that everyone, at all levels, be pleased with our results. “Count on us, Colonel!” He assigned a chief coach to each of us according to our respective programs and they were required to report weekly to the Colonel on our work. Yvon is housed with his wife at the nice hostel nearby. I would join him there

the next day, with the agreement of my mentor, because I really couldn't stand the "cell" in the barracks where I had spent the first night. My credentials as a journalist allowed me this privilege.

Our program was quite onerous, but took place almost entirely in the morning, thus giving us considerable free time. I rose at sunrise, at six thirty had breakfast, between 07.hrs to 09.00hrs. trained outdoors with the boxing team; a nine to ten kilometre jog interspersed with brief skipping, shadow boxing, gymnastics, etc. after that thirty minutes of well-deserved rest. From 10.00 to midday we did specific, practical and theoretical work on the all matters of fitness: races, jumps, wrestling, throwing, carrying weights and climbing as well as teaching skills. Our mornings were very busy. I, as well as all those from many different disciplines were here to give the best of themselves. At lunch time we all met together to satisfy the enormous appetites we had built up. For his coaches and athletes Colonel Beaupuis had managed to get exemption from the rationing imposed on the general population. Some of the big heavyweights (wrestlers, shot putters and power lifters) from 90kgs to 120kgs even received extra rations. If we were to enjoy these dietary advantages we had to justify them, so work, work, work was the normal order of the day.

The afternoons were free. Either I would do extra training or try out other disciplines: wrestling or judo which was quite new to France, Alternatively, Yvon deigned to exchange a few balls with me on the school tennis court which was in poor condition. We even went to Juan-les-Pins where we would swim.

I got on well with the training coach. He was both a French champion at the triple jump (his best of 14.30m would today be exceeded by the best females) and a writer-poet for which he had achieved a certain following.

We had twice been designated to go to spend the day at Beauvallon at the Centre de Formation des Monitrices (Female Coaches' Training Centre). This girl's college in Antibes was where the Fort Carré coaches went twice a week to augment their knowledge in various disciplines, including adventure activities. Obviously this outing was much sought after. The poet Gilbert Prouteau was a great success there, which reflected, just a little bit, on his acolyte. But there were also student-instructors at Fort Carré, the girls and boys were allocated to two distinct areas. Supervisors were employed on both sides to ensure that there were no 'problems', however these did occur, and some became serious. Am I allowed to mention a romance which developed between one of these beautiful athletes and Jean-François B., a champion 110 m hurdler, who would later take over from his father as the head of a major French newspaper? The young student instructor was found in a "delicate situation", contrary to the principles of the school, which was to result in her dismissal and that of J.F.B.

Prouteau, J.F.B. and I were always looking for a good practical joke. One day a very young girl journalist come to make a report on the school for a regional newspaper and we told her "under the seal of secrecy", that Prouteau was the natural son of General MacArthur. She thought that she had slipped the 'information' into her article as discreetly as possible, but this caused an unholy row that Colonel Beaupuis struggled to keep quiet. The severe lecture we received was quite justified.

During our stay Yvon took part in two tournaments, one in Juan-les-Pins, and the other in St-Raphaël. In both finals he was to oppose and beat Robert (Bob) AB, his heir apparent. Bob was a Jew "Blackfoot", coming from a wealthy Algerian family, quite different to Yvon in many ways: size (1.7m), culture, education and playing style. He would later become an MP (Député). His game was very elegant like himself, but the power of the great Yvon almost always made the difference. The antipathy that each of these two champions harboured against each other was well known. The spectators made fun of it, but it was, in reality, quite sad. Each winning stroke was accompanied by some sort of nastiness by the perpetrator, sometimes a noise and sometimes even swearing coming

from Petra, more discreet but sharp and punchy from AB. Whenever I could, I accompanied Yvon, I was his most faithful supporter. I used to take my racket, 'just in case', with the hope of being able to spar a bit on an adjoining court. This is what I was doing when playing in a scratch doubles, while he was playing a final a stone's throw away on the main court, when I heard him call for me in an angry and bossy voice that meant he needed me urgently. He had broken his racket in two. He had only the one and I had to give him mine. This anecdote illustrates the amateurism of the time. France's number one player had come to a final without even a spare racket; due to an unforgivable recklessness no doubt, but also insufficient financial means. Travel and accommodation allowances were practically non-existent. There was no fortune to be had despite his considerable talent. In this case, my racket was lighter, differently balanced with much less tension than Yvon's. He adapted, and angry at his lack of foresight and against me and my racket, he eventually prevailed and won his match. Bob Abdesselam concluded that without my racket Yvon would never have won. It ended with a drink all round--paid for by me! It was the last straw! In return I made Yvon, while apologising to my three double companions whom I had had to abandon, to come to exchange a few kind words with them. He came a little reluctantly but nevertheless managed to dissipate their bad mood.

At Pentecost I decided, with the agreement of Prouteau, to go by bike to Sanary to spend two days with You, Roger, Dany and Pavan. I had had a busy week, and my leg muscles could hardly cope with the 150 Kms through the Esterel and Maures mountains. I arrived exhausted, to be pampered by the family. You lived in a small house that she had furnished comfortably, and was employed by the Red Cross in her work as a nurse. She was highly sought after and seemed quite satisfied with her lot. She had found long standing family friends, the Bards, who had helped her find her feet, and who, with Roger, his wife and daughter, died on 13 August 1944, bombed by the US air corps.

Roger ran a real estate agency opened by his friend Edouard Gagneux from Lyon, This work complemented by an insurance portfolio allowed him to be quite comfortably off and, if necessary, to help our mother. So I was fully reassured of their wellbeing and happy to see the four of them together. A harmonious atmosphere surrounded them. Roger was a good head of the family. They were all four as happy as I was at our reunion, and these two days spent together were wonderful. On Tuesday morning I took the first train to Antibes to be at work on time. I was actually late and was rightly given a serious telling off by my "mentor" and friend Prouteau. I compensated by putting more effort than usual into my work with the logical corollary of getting seriously over tired.

I made friends with two others at Fort-Carré, a couple of "oldies" of about thirty years old who had introduced me gently---that is to say with a lot of shouting---to their disciplines. Bourron was a solid man from the Antilles; about 100Kgs a champion hammer thrower, shot putter and discus thrower. In these three throwing events there was a lack of anyone under 90KGS and despite my 63kgs I wanted to learn, I had already practiced a little with the shot and discus in Vichy with mediocre results but the lack of body weight seriously handicapped my performance. The hammer moreover has a very complex technique, with an incredible rotational speed; great champions can have a weight of more than 300 kg pulling at the end of their arm. Although I tried to keep steady I always felt as if I was going to fly away with the hammer, which amused those watching.

I must mention Costes (also 100kgs), who was a Greco-Roman wrestling champion, a discipline which lay people just cannot imagine the difficulty. Heart rates go upto 180 or 200 beats/minute. Costes and I, although we did not yet know it, would work together during the entire month of June, on the promotional-demonstration tour of 'adventure' pursuits, to be held in the Valcreuse region.

I almost forgot Bouaza, a Frenchman of Tunisian origin. He was an excellent weightlifter. He wanted to teach me his 'art', but we had to agree that I was no good at it and should give up. I liked him

and I was sorry to learn at the end of the war, that he had been killed at the liberation of Paris, on the roof of a building where he was shooting at a group of fanatical militiamen³⁰.

The next two were not active in athletes, but were two essential 'backroom' characters. First the 'father' Spitzer, an old man, sixty years old, a Jew native from Central Europe. He was head coach, the trainer of high-level athletes. He was nicknamed the sorcerer. He had highly personal, and sometimes original methods and the results he obtained earned him unanimous respect in the international world of athletics. I witnessed that after a training run of 1500 meters, he smoothed his finger over the brow of a runner to collect the sweat and put it to his nostrils to conclude that his runner had reached his optimum form. 'Father' Spitzer did not return from the death camps.

Milou Pladner had been the world boxing lightweight champion. He had to give up boxing as a result of eye problems which were to worsen until he was completely blind. He became a remarkable masseur; all those who passed through his hands were amazed by his unique touch. Muscle, tendon and joint injuries were immediately located with precision and treated with incredible knowledge and a touch of the fingers. Obviously Milou, to compensate for his blindness, had developed a gift, perhaps because of living permanently in the dark; he had achieved a skill above the ordinary. To watch his hands work on a body was a cause of wonderment.

It was with some regret that I had to leave Fort Carré to return to Vichy. It had been a wonderful month of work, pleasure; human and professional enrichment where I felt I had gained maturity and felt stronger. I felt better armed to face I knew not what. That was it.

As soon as I got back to Vichy I was told by Herman Grégoire of the work I would be doing concerning the promotion of sports as already mentioned, principally adventure sports throughout the Department of Vaucluse which was finally chosen due to the climate, but also because of our relations with certain elected officials there. My specific role was also decided.

Two days later I left for Avignon in the company of two young representatives from 'l'Équipement Sportif' who would be required to determine, with the municipal authorities, what was needed in respect of the planning, locations, ancillary equipment and so on. We would make up a good team

At Avignon we were greeted by a strong, alert and dynamic man in his fifties who was going to be the leader of our team. Mr. Féron was a former decathlete who had competed at a high level. He now ran a transport business in Avignon and was thus able to provide our Ministry with a coach that had been adapted and equipped to meet the needs of our mission. We met up again with the two instructors who had been delegated by Colonel Beaupuis for this promotional tour: Costes and Bock. Our "circus" would be composed of seven people, including our driver..

Circus was the right word. Our car was equipped with a loud speaker, so when we arrived in a town or a village, we went up and down the main roads announcing loudly the purpose of our visit and the opportunities offered to the residents. That evening, usually in a public square, we showed a film promoting the Organization and the work of the coaches at the Fort-Carré in Antibes as well as excerpts from major sporting events, primarily athletics.

The following morning we held an introduction for school children and anyone else interested in adventure activity. Coste, Bock and I shared this work. We ended with a demonstration of wrestling and weightlifting by Costes and Bock, and high jump and long jump by me. It was not required to excel but to teach the best technique. I was teaching the scissors technique used in the long jump to gain distance and also to look good. For the high jump I demonstrated the new technique of the belly roll which had just been introduced from America. It was all very effective and a big success. Since

then of course all this has changed. Our system worked well and the relationship between us excellent. Féron was a good captain, however, I would soon learn, that a good relationship should sometimes be treated with caution. In the hotels that that we stayed at we used to meet up for a drink at the bar, chatting among ourselves and even with the boss. One evening there was a conversation focusing on current events, the conduct of the war, the situation on the Russian front, etc. I had barely started to express an opinion before Féron interrupted me giving me a slap on the back and suggested firmly but kindly that we all go for a walk before going to bed. He would explain to us that the hotel manager, under his goody-goody demeanour, was in fact an unpleasant militiaman and it was very important to be careful of what was said in his hearing and my inherent recklessness could quickly lead to unpleasant consequences. I had already had an interview with Féron during which I had given him my opinions and my intention to “join De Gaulle” at the first opportunity. He had tried to dissuade me by admitting to me that, in his opinion, a German victory was desirable, for several different reasons, that obviously did not convince me. He added that despite his belief he would never betray anyone who did not share his point of view. Although his opinions were moderate, Féron was in serious trouble after the war.

We finished our tour of the Valcreuse in late June, after visiting some 20 communes. It had been a great success and we were well satisfied with our work. At Avignon, on the last night, Féron offered us all Champagne. We broke up with regret. Throughout the month spent together there had been real togetherness despite some inevitable hiccoughs.

On our return to Vichy, my two companions from l'Équipement Sportif and I were called in to see Borotra who showed his appreciation. It was a nice gesture.

Having just got back to work I was put with team of 8 or 10 people to prepare for a comprehensive operation of travel throughout Algeria to show off the best of French Athletics. Some 300 people would be taking part in this long distance trek: athletes and their leaders, journalists, and all the hangers-on. Monette and Grégoire would be the delegation. I tried to wangle a place but to no avail. Someone had to hold the fort. This huge assembly on a three week tour would be a big success.

I was now working with Lucien Lorelle, a well-known Parisian photographer who took hundreds of pictures throughout the Algerian tour. The idea was to obtain an imposing book with appropriate texts and pictures showing all the travel and various events that had taken place. This coffee-table book had to be of the very highest quality by its appearance and content, because it would be a unique copy to be presented to Maréchal Pétain. It would take us a full month of hard work and dedication to complete the project. It ended up very successfully. Lorelle and I chose the photographs, their format and layout, Grégoire wrote the text. In the Old Town we found an elderly Jewish bookbinder's shop all vaulted and ramshackle but the reputation of the artist himself was renown and justified. I still keep in my memory, my sight and nostrils, the odds and ends of this medieval workshop, the ancient, rare equipment, the smell of hot glue, the huge and heavy iron press, the leather and parchment scrolls on the shelves. In this strange and dark environment the old bookbinder, with his alert step, sharp and precise gestures, surprised the visitor. His passion and talent filled his worn body with life and energy. His wife had died two or three years previously and without his work as an artist he would never have survived. He was absolutely delighted by the task that we asked of him, only insisting that he have the necessary time required. We didn't hurry him. We knew we would get what we wanted; we felt that he was happy to do the job. Lorelle took some photographs of him, photos which proved worthy of the two artists that they were. In the turmoil that was to come, what could have happened to him and his family?

The work having been completed, Borotra wanted the two of us to present it personally to the Marshal, with whom he was to lunch a few days later. I tried to get out of it by suggesting that I had only been a modest contributor (here the term seems wrong, never mind...), the actual reason was

because of my Gaullist feelings that would be compromised by this visit. But the invitation became an order and I had to comply.

On the appointed day at 2pm sharp Lorelle and I arrived at the Hotel du Parc. They took us to the top floor (the Sème, I think) where, after a short wait, we were shown to a room of modest proportions, the Marshal's personal dining room, where he and Borotra were drinking their coffee in the company of an imposing officer, his aide-de-camp and private Secretary. The latter came to us and took our superb album from the hands of Lorelle. Borotra signed us to approach and introduced the Marshal who gently shook hands muttering a few kind words. Together with Borotra standing beside him, he admired the beautiful bookbinding and some of the photos and perused the text. I looked carefully at him without feeling any awe that I had thought I might. He was undeniably a very nice old man with his pale face and his clear alert and twinkling eyes. I looked specially to see if I could discern signs of the great military leader that he had been. Oddly, and contrary to what seemed natural and obligatory among the older generation (naive idea that I modified in later life), he did not emanate any great kindness from his expression, but rather superiority, pride and authority. I just felt some sympathy for him. Lorelle and I remained standing, only for a few minutes but it seemed an eternity to us, finally to receive lively and sincere congratulations and appreciation in a friendly but at the same time, military tone. After we had bowed and made our exit we were escorted out by a uniformed officer who gave us a smile of appreciation.

Leaving the Park Hotel behind we didn't say anything until we got to the bistro where, without any discussion, we ordered a fresh half (litre of wine) well cooled, which by then, we really needed. After a short while we began to exchange our impressions. Lorelle was happy and proud to have shaken hands with the Marshal, believing that our work was appreciated and that we would have an important memory and tale to tell. I felt that my old friend (perhaps fifty years old) had a more simplistic view, such as the satisfaction of having done a good job for an important client. I was expecting something else. Perhaps at his age I would have maybe reacted in the same way; well no, perhaps not; I write without thinking. My mind was a bit confused, mingling some pride with self-inflicted anger at my weakness at succumbing to this feeling of pride.

My wish to join De Gaulle could not be taken away by the boost which we had just experienced. I felt as if I had betrayed a friend, and was miserable. Lorelle conjured up the words to analyse and minimize my reaction. During a good walk back along the banks of the Allier, I finished up by being my usual carefree self.

That very evening I had the opportunity to tell my story to Uncle Henri. We had arranged that we share the cooking in the evenings, in principle every night. Uncle Henri really took me apart for talking about my Gaullist sympathies and my intentions. He spoke to me with great kindness, very pleased that I had put my confidence in him, and the ideas that I had expressed, but he warned me in no uncertain terms against any indiscretion. He also suggested that he may be able to 'give me some advice' later. That night I got to understand - what I had supposed for some time- that behind the articles on the Navy that Uncle Henri wrote in "Gringoire" and "Je Suis Partout", newspapers with very poor reputations, there was a 'gentleman' and that his convictions would lead to his inevitable death. I much regret that we had not been closer, yet another of my many regrets in life.

A few days later I was able to take three weeks holiday. The first week was shared between Roquevaire and Isle sur Sorgue. At St-Joseph I was particularly spoiled by Bonne-Maman; and my wardrobe, in great need of maintenance, supplemented by a few new purchases, was restored to a second life., I found Uncle Paul much aged, he died the following year. The mad nights at the Château had long gone.

At Isle sur Sorgue, my father also being on holiday, we took the opportunity, despite the lack of fuel, to go out for car rides. It was not very remarkable but we did receive an invitation to the Solomons at Carpentras. Mr Solomon was Managing Director of the Vaucluse Plâtrières mines, of which my father was CEO. He was an intelligent and cultivated man who my father really appreciated, although he was a Jew. I noted that, when the conversation turned towards the current situation regarding France, Germany and the front in Russia, Solomon and my Dad became very reserved and cautious in their remarks, which contrasted strangely with their usual conversation, always free and confident. In August 1944 there was no idea, especially in the non-occupied area, that prepared us for the 'Jewish problem'. But we may have vaguely sensed it, which explained the discomfort that I was able to discern. Much later I would come to understand it completely. I believe that the Salamons succeeded in escaping the Nazi net, but I don't know how.

The following two weeks in Sanary were wonderful, partly with friends of my age, but specially with You, Roger, Dany and Pouné. Mother was looking after an elderly Swiss man, owner of a vineyard, not far from the village; this was known as "La Milliaire", named after the remains of a nearby mile-marker on the old Roman. His son and his wife and their two children also lived in the family mansion. Old Mr. Roethlisberger, with much reduced mobility, had however kept all his wits his independent will, and authoritarian ways. He was often exasperated by the fairly unimpressive personality of his son whom he considered unfit to take over as manager of the estate which produced "Château Milliaire" (white or rosé) which was much appreciated in the region. Although remaining very charming, Mr. Roethlisberger's son would, before reaching fifty, begin to have mental problems and sadly never left the place again. You and Mr. Roethlisberger were good chess players. She was a little better than he was, but kept back from winning, because he did not like to lose and his blood pressure would increase. They were a charming family with a beautiful estate and a good wine, La Milliaire is now lost in the middle of a development of maisonettes without charm. The granddaughter whom I knew is now an elderly lady whose character and stubbornness are reminiscent of her grandfather. She manages to keep up a large house with the help of her husband and their daughter. They are universally loved and respected. The vineyard and the vintage they produced have all disappeared.

It was during these two weeks at Sanary that You introduced me to chess. Roger also played well, and it was following their games that I was able to achieve some progress quite quickly. It is a game, or a wonderful art, which requires many varied qualities: concentration, patience, strategy, foresight, strength. This explains why I could become a reasonable player, but not really a good one. Our son Olivier at the age of twelve began to beat me. I am not a good loser, but was very pleased to see that he felt at ease with the game.

These two weeks in Sanary passed quickly. The day came to return to Vichy with my thoughts and feelings filled with my dear mother and of the other three.

I resumed reporting sports on the morning programme with Jean Augustin, and with Georges Briquet did some live radio commentary. One day in the late afternoon, Yvon Petra and I went to the Borotra and Glasser tennis-club to play a doubles match. Yvon told me in confidence that Pierre Brive had asked him to warn me that Georges Briquet might play a dirty trick on me to ensure a young whipper-snapper like myself would not be any danger to his position in the organisation. Brive was an upright chap and well intentioned, as bright as Briquet, but in his job Briquet was remarkable. He had an unmistakable voice, as if it was placed in a muzzle, as some singers, and an easy, clear and concise flow of words which I found great. The rare moments when he left the microphone to me, I tried to imitate him, and until then it had worked well, or it seemed so to me. Pierre Brive's warning delivered through Yvon seemed rather pointless, I nevertheless promised to be careful

The following Sunday a large athletics meeting was to be held at the Vichy Stadium with all the best French athletes present. The Maréchal would be there, surrounded by numerous personalities. Briquet would be reporting with me as his assistant, as usual. I was delighted and ready to fulfil my role, and my enthusiasm seemed to amuse Briquet, I should have been wary of his smile. On Saturday morning Herman Grégoire informed me that Briquet had had to go to Lyon to cover another meeting that he “had confidence in me” to undertake the reporting in Vichy. I would be supported by a very experienced technician who would give me all necessary advice. I felt both pride and anxiety; only the anxiety would be justified. In short, my commentary was a fiasco. I wasn't experienced enough to assume such a task alone, and Briquet knew it. He had succeeded. My brief life in radio ended there and then.

My family, father, grandmother, as well as friends who had been listening, were all witness to my shame. The shame of my life, but by pure good luck those in Sanary were not aware of it, they had fortunately missed the transmission. I was very fortunate. This was a great education for me, and where pride and vanity were present I took great care to have the knowledge, competence and preparation necessary to overcome them. Let us move on and put this behind us..

Aside from tennis I had two other sporting interests: rowing and, except during the summer months, rugby. We were at the end of August, the Sunday after my inglorious commentary and I decided to go to the Rowing Club to row for one or two hours in a skiff on the Allier. Ministry staff had significant benefits, if membership was not exactly free, we got significant discounts at most clubs, and this was much appreciated.

At the club I met two other members who suggested that we go out together and do a few sprints while we were at it. I accepted gladly. One of them was a good rower who often took part in competitions. By observing and with his guidance I had become an acceptable “paddler”, but with a rather rudimentary technique. Canoeing on the Lake at the Bois de Boulogne is one thing, enjoying a good paddle in a skiff is something else. My other companion was about my standard. We went peacefully down the river for a long time and could see Bellerive bridge about 400 to 500 metres distant. We decided to race to the bridge and the better rower quickly went ahead. With the other it was an indecisive struggle. Approaching the bridge, on which were gathered a few Sunday walkers who encouraged us with gestures and shouting, I wanted to make an extra effort to gain the advantage over my opponent and I must admit to encourage the spectators a little. As a result I caught a crab and was unbalanced. It was impossible to regain my equilibrium; a skiff is unforgiving in this respect. It was only by swimming and pulling the skiff out behind me that I could reach the bank, with the laughter and cheering of the audience above on the bridge mocking the fool below ringing in my ears. Yet another lesson in prudence and humility, (I related this to a young cousin who will recognize it, at a small meeting of family around a table in Paris a few years ago) surely needed, but probably still having to be confirmed.

The months went by and what we had long dreaded eventually took place: our Sports Secretariat had to move. We had to abandon our beautiful facilities at the Hotel des Célestins to the Ministry of Finance, which obviously had more clout than we had. We settled in the vast spaces of the Casino; partitions being set up to accommodate the necessary offices. We did the best we could.

1942

We would do less well with the arrival of winter, which was going to be very harsh. The heating was very insufficient so, we worked, more often than not, in our overcoats. Housing problems also had to be solved. Young clerks and editors, of whom I was one, moved into hotels that were basic

and no palace. Heated rooms were reserved for women and important people. My room was located in an annex of a small, quite nice hotel, but this had no heating whatever. In the morning my thermometer read 3 to 5°C. With my neighbour we would each take it in turn to get a bucket of hot water from the hotel by running through the small snow-covered or frosted garden. Colds and tonsillitis were common. Food became more and more scarce, less than in the occupied zone certainly, but still Vichy carrots did not provide calories. I partially compensated with cakes that I wolfed down in the bakery neighbouring the hotel. The two young ladies who looked after the shop were very kind. They were always dressed in black and in their pale faces a charming and sad smile welcomed their customers. Their parents had been killed in an accident a few months previously and they had bravely taken up the torch. The youngest was very pretty, at least she seemed so. In short, I ate a lot of cakes during this winter. There is more to this which I will not go into.

It was absolutely necessary to replace calories burned up on the pitch in the tough but wonderful game played with the oval ball, I mean rugby. In this sport I experienced emotions much as I had in the mountains; "a school of will and courage". My average height to weight ratio of 1m65 to 66 or 68 kg (in winter a little more than in summer) and my acceleration made me a natural wing three-quarter. The formidable joy of escaping from the opposing pack to dive over the line was great, but obtained at what price! On the field weight differences were considerable. The "pillars" were often colossi of 100 or 110 Kgs. and when a light weight like me needed to brush off a whole charging mass of them at any cost, an unconscious appeal was made to the Almighty God of Rugby. When in contrast a light weight was plastered when in full flight by one of these Mastodons, it produced a few sparks: but what a game, what wonderful sport. It is perhaps not a definition, but there were many academics in rugby; in football; none.

Back at the Ministry a significant change occurred for which we were not prepared. Jean Borotra, our friendly and efficient Secretary of State for Sports, who was probably not demonstrating sufficient qualities of a good "collaborator", was replaced by a soldier; Colonel Pascaud. We were in the spring of 1942, and the first thing he did was to transfer our services to Châtel-Guyon. We were not based just anywhere, in l'hôtel de la Cloche (Bell hotel) no less, which made us the butt of silly and subtle jokes from friends and others

For the majority of us this important change meant the end of life as we knew it. Vichy was an important city offering many possibilities for cultural, sporting and social activity. We had got used to things and from any points of view we had organised a pretty nice life for ourselves. Châtel-Guyon was dead, where all activity around the thermal baths had ceased. All said and done morale took a dive among the staff at the Office of the Commissioner of Sports.

One evening, to revive our spirits a little, Jean Augustin, Yvon Petra and I decided to have a drink in the bar in the classiest hotel in Vichy. We made some effort at dress up, which would prove to be no bad thing. There was a pleasant warm atmosphere, friendly, discreet lighting, comfortable armchairs and the decor was chic and in good taste. Elegant and discreet clientele, some pretty women in the company of people whom we identified as government officials, journalists on the lookout for 'information', profiteers looking for a deal or protection, or someone they could use to their advantage. This was a world of the well-mannered, smiling, often nauseating, and even disturbing humanity. For example at the next table the discussion, half in German and half in French between four men of about thirty years old, all good looking with fresh but hard faces. Watching and listening to them (discreetly of course) we feel uncomfortable, quite uneasy. Under a guise of friendly co-operation it seemed clear that the two Frenchmen (police, milice or officials) were getting mandatory orders from the two Germans (Gestapo or police...). The prevailing attitude of the latter two with respect to our two compatriots - even though they were probably two collaborating bastards - was to me, unbearable. The truth struck me in all its brutality. For more than a year, like the vast majority of the French, I had fallen asleep in a kind of stupid beatitude and unconsciousness. I was guilty of forgetting the hard and

sad reality; that France had been defeated, subdued and occupied, without having undertaken or even tried to do something serious and intelligent to reach those who would carry on the fight one way or another. I needed to take some hard decisions. My black thoughts were interrupted by quizzical laughter from Yvon and Augustin to whom I had not paid much attention for a while. In a few words I quietly explained my state of mind to them. They understood, but I felt, not without some sadness, that the question raised by my anxiety upset them much less than it did me. My reaction had been perhaps simplistic, silly and unwarranted; we ordered another round. I let myself relax and left it to later to think hard on the best way to act, to be "useful". I was all the more convinced of this compelling need by the questioning, cold look of our four neighbours when they got up to leave. When it was our turn to leave, quite a long time after, we were three sheets to the wind.

Our move to Châtel-Guyon was quite difficult and disordered. Ultimately this transfer concerned only a portion of our organisation, a good half no more. My cousin Monette, Herman Gregory, Yvon and Augustin and most of those with whom I worked remained in Vichy. Uncle Henri promised to get in touch when he could find a 'solution' for me. He was a sailor, and like most French sailors he did not like the English, there were too many naval engagements separating us. Now we were allies there was no room for past antagonism. It was thanks to the British that De Gaulle could think of raising an army that would be able to take its part in the liberation of our country until victory would be ours.

We were now located in Châtel-Guyon. Our offices were located in a small but comfortable city centre hotel. The staff was housed in other hotels, and because of heating problems, allocation of rooms was made according to seniority and gender. This did not seem to be of great importance because summer was on the way. My room was located in a big, beautiful hotel, Le Métropole, set a little way up the hillside with a magnificent view over the city and the beautiful country landscape. The hotel was not functioning; housekeeping and cleaning were simply carried out twice per week. Only some of the rooms were heated during this winter, the others were not. It was obviously in the latter into which I would move; I knew this from before leaving Vichy. Our isolation in this small spa town in the Puy de Dôme area, in which the usual activity had completely ceased, seemed to us at first to be a little humiliating. On the occasion of our transfer Ponvianne was promoted, he was made our Head of Service, the captain of our ship, isolated on the high seas. He was taciturn, as he was on the rugby field, undemonstrative, unforgiving, but solid and secure. I would have proof of it later, but I already knew of his good qualities.

I didn't have much work so had plenty of freedom. The area was very beautiful and I cycled, alone or with friends, doing some great rides. I also took up tennis again. At the club, the professional, about forty years old, played with me when he was free. His game was very technical, very "straight". I sometimes got the better of him by my speed, but the outcome was mostly quite obvious, I had to accept my lesson. He was called Solonovitch, we called him Solo, he was a Jew coming from Central Europe. We got on well and sometime later I was happy to introduce him to the one who organized my escape.

In August, as in the previous year, I shared my holidays between Roquevaire, l'Isle sur Sorgue and Sanary. With my father I was really very sorry at not being able to discuss the problems concerning the progress of the war. I felt very bloody-minded and hemmed in. There was no question of entrusting him with my intentions. It was very difficult for a twenty-two year old to keep secret thoughts that are uppermost in mind. Roger approved, but without much enthusiasm. Only You was delighted, with a natural reserve stemming from her maternal instincts. I got back to Châtel-Guyon with my heart revived by their affection and more determined than ever to get out of this torpor in which the French seemed to revel. I had to be prudent and wary, which was brought home to me after this very unpleasant episode. I was being shaved by a hairdresser, with whom I had struck up a friendly acquaintanceship at the tennis club, when a customer began to speak of De Gaulle in glowing terms.

My barber immediately reacted furiously waving his razor about and threatening that if anyone expressed Gaullist or anti-Pétainist ideas in front of him he would denounce them to the Milice³¹. This threw a cold blanket on the other customers and prompted me to ask him to put his razor down, making a joke of it all. With that the atmosphere relaxed a little. But then I understood that it was seriously important to be very attentive to one's remarks wherever one may be and in all circumstances.

Summer ended, and during a long rainy period, we had to agree that it was much colder here than in Vichy. Out of office hours, because our rooms were not heated, many of us, specially the bachelors, found ourselves congregating downtown in a large brasserie where we came to recognise and get to know quite a lot of people. I thus met a young architect and his charming, friendly wife; good looking, fine and intelligent features reflecting a seriousness and determined nature with a lovable and slightly mocking smile. Florent represented an important Clermont-Ferrand firm of architects in Châtel-Guyon. I was not able to judge his professional qualifications, but his excellent reputation was testament to his ability; however I quickly came to enjoy his human qualities and his keen intelligence, despite his modesty and discretion. Sometime later I had the opportunity to verify that he was a great fellow, and equally courageous.

In the back room of the brasserie there was a table tennis table that attracted quite a lot of players. I, in all modesty, was one of the two best players which indirectly caused me a lot of trouble.

As everyone knows, one of the consequences of the American landings in North Africa³² on 8th November 1942, was the cessation of the Free French Zone. The Germans poured in throughout the area, in Châtel-Guyon as elsewhere. The climate became much more tense and necessitated the greatest caution regarding behaviour and expressed opinions. We were most surprised when a strapping guy, dressed in uniform, entered our table tennis room, greeted us politely, and motioned us to continue the game interrupted by his intrusion. He was called Hans - how could we not remember this name? He was a champion player from Stuttgart, which made us immediately sympathetic towards him. He was also quite friendly and strove to behave in such a way that gave us confidence in him. In two or three days we had developed a relationship of good fellowship between us. For me this situation seemed awkward, ambiguous which I found unhealthy. Hans was very nice and well-mannered, but despite it all I could not help but see him as the enemy who occupied our country and whom we should kick out. I felt guilty and uncomfortable. One night I was playing against Hans by doing my best to lose honourably, because he was much better than any of us. There were a dozen of us in the room. Suddenly the door burst open with a bang forced open by an onrushing German officer who fell on Hans shouting and swearing at him. He snatched the racket from his hands and threw it against the wall. He then pushed him toward the door while shouting a few ugly words in our direction making it understood that the French were not his friends. This sudden animal-like anger silenced us completely so as not to aggravate the situation. When Hans passed in front of me, I took my courage in both hands and threw him a clear and specific "goodbye" - we owed it to him - while being fully aware that this brute of an officer could take it very badly. And indeed, moving slowly, he came towards me and stopped, fixing me with a hard unfriendly stare for a few seconds, an eternity during which many things went through my mind, and finally raising his hand shook it at me, as he would threaten someone with a punch. Then he suddenly, brutally shoved Hans towards the door which he slammed as he swept out. I had reason to remember this episode that in itself was not too dangerous, as it forced me to see how fanaticism could be the cause of stupidity and wickedness. Of course we never saw brave Hans again.

This unpleasant episode gave me a very useful kick in the arse and I renewed my search for a solution to my compelling idea of an escape plan to get to England or North Africa. The "Resistance" was still embryonic and just unknown. But through Florent, my architect friend, I vaguely knew that groups were forming in some areas to participate in the fight against the Germans in various ways; providing intelligence, sabotage, surprise attacks, etc. But all this was still very vague, and it was

difficult to get in touch with these networks. On the occasion when these conversations took place they never got very far. I thought I could see that Florent was better informed than he let on. But I didn't want to ask too many questions, for the moment at least.

When winter approached, one had to accept that the unheated rooms were really freezing. That winter also was going to be very bad from the beginning of December when it became difficult to get out of bed in the morning, even more difficult to wash while shivering. But there are times when one finds a real affinity between boy and girl, a true solidarity that lies dormant until awakened, that is how I was able to find a warm welcome in a heated room. Françoise; I owe you very many thanks, and much, much more.

I would spend Christmas and New Year in Vichy with my cousin Monette and her husband Herman Grégoire who had decided to "regularize" their relationship. At the beginning of 1943, I found everyone quite depressed and Vichy changed. The Germans were everywhere. The term 'collaboration' had, alas, taken on its true meaning, mistrust and hatred divided the population. From now on, without being a forecaster, it became clear that the behaviour of the collaborationists would be remembered if victory was achieved, and happily victory was ours. Repercussions for the collaborators were often serious and excessive, having nothing to do with true justice.

In Vichy the true misfortune of France was being lived out, whereas in Châtel-Guyon we lived a relative carefree life in guilty unconcern. My friends Yvon, Petra and Jean Augustin still thought only of tennis and seem a little embarrassed when I let myself go and expressed my rebellious intentions to them. These three would get through the storm without too much trouble and I would find Yvon in Paris in 1945, divorced, and living with his father. As a sports journalist, I was able to provide them with free tickets to football matches. They were two great football fans so they had a big affection for me. I have very happy memories of my two friends with whom we did everything together

Having dinner with my uncle Henri, Monette and Herman, I found all three fairly gloomy, although my uncle, now that the fortunes of war had changed, now considered a German defeat inevitable; in two years or perhaps a little more, he said. Actually his forecast proved to be accurate, but he would not be there to see it. As I have already said, he would be arrested in October 1943 and deported to Auschwitz from where he would not return. Yes, Vichy was a sad place, even the three or four cakes left in the glass display case seemed sad. No I didn't go into the shop, that's the truth.

Before returning to Châtel-Guyon, Uncle Henri advised me not to try anything without talking to him first. 'Intelligent Services' were on the lookout, several people had been arrested. No one knew what had become of them. He hoped to soon tell me of a possibility to get to Portugal (via Spain) and then England. The key words for the moment were "Silence and Discretion". I found him tired and worried without having lost any of his dynamism or energy. But kissing him goodbye I felt quite emotional. I would not see him again.

On my return I found Solo, my friend the tennis professional, not very well. Not only because of a dose of flu, which incidentally I did not escape from, but also due to disturbing information which he had received regarding the arrest of some of his Jewish friends in the Paris region. He thought that this could spread, and he was worried for himself. I had a soft spot for Solo and wished that I could be useful to him but thought that he was exaggerating things. I tried to reassure him with the best of arguments but in truth fairly unconvincingly, but temporarily it had a positive effect. In the following days I had a very frank conversation with Florent. I discovered little by little the first true resistance I had come across. I was amazed to find, under his calm and kind demeanour, a passionate, courageous, organised and methodical fellow. I was confident of him, and after a while I decided to talk to him about Solo. His response was immediate and firm, to my astonishment he said: "bring him to me immediately, he has to leave soon". No sooner said, than done. Two days later Solo invited me to

lunch. "Your friend Florent is really great", he said. "I'm leaving tonight ". I didn't ask any questions. He obliged me to accept a beautiful racket the club had given him. It was brand new and he was happy to make a gift of it to me. I was touched, but I knew that before long I would have no opportunity to play tennis. He, of course, was unaware of this. We hugged as brothers. Goodbye Solo, God keep you. What happened to him? I have no idea.

The following month, February, the behaviour of the Germans and the Milice became much more unpleasant. It was evident, despite the spreading of lots of misinformation, that the progress of the war hardened their attitude towards the general population. Almost everywhere the situation started to become more favourable to the allies, which made the opponents nervous and aggressive. I now felt that time was running out and that I absolutely needed to decide what action I should take, even if it meant taking undue risks. Florent, to calm me down, told me, without giving me details, that an escape line to Spain was being set up, but still some patience was required.

It was only in early March that things would become clear. Before the end of the month, unless something unforeseen occurred, I would be in Spain. Now I had to prepare myself. My personal problems came to be joined with those of Maurice Erlichstein. Maurice was the son of the owner of the restaurant where most of the agents of our administration ate lunch. This lady was a good friend of Françoise and she confided in her that her son was trying to leave France to join a group of resistance fighters. I liked Maurice, he was straight, frank, direct, strong and courageous. Florent proposed that he go with me, the only reason he had to leave was because of his name, he would be given identity papers in the name of Maurice Aubertin. Around the 15th we were ready. I felt, knowing his opinions that I should talk to Ponvianne, my Director, about my imminent departure. Not only did he approve, but he would ask his counterpart in Pau to give me, if necessary, every possible assistance. Splendid Ponvianne, this recommendation would actually prevent us getting in to serious trouble.

But things got more complicated. On the 18th I received a summons from the Clermont-Ferrand Kommandantur stating that I had to be on a train at a particular time on 28th March bound for Stettin in Pomerania. The order had been given under the Service of Compulsory Labour (S.T.O.), I could dawdle no more. Florent told me that Maurice and I would be expected on 27th at Licq-Atheret³³ where we would arrive on the scheduled coach from Pau where we would be met by Michel. This was to be our smuggler who would guide us across the border.

On the 20th in the evening I was in l'Isle sur Sorgue. Of course I spoke to my father of the orders from the S.T.O. He would not admit to any other way. Yet that was the only good and sensible way to go. Parting the next day, his only sad but serious comment was "Do your duty". Yes, my father, I will do my duty as I understand it, as everyone should conceive how it should be done.

At Sanary, it was all quite different. You was very moved, but she could not imagine that I take any other decision. Roger gave up his cool attitude and was as excited as I was. When I left the next day, we got into a group hug like rugby players in a scrum. You came with me to Toulon railway station. And there we had one of the key moments of my life. This was a particularly difficult separation where we expressed all our love and tenderness for each other. It was time to go. Only passengers were allowed on the platform after tickets and papers had been checked by the German soldiers. There was no more time to talk. I made my way to the platform with a last farewell wave of the hand and You disappeared into the crowd. Suddenly on this awful and sad station platform, I was overcome by terrible panic, as if fate would intervene and we would never see each other again. The guard prevented me from leaving. So quickly, through the privet hedge and railings that separate me from the forecourt, I tried to see You and call her. It was all in vain. No, I would not cry with all these people around me, but I had a vivid impression that we would not meet again. In fact I never again saw my dear mother; nor Roger, Dany or Poune.

Almost sixty years later I had, with my wife Sim, the consolation of recovering their bones from the cemetery at Sanary, to incinerate them and place the ashes in our grave at St-Firmin where our small family group will all be interred together. This is in a beautiful valley of the Hautes-Alpes, you are always welcome to visit us, any of you who have friendship or affection for us.

Getting back to Châtel-Guyon; it was March 23rd, on 25th in the morning when Maurice and I left Châtel-Guyon. Françoise came with us up to Clermont. It was a sad occasion. I was also, but my mind was now concentrated on the adventure that awaited us. Ponvianne gave me a travel order certifying that Maurice and I were allocated for a few days to our administration at Pau to visit some sporting venues in this sector. He had also given me an "advance on the expenses of my mission". Farewell to the Puy de Dome and Françoise.

In the evening we arrived at Tarbes without encountering any controls. We had dinner and stayed overnight in a regular hotel, without taking the risk of meeting any patrols in the city. The next day we arrived at Pau at about midday for lunch. We were received in the early afternoon by the Director of our Delegation. A great guy! How could I forget his name!

He gave us a thorough briefing on our mission and the work that we were supposed to undertake and advised us of the necessary precautions and attitudes to be observed during the inevitable controls in this frontier zone where we "operated". Each of us was given a precise and detailed order which would be very useful to us. In thanking him I was conscious that helping us like this he was taking a considerable personal risk. He came back saying that it was us who were taking the risk and that it was he who should be thanking us. We left feeling very heavy-hearted. We moved to the hotel he recommended. The owners were sympathetic, no questions asked, just a few kind words and a comfortable room. The recommendation had been well thought out.

Pau is a beautiful city and we could not resist the pleasure of doing a tour in the city. It was cold but we had a superb time. We were amazed looking South, quite nearby it seemed we could see the barrier of the Pyrenees still covered in some snow. We thought about it a lot; tomorrow the war was to be the start of the war for us.

PART VII

ESCAPE TO SPAIN

We enjoyed one last good meal and a final night in a real bed, we were well aware that we may not see another for some time, and appreciated it all the more. Dawn broke on March 27th. Maurice was very excited, I felt as if I wanted to join him, and although outwardly very calm, I was bubbling inside. A substantial breakfast was provided by our hosts, wonderful people. The hotel owner looked at us and we shook hands in a declaration of friendship. As expected, our coach came at eight o'clock and we left Béarn, making our way to the Basque country. The weather stayed fine. We went through pretty villages, Oloron, a city with beautiful houses and steep streets, and Mauléon, a big village, the ancient capital of the province of Soule, in the Basque Country. We were now in the border region well-guarded and patrolled, it didn't take long for this to be confirmed.

Shortly before Tardets our coach was stopped. Two German soldiers came aboard, one at the front, and one at the back, so that it would be impossible for anyone to leave without having been checked. The one at the back, where we were, was the elder of the two, perhaps forty years old. Many decorations adorned his chest and a vivid scar ran from his temple to his chin. He had a large mouth and piercing eyes that focused on our identity cards and our mission orders. His insistent look kept going back and forth from our papers to our faces. For a moment I thought the game was up, and for a few seconds, terrible images went round in my head. In a tone of incredulity he questioned me: "Equipements Sportif?" I hastened to show him some plans of playing fields that their representative had given me just in case...All was well! I feared that the identity card that Maurice held in the name of Aubertin would not pass muster but our German returned the documents with a shrug and a big smile, saying: "Ah sportsmen!". We had got out of that one, what was he thinking of, was he really convinced? I was not sure, but then...? With his colleague, the younger, more suspicious and aggressive one, our luck may have run out. Would the lucky star of escapees remain with us?

Our coach set off again with all its passengers. We went through the pretty market town of Tardets with its beautiful Basque houses. All the men wore Basque berets and rope sandals on their feet. Half of our passengers alighted here. During the stop in the central square we saw several Germans. Some of them looked at us; were we going to be questioned by another control? We started off again with a big 'phew' of relief. There was 15kms between Tardets and Licq Atheret. For the first time I became aware of the beauty of the landscape, of the county side, as well as the mountains, We would now have to tackle them head-on; getting into this beautiful natural area, which would be both our friend and our enemy. It could offer us protection against the inevitable surveillance and the patrols of the enemy, but it could also set traps and hazards for which we were ill-prepared. But we were going into action, and our determination and enthusiasm took over our whole being, as strong as life itself

The coach stopped on the main square of the tiny and charming village of Licq. A young man of about thirty five years immediately took us in hand. Quick introductions: Michel, Maurice, Jacques, there was no time to lose, the patrols were frequent. In a small barn away from the road we joined four other candidates for the crossing of Spanish border. Each of us was given a stick that would serve as an aid to our walk. Michel told us to hurry up. The village was surrounded by very steep meadows devoid of any cover, we could easily be seen. Michel chose the quickest route to reach the edge of the forest

above us. Our guide forced us to do this at a sprint. Among our four new companions, two were hardly able to make it, especially one of them, who was abnormally short of breath. Michel looked at him with disdain. Just my thoughts; he must be saying to himself that things were not going to be at all easy. In the shelter of the forest, we paused to properly recover. I took the opportunity to look at our group, making a judgement and evaluating each individual. It is probably what we were all doing. Michel was a typical Basque: small, chunky, bright, solid and resistant.

In Antibes I had gained enough experience to weigh up the physical aspects of any individual. It was clear to me that one of our companions had proved on this flying start that he should not be among us. His lack of weight, his pale face, his extreme tiredness made me doubt his ability to overcome all the effort that would be asked of him. He may be only twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, but he had the appearance of a sick forty year old. His brother was with him, not much stronger, but younger, he looked after his elder brother as a child. Maurice whispered to me "they are Jews" he knew what he was talking about, but I didn't care. In the circumstances I had good friendly relations with these two brothers, in contrast, between Maurice (Erlichstein!) and them there would always be a silent hostility; bizarre

Among us was also a very young boy of seventeen. He was a little big-baby, rotund and clumsy, actually not as clumsy as we thought because he in the end he would behave very honourably. The sixth and last was a fellow of 30 years old, slim and light with a fine but strong profile. Something about him worried me. He was called Scorvider and was Canadian. A real Canadian, because many escapees, such as we were, said that they were Canadian at some stage due to the favourable treatment they could receive from the Spanish authorities. He knew everything, he knew best, and he wanted to tell everyone what to do; his pretensions were unbearable; so much so that our people-smuggler threatened to send him packing, and sometime later Maurice and I were on the brink of it smashing his face in. Eventually he would show us a completely different attitude that would surprise us, cultivated and intelligent, he would make us forget our first impressions, we nevertheless remained on our guard. The future would confirm that we were right the first time.

Michel beckoned and we left. We walked, climbed up and down for four hours, the elder of the two Jewish brothers constantly showing signs of fatigue, but he clung on with courage, each of us in turn helping him. From time to time Michel allowed us to rest. We rehydrated with water from the many streams. At nightfall we got near a hydroelectric plant at the edge of a big torrent that we would have to cross on a bridge adjacent to the generating station. The site was guarded by two German soldiers conducting patrols at more or less regular intervals. Michel therefore stopped us at a distance with orders not to move and remain silent. He went to ascertain the situation and would return to pick us up at the right moment; we would need to cross quickly and in silence. There was no other way of crossing the torrent and it was essential to get to the other side. The absence of our guide seemed endless, it was dark as night when he returned, half an hour or more later. Melting into the night-time we had neither heard nor seen him return.

Quickly and silently, hand on the shoulder of the one in front due to the darkness; we crossed the sunken road, climbed to the narrow metal bridge which seemed to take ages. Our progress was not as silent as it should have been; fortunately the impressive noise of the rushing water drowned all our noise. With hearts in our mouths we imagined the German sentries nearby who could, at any second, challenge us. We crossed the torrent and were once again on a narrow steep path. Letting go the shoulder of the one in front we held the end of the baton which had been given us, minimising the risk of deviating from the trail. We felt that Michel was now more relaxed, he was less sharp with us and slowed us down because of the darkness, allowing everyone to keep up. At about ten o'clock we reached an altitude of between 1500 and 1800 meters, where there was a shepherd's hut half full of hay where we would spend the night. Michel himself would go down into the Valley and would come in the morning to guide us, this time to the border pass. Why didn't he stay with us? That was a mystery.

We also set a look-out to ensure that we would not be surprised, we had to have confidence in our benefactor but caution was necessary.

In the early morning, while I was on guard duty well hidden behind a mound, barely perceptible through the morning mist, the silhouette of a strange and wonderful visitor appeared only twenty 20 metres away on the grassy slope behind the cabin. It was a magnificent IZARD, a Pyrenean chamois³⁴ down from its snowy heights to graze the newly sprung grass. Its instincts, its highly developed sense of smell, or perhaps just a single beat of my eyelids, had alerted it to my human presence. Without any panic it trotted off with an elegant, high, powerful step, to join its herd, leaving me amazed by this image of stunning beauty.

A little later Michel arrived, bringing us bread and cheese. It was the least he could do, because before leaving Licq the day before, each of us had given him some money for his trouble. It should be said that he had not discussed it or asked for it, everyone did as they thought fit. Reinvigorated by this sustenance, we resumed our trek. Contrary to what we were used to, instead of the fog dissipating it became thicker. Our guide was very pleased, because the German patrols with their binoculars would not be able to see us. They did not hesitate to shoot and had recently taken many prisoners and also killed and wounded many.

Our progress was very slow. The elder of the two Jewish brothers was finding it more and more difficult and often stumbled. On a little steeper section he tripped on a large rock and hurtled ten metres down the slope. He injured a knee and an arm and seemed in a bad way. I went with his brother to pick him up and we got him back somehow. Michel did not turn a hair; it was his job to lead us to the border pass and that was all. If anyone fell or was unable to follow, that was not his problem. Having resumed our trek, we had to admit that our wounded companion would not be able to flee any pursuer, not so much because of his injuries which were not so serious, but because of his extreme fatigue. As I felt in great shape, despite the opposition of Michel, I took him on my shoulders. After half an hour, I was obviously exhausted and had to give up. The two brothers discussed the situation together and the elder eventually convince his brother to leave him there. He would go down into the valley and find another solution. This was a reasonable outcome, and Michel was only too delighted, a little later a path was pointed out to our unfortunate companion, which, after a long descent, would lead to a friendly farm. We did not have time to grieve on this abandonment and continued in the fog that seemed to be more dense here. In the distance we heard several shots; we did not ask any needless questions. Michel said that we were now approaching the summit and it gave us some encouragement because we were getting very tired. Very soon, Michel told us that we were almost there and that he must return to guide another group. As I had told him a little of the mountain treks that I had undertaken with Arnaud, he told me the direction to follow, with some extra advice. Goodbye Michel and many thanks. That 'thank you' would be much regretted.

For some time the path was no longer discernible. We reached the snowline but Michel had not said anything about it. Had I lost the way in the fog? We continued, we would soon find out. The snow became more and more deep, I was for going on but behind me they started to complain. They had reason to because we had come across imposing rocky outcrops baring our way, but I was on the right track; traversing slightly right, we finally reached this famous pass. Shouts of joy, those in the rear catching up, cheers France, hello Spain.

We found renewed strength and ran down the Spanish side as quickly as possible singing and laughing. Farewell snow. We found a path that took us to a small stream we would have to cross. A man was bathing his feet and splashing water over his face and arms. Our first Spaniard, "no, it's my brother," exclaimed our Jewish companion. They had a private moment together, laughing and crying at the same time. Our pass was only a false pass and not on the border. In this thick fog we had got lost, I had lost my sense of direction. What bad luck, but it was also lucky that all the noise we had made

had not been heard by a German patrol. Having recovered our unfortunate companion, and too exhausted to make another attempt, we decided to try to reach the “friendly farm” which Michel had spoken about. But we were sceptical as to its existence, as we had lost confidence in this Basque smuggler who had well and truly abandoned us in this hostile environment with a real danger of meeting our death. We resolved, despite our exhaustion, to be vigilant, cautious and quiet but to carry on.

Finally we found this friendly farm, especially when Madame Etchetto-Algory, her daughter and the farm boy got to know of our disastrous adventure, they would generously look after us, host us, feed and treat our ailments for three days, so we could recover to make a new effort to achieve our aim. We had to keep our heads down; during the day we remained locked in the barn where an abundance of straw enabled us to hide and rest. In the morning they brought us a bowl of milk and a slice of bread, at midday a large sandwich and an apple. In the evening when night had fallen, we joined our hosts, all the shutters pulled to, in the large living room with cracked walls, peeling paint, and broken tiles. In the large fireplace a comforting wood fire blazed. Ms. Etchetto was a widow of two years, and with difficulty, she managed the farm with the help of her eldest daughter (17 years old) and the young, strong, dedicated farm boy; five of her younger children had been taken in by the rest of her family. Dinner time, when we all gathered around the large table was the highlight of our day. With steaming vegetable soup and a chunk of bacon before us, we talked about this and that, our adventure of course, but also the life on the farm, the mountains and the country. The two women after having served us ate apart, seated at a little distance. It did not seem natural, but it was the custom and we should not have been embarrassed. They were not in the least put out; it was the way in many peasant communities throughout the world. We were with a poor, hard-working family, with rich and generous hearts, rough, kind-hearted people. We would forever be grateful to wonderful Madame Etchetto, as well as her daughter and the valiant farm boy who loved each other so much. On the third morning, we were accompanied by a friend, of the same farming stock, who would take us, without any problem, to the famous border pass where we would disappear into the Spanish Basque countryside with handshakes and back-slaps all round.

An emotional last look at the plains of France, without any lingering, because a patrol could turn up at any time, and we went down on the Spanish side, our hearts full of enthusiasm mixed with a bit of anxiety.

On the Spanish side the slope was less steep, but the distance was much further to reach any inhabited area. The French side was both wilder and less harsh. Here there were more impressive peaks, steep ravines, slippery snow fields, but also long grassy slopes alternating with vast areas of beautiful trees. The contrast was striking. The meeting of a bear rather than a chamois would not surprise us. We walked quickly; the descent was easy but endless. Soon we caught up with a boy from another group who was an escapee like us; he was alone as he had been unable to follow his companions. Too tired, too badly prepared, he had had to spend a night in the mountains; his feet were in poor condition and walking difficult. His light weight and small size suggested that I might be able to take him on my shoulders. My companions, remembering the first carry that I had tried with the elder Jewish boy, nicknamed me the “bearer”. Maurice would also take a share of the carrying, and our new companion would try to walk the easier sections although his legs were very weak. He was a cook by profession and we made up recipes that made us salivate and added to our good mood. There was no path to follow but the descent was not very difficult, but endless. We had left the col behind at about eight o'clock on the morning on 31st March 1943. At about three in the afternoon we finally saw a large log cabin in an ideal holiday location in the natural landscape, with a wisp of smoke rising from the chimney. We surprised the four “civil guards” (Guardia Civil), corresponding to our police, who were having a cup of coffee. They were as happy as we were at this meeting because they were supposed to intercept anyone coming from France, they would have been in serious trouble if we had

continued our way without stopping. They thanked us sincerely and gave us a little of their bad coffee with some biscuits. Brave nationalist³⁵ military men: they would not always be so nice towards us.

This break comforted us somewhat; two of them led us to the nearest village, Ustarroz, which was yet another two hours walk away. On the way, one of them, who spoke pretty good French, told us why they had exchanged gunshots with a German patrol which wanted to pursue some “escapees” into Spanish territory. Like all good Franco supporters, they looked favourably on a German victory, but would not tolerate such incursions onto Spanish soil. We were met and “welcomed” to a small village prison, cold, filthy and damp. The soup was terrible and thin, but women came and passed some bread and nourishing delicious local cold meats through the prison bars. In the Spain ruled by the Franco regime, there were some regions which had retained their Republican sympathies, and remained grateful to the French for taking in a large number of Spanish refugees during the Spanish Civil War that had torn the country apart. This was the case of the Pyrenean border regions. We were grateful to the kind ladies of Ustarroz.

At night, despite our exhaustion, we were unable to avoid the presence of a swarm of bedbugs. All of us were badly bitten by these nasty pests.

The next day we were transferred, to Isaba about 20 kilometres away, where there was a larger goal, a little more modern, but also dirty, cold and wet with the same population of bedbugs. The next day we are taken to Pamplona (Pamplona), capital of Navarra, where we were interrogated at length in the central police station. The Inspector took a long time questioning each of us, after which he told us, in a conciliatory tone that gave us confidence, that we would be taken to an hotel where we would be under surveillance and the next day the authorities would decide what to do with us. Bastard copper! Why had we taken him at his word? First stop the hairdresser, who shaved our skulls in record time, just like a sheep shearer. Immediately we were under the shower of sulphurous water mixed with a powerful detergent. Lice and crab lice were killed immediately but our skin was also scorched. During this time our clothes were completely disinfected in an oven designed for this purpose. Now that we were quite clean and fragrant, all seven of us were put in a cell designed for a single prisoner. We were told that this was due to the current overcrowding, We were going to spend three days there, forced to sleep in turns on the floor: a group of four followed by one of three, the others remaining standing or each one sitting on the slop pail in turn. When one of us needed to “visit”, the others turned their backs. It was difficult living like this; fortunately we got on reasonably well. Later we would be more than three or four per cell with a bench for each person.

The food was insufficient, as in all prisons. In the morning we were given a bowl of coffee and a piece of bread. At 16.00hrs a good plate of rice and potato soup. That was all, but given our lack of exercise we managed to stick it out. We had an hour of 'walking' in the courtyard every day. We had to walk in silence, two by two. Back in the cell we had to stand motionless while the goalkeeper made a roll call. The first rollcall was a painful experience for me. The keeper was a brute of about thirty years old of medium-size but stocky, all muscle, undoubtedly indicating formidable brute and feline strength. He called: “Po-ou-tête” I answered “Présent”. “dechassal”...”Présent”. Calmly he approached me, almost smiling, and without anticipating anything, with incredible speed, he dealt me a blow which, it seemed to me, turned my head through 360°. I managed to make him understand that it was my full name, and that I had not sought to respond instead of another. He laughed it off and as an excuse, gave me a friendly tap on the shoulder to disassociate himself from this action. My foolish companions felt obliged to laugh too.

On Sunday mornings, mass, held in the large central hall, was mandatory for all detainees and all staff. Built on the model of modern American prisons, such as seen in the movies, it had all the cells arranged on several levels around a central hall. It was reached along galleries with solid iron barriers. From these balconies overlooking the great hall where all the inmates were assembled for the mass,

armed guards could survey us and see that we behaved. Others stayed among us to ensure our perfect discipline. At the end of the mass, during which we stayed upright and motionless, the prison band played the Franco anthem with passion and conviction. While this was playing everyone had to keep their arm outstretched in the form of a fascist salute. It was not easy to accept this obligation but we had no choice otherwise we risked very harsh reprisals. Franco fanaticism was pretty well the same as Nazi fanaticism.

Our prison population was composed almost entirely of Spaniards, common law and political prisoners in about equal numbers. Among these a few with the death sentence lived every day in fear; however they had some hope because for the last few months there had been no more executions, nor were there any while we were there, and I don't think there were any later. We were a small group of "French escapees", which would grow a little, there were fifty of us when, a month later, they took us to a new destination.

One morning, handcuffed in pairs, we left the prison to walk to the station. We were sent off with loud cheers of the Spanish prisoners who were aware of our motives; they continued to yell encouragement until we got to the station. All these voices in favour of our anti-fascist determination warmed my heart, as they came from both petty criminals as well as the political prisoners, at the time we were as one. Our train was destined for Madrid, that's all we knew. Our handcuffs were tight, difficult and even painful, but the journey was a welcome relief from our incarceration. The scenery going by was interesting, beautiful, and even spectacular at times. We were guarded by soldiers, often younger than us, and not unpleasant. Their uniforms were in very poor condition, and their footwear consisted of worn, dirty, rope soled sandals. We exchanged a few words but we had difficulty in understanding, despite our mutual good will.

It was night when we entered Madrid station. Other Military personnel took charge; these were very different from the previous ones. They had impeccable uniforms, hard faces and a hostile attitude; they were surely from a special unit, such as the commandos, "Caudillo fanatics"³⁶. We were locked up in a room devoid of all furniture, forcing us to sit on the ground, hands in the air. Onlookers were shoved aside and the door closed. Our guards trained their machine guns on us. On some of their faces we could see a sadistic pleasure. For a minute, that lasted an hour, we truly believed that we were going to be victims of a horrible and cowardly massacre. The door opened, an officer observed the scene for a moment, settled his men and allowed us to lower our arms, but we were going to spend a dreadful night, thirsty and hungry, on the floor, and handcuffed like Siamese twins; sleep was impossible.

Early next morning, we were put on a train guarded by a similar escort to that we had had previously: the miserable lot with tired sandals and pitiful uniforms, but young and pleasant enough. Our group was now significantly increased with other "French escapees", coming from various prisons in the border regions. We were approximately three hundred prisoners in total, and they would be taking us to a prison in the south of the country. We would soon get clarification from the soldiers guarding us. It would be a prison in Totana in the region of Murcia, no other details. At midday our train stopped briefly in the countryside due to work on the track, at a level crossing. Two cars were stopped on the road until we had left. Our enforced stop being prolonged, one of the drivers who had heard us singing, came to see what was going on, our nationality, our destination and so on. Chance has a funny way of intervening. Our questioner was a Frenchman, his name was Bourbon and he was a representative of the French Red Cross in Southern Spain. Having obtained all the information that was useful to him he promised to see what he could do on our behalf and visit us as soon as he could in Totana. This miraculous meeting lifted our spirits. It was justified because Bourbon kept his word, came to see us regularly and did a lot for us.

We got to Totana in the afternoon. The village with white houses was situated in a wide valley surrounded by craggy, bare mountains. We walked, still handcuffed, two kilometres from the station to the prison, located on the edge of the village. It's was a beautiful old building with thick ochre walls, more of a historic monument than a modern prison. It was actually an old monastery which had been decommissioned and put to the needs of the cause during the Civil War. The whole building was quite beautiful, but comfort would be sadly lacking. We would look after the comfort aspect, winter was over and this region had very favourable weather. However we would miss the soup we had at Pamplona.

We were split into three rectangular halls, one hundred in each. Our paillasses were lined up along the walls. Washbasins and toilets were installed at the back in a separate room. No comfort, but very clean. Every day the ground was washed with soap and water like the deck of a naval vessel. This was the job of five Spanish prisoners assigned to the maintenance and service of our room. They had their sleeping quarters near the entrance, separate from ours, and the guards treated them more harshly than us. Two of them were political prisoners condemned to death. It was unlikely that they would be executed, but nobody would know for certain until their sentence had been officially commuted. They had suffered torture and ill-treatment, one of them appeared to be sixty years old, but was in fact only thirty three!

Two or three hundred Spanish prisoners were also held in Totana, the majority were political prisoners. In principle we were not allowed any contact with them, but one of their rooms was quite close to ours. Our two main doors were very close and we became used to speak to each other through the bars when the guards were elsewhere. They knew why we were here and despite many misunderstandings they had considerable sympathy for us,. "De Gaulle, Primero Comunisto del Mundo! ", they would say admiringly. It must be said that at the time the Spanish political system had little middle ground, there were two extremes: the Republican Communists and Franco's Fascist troops. Between the two there was a void, which explained a lot. Some of them become friends, in particular Jesu (pronounced Résou). He was only twenty-five years old and had been sentenced to death at eighteen, his youth had saved him. It seems that he had fought valiantly, but he had also committed acts of unspeakable cruelty, excessive Spanish passion. He was a good chess player, along with several of his fellow prisoners. They had made the pieces from bread dough. We managed to play some good games. Later Jesu and two or three of his friends planned an escape for me and three friends. This comes later.

I need to expand a little on the composition of our group of escapees from France. We were all about the same age - eighteen to twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, with rare exceptions, but our origins could be very different. Socially there were: a few students, civil servants and private sector employees, craftsmen (engineers, tailors, drivers, masons, and so on), peasants, some business executives, and then the areas from which they came: Paris and the suburbs, various provinces, but especially Béarn³⁷ and the Basque country. Those who lived in border regions were best placed to cross the border, thus they were the most numerous among us. Curiously, although they were neighbours, the French Basques and the Béarnais didn't like each other. This spilled over into the prison and sometimes led to nasty brawls.

Among the "Parisians" was a special figure, but in this context he really felt at home. When we got to Casablanca, he didn't hesitate to enrol in the Foreign Legion. He was courageous and had panache, "Pigalle", was his nickname. Rogue, pimp, black marketeer, fugitive from justice, he was certainly not an angel and was probably not among us with the same motivations, at least initially, but he was a member of my circle of friends. He had many tattoos, the most notable being located at the corners of the eyelids. It was said that he had a special one, particularly well placed. If you asked him about it he smiled without replying.

Maurice and I, along with three other comrades, had formed a gang of our own, we were inseparable. There was René Kerjean, a Breton from Paris, very friendly, direct, strong, and always ready to help others. But it was unwise to cross him, he would have the opportunity to show what could happen; moreover he was an excellent amateur middleweight boxer.

I had the luck to come across him after the war, first at Air France in the years 1947 to 1950, and then much later, shortly before his death (cancer of the bone marrow). We got on well and liked each other.

Papon was in the gang, he was older than us, maybe thirty years old. At our age an age gap of seven or eight years was substantial and Papon was almost an old man as far as we were concerned. We listened to him and willingly took his advice. Shortly after our marriage, in 1947, as we were coming out of a nightclub late at night, Sim³⁸ was amazed to see me fall into the arms of our cabbie exchanging shoulder-slaps and hugging each other. It was none other than my Papon from Totana. When we arrived at our destination we invited him in to come and reminisce at length about our memories of prison. He went at first light with a load of coffee, sugar, oil, rice and more besides, all the foods that I had brought back from my travels and which were still unavailable in France. He refused to accept his fare.

The fifth gang member was a student of great finesse: face, silhouette and spirit. He was the intermediary between Bourbon, who visited us regularly in Totana with the approval of the prison management, and our group of escapees.

He was called Delvincourt at least that was the name mentioned in his papers. It was not until our arrival in Casablanca that we had any knowledge of his true identity. He was Jewish and was called Scali. He had a successful time during the war, while serving under General Leclerc in the 2nd Armoured Division

We spent a good part of the afternoon in the main courtyard, to walk, talk or just loaf around or even play Basque pelota with bare hands against the front wall, backed by one of the large walls. Each day we became weaker due to our pitiful diet. In the large pot, provided at mealtimes by our Spanish "domestic", swam a few empty bean pods in opaque water in which they had probably cooked a few root vegetables which had disappeared completely, to the benefit of the staff. The meagre supplies, very kindly provided by Bourbon on his visits, disappeared at speed without making any real contribution to our calorie deficiency.

For the first three months we lived more or less on our reserves, but would quickly reach a point when our immune system broke down and we became seriously debilitated. Some were covered in a painful eczema, others would experience serious back problems, but the main thing was the severe dysentery.

In fifteen days we would lose two comrades who were unable to be saved by our friendly Spanish doctor who was also a prisoner, like any other. He had a cramped and poorly-equipped infirmary and a very rudimentary pharmacy. In my turn I went to him with about twenty others, it came upon us very quickly, every quarter of an hour I passed blood. It was at this point that the death of a third prisoner took place. I began to lose my morale. Kerjean then managed a stunning coup, having asked for medication for an upset stomach, he managed to steal a small box containing a dozen sachets of bismuth, snatching it from the medicine cabinet. I swallowed the whole lot in a single go and stayed "stuck" for three days, saved from a fate that could have ended very badly. I learnt later that to swallow these twelve sachets of bismuth in a single dose could have led to serious complications. I had had to take immediate action, it all ended well, so no harm was done.

When it became too serious, plaguing both Spanish and French detainees, the authorities thoroughly disinfected the premises, mattresses and clothing, and put everyone under a shower, a little corrosive but effective.

Those who know Spain will know that after lunch and up to 4pm. specially in the summer, life is virtually suspended. Everything comes to a full stop or if one likes, runs at idle. This is true almost everywhere, prisons were no exception, it was certainly true of Totana. The high walls that surrounded the buildings had at their top six sentry boxes complete with sentries, connected by a covered way. At night, at regular intervals, the sentries called to each other to ensure that all was well - "Alerta... uno... alerta... dos...", until: "Alerta... sez". These calls stretched into the night like the singing of the muezzin or the plaintive notes of flamenco; I loved it.

During the day these calls were not needed, even more so for those two hours in the afternoon, when in Spain, time stops. Within our gang an idea germinated, and we thought of ways to take advantage of this, to attempt an escape. We had seen that at this time the sentries slept in their sentry boxes and we were all in the main courtyard, virtually without supervision, everyone dozing in the shade or in the sun, others playing cards or chess. No guards or sentries in sight. Two large wooden benches were aligned along the wall. They were rarely used, as we preferred to sit or lie on the ground. We calculated that the length of one of these benches, drawn up against the outer wall, would easily attain its height, on condition of course that we planned everything properly and carefully choose a propitious moment. Our friend Jesu, in whom we had decided to confide, encouraged us to give it a go. Meanwhile, he and some of his comrades had secretly organized a means of communication with the outside world. He had managed to contact some members of his family in Almeria who were simple fishermen, who would be able to take us at night to the Algerian coast. The most difficult thing would be taking advantage of the two short hours we would have, until our escape was discovered, to get away as far as possible from Totana; to the hills where it would be easier to hide. It would take three days, moving only at night, to get to the address in Almeria. A few days later plans had been made. There was only one flat note to our plan, our friend Delvincour, weakened more than the others by this harsh prison life, would not join us. He said that he would not be able to cope with the extreme efforts we would have to undergo. It was also possible that he was discouraged by the excessive risks we were taking, and it was true that the "carabineros" were trigger-happy. Jesus assured us that we had more chance of success if our group was only made up of four of us. If Jesu says... anyway, our project, so well planned, fell through.

Three days before the date fixed for our escape, comrades in another section preceded us. They managed to get over the wall, but were captured soon after, without fortunately, being hit by the carabineros fire. Badly mistreated and beaten, they were in a pitiful state when thrown into individual cells. They joined their group a week later, still showing marks as a result of their beating.

For us the adventure was over before it had begun. The new precautions taken by the management would give us no chance.

Time passed so slowly. Bourbon assured us that negotiations for our release were in hand, but we saw nothing happening. Chess, cards, and some more or less silly games allowed our minds to be distracted, to forget "just for a moment" our miserable condition. A comrade, originally from Napoli, had a fairly good singing voice and taught me a very pretty song "Torna Sorrento" ("Vido mare quant' è bella"). Our companions liked to hear us sing and we took great pleasure in meeting their demands. Our Spanish friends, clinging to their bars, also enjoyed it. One of them taught me a very beautiful song he composed and which was taken up –one could say "highjacked" - by Pedro Vargas, who would take it on a tour of the world: "Yo te quiero mucho..." , he was a common-law prisoner, who had killed his wife, and in his repentance, he had dedicated this song to her. He obtained much sympathy because of this.

The main thing throughout was not to lose from view our ultimate aim: our departure for Morocco and to enrol in a combat unit, everything else was just a preliminary. September arrived and our morale was reaching breaking point; we had to do something. If nothing new should come very soon, it was decided that we should go on a hunger strike. Bourbon was told, and it met with his approval. He had prepared an "argument" that he would put forward to the authorities concerned and which should resolve the matter quite quickly. The management of the prison was forewarned and they attempted to reason with us but in front of our determination the management showed considerable concern. The Spanish prisoners, who were well informed, confirmed the discomfort felt by them and encourage us to stand firm.

Shortly before the end of the month we began our strike. Absolute refusal of any food, a little water was all we would accept. Every trick in the book was brought out by the management to get us to give up. Bourbon had beaten the drum, informed the press, foreign embassies and the religious authorities, which worried them even more. Some very important personalities came to visit us to encourage us to give up. Despite the efforts they made to give us improved rations the obvious panic by the authorities encouraged us to persevere. As we got worse, they even served us a paella, probably not much good, but the smell alone was very tempting. Having started this strike we were not about to abandon it, we would continue to the end, but it was much harder than we had thought. On the third day, taking into account our weakened state, we were unable to stand. "Revolving dizziness", as we called it, falling immediately to the ground. Our only movement, to go to the toilet, was on all fours. Curiously, around the tenth day, everything seemed to become easier. One felt taken over by sleepiness and an indifference which must seize a climber exhausted in an icy storm. Fortunately at this point (tenth or eleventh day) was when Bourbon and the Director of the prison came to tell us solemnly that we would be released no later than within the next fifteen days. Firm commitments had been made by the authorities. We had won, this strike had been too embarrassing for the Spanish Government; even the Americans had intervened.

It was on 21st of October that we said farewell to the prison at Totana. Again handcuffed to each other we emerged under the encouragement and the cheers of the Spanish prisoners who, over time, had become friendly companions. What could have become of Jesu? We arrived in Malaga station in the afternoon, and warmly were welcomed by French and Spanish authorities; outraged at our handcuffs, they were immediately removed. We were then joined at gathering places, mainly in bull rings, by many other "French escapees" coming mainly from the concentration camp of Miranda. We were about a thousand distributed in different parts of the auditorium. This freedom which came so quickly was intoxicating. Some sang, laughed or spoke loudly and stridently to give free rein to the vital energy which has been stifled for months. Others remained prostrate or wandered round without quite realizing that they were free. I made sure I was free by wandering along the corridors and rooms of these beautiful arenas. I bumped into my friend Michel Junguenet from Fontainebleau, arranging his sleeping quarters; it was a happy and noisy reunion that we would have to celebrate that very evening, by a spree in the pubs of the city. Those of our "clan" from Totana accepted this newcomer, and as soon as we had finished the very decent dinner which was served, our group headed for the city life and lights. We had been well warned that the French escapees assembled in the various bullrings round the city, who wished to fight against the Germans would not be welcomed by everyone here.

The fascist sympathisers were very much against our presence, so if we were to go to town we would have to remain discreet. We promised, and we held our side of the bargain, we would not cause any fights to develop, although we would have very much liked to do so. But it was not very clever to stroll around in a group of fifteen or more as we did, because of others who had come to join us. Inevitably, identifiable as we were, we were arrested by the first 'carabineros' patrol we encountered, and off we went to the police station.

Kerjean and I lingered at the back of our small troupe, and taking advantage of a moment of inattention by the guard closest to us, we were able to slip into a café. The owner behind the counter saw our game and it was obvious that he would denounce us. With a firm, quick gesture he made us squat behind the counter. How lucky we were to come across him! He had taken a serious risk in hiding us. No policeman appeared, so the story ended with us drinking a “cerveza” (beer) with this very sympathetic café owner, to whom we related our past adventures and our motives for the future. All ended well. We returned to the bullring as quickly as we could by the shortest possible route. Our wandering friends were escorted back later that night.

As an aside, it was in these beautiful bull rings of Málaga that, seventeen years later, during our holidays in Benidorm, then a simple fishing village, I took our son Olivier, then thirteen years old to his first Bullfight. He pretended to like it, probably for my sake.

Two days after our arrival here, on 13 October, we were all shipped to Casablanca on two boats, the Gouverneur Général Lépine and the Sidi Brahim. Two very old ships, especially the Sidi Brahim, which was the one to which our group was allocated.

The management put a stop to it all, when it became too important, plaguing both Spanish and French detainees, thoroughly disinfecting the premises, mattresses and clothing, and putting everyone under a shower, a little corrosive but effective.

The main thing throughout was not to lose from view our ultimate aim: our departure for Morocco and to enrol in a combat unit, everything else was just a preliminary. September arrived and our morale was reaching breaking point, we had to do something. If nothing new should come very soon, it was decided that we should go on a hunger strike. Bourbon was told, and it met with his approval. He had prepared an “argument” that he would put forward to the authorities concerned, and which should resolve the matter quite quickly. The management of the prison was forewarned and they attempted to reason with us, but in front of our determination, the management showed considerable concern. The Spanish prisoners, who were well informed, confirmed the discomfort felt by them and encourage us to stand firm.

Shortly before the end of the month we began our strike. Absolute refusal of any food, a little water was all we would accept. Every trick in the book was brought out by the management to get us to give up. Bourbon had beaten the drum, informed the press, foreign embassies and the religious authorities, which worried them even more. Some very important personalities came to visit us to encourage us to give up. This obvious panic by the authorities encouraged us to persevere, despite the efforts they made to give us improved rations, they even, as we got worse, served us a paella, probably not much good, but the smell alone was very tempting. Having started this strike we were not about to abandon it, we would continue to the end. But it was much harder that we had thought. On the third day, taking into account our weakened state, we were unable to stand. “Revolving dizziness”, as we called it, falling immediately to the ground. Our only movement, to go to the toilet, was on all fours. Curiously, around the tenth day, everything seemed to become easier. One felt taken over by sleepiness and an indifference which must seize a climber exhausted in an icy storm. Fortunately at this point (tenth or eleventh day) was when Bourbon and the Director of the prison came to tell us solemnly that we would be released no later than within the next fifteen days. Firm commitments had been made by the authorities. We had won, this strike was too embarrassing for the Spanish Government; even the Americans had intervened.

It was on 21st of October that we said farewell to the prison at Totana. Again handcuffed to each other we emerged under the encouragement and the cheers of the Spanish prisoners who, over time, had become friendly companions. What could have become of Jesu? We arrived in Malaga station in the afternoon. We were warmly welcomed by French and Spanish authorities, outraged at our

handcuffs, they were immediately removed. We were then taken to gathering places, mainly in bull rings, where we were joined by many other “French escapees” coming mainly from the concentration camp of Miranda³⁹. We were about a thousand distributed in different parts of the auditorium. This freedom which came so quickly was intoxicating. Some sang, laughed or spoke loudly and stridently to give free rein to the vital energy which had been stifled for months. Others remained prostrate or wandered round without quite realizing that they were free. I made sure I was free by wandering along the corridors and rooms of these beautiful arenas. I bumped into my friend Michel Junguenet from Fontainebleau, arranging his sleeping quarters; it was a happy and noisy reunion that we would celebrate that very evening, by a spree in the pubs of the city. Those of our “clan” from Totana accepted this newcomer, and as soon as we had finished the very decent dinner which was served, our group headed for the city life and lights. We had been well warned that the French escapees, assembled in the various bullrings round the city who wished to fight against the Germans, would not be welcomed by everyone here.

The fascist sympathisers were very much against our presence, so if we were to go to town we would have to remain discreet. We promised, and we held our side of the bargain, we would not cause any fights to develop, although we would have very much liked to do so. But it was not very clever to stroll around in a group of fifteen or more as we did, because of others who came to join us. Inevitably, identifiable as we were, we were arrested by the first ‘carabineros’ patrol we encountered, and off we went to the police station.

Kerjean and I lingered at the back of our small troupe, and taking advantage of a moment of inattention by the guard closest to us, we were able to slip into a café. The owner behind the counter saw our game and it was obvious that he would denounce us. With a firm, quick gesture he made us squat behind the counter. How lucky we were to come across him! He had taken a serious risk in hiding us. No policeman appeared, so the story ended with us drinking a “cerveza” (beer) with this very sympathetic café owner, to whom we related our past adventures and our ambitions for the future. All ended well. We returned to the bullring as quickly as we could by the shortest possible route. Our wandering friends were escorted back later that night.

As an aside, it was in these beautiful bull rings of Málaga that, seventeen years later, during our holidays in Benidorm, then a simple fishing village, I took our son Olivier, then thirteen years old to his first bullfight. He pretended to like it, probably for my sake.

Two days after our arrival here, on 13 October, we were all shipped to Casablanca on two boats, the Gouverneur Général Lépine and the Sidi Brahim. Two very old ships, especially the Sidi Brahim, which was the one to which our group was allocated.

Part VIII.

NORTH AFRICA

Farewell to Spain and its prisons, we were off to Morocco and Algeria. At last we would do something for the liberation of France from its struggles. Our two ships were escorted by two destroyers of the Free French Navy to ensure our protection against any possible aggression from German submarines. The holds were adapted to accommodate beds; the heat, smells, promiscuity and the rolling and pitching of this tub caused an unpleasant sensation, probably seasickness, which I had not previously experienced. Those around me very quickly confirmed it. There was no question of remaining in the hold, unless we wished to suffer. The “clan” decided to go up on deck, even if it meant that we would be ordered down again, but nothing untoward happened, and by keeping our heads down we were able to make the crossing in the open air.

When night fell, it became very cool and wet but we found a corner sheltered from the wind and with the blankets distributed to us we had no problem. Moreover we spent most of our time leaning on the railings to admire, in the silence that surrounded us, the reflection of the moon in the wake of the boat. Approaching Gibraltar our two guardian angels zig zagged to confuse enemy submarines that often frequented this area. We were well aware of the danger and being tired and debilitated we had some anxiety about it. It was at this moment that we saw, coming straight towards our boat, two clear streaks ruffling the surface of the sea, certainly torpedoes. We were about to be sunk but many identical streaks came to reassure us. It was simply a school of dolphins that had come to accompany us for a few miles. Wonderful dolphins, I had never loved them so much. Going through of the Straits we admired the dark silhouette of the great rock and reassuring lights of the Spanish coast and Tangier

It was in middle of the day when we landed in Casablanca. A whole lot of soldiers and civilians greeted us with the Marseillaise and patriotic speeches. We were then taken by GMC trucks to 209 depot, an important military transit camp built to house and feed us, but also of course to analyse the indispensable information regarding our identity, the origins and aspirations, of each one of us. Some of us were found to be not all that saintly, and it was with sadness and anger that I found out about some of these. In the large central square of the camp, recruiting agents of the various sections set up shop: infantry, marine, aviation, armoured division, all coming, like barrow boys, setting out their merchandise, encouraging us to commit ourselves, each of us showing interest and the advantages we could bring to the unit of our choice in mastery of a weapon, or any skill we may have. It was like Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park, a cattle or slave market, everyone bidding for what they required. It seemed odd but not very dignified, at least at first sight. In fact these officers were there to recruit the best of us. Mounted on chairs, tables, boxes, they did their best, putting their talent and their faith in trying to recruit these new arrivals whose motivations, determination and enthusiasm made them choice recruits. Our small French army was still very large and urgently needed extra men of all abilities. Instead of laughing stupidly at their efforts and shouts, which were a little dramatic, we should have applauded their dedication, conviction and perseverance. It was you the recruiting agents, who helped us make our decision in favour of this or that unit. We owe you a big thank you.

In our little group choices were made. Michel Junguenet and I chose to be student pilots. The other four were dispersed between the 2nd D.B., Navy and the Paras. We would be separated. I would never see Scali again, he was a great chap, and I would miss him. In 1947 I found Papon working as a

taxi driver, as already narrated - and Maurice fifty years later in Draguignan to where he had retired. We'll come back to him as well as to René Kerjean.⁴⁰

Michel and I were transferred to a camp at Mediouna to wait for the inevitable medical examination. We would stay here for a month doing nothing and without receiving a word from anybody. We despaired, and Michel started to show an obvious predisposition to alcoholism. A few years later he would become a big loudmouth and succumbed to this addiction, something which finally separated us. We were given very good allowances during our month of inaction but we spent it all.

At this time in Casa there was a large international mix of people that met in bars, restaurants and nightclubs. We were linked in friendship with two older boys - maybe thirty-five years old. Henning was a very charming chap, athletic, kind, sweet and a great debater. He was Franco-British-Egyptian - I never knew exactly, besides he never spoke about himself, he lived with his mother in Cairo where he was a teacher. Why was he here? It was all very vague, probably an intelligence officer but it was of no importance to us. Dimitris was Franco-Greco-American (?). He was responsible for a unit of the Military - U.S. Police. A little rotund, looking more like a pile of leather than a policeman, yet he was a fierce brawler and a leader, very respected by his men, his flexible and feline look and vivid gestures in stark contrast to his rounded silhouette.

Come, I must confess that for the four of us, the bars in Casa became our place of worship and where we spent most of our time. Our return to the fold, often at daybreak, was sometimes difficult. In principle Michel and I had to return each night to our military dormitory where the discipline was lax. The authorities were aware of the deprivations we had undergone in Spain, and gave us as much freedom as we wished. As long as we were present every morning at eight o'clock for reveille and the roll call, we were free for the rest of the day. Usually we started by squeezing through a discreet hole in the fence, that others had made before us, in an area which was not overlooked. We should have requested a pass which would no doubt have been granted but it was just a waste of time. In the smelly track outside our hole in the fence our usual horse trap was usually waiting for us with its brave trap-driver who helped us in our escapades. From time to time we occasionally went to Dimitris' comfortable studio. Behind his hard exterior, in truth not often seen, hid a hopelessly tender heart. The adventure of his life has just ended, and he didn't stop assailing our ears with it, putting our patience and our friendship to the test. At that time, I had the annoying habit, painful for some, that I've never quite lost, to throw good words (not so good sometimes) to the wind. One night we arrived at Dimitris' seriously drunk, and he went on at us once again, maudlin about how Lucie, the object of his adoration, had announced with cynicism and wickedness that she loved another, and that she no longer wanted to see him again. They were on the beach bathed in beautiful moonlight. "The place was magical and it was demonic," he groaned. I just couldn't resist. "But what were you thinking of doing with Lucie?" Stupid and malicious, I admit. But we were three idiots beached as whales on the shore. Dimitris was furious and took things very badly. We apologized, trying to calm him down. Well, he had seen enough of us and he left in his official Dodge to the port to see some of his Military Police. Michel, seeing that our friend should not be on his own, got into the passenger seat, Henning and I returning to our respective beds. We would learn the next day that our two companions had had an accident. Dimitris was unscathed, but in trouble for his irresponsible and serious wrongdoing, with regard to discipline.

He was immediately placed under arrest and transferred to another unit. We would never learn anything more and would not see him again. Michel was injured, not seriously, but his mouth and teeth took a serious blow. I went to the hospital to see him and knowing his condition, I took him a very hard but tasty nougat bar. His ugly and painful grimace made me laugh. However he appreciated the orange juice which I had hidden in my backpack.

A few days later Michel and I were transferred with a few others to the airbase at Rabat.

Rabat was a very pretty town full of greenery and charm, significantly smaller than Casa, although it is the capital. We liked to sip mint tea on the heights above the city in the well laid out Oudaias Gardens.

We lived a simple life, good and orderly, here again we were able to escape through a hole through the fence that surrounded the camp, and roam around the city. What else could we do? We were left to ourselves, free from any work or useful activity, waiting only to be summoned to the medical examination to be student pilot. It was with enthusiasm that we finally got what we had come for, to be assessed for our destiny. Our difficult stay in Spain had left its mark on our bodies, as it had on a lot of other “escapees”. We therefore looked for another solution before being put to any old task. A friend whom I liked, Jacques Blum, who was also waiting for a medical, was applying to join to the school l'École d'Aspirants de Desaix in Algeria. I was considering the commandos or paras, but with my current physical condition I'd surely be rejected, so why not the l'École d'Aspi⁴¹? The rank appeared attractive and seemed to have responsibilities other than those of simple soldier. On the other hand, it would further delay “the moment of truth”, the essential goal for all the “French escapees via Spain” which was to fight for the liberation of our occupied country. The choice was made, I had to revise my thoughts and go for this new objective

I should have explained that this training school was a unit of air artillery, which was none another, as its name suggested, than a body of DCA (Défense Contre Avions), part of the Air Force.

So we were now 'Air Gunners', without any assignment for the moment, pending an examination before a panel which would determine our ability to be among the E.A.R. (Élèves Aspirants de Réserve). This review wouldn't pose any problem for me, but Michel, who had not taken his baccalaureate, would be rejected. I would not see him again until 1945 at Fontainebleau, when the war was over. Jacques Blum and I would be part of the second “batch” of Aspis students based in Desaix, a pretty village near the sea, at the foot of Mount Chenoua, which dominated 900metres of Mediterranean shoreline. We were about 50 kms to the West of Algiers. We would undergo accelerated training , justified by the constraints of the war, which would begin in early January 1944 ending late May.

The school was situated on the edge of the village and divided into four or five small buildings arranged for the different courses that we were taught: weapons, signals, physics, chemistry, ballistics and math, etc. Sports and physical education also held important place in our activities which would give me a privileged position among my fellow students. My work at the Office of Sports and also at Fort Carré in Antibes and my experience as an auxiliary supervisor, was considered of sufficient worth to designate me as a supervisor alongside the lieutenant responsible, among others, for this activity. In truth he was a very poor athlete, but energetic and a competent leader, it was thanks to him that at the final review I would get my officer-cadet stripe.

During this internship I had a serious clash with his counterpart in signals, a Giraudiste⁴², a fanatical anti-Gaullist, who claimed that he had banned me from wearing the cross of Lorraine just as I was leaving to go on leave; that is to say even off school premises, something I could not agree to. During my whole time there he was unpleasant to me, and on my final review I had to be interviewed by him and he questioned me at length on subjects that we had hardly touched. He had no difficulty in hanging me out to dry. Not very happy about it, but not daring to send me off with a zero mark because of my good results in other areas, he conceded just a half mark which made my final success problematic. Outraged by the attitude of his colleague, the supervisor of sports automatically gave me nineteen and a half marks which enabled me to be honourably included among the successful leavers.

We were in a region of highly successful vineyards, which produced wines of good quality. Viniculture requires sunshine and each winery had its cellar, a big area equipped for the storage of maturing wine, it was thus that we slept in a disused cellar. The beds were set out two or three in each alcove of the vaulted cellar, cleared of large storage casks which had occupied them. Jacques Blum and I had set ourselves up as best we could and were as comfortable as possible.

Apart from our classes we were left to do as we wished and we certainly took advantage of what was available. A few kilometres away, on the seafront at the foot of Chenoua hill, next to the village of the same name, there was a beautiful beach from which we could have great swims. A little later we often visited the stunning Roman ruins of Tipaza. They were magnificent.

At the weekend, “excats” were easily obtained. We frequently went to Algiers. The city was crawling with soldiers of all types, French, American, English and the occasional Canadian. One had to arrange one’s own transport; hitchhiking worked well. Relations between the civil and military authorities were good. The French from Algeria, foolishly called “pieds noirs”⁴³, had an odd accent. How can I describe it? It was a mixture of French and Arabic accents. Different of course, but melodious, as is the creole accent of French-speaking countries overseas, music and sunshine in harmony, these were real people, passionate, harsh, and soft in turn. They had not lived, as we had, in metropolitan France under the tricky and often dangerous German occupation, but had nevertheless experienced difficulties due to different political views. Distanced from the occupying forces, they surely didn’t know about the criminal ‘collaboration’ which had caused so much harm and death in metropolitan France, as a result they were strongly divided between “Petainistes” and “Gaullists”. Before the American landings on November 8th 1942, the Gaullists had to keep a low profile under penalty of ending up in concentration camps erected in the South of the country, the existence and severity of the regime in these camps would only be known too late. A majority of “Pieds Noirs” trusted Pétain, remaining somehow convinced that he was leading a “double game” in anticipation of better days when he would resume the battle to liberate France. Fortunately a small group of committed, intelligent and well-organized people worked in the shadows, carrying out remarkable preparatory work to create the best conditions for the American landing.⁴⁴

Many books have chronicled the critical and decisive contribution of these men from Algeria. These “Resisters” by their magnificent enterprise on the one hand ensured that the losses in men and equipment on landing were far smaller than might have been feared (they were three or four times lower than those of the same operation carried out at the Morocco), and on the other hand that “control” over the country contemplated by the Americans could not take place. The “elimination” of Admiral Darlan⁴⁵ (with the likely approval of De Gaulle and the Comte de Paris) deprived the Americans of help that they would have needed.

Divisions at the heart of the population remained. Pétainistes would certainly not go over to De Gaulle. They regrouped behind General Giraud, marking their willingness to reposition themselves and possibly fighting against the Germans, but avoiding joining the “traitor” general sentenced by Vichy. Fortunately little by little De Gaulle would eventually take over political events with his great personality, and become the only leader of France Libre.

It was in this quite poisonous atmosphere that we, the “French escapees through Spain” had to take a political position. The adventure that we had chosen naturally ranked us among the “Gaullists” and we wanted to prove it to the world, off college limits clearly visible on our uniform, by wearing the Cross of Lorraine so dear to de Gaulle. This did not go by without creating problems and even a few fights, but we became the largest group and our Cross of Lorraine, approved by some, was tolerated by others.

I should have added that our small circle included in particular an aristocrat who became the founder and head of the commandos where I was later accepted, Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie, and also a young man of twenty years, Mario Faivre, who in his Peugeot 302, on 24th December 1942, would drive Fernand Bonnier de la Chapelle to the summer palace, to assassinate Darlan. Having narrowly escaped the death penalty for being an accessory, Mario would subsequently fight with exceptional courage with the "special forces", before joining the commandos with whom we fought together and became friends.

Like most of my college pals, I was welcomed into several "black foot" families. The first time was after a huge brawl that left some scars on the face of my friend Jacques Blum. On Saturday evening we had gone to Tipaza with three other mates from college to see a western showing in a local hall, put on by a mobile cinema which toured various villages in the region and showed a film every weekend. Mr. Lecronier organized these film evenings with the help of his wife, his daughter Huguette, and Mouloud, a Kabyle, 30 years old, who didn't say much, but with a wrestler's physique that could sometimes be useful to enforce a little discipline when required. In the interval Mouloud challenged a small group of young Arabs who, through the darkness, had entered without paying. The argument degenerated quickly and Mouloud, despite all his 'know-how', was overwhelmed, so we decided to help. It was very fast but very violent. I had learned in Antibes that rather than strength, speed was the essence of fighting. I was very lucky to find an "opening" to the stomach of the opponent who seemed to lead the group of rogues. He beat a retreat folded in half, taking his accomplices with him. The incident ended well. No nasty knives, only some bad fists. At the end of the film Mr. Lecronier insisted that he wished to thank us by offering us a glass in the bistro that was still open. Mouloud expressed his gratitude by some happy grunts.

Jacques Blum and I, who were probably the main antagonists, were discreetly invited to spend the following Sunday at the Lecroniers' in Castiglione, quite an important town on the road to Algiers. Jacques soon left and it was thus that I spent a pleasant weekend with the family. A discreet flirtation started up between Huguette and me. I was surprised one day when I overheard the parents discussing, in a low voice, the terms of our engagement, I made myself scarce and quickly brought my visits to Castiglione to an end.

One Saturday evening, returning from Algiers, I was given a lift by a very friendly couple who wanted, with tact and politeness, to know everything about our training school, the full story of our escape from France, my personal motivations, etc. They stopped at Bérard, seven or eight kilometres short of my destination at Desaix. Albert Jacquemond and his wife invited me to come and spend the next day, Sunday, with them and lent me a bike to return to college. This was the beginning of a very nice friendship. Every Saturday morning I took to the Bérard road with "my" bike to stay until Sunday or even Monday morning. I had my room which had been that of Albert Jacquemond my host, before the death of his parents in a car accident, and his marriage which came sometime later. Albert was the same age as my brother Roger, who was fifteen years older than me. The Jacquemonds' and their eldest daughter fourteen or fifteen years old, an excellent pianist, became a second family for me, until my departure from Algeria, To this day I do not understand how I could, after the war, never make any effort to contact them; dreadful ingratitude. I certainly could never return their generous hospitality. Albert and I went hunting and fishing together, game and fish were plentiful. He had even developed, before its time, a diving mask which was perhaps not perfect (it leaked quite a bit) but it meant that we could, using a trident spear catch excellent jack, groupers, lobsters, spider crabs and much more. He was severely bitten by a big Moray eel, after that we were very wary of them.

The house next door was inhabited by a very friendly family. Madame Macé had lost her husband in 1940; she had been left alone with seven children, five girls and two boys. The two older daughters were married, and Paul the third child, was a medical student in Algiers, so remaining at the

Bérard home with their mother were the three younger girls (nicknamed the three graces, because they were pretty and charming), the youngest Christian, was eight or ten years old.

Having been introduced to Madame Macé by Albert I was more often in the company of the three graces rather than at the Jacquemonds' where I kept my room and ate my meals; another ingratitude. An explanation and an excuse for this: my particular interest was for Bernadette, eighteen years old, the youngest of the three graces. This amorous flirtation lasted until my departure and continued by letter for some months. I heard that Madame Macé had asked the Jacquemonds many questions about me. Time, distance, war and youth did their work, and I had no more news of "Dette" until her death in 1995, I found this out quite by chance by a casual glance at the obituary column of my newspaper in Cannes.

We got to the end of studies and the various operations constituting our Air Cadet gunnery training. After the big fright, already recorded, concerning my serious disagreement with the examiner in signals (radio, telephony, etc.) all had worked well, and I had already been given a few centimetres of braid depicting an officer cadet that I was going to need to put on my cap and the epaulettes and cuffs of my uniform.

This last day was set aside for a live shot at a target (windsock) towed approximately eighty meters behind a plane. After all the exercises my results were perfect, so I had no worries. Our six "Bofors 40" were set up on the coast road overlooking the sea near Guyotville. I was in charge of N ° 2 gun. The aircraft was reported and soon our mark was sighted. My two gunners made the relevant adjustments for elevation, distance and angle that I quickly calculated for the shot. Fire! We were the only ones to touch the target. Hurrah! Congratulations from the examining lieutenant. Two other passes would be made. On the approach of the aircraft I quickly redid my calculations and was very annoyed when the gunner responsible for the angle of shot was slow in reacting to my orders, he yelled that I was setting the sights on the aircraft and not the target. He was right. I was to blame for almost causing a fatal accident. Of course I didn't give the order to fire and the aircraft and target went by without us firing a shot. The lieutenant was furious. What are you playing at? I replied that I was not fast enough, that I have miscalculated... I felt that he hesitated, he gave me a reprieve. On the third pass, we had to be perfect. No, we would not hit the target (none of the cadets managed to hit it), but we nicked the rope just ahead of it, which gave almost the same number of points. It was a satisfactory result and I thought that I had done reasonably well. But the lieutenant called me aside. He was not fooled and fully understood what had happened. This kind of error was not usually forgiven, but given my good results throughout the whole time he turned a blind eye. I was obviously not very proud of it and thanked him as best I could, but felt embarrassed about it.

So here I was, an officer cadet in the Air Gunnery Corps (l'Artillerie de l'Air), it is what I had wanted. But air gunnery; I didn't feel that I really had the soul of a gunner, it was to fly that I really wanted. So I immediately made three transfer requests:

- The first as a student pilot. This had the best chance of success, since it was within the l'Armée de l'Air, the corps to which I already belonged.
- Another in a unit of Paratroopers;
- The third in the Commandos.

In light of these applications, and waiting for a response, I would get a provisional assignment, it came quickly. I was to join a 'repair company' immediately, near Oran airport, in la Sénia.

My arrival in this unit was greeted with relief by the captain and the other ranks. I was responsible for everything concerning discipline, of which, in this place, there were serious problems. I was not at all excited by this task, quite alien to me and not at all what I expected of the army or what I expected I would be required to do. The captain was a big handsome man of forty years or so who

seemed more interested in his small but beautiful driver rather than his responsibilities of an officer responsible for his unit. I would have to cope alone, with a team of totally undisciplined guys, to remedy a situation that had been left to deteriorate due to lack of authority. I couldn't even count on the help and advice of the lieutenant and the sub-lieutenants. They were technicians, and as long as things went well in their sphere of operations, they didn't care what went on elsewhere.

In this atmosphere I did not hold out much hope but I was determined not to let myself down, and Lady Luck was with me. The day after my arrival, at lunchtime, as I somewhat absentmindedly supervised the queue of men who were shuffling along to fill their bowl at the hatch in front of the kitchen, a fight broke out between two of them. Two burly ruffians went to it with gusto. I forced my way through and, while making sure I did not catch a nasty blow, I pulled at two arms that were within my reach. At the same time I put out a leg to throw them off balance. Everything worked perfectly; the lessons at Antibes had borne fruit. My two ruffians fell to the ground. They, as well as their comrades, looked dumbfounded at the small stocky cadet who had made them lose face in front of their comrades. I had this one opportunity and I had to take advantage of it. I made them go to the back of the queue and withdrew any exeat for the following Sunday. I had achieved a precious advantage that I held until my departure, a month later. But after all, these boys were not all that bad, and we eventually got on quite well.

This curious experience as a disciplinary officer was in the end less hateful than I had feared. It allowed me to discover the beautiful city of Oran which was very different from other cities in Algeria and very Hispanic. People spoke more Spanish than French. After having been so influenced by the Arabs, Spain was in turn setting its footprint down here. The women of Oran were especially pretty, but like the men, they were hot blooded. I remember with delight the pleasure that I took, one Sunday evening, to get involved with a crowd of civilians and military chasing a pack of American sailors all the way down Arzeu Street to the port with forceful kicks in the ass, as some of them had behaved very badly towards some young girls. Our US allies were not all little saints.

Fifteen days after my arrival, I got three days exeat on the occasion of Pentecost. I was invited by the Jacquemonds and went to Algiers by "air-stop" (hitching a ride) from la Senia airport. I found a place aboard a twin-engined "Marauder", Impressive power, but very poor gliding ability. My return would be taken care of in an amphibious Catalina with high-wings. My friends in Bérard were pleased to see me again; I was like a rabbit in clover.

Shortly after my return to la Senia, I was summoned to the Colonel's Office. I would be transferred to the Commandos. I was congratulated and at the same time given three days "jankers" for putting in three requests simultaneously for a transfer, which was forbidden. For those three days I would be quietly continuing my job as head of discipline, without any change.

A few days later I reported to the Fort Staouéli near Sidi Ferruch, 20 kilometres to the West of Algiers. I was received by Commander O'Cottreau, forty years old with a great saloon-fighter's jaw, firm but friendly. He was head of the C.O.S. (Special Operations Centre), which provided all those who arrived here with specific 'Commando' training. Very demanding training where the physical and psychological aspects of the men were rigorously put to the test so that in a few months they could obtain men who were trained to fight in the most hazardous of conditions.

Like most of the volunteers who constituted our group, I would learn how to exceed my limits using will, pride and humility. There were no strong-arm or super-men, each had to give of their best and suffer in silence. If you were at the back, you followed your neighbour who continued to move forward, and you had to follow. All these operations were carried out in the huge moat of the star fort; on the beach near the fort, in the sea, and in the surrounding woods and also in the air, because we would have to make at least four parachute jumps to be obtain our diploma. But all this, despite various

ailments, the suffering of the body and the shouting of the instructors, was accepted with enthusiasm and joy.

I had lost my friend Jacques Blum who remained in the Air Gunnery Corps, but could commiserate with Maurice Frey, Christian Roland-Gosselin, and also Anderson one of our Canadian instructors, smaller than me but twice as wide. Outside of work, we went for good times together to “unwind”, without however over doing it. And then I was able to spend my weekends at Bérard with the Jacquemons, and very special moments with Dett.

In Algiers I saw a poster advertising the Opera La Tosca starring César Vezzani. I persuaded Christian to accompany me. At the end of the show we saw César in his dressing room. We talked about Marseille and the good times we had had of late nights at “Gauls”. He asked me if I had any news of my father and, perceiving my embarrassment, admitted to me that he had never understood his position in favour of the Germans. He congratulated us and wished us good luck. He didn’t invite us to dinner. I found him aged, his voice also, and a skinflint, hiding out in Algeria, like many others.

During September, school and academic studies resumed. Dett was in her final class and lodged with an old, very nice, uncle in the Rue Michelet. I saw her more often and sometimes gave a little help with drafting of some papers for her studies. I remember a text on Châteaubriant on which I had had to work on laboriously. On the next visit, she said in a mocking tone “we have had a three,” this meant that my high regard in her eyes had taken a dive.

One Saturday in September Jacques Fages (a new friend), Christian Roland-Gosselin, Maurice Frey and I were invited to lunch in Algiers to Jacques’ aunt, Madame Deviller, whose husband commanded a unit of soldiers somewhere in the theatre of war. This very friendly lady loved to receive her nephew’s friends, thinking perhaps that by this good deed she was closer to the life for which she lived, and was in constant anxiety for his safety,

Madame Deviller was wonderful; she called us “my children”. Jacques and Christian arrived first, Maurice and I were a little late and we apologized. While our hostess and my friends exchanged a few words standing in the hall I discerned a kind of awkwardness but didn’t attach much importance to it. I liked the atmosphere of this beautiful and spacious apartment, the smell of wax and aged furniture, subdued, reassuring lighting, and the hidden presence of the previous generations who had lived here. Yes, I felt comfortable here and I told her so because I felt the need to express it, Madame Deviller thanked me with a sad smile. “Jacques needs to have a word with you”, she said. And while the others went through to the drawing room and closed the door behind them, Jacques and I remained in the hall. “I’m sorry” he said me with great kindness, and gave me two “postcards”, the special type that we used to correspond with our families. One of them had been sent by me to my mother; it had been returned to me with the simple words: “Addressee Deceased “. The other came from the Red Cross in Sanary describing the circumstances in which my mother, my brother Roger, his wife Andrée (Dany) and thier daughter Odette (Poune), had been killed in the American air bombardment of the city, on August 13th. With some others, they had taken shelter in a deep cellar with thick walls in the house of their friends, the Bard family, on the outskirts of Sanary. The bomb that struck the corner of the House and caused the partial cave-in of the walls of the cellar was apparently intended for a “decoy gun emplacement” of nearby German DCA. The lack of precision of the American bombing was obviously due to the high altitude of the aircraft. There were twelve people gathered in the basement, nine were killed. Only three members of the Bard family had been brought out, of whom the eldest was ninety three years old.

I felt the friendly hand of Jacques on my shoulder. I thanked him and asked him to apologize to his aunt. I needed to get into the air, have a walk, go round the arcades of the large square, and a little further on to breathe in the trees, plants and smells of nature, I tried to cry but my tears were blocked,

even if they existed. For two hours, I walked round and round with no aim in view, my legs and head working away, as in a nightmare. I caught a few questioning looks and I gradually came down back to earth. Stupidly I called in to see Dett. The old uncle was there and I told him what had happened. He, who had never recovered from the death of his wife, found simple and sympathetic words to say. With a coffee and cake which were served, a little self-esteem returned, pride, perhaps, which gave me an apparent serenity. Discreetly, he withdrew to his office, believing that it was the best thing to do. But soon Dett's rather clumsy attitude which, come to think of it, was excusable, began to get at me. Despite my feelings for her, I couldn't stand the feeling of pity she lavished upon me. I didn't hang around, perhaps I was running away; too bad.

I got back to Staoueli. In the austere darkness of the fort I felt better. The following days I took to training as if possessed; up to exhaustion, but with a new pleasure. Little by little, youth and life return to obscure the past. I had this force within me, as with us all in this place, imperious and demanding, which overrode everything; dedicating our entire commitment to our participation in the fighting, for the liberation of our country.

Most of our training was now finished, and we were eager to put all we had learnt as commandos against the Germans. Twice we were told to be ready for embarkation within 48 hours, but it was cancelled. Frustration set in and resulted in a few fights, including a very serious one in the Algiers Kasbah, which would lead to serious consequences.

PART VIII

CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

In early December we finally embarked on the “Banfora”, a small French ship, quite old, being used as a troop transporter sailing under the British flag with an English crew; the mysteries of war. The Captain called for volunteers and, despite a poor knowledge of the English language, I put myself forward to be the interpreter. It was just about good enough to allow me to take my meals in the officer’s mess (with no authoritative rank the cadet was considered as a sub-officer, but as a commissioned officer when required) and benefit from a personal cabin. The sea was rough and most of the passengers (men and officers) would occupy their berth more than their place at the table. Fortunately I didn’t have any problem.

Having arrived in Marseille, we marched seventeen kilometres to a huge estate, near Aubagne, which I had known when it was called “La Demande”, the owners being friends of the Poutet family. It was now a large housing estate requisitioned by the army for the transit of troops, before sending them on to the front.

We were scattered in various buildings and pavilions, mostly not yet completed, so our comfort was very spartan. It was here, that a few years later, in 1962, the Command (the “parent company”) of the Foreign Legion, having left Sidi-Bel-Abbès, would come to make it their permanent home.

We were based here very temporarily, for a few days at most, waiting to join a sector of the combat zone which, for the moment, remained unknown. Aubagne was located only eight kilometres from Roquevaire (where Bonne-Maman lived alone in the “Château”) and about forty from Sanary, where my mother, my brother, his wife and daughter had been killed. I asked the Commander O’Cottureau to give me a day off to visit these two places. Permission was granted without any problem, but I would have to bend an ear to get anyone to lend me a Jeep. Despite the difficulty, I managed it thanks to the intervention of Lieutenant Sanchez, who would become a very good friend.

It was cold on that morning, and the windshield of the Jeep was frosted up. I knocked on the big wooden door of the Château at about seven thirty in the morning. I was moved at the idea of seeing my grandmother after a long absence of eighteen months during which so much had happened. The noise of the large key in the huge lock brutally brought me back to the present moment. I only had time to see Bonne-Maman, a little aged in her too-loose-fitting gown, before opening my arms to embrace her. But I remained planted there, astounded, incredulous. By way of an affectionate and emotional reunion all I got was a truly horrendous shouting at and telling off: “unhappy wretch, where have you come from? What have you done? Your father is in the Milice, we have no idea where he is.” We eventually hugged and my heart filled up.

During a good breakfast I learnt that my father, furious at my escape, had joined the “collaborationists”. We learnt later that he was connected to Darnand⁴⁶ and Déat⁴⁷ and had gone to

Germany. He would be arrested at the same time as they were. Later in this story I will tell how I came to speak at his trial.

Bonne-Maman's primary concern was the fate of my father. Everyone knew that she loved him more than any other, even leading to bitterness and jealousy on the part of Aunt Renée, so what had happened to her grandson for eighteen months, and the deportation of her son-in-law Henri Pelle des Forges, were secondary considerations. This is how her maternal instincts affected her. Today, after more than sixty years, I can understand her attitude, but that morning, where I had gone with joy in my heart to find my grandmother at the Château, combined with the sadness of going to Sanary to find the last resting place of those I loved most in the world, I was filled with pain and anger at this unpredictable homecoming. It was therefore with a morbid satisfaction that I told Bonne-Maman that I was leaving immediately for Sanary, and gave her the reasons why. I was not displeased to see her go all sheepish. All of a sudden I wanted nothing to do with her, and it didn't take long for me to promise her that I would write. We left each other quite amicably. On the road, because the steering gear was playing up and made the Jeep behave in an abnormal and strange way, it needed my full attention, complete concentration, not allowing my thoughts to wander. It was just as well.

My arrival in this village where I had spent moments of great happiness, and where I would find happiness again with my wife and our son, I could hardly have imagined what could have happened and I felt a profound emotion. The smell of war hung over the place. The dynamiting carried out by the Germans before their departure had caused the greatest damage. All the old, brightly painted houses lining the right side of the port, had disappeared, there were still heaps of dirty and sad looking rubble around. Hatred overcame me. How I was going to make them pay for all this, and so many things besides, we would learn little by little.

At the solicitor's I spoke at length with Mr Gaymard the chief clerk who was an intimate friend of my brother, and who had sent me a letter giving me all the details of the drama. On his advice, and his instructions on how to get there, I went to the cemetery. The tomb was simple and beautiful, covered with a stone slab, on the stele were the four names and dates. It was Edouard Gagneux, Roger's childhood friend, and owner of the estate agency (which was now part of the rubble mentioned above) on the port, where Roger was the Director, who had bought this plot on a hundred year lease, and had had the memorial erected. Ingratitude was one of my many faults; I should have liked to have had more contact with him, awful. Personally I do wish to be thanked, but is that any excuse?

I stayed there some time, taken over, after a while, by a certain serenity, by reviving all the pleasant memories of those happy moments the five of us had experienced together, good meals (curries, bouillabaisse, roumazave...), where it was as noisy as the dishes were tasty; with Roger's humour and impersonations, You, happy at the centre of the four of us, the knowing looks, all that and much more made up our happiness and love, inseparable from each other.

I wanted now to go and see the Bard family. It was at their place that they were killed, it was here that they had taken shelter and lived since the centre of the village had been evacuated on the orders of the Germans. But it would soon be noon, and they may feel obliged to ask me to stay to lunch. It would not be very gracious to refuse, I would in no way feel embarrassed to accept, but I didn't wish to sit at table in a family I hardly knew, with a duty to talk, to communicate and to be a good guest. Thank you, Mr. and Madame Bard for your good intentions.

On the quay I found a sandwich to nibble at the "Nautique" with a glass of "Château Millière", the good wine from the small vineyard "Millière" at Roethlisberger where my mother looked after the grandfather with whom she played chess, taking care that he should win so that his blood pressure remained constant.

I then went for a walk round Port-Issol, a beautiful area with large villas and a pretty beach framed by cliffs of red rocks. I had been truthfully told that once again the Germans had blown everything up, there was not a wall standing. What stupidity! How sad! I had to leave.

I went off, a little fearfully, to see the Bards. They received me with great kindness and, at my request, showed me the cellar largely caved-in where my family and five other people were killed. Impressive, but I didn't take it in. However I now had more understanding of their disappearance. I lived with it and over time it became less painful. They were in my heart but I had to prepare myself to manage as best I could in my life, be ready to do everything that was asked of me, without fear or failure. They now led me to a small building in the garden, away from the house. This is where everything that had belonged to my mother and my brother had been brought together; it was a bit like a flea market. Gaymard made me understand that this bric-a-brac could not be moved pending the settlement of their estates. But I could of course, as Dany's brothers had already done, take a few objects and papers which I valued. I quickly realized that the "withdrawals" taken by Maurice and Roland Jacque, were substantial enough. However, material and financial matters were totally foreign to me, always will be, they seem unimportant and often inappropriate when looked upon in relation to the interests of my own very small family. Now is the time to blame me, but it is too late to put right all the errors or omissions I have been guilty of.

Among all these objects before me I found several that had belonged to You. I rummaged around among all these objects, piled higgledy-piggledy, for nearly an hour to try to select a few items having special importance because of the memory of You that they represented, very few because of the space they might take. Regardless of everything I knew that I could not recover everything. Others would do that. I didn't mind if it was legal or not. I came away with a small bag containing You's passport, the "Histoire Généalogique de la Famille de Chazal" that I had given her seven or eight years earlier; some beautiful old Malagasy engravings, and the anthology of contemporary poets in three volumes that Jean Poutet had given her, a few odd letters some of which had come from Maréchal Lyautey and Maréchal Gallieni, a few photographs of herself and various members of the family (my brothers, myself, etc.) and that of her grandfather Edmond de Chazal, and one other item, which had belonged to him, the lovely meerschaum pipe, which as a small boy I had admired at Uncle Chamarel's home.

I no doubt kept some other items which I cannot remember, that disappeared during our twenty-five or twenty-six moves, such as the beautiful Malagasy engravings. Realizing that it would be difficult to keep this precious booty without risking its loss or theft during the turbulent period that I would soon be living (?), I needed to entrust it to someone who would return it when the time came. After having thanked and said my goodbyes to Mr. and Madame Bard, I gave my bag and its contents to Mr Gaymard, who promised to keep at safe until I could return to reclaim it in more favourable times, i.e. when the war was over. He didn't dare suggest, and neither did I, that I may never return. An exchange of discrete smiles proved however, that the thought had gone through our minds; my destiny was to return.

We remained a week quartered in Aubagne, then went towards Besançon where we set ourselves up in a small village located about 30 kilometres away: Guyan-Durnes, near Ornans. We would remain there until mid-January desperate to be finally involved in operations. However, the front was not too distant; in a favourable wind we could hear the firing of the guns. Commander O'Cottreau was called to other duties; I liked him, and would meet him a year later, in Paris, during a press conference given by Georges Bidault, Minister of Foreign Affairs. I was then a journalist and he was Deputy⁴⁸ Bouvier; his real name. He was no longer the "bar-fighter" that I had admired. We had a few brief minutes together; just enough to see that he was embarrassed. He had changed like a chameleon to be entirely taken over by politics, I left him sad and disappointed. Let's move on, it is not always in war that one can give of one's best.

To take his place we hit on a really friendly captain, a giant of a man with a stentorian voice, calm and firm; a quiet strength. Captain Esbert was a black-foot – Algerian of French extraction—in his early forties, who quickly gauged his world and behaved with each person on the basis of the opinion that he formed. He was both a fine psychologist and a natural leader. His gentle kindness did not exclude great firmness. Each of us would, at one time or another, find this to be true. It was quite natural that we came to love and respect him. He was in no way a commando, which would lead to him being killed rather stupidly three months later. He was an innate leader who was able to make us appreciate and obey him despite the difficult and undisciplined band of men that we were.

The winter of 1944/45 was exceptionally cold, and especially in this region neighbouring the Jura. We had several falls of snow making the pavements and roads slippery. Like other 2nd lieutenants and officers, I was billeted in an old farmhouse outside the village. A cantankerous peasant woman, a widow for the past two or three years, and her two daughters lived there. The eldest daughter was as ugly and unlovable as her mother. The younger, twenty years old was fresh and pretty, the mother of a cute, almost one year old, baby. Her husband worked in a factory a long way away in the Gard. My room, if the earthen floor space could be called such, was attached to, but not part of, the main building which was heated. I was somehow, like an astronaut outside his space module. This uncomfortable situation was pretty ghastly when the temperature outside was between minus sixteen and minus twenty-four degrees centigrade, and my little cockpit was only minus ten, but the heavy thick blankets and the big eiderdown did give me some warmth if I battened down all the hatches. The farmer-woman and her elder daughter pretended to be deaf when I shyly and awkwardly tried to complain. Fortunately the fresh and lovely Rose very kindly found me a much better and more enjoyable heater; let's leave it at that.

I was in principle, assigned as a platoon commander under The Captain, working with Lieutenant Planchez and two sub-officers. It was a sinecure. I was from time to time called to HQ at Besançon to do some translation from English into French (with the help of a small dictionary that I always carried around in my little bag). I therefore had great freedom; I profited from this by hiking in the countryside and the surrounding woods, well wrapped up and equipped to face the cold and the snow. I had many beautiful encounters with the wildlife, hare and deer in particular, whose tracks I was beginning to recognize in the snow. I felt at home, and at one with nature, in all seasons, it was an almost mystical feeling.

My friends Frey and Roland - Gosselini, as well as two other 2nd lieutenants were each in charge of a platoon of thirty men and therefore did not have the significant freedom than I had. With the agreement of Esbert, I occasionally took over from them so that they could, for example, go to enjoy themselves in Besançon, often going to the cinema. On their return I gave their boys back to them exhausted but happy from the hard exercise we had had in the surrounding fields and forest. The atmosphere could not have been better. Even if we used our opportunities to best advantage, we were also very conscious, and even somewhat ashamed, of our privileged position compared with all those who were in combat. We were eager to join them. When would we be called up? It seemed that we would soon be incorporated into paratrooper or commando units to replace the heavy losses they had suffered. We were chomping at the bit, eager to prove what we could do, that is why we had escaped from France and had suffered in Spanish goals. Esbert did his best to calm us, keep us occupied, and keep us abreast of developments in the conflict on a daily basis. What was not obvious, because if HQ had of necessity a precise knowledge of the progress of the fight; at the bottom of the pile, that was us, we were generally ill-informed? We owe our thanks to our captain, such an amazing man who had no more than three months to live.

Christmas Eve 1944 was extremely cold but the sky was clear and bright. Lieutenant Planchez, who had a good knowledge of the subject, gave us a short lecture in astronomy and introduced us to the

main constellations. It was certainly very interesting, but our bodies and minds were elsewhere and couldn't stand it for long, much to the displeasure of our astronomer. But he knew, as we all did, that one of the best things to warm us up was good, hot food. It was particularly true on this Christmas Eve, when the special menu waiting for us was already exciting our taste buds, as in the story *The Three Christmas Masses* by Alphonse Daudet. In the kitchen the Chef and his assistants had done things well. The table was beautifully decorated, and the smells coming from the kitchen pleasantly tickled our nostrils. My friends Frey and Roland-Gosselin, as well as the other two 2nd lieutenants were not with us. They decided to celebrate with their men. It was the sensible and normal thing to do. Excellent dinner, the main course consisted of a delicious hare which had surely been poached. We were served only the best. The meal was good, held in lively, friendly company with excellent wines. I took care to moderate my appetite, because I was invited by Frey and his boys to celebrate with them after midnight mass.

At the end of our meal (which was not heralding a new beginning) I was called upon to sing the "Minuit Chrétien"⁴⁹. I put all my heart into it and saw, as soon as I'd started this beautiful carol, that it was having a real emotional effect around the table. Naturally everyone thought of his own family, those we knew in action on the front, those already missing, and also the fate awaiting those of our little group. I finished in a quasi-religious silence that contrasted with our usual loud banter. A few amical looks were exchanged before our captain broke the silence with his penetrating voice, grasped the bottle of kirsch and gave everyone a good swig. It should be noted that here kirsch was the spirit of choice, being drunk at any time, a bit like tea among the English (I exaggerate only a little) or more like vodka among the Russians. A greater reason was when it was very cold, which was now the case, we would be offered a small glass of kirsch, as elsewhere they would offer you a cup of coffee. And the kirsch here was generally excellent, especially welcome and beneficial in the cold that crept into your bones.

It would soon be time for the Christmas Mass, and I went to the Church which was already full. I spotted near the choir Maurice Freyet and a few of his boys gathered round the harmonium played by a charming old spinster devoted to the Church and the pastor. They had practiced a few Christmas carols that they would sing gently in the middle section of the mass. Coming out of church they got many compliments, well deserved. I went with them to share a meal to commemorate the arrival of Christmas which they knew how to celebrate. But for me this second hare caused me some concern, I was obviously careful not to say anything. I left very late, after the bottle of kirsch that I had brought had happily been drained. The thousand nine hundred forty-fourth anniversary of the birth of Christ made it all worthwhile, especially in this cold.

We would remain on hold here for more than a month, by striving, unfortunately in unfavourable conditions, to maintain our fitness as far as possible, and keep up the specific training we had received. It was a rule, a duty, and we were proud of it.

In January we finally got our orders sending us to the combat zone. Our enthusiasm and morale remained high. In fact, we landed only a few hundred kilometres to the northwest in Dampierre-les-Bois in the Montbéliard sector. It was a fairly large, important village on the edge of the forest. Belfort was not far away and on the point of being liberated after very hard fighting. We were sure they would soon make use of us, and yet we were going to remain there for a good month. To soothe our impatience, we were told that they were keeping us in reserve near the front to be used very soon as reinforcements for a major attack on the Rhine. But our boys, who were not all choir-boys, started to play up; especially creating difficulties through petty theft. We received complaints from the Town Hall; we had, at all costs, to occupy their physical and mental state. A useful and pleasant solution proposed by The Mayor was adopted with enthusiasm. We would transform ourselves into loggers; STO (Service du Travail Obligatoire)⁵⁰ had deprived the population of robust men to keep the village supplied with firewood.

We would take this on enthusiastically under the guidance of two veterans of the profession. As a result our commando loggers returned at night exhausted and happy from their efforts. No more chickens or rabbits were stolen and everyone loved us, we had largely made up for past misdemeanours. I was billeted with an exceptional family, well known as stalwarts of the village, "The little man" and "The little woman", so called due to their small size adopted me as a member of the family. Their young son of thirteen or fourteen years and two or three of his comrades were always with us, a little too often perhaps but always willing and ready to help. Frequently, embarrassed by their insistence, I had to decline my kind host's invitations to dinner, I had some excuse, because the "the little woman's" talent in the kitchen was well known, as was the "little man's" excellent cellar. In short I was overly spoiled and had to take care not to overdo it.

I was summoned one morning by the captain to run a "special mission". It was an inventory of, and to check the proper functioning of many German armaments which had been brought to us to check out. There was a stock of P38 pistols and P40 repeaters as well as machine guns. I took a dozen of my "loggers" with me, and we organized our shooting range at the foot of the high railway embankment on the outskirts of the village. At the bottom of the slope ran a small, narrow road, more of a trackway, very little used. I cut off a hundred meters by posting sentries to stop anyone passing, and started shooting. We were amazed by the manoeuvrability, solidity and the rate of fire of the automatic weapons. They seemed much better than the U.S. equipment we were issued. I promised myself that when we got into battle, I would equip my boys with this equipment as soon as possible, without saying anything to my superiors. And that is indeed what I managed to do with the full agreement of my platoon. Others would do the same. Having tested and adjusted all the weapons, I stopped the firing and reopened the road to traffic. While putting the guns away a burst of fire from a P40 went off. I leap on the commando holding the weapon. Too late, a 15 year old boy, passing on his bike was hit. He went on for 20 metres and collapsed. He was taken to Montbéliard Hospital where he died three days later; his liver had been pierced by a 9 mm bullet.

The captain naturally blamed me. I had to write a report on the circumstances of the accident, but I refused to name the commando responsible. My superiors held me responsible, and they were right to do so.

In the end the case was put down as a regrettable incident of war. It was made much more easy as the family of the child made no complaint. The parents that we went to see, the social worker and I, had another five children to look after. They were poor people, tired and helpless. According to the regulations, we gave them a sum of money which would cover their immediate expenses, and also allow them to cope financially for a few months. We were sad and ashamed of our role. Surprised and also pained that their relatively minor regret seemed to be lessened by the offer of our financial "mite". For several days I was overwhelmed by this incident. On my own I visited the family again to reiterate my sympathy and regrets. I was received with extreme kindness which disarmed me further. As for the commando responsible for the dramatic shooting, he received no official sanction since his name had not been disclosed. Certainly he was disappointed, but I gave him a hard time for an extended period, giving him the worst chores and excluding him from shooting practice. He was mortified, but did not hold it against me. He was to be killed three months later at Waldrenach. It is one of my major sorrows.

In the evening, at my hosts, I often met a young, endearing couple, cultured and intelligent. They were both teachers, and well thought of in the village for their dynamism, their kindness and their knowledge. We had long discussions on the most varied of subjects. I must confess that I was often surprised by the erudition of these two visitors, and I had to admit that primary teachers, for whom I had previously rather foolishly thought of in a negative way, were highly quality people; but these two were really exceptional. We often got into an argument, especially with him, because of his Marxist

views that he could not help to express on almost all issues. He tried to spare my feelings on the patriotism of the commandos, but could not hide his aversion to the army in general; considering that the resistance movement, particularly the Communist FTP⁵¹, had an essential role, and a far greater efficiency, than our Free French army in helping the allied forces. When a discussion was about to escalate, the “little man” brought his best kirsch to the table, the two debaters would be sent off with a friendly slap on the shoulder, and the evening ended happily. We enjoyed each other’s company, my “Marxist teacher” and I, but the atmosphere was often electric between us. Nothing could make either of us change our minds and we had, unfortunately, to leave it at that.

After our departure from Dampierre I was appointed by the Commander, together with a colourless, boring Captain whom I had not previously met, to make an inventory, of all the housing and various public and private premises that our unit had occupied during our stay. After having done this tedious job and written down, as honestly as possible, the costs relating to these various dwellings as well as some of the damage that had been incurred, we presented this inventory to the City Council during a meeting in the Town Hall. My instructor was present, and with alarming aggression, especially for my feeble captain, challenged most of our figures. The Mayor and his City Council calmed the situation and we eventually came to an agreement. But I was somewhat saddened to leave Dampierre on this unpleasant note. Other important matters were waiting for us, and it was necessary to turn the page without looking back.

At the end of February we were indeed headed to Alsace. Colmar and its region had just been liberated. The fighting was costly in human and material losses in particular for the Shock Brigade led by Colonel Gambiez. It consisted of two half-brigades: the Shock Battalion and the Commandos of France. These two units were now at rest in the region of Colmar and needed to augment their numbers, severely reduced by the recent fighting. We, the C.O.S. Commandos, were therefore natural replacements to be posted with the Shock Troops and the Commandos to replace their respective losses. Roland-Gosselin, Frey and I were assigned to the “Commandos of France” at Orshwihr. We lost our friend Planchez who was posted to the 'shock troops' in Rouffach, 5 Kms away. Many friendships, which were forged from Desaix and Staoueli, were ruptured, at least temporarily, by the play of these assignments. For some these friendships would sadly end permanently as the battles that lay ahead took their toll. It was the price of our participation in the final victory.

We also lost our captain Esbert who was temporarily assigned to Sector Command. We “got him back” later, alas, only to lose him subsequently, this time never to return, as already said.

To receive us at Orshwihr on the first evening, the Commander Henri D'Astier de la Vigerie convened all of the officers and lieutenants around the table. Our chief was an aristocrat, attractive, with a thin, angular face like that of a bird of prey. His sharp eyes settled on you, seemed to take you in on the first glance without leaving the slightest sign of his “diagnosis”. Above all, one should not shy away, he would consider it badly and neither should one be too assured; he disliked those who showed off, playing the tough guy. One had to behave sensibly, be oneself and not put on any airs, that’s what we were told, and overall we seemed to pass this first test. D'Astier was the type of character who can be found in certain historical families: impressive, charming, brave (his ancestors were admired for their bravery), authoritarian, cultivated. In fact: a terrific fellow; and we were immediately proud and happy to have him as our Chief. He was already famous among us all for his important role in the secret and effective preparation of the American landing in Algeria with a small group of his friends. I've already mentioned this.

The Commandos of France included: a command section (two or three officers and 20 men headed by Commander D'Astier); four Captains in charge of a “commando unit” each unit having an administrative section and four platoons of thirty to thirty-five men each under the command of a lieutenant or second lieutenant known as “aspis”. Each Commando unit was therefore made up of

approximately one hundred and fifty men, including a captain, a lieutenant, four sub-lieutenants. In total “Commandos of France” thus represented between six hundred and twenty and six hundred and fifty men, other ranks and officers.

Christian (Roland - Gosselin), Maurice (Frey) and myself were assigned to the 3rd Commando under the command of Captain Banzy. I was responsible for the 4th platoon, Maurice the 3rd and Christian the 1st. The 2nd platoon was commanded by Sub-lieutenant Mario Faivre. At the age of twenty-two, Mario was already an old adventurer. He took part, with D'Astier, in the famous group that participated, with the greatest secrecy, for the preparation of the American landing on November 8, 42 in Algiers. It was also he who drove, on December 24th 1942, Bonnier de la Chapelle in his old Peugeot 302, to the summer palace to execute⁵² Darlan. It was he, who furthermore, with about 50 other volunteers, after a very hard training in England, was a member of the Sussex network. The “Sussex” were super-commandos parachuted into occupied France to help the “maquis” by training them in technical matters (fighting, explosives, radio, etc.) making the best use of men and equipment as well as economising on human lives. They always had with them a small bulb of cyanide only to be used in extreme necessity. Mario was an outstanding soldier whom we all appreciated as such, as well as for his friendly nature. In one of life's little coincidences, after fifteen years, we met again in Cannes, both obviously retired but having a few more decades before conking out. We often talked about this period of our youth which gave us, at a very young age, a real sense of being alive.

Half my platoon was made up of “malgré nous”, young Alsatians forcefully incorporated into the German army, taken prisoner on the Eastern Front by the Russians and finally returned to France which had been only partly liberated. They had usually suffered terribly in prison camp. Many of course had not returned. They would be excellent soldiers, so it would be fatal for them to fall into the hands of the Germans, they would be executed on the spot. They all had an exceptional sense of discipline and were often outraged by the individualism and unruly behaviour of their other comrades. My other commandos were for the most part, like me, made up of “French escapees through Spain” who trained in the C.O.S. commando school. We knew and understood each other well, sometimes even without having previously met. Finally a dozen of my boys were volunteers who came to us after the liberation of their areas. Some had already fought in the Vosges and Alsace. As the “malgré nous”, they were the “tout bons”, and they had proved their worth. Others had just arrived. Certainly they wanted to fight and were trustworthy, but we would have to give them a “fast-track entry”, famed by those who knew what this meant and had experienced the rigours of this training. Captain Banzy, apart from his experience as an officer in the infantry reserve, was no more a 'commando' than these newcomers. In order to take charge of 3rd Commando he would have to rely on the outstanding qualities and experience of his second-in-command, lieutenant Guegot, who came to us from the Foreign Legion. He would also have to join the boys in one of the other four platoons to carry out his physical and technical training as everyone else had to do. This proved unnecessary, because fifteen days later he would be posted to another unit. And for good reason!

I was regally housed in a large and beautiful farm whose owners really considered me as if I was their son, who alas was still a soldier in the German army. They looked after me, caring to a fault sometimes. So every morning at seven o'clock I was woken up by my host with the cry of: “Jacques, c'est l'Heure”, while handing me a glass of schnapps that I was required to gulp down without grumbling while he looked on. I had to pretend to enjoy it and be satisfied, after which he expressed his pleasure with a great laugh that infuriated me but touched me at the same time. As it was always so very cold I pretty well gave in and accepted this daily ritual. It should be noted that schnapps, in Alsace, is a spirit that can be drunk at any time, a bit like kirsch in the region where we were previously; it was a rough eau-de-vie that was very inferior to the kirsch. If one really wanted to push the boat out one had to turn to the mirabelle or quetsche spirits whose fragrance and flavour could reach the heights.

Along with these strong spirits, the wines of the region had a very special character and a well-deserved reputation. Without coming up to the level of great Rieslings or Gewurtz Traminer, our Orschwihr was excellent; its only fault being that it was too easy to drink too much. The meals of the 3rd Commando brought together the seven officers and lieutenants and each of us had the right to a bottle at midday and slightly less at night. The cold and intense physical training helped to get rid of the toxins. Yes, I know, I acknowledge that we were overdoing it, and it was not good for us.

The daily program was pretty much the same. From 8.00 hours 'til noon, a quick march, a period of jogging interspersed with bouts of close-combat and crawling around, finishing by running through the vineyards, climbing the highest and steepest hill as fast as we could, and coming down at a sprint. To climb up we had to cross about fifty terrace walls each from 1.5 meters to 2 meters high and coming down we had to jump from one to the other. No wonder we had stiff thighs. We took great care during these exercises to ensure we did not damage the vines or terraces in any way. Each platoon leader was in fact at liberty to plan his training in his own way, provided that real progress was achieved.

In the afternoons we did long walks in the countryside, shooting practice, trekking in the hills, etc. Personally, I was inspired by a discipline developed by "Shocks" at Rouffach, training under live fire, the leopard crawl, displacement along a wall, etc. Hermann, one of my "malgré nous" and I, were good marksmen and we organized the operation very carefully. It got the boys used to the whistling of bullets very close to them, not playing at being lawless cowboys. Our shots were well considered, well aimed, getting as close as possible with zero risk; obviously risk could not be completely eliminated as this was a dangerous exercise. Everything went perfectly well, we always kept an essential safety margin.

One day over lunch in the officer's mess, we spoke about this exercise under live fire, which had to be done in optimal conditions with competence, planning and knowing exactly what was involved. One could not play with the lives of the men who had to have full confidence in the marksmen. Hermann, seasoned by hard fighting on the Russian front, was quite cold-blooded in any circumstances. I admired his assuredness. I, on the other hand, with a wonderful light and precise American rifle, probably shot nearly as well as he did, but always needed to take two or three minutes of concentration before beginning. Then everything would go well. The captain and the others were very interested in my little lecture. At the end of lunch we happily went our separate ways.

I re-joined my platoon and we spend part of the afternoon climbing and abseiling down a lovely cliff we had found a few days earlier about 2 kilometres from the village. I have already written about the regrettable incident when, during a training session, in front of all the other commandos, I had foolishly and wickedly humiliated one of my men, who had absolutely refused to participate in the exercise because of his uncontrollable vertigo. His self-esteem and bravery, of which no one could have had any doubt, could not take the harassment that I had so imposed upon him, and subsequently, wanting at any cost and at all times to convince us of his courage, he eventually took such risks at the battle of Pforzheim, that he was killed by a big burst of mortar fire that took away part of his skull. As I write these lines, sixty-five years later, my heart sinks. Peroni was a brave commando.

On our return to the village, we found the commandos in turmoil. One of them had been stupidly killed shortly after our departure to the cliff we were climbing. Captain Banzy and Christian Roland-Gosselin, without properly preparing for this hazardous exercise, and eager to prove their competence wanted to imitate us, despite their marksmanship being rather dubious. As soon as the first shots were fired, one of Christian's commandos, who had been crawling along trying to take cover, was shot and his carotid artery severed. In thirty seconds all his blood had been pumped from him. The incident obviously caused a huge rumpus. Personally, at the evening meal, I swore (as far as I could) at my friend Christian, and especially at Banzy, my captain, who admitted being responsible for the fatal

shot. Later Christian confessed to me that he had been the culprit and that Banzy had decided to take the blame. A little bit of “gallantry” in a bloody stupid episode. A few days later the military police took our captain from us, he was tried and acquitted, then assigned a position in one of the Ministries until his demobilization.

As an aside I must discuss the origins of some of the recruits who had experience, but came to join the commandos, paratroopers, and “shocks” as new-comers. It was thus that we had two commando lieutenants from the “Légion Tricolore”, this unit consisted of French Nationals who were sympathetic with the German cause, and had volunteered to fight side by side with them in the conflict. Some were even SS and made up the “Charlemagne Division”, hard and disciplined, that we had to face in a tough fight in the Black Forest about which I will write about a little further on. Patrick de B... and Michel de C... were here under new identities. They had fought on the Russian front and were remarkable soldiers. We pretended to ignore their “pedigree”. They were fine fellows, hardened, intelligent, brave, and appreciated by all. They had been wrong and had returned to the fold.

There was a young actor who had already tasted fame, Georges M..., who came seeking adventure and to do his bit. Still others needed to forget their past as German collaborators, or some other misdemeanour. Insofar as they were not criminals, and where they could fit perfectly into our business, and be effective as commandos, D'Astier accepted them, no questions asked.

And then there were two or three young ambitious politicians who hoped that this would fast track them on their chosen path, and why not, so long as they could take it.

As for our new captain, André Legueux, he had had experience in finance, circulating among the jet-set. He was about forty and not at all a commando but he had an air of authority, the easy speech of a politician and the assurance of an employer. He had no lack of appeal and common sense expecting to be obeyed without question. He came to us for a while; it seemed that it might be to forget some dubious operation he had been involved with. He was not commando material and he knew it, he was also well aware that he would not lead us into combat. He was essentially the “handler” of our 3rd Commando, and there of course, he was very competent, and left us free to train our boys in our own way. I had the opportunity to know him better while travelling to Colmar, when he asked me to drive, having heard (poorly understood, perhaps...) that I was a good driver. The steering of our jeep had considerable play in it, which made it very difficult to control, and I had to concentrate. This bastard jeep hated a straight line, and continuously fought to make me look like a fool. In a friendly and polite tone, ill concealing a joyful irony, Legueux suggested that I was probably used to driving on winding roads. It was ill spoken by him, knowing full well that the difference in our rank forbade me to reply, by repeating that short and powerful word made famous by a certain general.

Having paid his visit to headquarters, he decided that a good beer would be welcome. It was in fact three or four that I had to consume with him, so as not to hurt his feelings, during which we had a long conversation that gave me an insight into a character of great culture, sensitive, intelligent and crafty. I was amazed by the things he spoke about and the scope and diversity of his knowledge. But behind all this it appeared to me, however, that he hid something hard of which I saw some indefinable signs. This was a privileged time for me, but I ultimately came away with a mixed feeling of admiration and distrust.

Driving back I had a sneaky little pleasure; Legueux wanted to take the wheel stating that he was no mean driver himself, however he had no better success than me at mastering our capricious Jeep's line of advance. I never said a word but enjoyed listening to the growling and swearing under his breath during the frequent swerves taken by our little “hot-rod”.

Another little story about cars, very different but more amusing: my lieutenant friends and I, like everyone else in the Commandos, had very little free time for us to do our own thing and we were constrained by a lack of any means of transport. It was obvious to me that a car would have allowed us to make much better use of this free time. It seemed natural to take the necessary measures to this effect. I therefore assigned this mission, to “find” me a car as soon as possible, to the two Debout brothers, Julien the elder, and Michel his younger brother who were known to succeed in any underhand affairs. These two were the “terrible twins”, for better (they proved it in combat) or worse. I was confident of their ability to carry out this kind of mission and their pleasure in doing so. Indeed, the very next evening at nightfall, they took me to a farm yard, where I had a beer with my hosts before going to dinner; I was shown a superb 11CV front wheel drive Citroen, recently painted in camouflage. Obviously it had to have come from some sort of military unit; never mind, this kind of 'transfer' was a common occurrence. The important thing was to perform a speedy “withdrawal” and get away quickly in order to put anyone off the scent. I thanked Julien by giving him a double schnapps and Michel a good beer. The old farmer abstained, as I did, to ask any questions of the Debout brothers.

During the three following days, I took my closest friends off on some beautiful drives discovering a few of the tourist sights of the region. We agreed that knowledge of local culture and history was a good thing, and even a duty... and on the “third day” (always the third day) when we had just got back, a messenger coming from HQ gave me a note signed by Commander D'Aastier summoning me urgently. From the Captain's look I expected a telling off. To my surprise, he upbraided me, not for the misdemeanour committed, let's face it, highly objectionable, but for the lack of “discernment” in the doing of it. The fact was that the beautiful Citroen belonged to the Commander of military security in Colmar, whose investigative capabilities were not those of ‘Mr Know All’.

It appeared to me that Astier was more annoyed at his commando's integrity being questioned than of the misdemeanour committed. There would be no repercussions, but I was ordered, that very evening, to leave the car on a street in Colmar which was pointed out to me on the map. I was assured I would not be arrested as I got out of the car. Astier was without doubt a good boss. Christian Roland-Gosselin, Patrick de Beauport and Mario Faivre would accompany me on this last trip to Colmar where we intended to visit a few bars and enjoy ourselves before leaving our transport behind. It rained a fine and icy rain and the wipers didn't work properly failing to do its job, leaving the windscreen in a poor state. Patrick told me in a calm tone: “you're going too fast, Jacky”, prompting me to accelerate. This was a stupid reaction, which a few seconds later resulted in a ninety degree spin on the slippery road, ending us up on the embankment. Fortunately no damage to us or the car, but it would take us a full hour to get ourselves out of this uncomfortable position. We were exhausted and soaked, the night was a washout. There is more; we parked the car in the street specified and gave up doing anything else. It was an inglorious return, hitching and walking, arriving back in Orschwihr late into the night. Our story went the rounds of the Commandos and we were the butt of some stupid jokes.

Our stay in Alsace came to an end. Before our departure we had a change of captain. Legueux returned to Paris to get into the political-financial scene, and Esbert was happy to come back, we were happy to see him too. The very next day General Lattre de Tassigny came to visit units in the sector. A review and parade was organized in Guebwiller. Represented were the Shock battalion, the Commandos, the Foreign Legion and the Tabors. We were not disposed towards de Lattre because he did not value the lives of his men. Some said that, if the occasion arose, they would refuse to shake his hand. Of course none of the officers and lieutenants who shook hands with him kept it secret. They were even proud of having done so. I was one of them.

On 28th March the 2nd and the 3rd Commando units deployed discreetly on the Rhine at dusk, not far from Sélestat. It was a little-inhabited area where abundant vegetation could give a helping hand. Actually our 'Services' had been informed from a reliable source that enemy commandos had

planned a raid that night on the headquarters set up near Sélestat. The Germans got wind of our presence, and we sat there all night in vain, silently freezing. Pity, we had to start again.

On March 30th we finally left Orschwihr, to be stationed at Oberbetschdorf, about 20 kilometres north of Strasbourg. We now started to get seriously involved. The Allies had recently crossed the Rhine a little higher up, and it would soon be our turn. It would be on April 2nd at about 14.00hrs at Germersheim that we would cross this great border river on a pontoon-bridge put in place by the Company of Engineers under a rain of fire. The engineers were wonderful people who performed miracles under the most severe conditions. Bridge-builders, mine-clearers, tunnelers, you have left many of your number on the field of battle. Not enough is said about you, but your role is no less than that of combatants fighting the enemy face to face. You are essential to the work of the army and our thanks are due to you. Our crossing was under the protection of American aircraft flying above us to prevent any enemy air attack. Just before committing ourselves to the crossing, we had been harangued by General Schlessler. Apart from his encouragement to “push” back the enemy, he strongly recommended that we act like victors with the local population, not to ask, but demand, and “tell them what was what”, with authority, without favour or mercy. This was already our intention; but seeing that the General was encouraging us, so be it.

We would operate together with the 2nd Dragoon armoured unit equipped with Sherman tanks (33 tons, five men, 75 cannon, three machine guns and a grenade launcher), which would cause havoc, despite their inferiority to the German “Panther” (forty-four tons, 88 cannon and two machine guns) which was heavier, with more powerful weapons and especially with their armour which was three times thicker.

We had to follow the tanks in the open, and as soon as they came into contact with the enemy, protect them against being fired at by the “panzerfaust”, a formidable hand fired anti-tank rocket capable of drilling large holes through steel. This type of mission was obviously very unpleasant because we felt tiny in the middle of these huge very powerful machines spitting fire. It was an absolutely essential job that had to be done, and indeed was also carried out by the enemy against our “bazooka” troops. Of course we had to take on this 'work' when the tanks came into action, i.e. in open terrain. In the forest they were unable to get a decent shot, nor in the narrow streets of towns and villages.

So here we were on German soil. Our 3rd Commando unit would march 2 kilometres before arriving at Huttenheim village where we camped until the next morning. At sunrise the next day I was given a mission to go with my platoon, supported by three tanks of the 2nd Dragoons, to Weingarten, a large village located three kilometres away to relieve a unit of legionnaires engaged in hard fighting to take the village. We would be temporarily separated from our 3rd Commando unit which we would re-join somewhere in the direction of Karlsruhe after completing our task in Weingarten.

For this operation in a built-up area, I took great care to equip my boys appropriately. In addition to their Thompson submachine gun (11.45calibre) and their dagger, they were given three fragmentation grenades, formidable deadly devices, described as quite wrong for defensive purposes. Simply, it was a matter of taking good cover before the explosion. Splinters were lethal up to 50 metres.

During the fight, the prisoners that we would capture, and their equipment, would allow us to amend the weaponry that I had chosen. Replacing the U.S. Thomson (11.45 m/m) which was too heavy with the German P40 (9 m/m), and in addition giving each a Walther P38 9 mm semi-automatic pistol. This would be the equipment carried by each of my boys, with the exception of Julien Debout who was our sub-machine {Fusil-Mitrailleur (FM)} gunner who would do a fantastic job, and Schwinderhammer, an Alsatian “malgré nous”, bearer of the “bazooka”, the tank killer. Personally I was never without my wonderful American rifle (9 m/m) with telescopic sights, very light and precise,

accompanied by a colt 45, a Walther P38, a dagger and, if appropriate, two grenades. Today would be the day. On the approach to Weingarten we were met by two lieutenants of the unit we had come to relieve. They would lead us, carefully, to the most advanced positions held by them. The Germans were only a few metres away. Staying close to the cover of the walls, we were immediately obliged to walk over two corpses wearing the recognisable uniform of the S.S. Neither one side nor the other could remove them due to the fighting taking place. One of them (perhaps eighteen years old) seemed to stare at us with wide-open blue eyes. We quickly moved on.

Among the comrades that we were relieving, several were injured, some seriously. One of them, who held his stomach with both hands, with relief that everyone felt at leaving this horrible place, made the mistake of leaning away from the walls. A single bullet, certainly fired from a distance, laid him flat on the ground permanently. We could not afford any lack of concentration and the death of this poor guy reminded us of the fact. The lesson learned was imprinted on our minds so that our training and reflexes, would work at their best. Certainly the place was unhealthy; one had always to keep vigilant. Behind every window, every door, in every basement, there may be an enemy ready to pick you off.

It seemed that our brave legionnaire had been hit by a sniper who was set up at the top of the tower overlooking our position. We had been told to be wary of him. Our chaps discovered the snipers position by scanning the area with binoculars. It was just as he discovered the sniper in his bell tower that he was shot, his knee had been shattered and he would remain lame for the rest of his life. It was essential to neutralize this sniper and. I couldn't just ask a tank commander to demolish the tower with his canon. Well sheltered behind barely open shutters, I finally managed to eliminate the danger with my wonderful American rifle. Perhaps he was only wounded, given the distance (about 100 meters), but it put out of harm's way for sure.

This was not the time for any complacency, my Parisian urchin, Laing, had been hit in the thigh. He was a friendly, funny, scruffy, courageous little vagabond. A little later I took a few minutes to go and see him at the medical centre set up at the entrance of the village where he was taken. He was very pale, but his thigh was bandaged up until the surgeon could find the time to take care of him. I was told that he would not be long. I managed to ask them quickly before leaving: "Are you going to look after my boy soon, Doc? He replied: "I promise you I will, but I still have a serious case to first". Awkwardly I encouraged "Bubu", who was sure that he would die, telling him that no one dies of a bullet in the thigh, and I went to find the others struggling with the enemy occupying the houses that we were trying, with difficulty, to take one by one. We learnt shortly after, with anger and sadness, that our "Bubu" was dead. The femoral artery had been ruptured. He could have come out of it alive if the doctor had seen to it immediately. It seemed impossible. Bastard femoral artery, I couldn't understand it. Your enemies would be sure to suffer for this, Bubus.

It's weird and fairly ugly, seen from afar, as we lose the meaning of life, of its value, when in the thick of it. No time to think, we are stripped to the essentials, the need to protect ourselves and at the same time having an obligation, the obvious corollary, to kill those in front of us, as many as possible. The reasoning was simple (but is this reasoning?): it's them or us. Today I am embarrassed at the thought of the pleasure experienced at each enemy downed. Happy to take prisoners, was this the normal state of affairs? But were we to kill or injure? This feeling is only felt in the excitement of the action; killing in cold blood was a different matter. We will have to talk about it further on.

The battle for Weingarten was becoming more and more difficult, and we were being shot at from all sides. It was a miracle that we had no dead. To retire under the threat of encirclement we had to throw our grenades at anything and everything: through windows, into lower ground floor windows and in addition to use the bazooka to demolish heavy doors. Obviously it did a lot of damage among the families crammed in the cellars. What else could we do? With his FM (submachine gun) Julien

Debout did a good job, he put paid to a dozen Krauts. We also took many prisoners and we began to see that they were discouraged; this lack of drive was beginning to spread through, and infect the German units.

We could not let our guard down. In our haste to completely clear the village before nightfall, we had to avoid being overconfident and be brought down stupidly. We had reason to be wary. Fritz attempted a counter-attack that could have put us in difficulty if we had been a little less vigilant. In this action, one of our tanks, which had unwisely advanced without waiting for our agreement, was unfortunately panzerfaustered. It was stranded with one of the crew dead, and one wounded. The Germans eventually left the place, but not without covering their retreat with mortar fire. A large piece of shrapnel hit the wall 20 centimetres above my head; the ricochet scratched my neighbour's shoulder. A lucky escape, thanks!

Weingarten was now in the hands of my platoon and a unit of sharp shooters who liberated the other part of the village. The 2nd Dragoons lost a tank, but they had not really committed themselves to the battle. Tomorrow would be a completely different matter for them.

With the riflemen we posted a few sentries for the night, in order to prevent any enemy patrols having an easy time. We slept a little. Personally, at the request of the 2nd Dragoons, under whose orders we operated (in principle), I wrote a full report of our action as well as a number of proposals for citations (the Croix de Guerre). They would be very generous in their approval which particularly pleased me. It must be recognized that, without our hard work, their tanks would have experienced serious problems. We had done a good job of preparing the ground for the mission that they had to accomplish the following morning.

The 4th April was a wonderful clear day, but a bit cold on this morning at 06.00am. Five Sherman tanks started up their engines. Four of my boys climbed onto each tank. The programmed operation was as follows: a kilometre and a half from Weingarten the village of Jöhlingen was held by the Germans who had established a solid position which constituted a barrier that held back the progression of our troops on the road to Karlsruhe. The mission of the five tanks carrying my twenty boys was to advance through the countryside, that is to say on an path which the enemy would not expect them to come from, overrun the position in which there were eighty-eight anti-tank guns, and free up the route through. It seemed to me that this plan was ill prepared and very hazardous. First the roar of engines would naturally alert the Germans who would have enough time to prepare for our arrival. Then again, this enemy position was allegedly so strong, that not five tanks, but twenty-five or thirty should be put into the action. And finally, the final straw for me, was that my commandos were likely to take the brunt of this operation ordered by a command that had no doubt poorly considered all the options. But we had to go. The ten or twelve of us who remained at the edge of the village in reserve, with the last three tanks to act as reinforcements if required, encouraged those leaving, with waves and cheers.

Hardly had our five Sherman broken into open ground than a deluge of 88 calibre shells were unleashed toward them, all around them. Miraculously no Commando was hit. The operation was going to be a total failure that began with the panic of a tank driver, who fled in terror, abandoning his gear and his comrades. A second tank was hit and immobilized. I immediately noted that firstly, the crews of the armoured vehicles were not tough enough for the job, they had not fired a shot at the enemy position; on the other hand - and this explains a little of this - the firing of the German 88s was much more intense and heavy than anticipated. Finally, as already said, the equipment to achieve our aim was quite inadequate and our advance was doomed to failure.

Yet a miracle happened, I brought up all the rest of my boys, but under the deluge of fire which continued, we had to take all the cover we could. All around us the roofs and walls of houses were

collapsing. When finally calm returned, we were not displeased, mostly satisfied at ending up with a full complement of men. The heaviest toll was among our friends: two tanks destroyed (including one abandoned), one death and two injuries. At the headquarters, where I joined the 2nd Dragoon officers, they were all hurling abuse at each other; none of them accepting the blame for this crushing failure. The Colonel, uncomfortable down to his boots, made the mistake of asking for my opinion. I gave it without holding back, saying that my boys had nothing to do with this hellish business. I went in a little hard, within the scope of my angry feelings, but he thanked me nicely and told me to congratulate all my boys for their devotion to duty.

When, in the afternoon, we joined the 3rd Commando on the road to Karlsruhe, the Jöhlingen barrier, which had earned us a humiliating failure, was crushed finally by an intense barrage of artillery followed by a joint attack by Commandos, The Foreign Legion and Tabors. The enemy position was strong, but she finally lost three self-propelled guns, four 88 calibre guns, more than a hundred prisoners, 12 killed, 30 wounded. Our casualties were four killed and a dozen injured. Captain Esbert had been informed of the actions of my 4th platoon at Weingarten and, when I handed him a copy of my report to the Colonel of the 2nd Dragoons, he said simply: "I'm aware", with a friendly smile that spoke volumes, I can see it again and even now I feel the warmth of it. It was the last time that I saw him smile.

The next day was set aside to capture and clean up several villages where there could be enemy positions shooting at our units trying to advance in the direction of Karlsruhe: Stafford, Ispringen, Rinklingen, were attacked and taken, causing significant losses to the Germans

All measures against possible surprise being taken, we had now to regroup and get as much rest as possible, forget the difficulties of the last forty eight hours, because tomorrow we would be undergoing further hardships.

April 6th, 1945, at seven o'clock in the morning, our 3rd Commando all climbed aboard the thirty tanks of the 2nd Dragoon. The planned operation: to take Koenigsbach, a large village 10 Kms from Karlsruhe. Located in a bowl this town was protected by heavy artillery (self-propelled and 88s) and infantry positions on the hills that surrounded it. The opposing forces were significant. There was no question of attempting to take Koenigsbach without having first cleared it of enemy positions on most of the ridges that dominated it. It was about midday when our tanks committed themselves to the grassy slopes leading down towards the village. As if we had not already met enough strong resistance in the cleaning up of a portion of the ridge, we were now subjected to a fire of hell, from above, from below, from all directions it seemed. But what was going on in the head of our captain. He signalled to us with grand gestures, telling our commandos to stand on the tanks to obtain a better aim on the Krauts hunkered down in their trenches with their pauzerfausts and their submachine guns, with which they peppered us copiously. The large upright body of Esbert suddenly fell in a heap; a shot to the head had killed him instantly. My cadet friend Frey had been shot through the chest, fortunately he would pull through. Captain Esbert had had no commando training; he could not have taken a worse decision. Koenigsbach would remain a dirty memory. In our 3rd Commando: three killed, seven injured. Considerable losses were also incurred by the other three commando units as well as the Foreign Legion and Riflemen. My old buddy from the Lacordaire School, Jean-Baptiste Beaggi, who commanded the 4th Commando was seriously hit in the stomach. He only just got away with it. The Germans had lost: a hundred killed, one hundred fifty wounded, two hundred and fifty prisoners, seven self-propelled guns. Among the defeated enemy units there were two companies of S.S., one of which was made up of Frenchmen!

We spent the night at Koenigsbach, exhausted and hungry. Fortunately the supply lines followed on quite quickly. It was complemented by unscrupulous raids on local farms. This was war, General Schlessler said we should help ourselves, we did!

The next essential was rest, bodies and minds had been fully strained. But at 3 p.m. we were ordered to board the tanks as a matter of emergency to proceed in the direction of Pforzheim, which was a very strongly defended major city that we should not try to take without the necessary forces. On the ridge overlooking the city, we were greeted by 88 and automatic weapons fire. Accompanied by Shock Troops and The Legion, we preceded to clear the ridge before nightfall. We spent the night on the spot; hard and cold. By what miracle and what sort of system had we the right to a hot coffee to welcome the day at sunrise? That really was welcome.

Going down on Pforzheim with the tanks there was terrific firepower and an impressive number of fighters. Each unit, each commando, each platoon had to operate in a well-defined sector. My platoon had to fight right to the city centre taking care to remain pretty much on the same line as our neighbours to the right and left, to avoid the risk of being isolated and surrounded. This sector, which was allocated to me, was in principle, the most exposed, and we expected a particularly hostile reception. In fact the commando's guardian angel was with us, and our route, despite the firing of automatic weapons, mortars and (to tell the truth not so effective) hand grenades, would prove to be much less deadly for us than for our comrades. Yet the crossing (hugging the walls, of course) of the big square, to which we were the first to get to, and which we quite rightly feared, did not augur well for the continuation of our progress. Sergeant Péroni (I finally remembered his name), at the head of the right flank, was killed by a mortar fragment that removed a portion of his skull. It was this boy that I had humiliated in Orschwihr because of his uncontrollable Vertigo. Since that time he had never missed an opportunity to affirm his courage, at the price of taking exceptional risks. The penalty had fallen. I have never been able to get him out of mind. Quite by chance, after the armistice, I came across some of his relatives. I will say more about this later.

In relation to the number of forces engaged in Pforzheim losses were quite heavy, but three or four times smaller than those suffered by those at the Front

I have described a phase of the fighting which I attended with my platoon, to give a few examples of the actions that the 3rd Commandos de France had been involved in. I am unable, nor do I wish to continue, to report in detail on the operations carried out by the 4th platoon that I had the luck and the honour of commanding. It would take me another book to do this.

We continued, until the cessation of hostilities to lead the life of fighters more or less in the same circumstances as those recounted above. The main sites located along this road were: Isaringen, Dietlingen, Neuembourg, Waldrenach, Langenbrandt, Arnbach. Zavelstein, Horb, Tübingen, Reutlingen, Pfullingen, Erpfingen, Stockach. Feldkirch, Friedrichkaffen, Lindau, Bregenz, Röthis, Duns, Silbertal, Bings, and Arlberg.

It seems to me however that I cannot overlook some fights or events that a few of these famous names evoke in me.

Three days after the battle for Pforzheim, our 3rd Commando, commanded by Captain Sobra who had just replaced captain Esbert, killed at Koenigsbach, was given orders to seize the village of Waldrenach whose access points and surrounding forest were strongly defended by two companies of S.S. We spent a short night in Arnbach, a pretty village where one would do better to linger as a tourist. We had a four-hour meeting of the officers and lieutenants for a briefing where the captain traced our theoretical progress on the map, pointing out two alternative routes in case events conspired to make us alter our forecasts. Obviously it was clear to us that we were not going on a school outing. We had practically no hope, and the situation was hopeless

Before daybreak and in complete silence 3rd Commando started across the fields, descending to the bottom of the valley leading to the river Enz. We had no doubt, that behind the shutters of a house, someone would have seen our departure, and used the radio-telephone to give warning to those who were waiting for us somewhere on the other side. Approaching the river we paused, while a patrol made sure that the bridge was not mined and that we were not expected on the other side where the undergrowth marked the edge of the thick forest covering all the slope up which we would have to push. The coast proved to be clear. The first light of day appeared, a day that will forever remain in our memories. We went along the narrow road over the river and had an immediate climb to Waldrenach two kilometres away. We were in the midst of the black forest, aptly named both because of the thickness of the green vegetation and the darkness created by the tall fir trees growing so close to each other. For a moment we could see nothing, as if night had fallen again. We were moving cautiously, single file, in one direction. We were soon stopped by a wall of debris thick and deep. Progress continued on the right side, along a narrow forest path, in a direction that should lead us out of the forest to the west of the village. There was a company of riflemen doing the same as us two kilometres further east, so that Waldrenach would be taken in a pincer movement; from the west by the Commandos and on the east by The Riflemen. While moving as silently as possible, in each mind it became more and more apparent that the advantage of surprise was not in our favour. And yet we each did our best to blend into the silence of the forest and why not? Our illusions were shattered by a burst of submachine gun (it was a Thompson, recognisable by its noise and tone) that a guy from 3rd Platoon had just let rip in the direction of a thicket where a silhouette moved. Behind a cloud of leaves and twigs, chopped by bullets, appeared a guy from the 1st, pants down, who had lingered to satisfy a natural need. Miraculously he was not touched, but now it was certain that our hosts had been alerted and would hasten to welcome their visitors. Although redoubling our lookout, we were, shortly after, effectively picked off by automatic weapons fire, especially by snipers perched in the trees. In a few seconds we had three killed and four wounded. So as not to be immediately overwhelmed, we had to fire all our weapons and grenades, while trying our best not to provide a good target for the enemy. We knew what to do, but the surprise left us very little time to organize. Opposite us, to frighten us, and to keep up their morale they gave wild war cries and insulted us in French. We were well aware that French collaborators were operating in the sector, without knowing exactly where. And well; here they were before us; they were of the French S.S. from the Charlemagne Division. Like wildfire, the information spread among the commandos, increasing their already strong determination and enraging them with increased hatred. Do not tell me there were two sides with negative feelings in this, because they doubtless allowed us to get away, although in lower numbers.

Finally, we regrouped and got ourselves sufficiently organized to deal with the problem, but without being able to move forward. The enemy was now firing panzerfaust at trees that surrounded us, cutting the trunks, the falling trees causing death amongst us. This diabolical trick killed and injured many of us, the colossal staff sergeant Pech, who came from the Foreign Legion and was a formidable fighter, had two crushed legs and died two hours later. Captain Sobra, ensconced behind a big tree with his radio-telephone and his maps, displayed a communicative calm to give orders. He had just asked HQ to direct artillery fire on the enemy position but when the first shells arrived, it was quite clear that the shells were falling short and we would suffer further casualties, both by shell bursts and further trees falling on us. Sobra screamed down the 'phone and the range was finally set, but there was a threat of encirclement from the left of us, that is to say on the slope above us, but Mario Faivre and Christian Roland-Gosselin managed to neutralize their manoeuvre. I slipped crawling near Sobra to tell him that with my platoon, we would go down a little on the slope to the right, and then back up quickly throwing all our grenade power at the Germans. On a steep gradient, it is generally better to be on the higher ground, but in this case our mobility worked well and we succeeded. About fifty grenades thrown "parcel post" at our SS friends had their effect.

Suddenly there was an eerie silence with no one in front of us. They retreated as good fighters should, without the slightest noise and neither dead nor injured left behind. Certainly we well and truly beat them, but the progression of the Riflemen, more to the East, had also had a decisive effect. They had not encountered the same resistance as us, and good luck to them.

Without prolonging this tale, we came to the fields that descend to Waldrenach, which we could see four or five hundred meters in front of us. Remaining cautious, the village would surely be vigilant and ready to receive us; I realized that Julien Debout, my “submachine gunner” was exhausted. It was true that he had done a great job since that morning; we had started fifteen hours previously and that gun was damn heavy. I took him in hand and gave him my light rifle which he accepted with relief. At the same time, we were subject to two or three artillery shots that had not yet got their range, Michel Debout, Julien's brother said with some venom,: “lieutenant, you must know that it is always the machine gun carrier that they try to bring down first”. We laughed and stood rooted to the spot, but it was the truth.

The descent to Waldrenach took place without incident; the village was evacuated, so much the better, because we were completely worn out, physically and mentally after this hard day. But is it not by suffering that one becomes a better person.

I am finishing my version of some of the fighting which, seems to me, to be a fairly representative selection of the battles we experienced. But, leaving the fighting aside, some missions, or events, are still present in my memory, and are important to my story, so I must share them with you. Shortly after Waldrenach, our Commando troop took an active role in the taking of Horb, a pretty town on the Neckar River, and after hard fighting, at nightfall, we found ourselves isolated on the right bank. One way or another we felt the need to get our breath back, and the troop settled for the night, without difficulty, in the houses at the edge of the city. Sleep during this campaign was one of our main problems, and we learned to recover quickly, “battening down the hatches”, as soon as a little respite presented itself. It was thus when a sergeant sent by the captain came to wake me out of my wonderful torpor at 22.00hrs, my first instinct was to pounce on my P38 before coming to. A few minutes later, I walked into the main drawing room of the house next door, where Sobra in front of a roaring fire, was talking to a very young woman clothed to a large black cape. In a third chair, half asleep it seemed, was our foreign “doc”, not really listening to the conversation. Sobra beckoned me to sit near him. He remained silent for some time which enabled me to have a good look at the young person in front of me. In the dancing light of the flames, she seemed indeed very young and rather pretty, but I was especially intrigued by her presence in this place so close to the enemy lines. Her metallic voice emphasised the rolling “r” of the Hautes-Pyrénées, Sobra gave me a brief and precise explanation. This young woman was an agent of the Intelligence Services who needed to get through the enemy lines and I should therefore, with eight or ten of my boys, take her to the entrance of Isenburg village, two kilometres from here. Departure would be in one hour. He gave me a large scale map and advised me to find the best route and to be careful to choose my best men. The mission was a delicate one, and when I returned to find the agent and her bike with the little group of men I had carefully selected, I was confident that we had every chance of success.

In single file we pushed on into the night, into the unknown space between our lines and the Germans. As we left, Sobra gave me a cryptic order, firm and discrete, that would remain in my mind until we got to our destination. “In no case should she fall into the hands of the enemy, in any way whatsoever, do you understand me?” In no event shall in no case... The voice was barely audible but the order was so accurate that my Captain’s voice stayed with me. Had I understood him correctly?

Dammit; a pale moon showed its light through the clouds flooding us with its detestable light. The smallest stone rolling under a shoe made a sound like thunder. I chose to proceed in two stages: two scouts scoured fifty meters ahead, and then a discreet hiss told us that we could join them. So these

two kilometres would seem endless to us, but it was the safest solution. Especially during the crossing of the marshalling yard which was endless with large pebbles, rails, points, railway carriages that may be occupied by the enemy, all these traps that were present in such a place.

At the end of two hours of delicate, slow progress, all the senses highly tuned, we finally came to an embankment which marked the approach to the village. Above us was the road, the first village houses only one hundred metres away. With Julien Debout I slowly hoisted myself to the level of the road and we remained there, flat on our bellies for a few moments. Everything appearing calm, I signed to the young woman and bearer of her bike to join us. We were more emotional than she was as she left after a simple but warm hand shake. We saw her silhouette disappear among the shadows of the first houses and remained motionless until we could no longer hear the creaking of her pedals. I am sure that in the memory of those who had had the opportunity to participate in this mission, the calm and courage of this young person remained with them. Returning to Horb, we remained silent for a while. Then, in response to these moments of emotion that we had just experienced, still in silence, we had a look in a large building where we surprised twenty Germans in their sleep. Without much effort on our part perhaps, but having the benefit of surprise, we made no mistake. In any case, on our return it was with some satisfaction that we presented our prisoners to our captain. I have to state here that between the Captain and me there was no love lost because he considered that my platoon and I had the characteristics of a “gang” rather than a unit of disciplined men; not altogether without reason perhaps. We will come to this later.

Now a brief story about glass; of the mirrored type. When we searched a building, house, villa, or apartment during a fight, we proceeded as we had been trained and knew how; taking a minimum of risk, with no consideration for any material things or any occupants. In the case of unoccupied premises, things were generally easy, but recklessness was prohibited. One day, we had just relieved a company of riflemen after the capture of an important village in the sector of Tübingen. After having settled on somewhere for the afternoon and that night Sobra decided to reconnoitre that corner of the combat zone in two jeeps. On this “ride” were Sobra, Lieutenant Guegot, Roland-Gosselin, Mario Faivre, myself, Doc. and the two drivers. It was quiet everywhere; at least up to the edge of the forested area only a kilometre away.

My opinion on taking all the Commando officers and lieutenants on this trip was more than a mistake, it was serious misconduct. But I kept my opinion to myself, firstly because of my “good” relations with Sobra, and secondly because the atmosphere was good humoured and optimistic, foolishly, perhaps. We decided not to venture into the forest. Elementary, wasn't it?

Two or three hundred metres from the forest, thinking it imprudent to continue any further, we were going to turn around, when we decided to visit a large detached house, a little off from the road, apparently unoccupied. The front door was not closed. A long corridor led to five rooms: on the left a WC and a bedroom, kitchen and dining room, all empty, but in a mess, meaning they had only recently been vacated. The back door, unlike the previous one was locked. Through the glass skylight located above, Sobra, who was very tall, managed on the tip of the toes, to take a look. He ran back immediately, taking Doc and Roland-Gosselin with him. Lingered in the WC, I was stuck, Sobra shouting at me not go out into the hallway. Guegot, Mario and the two drivers had been left outside as lookouts. What had happened? Through the fanlight Sobra had had time to see six heavily armed Germans with submachine guns in their hands aimed at the corridor. Why had they not fired? It was miraculous, we were absolutely not on our guard and we had been found out as amateurs.

One of our two drivers was an Alsatian “malgré nous”. He managed to negotiate with the six Huns, and to convince them to surrender with their hands-up, having no chance of escape. They explained that their unit was hidden in the forest and that they were waiting for nightfall to join them, and that no, there was no one else in the house, they were alone. Mario and I decided nevertheless to

get together a see what was upstairs, accompanied by the two drivers. Being very cautious this time, we threw open the doors following the appropriate method: a big kick and taking appropriate safety precautions before entering. I was to take the fifth door, the one at the end. It was solid and only opened at the second attempt. In front of me was a fireplace above which was a large mirror in a gilt frame. In this mirror, my friend, I could see, behind the door half folded against the wall an officer in uniform, in his hand he held a P38 aimed in my direction. As I stayed there motionless and silent without entering, our eyes eventually met in the mirror on the mantelpiece. He realized the futility of any attempt and gave up with a sad nod. I love this story, one more that rings a little bell in my mind; the melodious sound of my guardian angel. Smile; great stuff.

Obviously the six prisoners from the ground floor had lied, saying that they were alone in the house. But in their place, would we have not done the same? Of course we would. Because of this lie I could easily have been killed. But even so I was not pleased to hear Sobra, even though he did not really mean it, that if I had been killed, all seven of them would have been executed. Sobra was a good soldier, but not a man of quality, even if he was to become a general. I was really more close to the few rogues in my platoon.

'Execute', was the order I received two days later. The beautiful residential city of Reutlingen had just been taken. We had been relieved by the Tabors and in front of us was a very welcome 24 hours rest. I was set up with my platoon in a large and beautiful villa whose owner, a gentleman of a certain age, had been killed the day before by a piece of shrapnel. His wife and two daughters had withdrawn to two rooms on the first floor, and we made ourselves comfortable in the rest of the villa, abstaining, for once, from any excessive or noisy behaviour. My boys had managed to lay their hands on some reasonable sustenance and we were about to eat when a commando from HQ came to give me a handwritten order signed by the Commander directing "that lieutenant Poutet de Chazal to proceed without delay to the execution of S.S.Xxxx... and to report to HQ immediately thereafter". In the garden I found a second commando from HQ accompanying the S.S. in question: a boy of eighteen, very pale faced leaning on two sticks. He had been wounded in the legs.

I was outraged about killing this child without even knowing why, so I asked one of the two commandos to accompany me in his Jeep to HQ where I intended to ask for an explanation and to protest that I had joined the Commandos to fight the enemies of France and not to take part in a firing squad.

Having listened to me patiently, the responsible Intelligence officer explained that:

1. This young S.S. was in his hospital bed and the German medic, not having sufficient skill or equipment to tend to him, a French medical team had arrived. This young man had seized a P40 from under his sheets that another fanatic had provided, and shot at the French health care team; two killed and one wounded.
2. The sentence had been passed by a military tribunal that had been quickly but properly set up.
3. That the decision to make my platoon carry out the execution had been made by drawing lots.

Convinced of the justice, but cursing my misfortune, I agreed it with my boys. Through one of my Alsations, I informed the S.S. of his sentence and granted him a few moments to write to his family. He put this letter in an envelope that he asked one of the daughters of the house to get for him, on which he wrote the address of his family. He then handed me some papers he had on him: identity papers, military certificates, a calendar, a photo of his sweetheart. We told him we would send them on with his letter. I asked him why he had done "it". He hesitated and smiling and grinning, replied in a muffled voice: "We were taught to have courage and hate". I was really shaken up, but kept impassive. We had drawn lots for the four marksmen who would use Tommy guns with high calibre bullets (11.45) which would be more efficient than the P40 (9mm). I told them to take care to aim at his chest; I didn't want his face to be damaged. My four boys took their position six metres from the wall, at the

bottom of the garden. I signed to him that we had to proceed. He did not seem to be afraid; he just looked at us through his light blue eyes veiled with a bit of mist, and gave a sad smile seeming to say: "it's stupid, eh"

All was ready, I made a sign, four short bursts and he was slumped, curled up on the left side. I had to make a painful effort to give the coup de grâce (ridiculous term). Turning round I realised that behind a window on the first floor two faces were watching us. It was essential that this lady and her daughters knew why we had done what we did. With Herman as interpreter, I did my best to tell them. Little by little their tears dried and were replaced by a great sadness. Their family while patriotic, were not Nazi, very much the contrary, at least that is what they said: well maybe.

Finally, they said they would be responsible for posting the letter and would take the necessary steps with their local authority to remove and bury the body. I was pleased to think that I had left them with a good impression of the commandos.

This sad story left a painful impression on me, which was fortunately much alleviated a few months later, when I learned by chance through d'Astier, when I became one of his staff in his Parisian press agency, that the S.S. in question had been a member of the criminal unit responsible for the ugly drama at Oradour-sur-Glane⁵³. Nevertheless I have always had a memory of the light blue eyes and the sad smile of this child of eighteen years, only just above the age of criminal responsibility, against this wall, where on my command, four short bursts of gunfire would take his life.

On a completely different note, but once more on the basis of the tinkling bell of my guardian angel, I will tell the story of a bed made for a deep, deep sleep. It was after the capture of Pfullingen, another beautiful residential city. We were finally going to be able to rest and especially sleep. We set ourselves up, my platoon and I, in the first available accommodation, not very comfortable, but large enough. It was occupied by an old woman and her two daughters of indeterminate age, all three as unattractive as their home. The boys settled down on the ground floor, my adjutant and I took the two free rooms upstairs. Before sprawling on the large, old-fashioned and not-too-clean bed, caution compelled me to make a quick inspection of the room which ended with a look under the bed. At first glance, aside from dust I saw, nothing unusual. I noted only that the jute canvas which covered the bed springs was in poor condition and had a large tear which seemed recent and deliberate, and was not caused by normal wear. Despite my fatigue, which made me want to forget what looked like nothing of importance, a funny intuition led me to further examine the opening a little by pulling the fabric. No; curiosity is not always a bad thing. I opened my eyes wide, believing I was dreaming, but I was not wrong: trapped between the springs, I saw a stick grenade; no, two stick grenades, probably with their pins withdrawn ready to explode under the weight of a person ready for sleep. Subsequently I found my immediate reaction to be bizarre and stupid: a mixture of anger, laughter and a bit of admiration for the instigator of this trap. I wanted to laugh, as if I was the butt of a good joke. It would have been more logical to show anger against this cowardly method intended to kill. Herman, who was a specialist in weapons and explosives, confirmed that the trap was cleverly assembled and ready to go off. In his competent hands it was rendered safe and he neutralized the system. We called the three women, who swore on the head of their glorious God that they knew nothing of the matter, stating that the German soldiers who preceded us in the house were solely responsible. They were very afraid of what we might do, seeing that we had absolutely no confidence in the innocence they expressed. They were not wrong, because my boys were not happy. They knew where they stood with me, they said that if I was to be replaced they would not know what to do and it would be a lottery. This is at least what they explained to me with humour, apologizing for letting off steam, rather overdoing it, on the furniture and fittings. I let you imagine the scene. Yes, yes, they went to town breaking up the house. Not everything, but not far off it.

I read of an odd fact; yesterday on February 20th 2008 in Corsica, some freedom fighters had strafed the facade of a public building and a member of the CRS had been shot, but his life was probably saved by his thick wallet that stopped the bullet intended for him. This story was a reminder of a similar incident that happened to me during the hard fighting at Waldrenach. At a certain moment, when the explosion of our grenades mixed with their pauzerfausts fire, I felt a shock on the chest, neither painful nor particularly powerful. At the time, not wounded, I attached no importance to it. It was only after the withdrawal of the Germans, when a relative calm had been established, that I realized that the left pocket of my jacket was slightly torn. It was in this pocket that I had taken the habit of placing a big and thick metal medal that I had found in a house in Weingarten, with the inscription "Tag der Arbeit" and a symbolic drawing of factory and field work, thereby commemorating "labour day". It had fallen down and I had kept it. Taking it from my breast pocket, I found it to be very twisted. It had, at the very least, saved me from serious injury. I kept it for a long time but eventually lost it in the many hard knocks that came my way. However for a few days I had a huge bruise on my left pectoral. The boys said that it was the fault of a love sick girl. How stupid!

I will finish my war stories with just two more, having nothing heroic about them (the others were not either).

On May 8th 1945 in the morning, we learned officially of the cessation of hostilities and the surrender of Germany, which had taken place in the evening of the day before. We had been stationed in Bings since the previous day, a beautiful small village at the foot of the Arlberg, on the Vorarlberg side. Immediately Sobra brought together a small group of a dozen commandos and officers to plant the French flag at the top of the pass. Mario, the doctor, and I were included. Halfway up we found snow, and progress became difficult, but we were a cheerful crowd. On the way up we came across two Germans, stragglers from the routed army. When we got to the pass, despite their protests, we made them dig a deep hole in the hard icy snow in which we planted the French flag. It was an emotional moment of intense pride.

There were three or four chalets and an hotel in town, all closed. However, on the ground floor of one of the chalets a small shop selling and renting winter sports equipment was open. This would allow us to enjoy the freedom of one or two hours of skiing, a discovery for most; we helped ourselves without asking the permission of the owner, only too happy to curry favour with us. This was our first day of peace, joyfully celebrated.

Three or four days later I was involved in an incident, still at Bings where we were staying for a few more days; an incident which gave my commandos and me a lot of fun, but which destroyed any chance of improving my poor relations with Sobra. Whenever circumstances left us the time and opportunity, a major concern was to get a car, and preferably, the most beautiful car possible. It was a real competition between the officers and platoon leaders who, with the help of our boys, tried to get the very best. Recently I had obtained a white Horsh which was great, and was the pride of my platoon. At the time it was a little German Rolls-Royce, but alas, the make eventually disappeared. With this beautiful car I went for a ride with all my boys in turn, in small groups, and we were showing off in front of the other commandos. Our beautiful car was our pride and joy, which made everyone envious, even those at a higher level. Well; I could have guessed it. So one morning I was summoned by Sobra who informed me that HQ considered this beautiful Horsh deserved to be allocated to a superior officer rather than to a simple lieutenant, and ordered me to put it immediately at the disposal of HQ. I was forced to obey with anger in my heart. But a somewhat devilish and yet very fancy idea came to mind, probably put there by a demon joker, not by the guardian angel, but then; why not? At this season the river which cut across Bings became a torrent, magnified by meltwater. I knew full well that when one stops a car, one must take care, well before getting out, to apply the handbrake and put it in gear, specially on the steep slope at the edge of a tumultuous torrent. I would however commit this oversight, an unforgivable error. With the applause and the incomprehensible hurrahs (!) of my boys,

and under my sly look of pleasure, in very bad taste, the unique and magnificent sight of our superb shinny Horsh sweeping away in the swirling waters of this awesome torrent was a sight to behold. I obviously couldn't imagine that Captain Sobra would appreciate this act of insubordination; it was the drop of water that was going to break the camel's back.

We would remain in the lovely village of Arlberg for about a month. The countryside was very beautiful and full of flowers; it was a mild and sunny spring. Relations with the civilian population were good. The Austrian accent, especially in this region, was much milder than in Germany. We got on quite well with the people, but, personally I kept a certain reserve, because behind the kind smiles, I had not forgotten how enthusiastically the Austrians had welcomed the Anschluss in March 1938, i.e. the annexation of their country by Nazi Germany. They all now wanted to show that they had become little angels which, from one day to the next, they clearly could not.

Towards mid-June I was summoned by Commander Viotte, who had replaced Commander d'Astier. He was a man and an officer of high quality, natural, cultivated and sensitive, having authority and was very well informed of everything that happened in each commando. He was also very close to all his officers and attentive to the relations between them. Through Lieutenant Guegot I learned that I was one of those he appreciated, and I was proud and pleased of his approval. I guessed that he might give me a job of work to do, and it was with an uplifted heart that I entered his office. Things would be very different. With a lot of kindness but remaining firm Viotte explained that Sobra no longer wanted me under his command. For his reasons he calmly listed a series of cases of indiscipline, almost with a smile which gave me the false impression that I would be able to change his mind or at least make me go over to 2nd Commando where I had my friend Kamenka. Nothing doing; one cannot change one's Captain's decision, and I would have to join one of the three Shock battalions, currently stationed in the South while waiting to leave for Indochina. Leave the Commandos! I would sooner die. However I still had a logical reaction and asked for an "exeat" for fifteen days which was granted. We left each other with a straightforward handshake and "I'm really sorry" from him.

Part X

DEMOBILISATION - HOLIDAYS JOURNALISM

I would return to France with relatives of Peroni, the boy whom I had criticized for his uncontrollable vertigo and who was killed in Pforzheim. They came to complete formalities and retrieve papers belonging to him, and they willingly took me to Paris with them. He was an excellent fellow between fifty and sixty years old, a surgeon with a clinic in Neuilly. She was no more than twenty-five years old, pretty but not too clever. Both were very nice and the journey would be very pleasant in their beautiful Hotchkiss, identical to that of my father. We made our first stop for the night at Orschwiehr where I took them to see the famous cliff that Peroni, their son had refused to abseil, no doubt the incident which caused his death by him later trying to prove his worth by taking excessive risks.

We would make our second stop at the Col de la Schlucht in a lovely hotel overlooking a meadow and a small lake. In the middle of the meadow could be seen two German corpses which had remained there since the fighting during the winter. The area was very heavily mined and so far the 'problem' had been neglected. It was a sad and weird thing to see when opening the shutters on this beautiful sunny morning. I hurried downstairs before my friends appeared to pay the bill for our meals and our rooms. Generous and grateful, but a stupid gesture, seriously eating into the small amount of money received before leaving the Commandos.

As we rolled along I thought about what I should do when we got to Paris. I had nothing planned but there would be time to decide on something. I couldn't think of anyone who would put me up for any length of time. I decide finally to ask to be dropped off at Neuilly, Rue de Chezy, at Mr. and Madame Marchant, close friends of my brother Roger and You, my mother, I had already met them in Sanary where they owned a secondary residence. Having thanked my surgeon and his young wife, I turned up with my luggage at the Marchand's who welcomed me warmly and asked me to stay. I didn't have to ask, because they were quick to offer, so I settled down in a pretty room where I would live with pleasure without any embarrassment or shame for the next fifteen days or so. It seemed natural for me to sit at their table where I took advantage of their excellent cuisine. Was it that I was seriously out of step in this period; me, who had always been considered until then by family and friends as a helpful, sensitive, courteous and well-mannered boy. I was proud of this reputation that I took great pleasure to cultivate and justify. I found myself alone, almost without family. On one side Poutet, my father, had been arrested in the Tyrol area with a group of collaborators and was in prison somewhere. My grandmother was old and alone in her château in Roquevaire. My aunt Pelle des Forges was all alone in her apartment in the Rue des Réservoirs in Versailles (my uncle had died in Auschwitz). On the Chazal side I was unaware of what had become of my aunt Yvonne (my mother's sister), Uncle Norman and their children, my cousins. It is above all to them that I would have liked to find warmth and affection. There was aunt Marguerite, in fact my mother's aunt, with whom we had stayed once, You and me, throughout the month of December, 1939. I loved her very much and would go to visit her in the next few days in her apartment in the Rue de Siam. But there could be no question of

troubling this relative who was eighty-six years old and who had always been good and generous towards me.

The Marchant's had a nephew of twenty years old who had been committed to the liberation of Paris and was in intelligence. Jacques was a clever and intelligent boy and we got along well, for the best and worst of reasons. With a P38 out of the window, we shot pigeons that perched on the trees in the small square in front. There were no nearby buildings, but still the uncle and aunt didn't like it much. They were right. For Jacques and me this would be the beginning of a long and faithful friendship.

I hastened to go and see Aunt Marguerite, whose affection and tenderness towards her nieces Suzanne, my mother, and Yvonne, but also for her nephews of whom I was one. I immediately recognised the building in Rue de Siam and was really looking forward to taking my dear Aunt in my arms who had been lost from view for five years. But I was really pained when the concierge told me she had died more than two years previously. Who would have looked after her, stayed with her until the end of her life which had been lived with love and dedication? My natural selfishness made me feel more and more alone and quite unconsciously gave me some strength to take myself in hand, to live, to survive. To begin with, I decided that I would join the Shock Troops at the end of my exeat. Although carrying out the same type of combat there had always been a bit of rivalry, not always the friendliest, between the Shock Troops and the Commandos. And then, in the file which would be transferred, my reputation would no doubt go before me, completely unjustified, it would say "unruly element". What sort of welcome would I receive? No! Finally, despite the appeal of the continuation of a military adventure in Indochina I had serious doubts, which were stronger than the campaign proposed to me. Christian Roland-Gosselin decided to demobilize thanks to his cousin, Captain de Recy, who had real influence in intelligence circles. We later learned that he was also an underhand wheeler-dealer who would experience some difficulties with military justice. But in the immediate future, de Recy showed me the way to a demobilization centre where, with his recommendations, I was quickly officially demobilized with all my papers in order. So here I was with a small amount of money which with my extravagant tastes I would use in a pleasant way. So, before anything else, it seemed to me essential to spend a real holiday in Sanary, to immerse myself once more in the landscape where I had spent some wonderful moments with those I loved most in the world. Jacques applauded this idea and decided to come with me.

I gratefully thanked Mr. and Madame Marchant for their generous and long hospitality; they would now finally be able to have space to breathe. On a beautiful morning in July Jacques and I took the train to Sanary. We arrived at night and - avarice could go to the devil - descend on the Hôtel de la Tour, the best, and besides probably the only one available. For a month we were going to let rip and live in a very nice way: Beach, boat, pleasant meetings. Jacques had a very nice two seater canvas kayak. Our pleasure was to go to sea in bad weather, laughing at the posturing of fishermen who shouted that if we had problems they would not come to pick us up. We called them "freshwater seamen". They didn't like that.

I paid a few visits to friends of You and Roger: Roethlisberger, the Bards, Gaymard, all who often invited me and talked to me with sympathy of their relationships with my family

I also met a small group of people from Lyon, friends or relatives of Roger, who had come to put flowers on his grave on this first anniversary of August 13th, 1944. Among them was Myriam Lecomte, whose first cousin was a well-known singer whom I had had the opportunity to meet and hear in Lyon with You, my mother, and also Jean d'Esme, a well-known novelist, who liked You very much.

And especially Gagneux, Roger's great childhood friend, to whom he had entrusted his real estate agency, and after the drama of August 13th, 1944, had made all the arrangements for the tomb where my four relatives were buried. I thanked him and explained why I was unable to pay him back. He didn't want to hear about it. He had done it, quite simply, out of friendship, and there should be no more said. It suited me well, but then Gagneux was a rich man.

I realised later than with these relatives and friends of Roger and You I had not behaved as I should have done; to have shown more interest and kindness, whereas they were benevolent and friendly towards me. Like many of my war time comrades, without even realising it, I had not got back to reality. Is that an excuse?

Having arrived at the hotel we found a couple with whom we immediately made friends. Le Comte de St Jean, a young forty year old, who was good looking and had the easy ways of a businessman relaxing. His young "fiancée" was charming and pretty. They came from Nice and, it seemed, that they had a business which required a lot of hard work. She was tired, and he wanted her to come to have a rest in Sanary. Wasn't that nice? Having spent two or three days with her, he went back to Nice and returned after two or three weeks to fetch her.

It was obvious that Le Comte de St Jean was very imprudent to leave his pretty "betrothed", all alone here, but it was especially ill-conceived to come, a few days later, to make a surprise visit at night. Mr. Mercier, the hotelier was scared and insisted that Nathalie had not yet returned from a night out, but failed to convince him. After having knocked several times at the door of the room while making quite a lot of noise, getting no reply, he got a few guests together to force the door. I found that all this was not at all how an aristocrat should behave and prepared to show him how a commando would react. Nathalie had the courageous and quick reflex to intervene between me and the Colt 45. She managed to lead her murderous friend towards another room under the stunned eyes of Mr. Mercier and Jacques Marchant awakened by all the hullabaloo.

Things should have been left at that, I'll spare you the story of what followed, and only tell you what I was going to learn myself, rather ashamed of my naivety; that Monsieur le Comte, if ever he was a Count, was a really unpleasant, ambiguous and influential character in Nice circles. My thanks are due to Nathalie who saved me from getting acquainted with a formidable calibre .45 bullet

My holiday in Sanary continued in a wonderful way until the end of August. I then returned to Paris with the intention of finding a job very quickly, something up my street, my purse being completely empty. I got lodgings in a small simple but friendly hotel, Hôtel du Nil in the Rue du Helder near the Opéra. The friendly and understanding hotelier summed up my situation and allocated me a nice light room on the sixth floor. There was no elevator, but never mind; I was only twenty five years old. I got in touch with my old commando friends, among whom were Patrick de Beauport et Christian Roland-Gosselin, who took me to a bar in the Champs-Élysées, the 'Paris', where Henri D'Astier had set up his stall. D'Astier was starting up a news agency in the Rue Etienne Marcel, near the Place des Victoires, with a Jewish financier named Michel. Christian and I were taken on as journalists at the A.D.I. (Agence de Documentation Internationale). I would be responsible for sports writing in particular, but could also be called upon to cover any other event, or conduct interviews as required. Concerning journalism in general, I made my debut under the patronage of Henri de Turenne, who was my age but already had good experience of the profession where he had acquired a great reputation. In the field of sport, where I quickly found my place because of my background knowledge, I made my debut with famous "freelancers", such as Fernand Albaret (football), Grosmolard (sic-rugby), Germaine X... (very famous in boxing circles), etc. As for tennis, I didn't need any "expert". We were fortunate to have an outstanding Editor-in-Chief: Lucien Bodard, who became renowned among his peers. In him was brought together competence, rigour, righteousness, intuition, generosity,

courage, and many other human and professional qualities. He remains one of the characters that I've admired over my career.

My short stint in journalism helped me:

- to approach, without fear or embarrassment, well-known personalities, politicians, actors, sportsmen, writers and so on .
- to learn about the structures of The Republic of which I was knew very little;
- To comply with the moral obligation to follow an ethical path, the professional code of ethics and the limitations inherent in any profession;
- Learn how to listen, observe, pay attention to everything, which was not my natural inclination;
- Finally to look objectively and honestly at people; those around me, in the country, in the world, but keeping a critical eye open. Not always easy.

The political world was quite alien to me, and I didn't like having to cover press conferences in government departments or ministries. Generally I didn't understand a lot of it. I tried to compensate by writing the odd short report but they were usually clumsy efforts. That is why, one day in the courtyard of the Quai d'Orsay, trying to pick up a few snippets of a lively conversation between the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bidault and a Member of Parliament, I approached them trying not to show too much interest. I was severely put in my place, to the delight of my fellow journalists thrilled by my failure.

I had more luck in interviews with actors or sportsmen and women: Jean Gabin, Georges Carpentier, Borotra (my former boss), Yvon Petra (obviously!), etc.

One of the characteristics specific to news agencies was the rapidity of events and its subsequent reporting. One had to try always to be the first.

It was a perpetual race with competing colleagues. Newspapers would certainly take their information from the better informed agencies, but also the fastest. This meant that for us, the information providers, we were always "super-fast", in our movements as in the drafting and transmission of our material. The A.D.I. lacked the resources of the major agencies, taxis were not for us; we had to run after metros, or simply run, doing "leg-work", and immediately after an event, chase up a phone to transmit our material to our "shorthand-taker". Always in competition with our rivals, who did not gift us anything, there was the inevitable jostling around telephone booths, mobiles being unknown at the time. In addition we knew that the A.D.I. had serious financial problems. We were forced to make a commotion to be reimbursed our costs, and even, a little later, to have our salaries paid. In the end though, if there were difficult days both professionally and financially it was, fortunately, all cheerfully endured because of the work which was done well, a temporarily beneficial financial situation, all coming out of a happy chance meeting.

One very sunny evening when going down the the Opéra Métro to see an ice hockey match between France and Canada, I was actually running, as I often did as I was always late, I realized just after the first intermediate level, that I had an image of a dream figure, she was there, immediately behind my forehead, engraved as if in negative, but just too vague. It was imperative to view the positive. I stopped my descent and took a few steps back as my momentum had propelled me forward. No, I had not dreamt it and was now convinced that my hockey game was quite irrelevant. I collected myself together and endeavoured with the utmost courtesy and artifice to introduce myself and convince my blonde, and wonderful vision, that nothing or no one, could justify keeping someone of her beauty and quality waiting. She had been waiting for her fiancé, a young military doctor whose duties too often led him to be very late for appointments. The pretty lady had begun to be weary of these repeated delays, and we eventually reached an agreement that she give me another five minutes

to see if the putative fiancé would turn up, after which we would simply take a drink in a pleasant coffee house that I liked, “Pam Pam Opéra”. The five minutes passing by, we would then begin a wonderful year of daily encounters that would mark the beginning of sixty-three years (to date) of life with my fairy Opera Queen, who did not then know that she would, in that moment, change her fiancé. Of course she will have her place: and how!, throughout the rest of this narrative.

You are perhaps indignant that, because of this, I failed in my duty as a journalist by playing truant on my hockey game. Don't worry, a friend of mine working for the newspaper “Combat”, with whom I got on well and for whom I had previously done the same service, called me on the phone and gave me a short report of the match lost by France, and I was able to submit a report in time to my agency.

Affairs at A.D.I. were not going well, and it was not difficult to predict that its inevitable collapse would come soon. It was about then that I was given the job of visiting Orly airport to interview Commander Dabry, a renowned pilot and former companion of Mermoz. We were talking about all this, which was not so long ago when French aviation radiated everywhere in the world, particularly in South America. My interviewee was a courteous man, and with great modesty continued for an hour, quite simply telling me the story of the wonderful team made famous by the great work carried out under the orders of a leader, Didier Daurat⁵⁴, and his achievements on the South Atlantic and the Andes route. He understood that my excitement, and very clear interest, was not only that of a journalist, but also, and especially, of an aviation enthusiast bitten by the bug. Much to his surprise and amusement, I told him of my visit to Farman in Barbizon. In addressing issues relating to the crews, he told me that commercial in-flight personnel would in future be solely made up of stewards, and also air-hostesses and pursers. He readily saw that I was surprised but interested. Of course I couldn't see myself as a hostess, but a Purser...! He told me, because I asked him, where I should go to apply for a job: Air France, Rue Marbeuf. I was grateful for his advice. Within three months I was at Orly with Didier Daurat as my boss and very soon I would make one of my first long-haul flights on a Douglas DC4 with Commander Dabry.

Part XI-

AIR FRANCE – FLIGHT PURSER

Indeed, as early as the day following this visit, I went to Air France where I got all the necessary information to apply for the post of purser. I fitted the criteria to apply, and I would be called shortly to undertake the interview when the best candidates would be selected for a training course. At the end of the course, their performance would be assessed and positions would be offered as appropriate to stewards, hostesses and pursers. Of the eighty boys and girls who applied, forty were eliminated. The written tests certainly played an important part, as well as those for languages where I thought I might fail with my inadequate English and my fruity, colloquial Spanish from Totana. But the most formidable hurdle was going before a panel of a dozen very knowledgeable experts where one was observed and studied under all sorts of conditions, bombarded with difficult questions on the most unexpected subjects, putting us to the test by trying to destabilize us by pushing us to the limit sometimes being indiscrete and provocative. In short a kind of torture chamber which, if it had not been that it affected our professional future, could have seemed fun or enjoyable. That being the case I decided to consider it as such and to make the best of it. I was right to do so as I passed the initial tests and found myself among the selected forty (twenty boys and twenty girls) for this one month training course that we were going to undertake in the beautiful Château de Maligny, in the region of Chablis. This course, in a very friendly atmosphere, lasted the entire month of April 1946. The château was sufficiently big for housing the girls and boys in two separate distinct wings. We had common rooms for studies of course, but not for the bedrooms. Some students were unable to understand this and took it badly. Really I had no idea why.

I made some excellent friends during this course. These would unfortunately be limited to only a few years because of the different directions we would take: André de Lassus, Charles de Lasteyrie (ninety-five years old today. No, he died early in 2009), Jean-Louis Blatteau, Pierre Minthe, Pierre Arbelot who would disappear in the Atlantic a few months later with the “Lieutenant de Vaisseau Paris”,⁵⁵ the giant seaplane that dominated the West Indies route. Among the candidates to be hostesses, Alix D'unienville⁵⁶ from a Mauritian family allied to ours, Paulette Vavasseur who would be killed on her first flight in a DC3 taking off from le Bourget. Also Jacqueline Gouny, Jeanine Latsha, Nicole de Benazé, who would soon get married to a pilot. There was quite a lot of pairing-up of this sort.

All these personalities were very different, their culture, their social origin, their character, their sociability, their attention span, etc. It was a pretty strange cocktail, indeed it was wonderful by its diversity, even if what they had in common was not always obvious. We had a team of supervisors and quite remarkable instructors, as much as from what they knew as their ability to provide us with a pleasant and efficient learning experience. Through this we could already see that we had joined an important company of 'quality': Air France. At least, that would be the case for those of us who would be accepted.

After all I had been through: the disappearance of my closest relatives in Sanary, the disappointing resumption of contact with my paternal family, this internship was an interlude, a pleasant and beneficial month, leading to a professional activity in the world of aviation which I had always dreamed of.

I was, as a result, one of the first French on-board pursers. My first flight was in June 1946, Paris to Cairo in a DC4. All my flights, in the first five years, would be on the DC4, representing more than five thousand five hundred flying hours. The DC4 was in fact the commercial passenger version of the Douglas C54, four engined troop carrier, some thirty-three and a half tons at full load, with a cruising speed of three hundred and thirty kilometres per hour. At the beginning it was fitted with forty-four seats, but that was clearly uneconomic and it was quickly increased to sixty plus seats. It was obviously not pressurized, the first pressurized aircraft (Lockheed Constellation) would appear a year or two later and at first, would be reserved for trans-Atlantic flights. On routes where it was required to reach altitudes of more than 20,000 feet (6,000 meters), one had to use oxygen masks. And it was better not to brag about doing without them, a little later I learnt the consequences of doing so.

After a couple of “adaptation” flights to Cairo, I was assigned to the South America route and then in June 1946 to crew on the opening of the line to Buenos Aires and Santiago in Chile. On these long-haul flights the technical crew was made up of the captain, an experienced pilot, the co-pilot, generally a friend of about my age, the mechanic who would be very experienced and often of the same generation as the captain, the radio operator probably older than any of us, at the time he would be essential on the long ocean and desert routes. With the evolution of infrastructure and instrumentation all this would disappear little by little, as indeed radios operators were made redundant. Much later, it would be the turn of the mechanics.

As for the commercial crew, it was composed of the purser and two stewards. Initially at least, hostesses were only employed on the North America route.

All long-haul flights, departures and arrivals, were to and from Orly. Some of the domestic flights continued, for a few years to fly in and out of le Bourget. Orly, France’s major airport had for infrastructure, only a few wooden shacks and two hangars. Little by little major buildings came to replace them..

Ah! That first flight to South America! June 30th, 1946.

We were a double crew: I was in the first with Commander Dabry, who, depending on the flight, would stay in Santiago and return in the opposite direction the following week. The other crew travelled as passengers, and would bring the plane back to Paris after a night's rest in Santiago. That was the idea.

Our Route: Paris, Casablanca, Dakar, Recife, Rio, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Santiago.

- Distance: 12,000 Kilometres.
- Flying hours: more or less 42, depending on the weather.
- Total time: about 50 hours with stopovers.

Such a flight was obviously tiring and took a lot out of one. After the experience of this maiden flight, arrangements would be made to ensure that the technical crew got much more rest, with a change in Dakar. For the commercial crew it was decided that, in the interests of giving the “very best service to passengers”, they should be in personal contact with the same people throughout their journey. Pursers and stewards were thus sacrificed, somehow, on the altar of “customer service”. This was not an exaggeration, because on each of these flights, sleep (specially) and fatigue management

would represent a serious problem. But our young age (twenty-five to thirty years old) saw most of us through as we didn't take long to recover.

On this maiden flight, quite naturally, we had some personalities on board, specially senior officials from The Air and Foreign Affairs Ministries. Very quickly the atmosphere became very intimate and almost family-like in the cabin, certainly between the passengers, but also between them and the PNC (Personnel Navigant Commercial). Many of them had never been on an aircraft, especially for a long-haul flight. Many came with some trepidation, more or less strong, more or less visible, but very real. We did our best to reassure them, to establish trust, by giving frequent information about our position, on the speed, altitude, the estimated time of arrival at the next port of call, etc. There was no microphone we could use, it was my responsibility to pass on all this information by using my vocal chords to the utmost, even then I could not be heard, because the sound insulation in the cabin was very poor.

During this first link up and on following trips to South America I would have the opportunity to establish friendly relations with some passengers (pay attention; I said "passengers"), mostly Argentine and French, about which I will tell you later. These friendships would generously help me to get to know Argentina during the twenty-six weeks I spent there; having made 26 round trips, with a weeks' rest in Buenos Aires each time.

But let's start at the beginning. We stopped off at Casablanca and Dakar. We had been five hours above the South Atlantic in this aerospace, where a team of pioneers who, under the direction of Didier Daurat, chief among chiefs, made the French wings of aviation shine brightly. At Orly we took on board a very beautiful wreath intended to be thrown in the middle of the ocean in tribute to these wonderful men. Dabry left his captain's seat to lead the operation. He gave me the wreath and signalled to me to open the door, more precisely open it inwards. With the speed of the 'plane, it would be well-nigh impossible to open it any more. So why hold me back by my belt, Commander? That's really useless. But as I unlocked the door, I feel irresistibly drawn outward, in a huge racket caused by the great air flow and noise of the engines. I had a hell of a fright, but it went as fast as it came. After a first suction effect, the door barely remained ajar, held by the wind's speed. We needed to push strongly in order to be able to pass the crown through. There was a moment of emotion and silence. In this minute of silence, my alter ego whispered that it was better to have a half asleep purser go overboard than a tired captain. But taking everything into account I would have preferred that Dabry rather than me, go to join his friend Mermoz and the crew of the Southern Cross in the ocean. It was in bad taste certainly, but when ground handling at night in Recife, the crew being let off for a beer or a gin and tonic, I confessed to having this wanton, preposterous thought, Dabry was the first to laugh at it. I was rather more embarrassed than if he had taken it badly.

Shortly after the "wreath to the sea" operation, there was the crossing of the equator. Among the various documents and papers I needed on the flight, were the "Crossing the Equator Certificates". I had to prepare and fill them in as we went along. They were all personalized and each passenger received his immediately after the crossing of the line that the captain gave some reality to by rocking the 'plane for a few seconds. To celebrate champagne was served. For most of us it was indeed a baptism, so a little partying was in order. Today, of course, this makes no sense; almost everyone has already travelled, often over long distances, on modern aircraft, in comfort, at altitudes, speeds, that have nothing to do with DC 4 flights in 1946. At that time those who had crossed the equator were very proud of having done so. Nowadays?

After a short night in Recife (ex Pernambuco), we stopped in Rio and Montevideo, and had a new overnight stopover in Buenos Aires. Behind the window, because we had been taken to an hotel, I saw with amazement the wide avenues, lights, shop windows, traffic, and monumental buildings of this great capital, having an importance that I had never really imagined⁵⁷. But after 38 hours of flight

(from Paris), we were tired, and the indisputable need of a good meal and restful sleep outweighed our very real desire to get acquainted with this beautiful city. We were put up at the Lafayette Hotel, a name very evocative of the relationship between France and the American continent. Soon I would get used to it all. The old concierge was French, as well as the manager's wife. I often had the opportunity to help them out, which ensured that I was particularly well looked after.

After a good night's rest, we went on our way to Santiago. By that time three-quarters of our passengers had left getting off at Rio, Montevideo and here in BA. At Rio were joined by a colourful character, Paul Vachet. After being one of the companions of Mermoz at l'Aéropatiale, he came to be based in Rio as South America Director of Air France. He was dynamic, authoritarian, cultivated, beguiling, kind, unbearable, efficient and knowledgeable. I learnt to know him in all these aspects. I hated him and yet admired him, I would be the recipient of some serious dressing-down, to some approving grunts, some gruff and impatient encouragement, shrugs of shoulders, alarm calls at four in the morning, an occasional friendly slap on the back with a big laugh as we left. Dabry, his friend from the war days, was much amused by our domestic rows, because I would then tousel my hair which, to my surprise, seemed to disarm my torturer.

So, we took off from Buenos Aires at about eight o'clock for a four hour flight destined for Santiago. It was cold, crisp and clear weather. We were in the southern hemisphere, and it was the beginning of winter on the 35th parallel.

The flight was going along without any trouble. On the approach to the Andes cordillera that we had to cross at an altitude of more than twenty thousand feet (six thousand two hundred metres), we began to gain height. Suddenly engine number 3 started to vibrate alarmingly and it was necessary to shut it off. It would be unwise, for a commercial flight in these circumstances, to venture anywhere near the white barrier of the Cordillera which was now very close. Dabry decided to land in Mendoza, a town of average size at the foot of the mountains, at an old, little-used airfield with hardly any infrastructure. But this is where Mermoz and his colleagues had left a lasting impression. News of our arrival soon spread, celebrities and a crowd of curious onlookers rushed to greet us, see this long-haul aircraft from France, reviving memories of those pioneers who had conquered the fearsome Cordillera. They were very friendly, but we had to get back to reality. An engine change would be necessary and that would take at least forty eight hours. Leaving the engineers to get on with their responsibilities and do their work, I worked under the orders of Vachet who took over all the necessary operations, writing and sending telegrams to Paris, Buenos Aires and Santiago, to complete lots of administrative tasks, fill in various documents required for the relevant authorities, to ensure the accommodation of passengers and the crew, and remove the luggage from the hold. All fairly simple operations if one was doing this at an organised stopover with the personnel and the necessary equipment. But here the very rudimentary organization and much reduced staff complicated things enormously. This explains why there were, as already stated above, some things which went wrong and some unpleasant things said, fortunately without serious consequences. Personally, despite all these difficulties, once things had settled down, I could with the others, enjoy a little bit of the good side of this forced stop, and in particular to taste the excellent wines of the country, Mendoza being the wine centre of Argentina. They wanted to persuade us that their wines were better than our best Burgundy or Bordeaux, although of good quality, they were not comparable: at least they were not at this time, because since then, the wines of Argentina, and especially those of Chile and California, have considerably improved to rival our own. But this is another story.

Forty-eight hours after our arrival, the aircraft was ready for take-off, but unfavourable weather would delay us once again. Bad weather was common at this season, when the mountains disappeared into a mass of cloud, which was unfortunately the case and we had to wait for it to ameliorate. As a result of our failure to take off, we had the pleasure of discovering Mendoza, its friendly and welcoming people and the quality of its wines, to appreciate the team work of some (our mechanic who

was effectively supported by his colleague from the second crew who was travelling as a passenger, whereas on the other hand my friend Jean Minthe vanished instead of helping me, something which seemed to give Paul Vachet an ulcer), to admire from its base the stunning mountain range, and to experience and learn to cope with the extraordinary vagaries of air transport in those days.

Early in the morning of the third day, into a sunlit, clear sky, we finally took off for Santiago. We circled for some time before reaching the altitude required, about two thousand feet, to cross the Cordillera. It was a moment of emotion for most of us. Here was the highest, if not the largest chain of mountains, with its highest peaks, including Aconcagua which, despite our altitude, was our master; nearly 7000 meters (6969). We imagined Guillaumet⁵⁸ wandering this huge wilderness for days before being found, exhausted, by an Indian peasant; a real historical epic.

Soon we were above Chilean territory. Like Mendoza, Santiago was located immediately at the foot of the Cordillera. And, as we had already circled to obtain height, we now needed to circle for quite some time to descend. The Chilean welcome was enthusiastic and eventful. Many came to attend our arrival, curious, happy, noisy, and especially warm hearted. Those of the crew, including myself, who would stay to rest here for a whole week, appreciated all the more this good friendly welcome. Together with the other crew, who would be on the return flight, we spent a pleasant day exploring Santiago, the lively streets and old houses which traced its turbulent history, its very mixed population, with different origins, Spanish conquistadors and ethnic Indians, often of mixed blood. I very much enjoyed this week while waiting for the next flight, mitigated, to my great regret, upon our return to the hotel. Because of bad weather that could frequently hold us up, Vachet contacted and convinced management that we should have a change of crew in Buenos Aires instead of Santiago. This is how, in the end, forced by the nature of things, I became a diligent tourist; and over the next two years learnt to love the country of Argentina, so diverse, so vast, and often very beautiful. For some time we continued to provide a service to Santiago, but it was quickly given up in favour of the Argentine “Aerolineas Argentinas” Company. This company, for the record, had numerous technical problems generating a great mistrust on the part of air travellers, to such an extent that a number of passengers who were potentially able to have free travel on its routes preferred to pay for a seat on an Air France flight. I was in a position to confirm it.

After this short stay in Chile we went back to France. It was crew number two doing the relay, taking over, and so I had to stay in Buenos Aires for a week. An incident occurred upon arrival at the airport, which could have been funny if its consequences were not so disastrous for my friend Minthe, who was purser on the return flight, it was all his fault it must be said. He came to the realisation that he had left, in the toilets of Santiago airport, a satchel containing all his personal papers and his money, but also, and especially, all the crew’s passports. Vachet used his influence and contacts to ensure that the flight would not be delayed, but all the members of that crew had to stay grounded for a week in Paris before retrieving their passports. The penalty would be summary. My good friend’s short career in Air France came to an abrupt end. He would quite easily bounce back in a much more suitable job making better use of his intellectual abilities: making use of a psycho-technical method, consisting of applying appropriate tests to measure skills in various areas, of people who require an assessment. Interesting, but the reliability of the result could be questionable; this method was specially used in the recruitment of personnel. Bizarre how things go full-circle, he would get the Air France contract and later, that of the UTA, the second French aviation company, of which I was then Regional Director in Africa. It was a nice comeback, with a little taste of revenge thrown in.

Returning to Argentina, I was impressed by this first week discovering Buenos Aires. The city is huge, but the centre can be explored on foot fairly easily. At that time (1946), the local population of the country was barely seventeen million (today it is approximately 38 million), including a good half of them collected in the metropolitan area of the capital. I would have the opportunity to observe much of the country and appreciate its diversity. I will come back to this. The knowledge of the country that I

would gradually acquire would be mainly through friendships with sympathetic passengers who took as much pleasure showing me around as I enjoyed their invitations and information freely given.

First of all I was reunited with my childhood friend Pearly, daughter of Alice Rabah who had been a good friend of You, my mother. She married Etienne Dupin, a university classmate, who owned, together with his brother Daniel, an important family pharmaceutical laboratory business. She had been lost from view for a decade, and our reunion was warm and friendly. At Etienne and Pearly I would be always welcome, and would take full advantage to the limit of what was reasonable.

Alberto de Ridder would become a very good friend that unfortunately time and distance would subsequently gradually erode. Alberto, 35 years old, was head of the family after his father died two years earlier; this was one of the great families of the country, by class and wealth. The family company covered numerous and important activities: banking, automotive, grain, real estate, etc. His mother, Madame de Ridder, with the authoritative support of Alberto, reigned with serenity and majesty over this big and beautiful family of seven children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, and goodness knows how many grandchildren. I was invited at any time, to enjoy the swimming pool and the tennis court, where the youngest, twenty years old, played at a good standard.

Friendly relations would become twisted with some passengers, and I will mention these later. In contrast with some of my passengers, during my first two or three flights to Rio and Buenos Aires, I had a very unpleasant experience with a few of them because of their mere presence on board, because of the mistrust and hostility which had been proven against them it was sometimes difficult not to manifest my feelings. Departing from Orly they were accompanied to their seat, by two or three people, military or civilian, apparently belonging to our 'Services'. I felt it very disagreeable to see them chatting together in an almost friendly manner, even laughing like friends at a stupid but good joke. I found the quasi-complicity between our French officials and the Nazi officers or unsavoury political figures very unhealthy as they were criminals who were now discharged after confessing their crime. They were in fact Nazi, either civil or military personalities, having been picked up by our army at the end of the war and subjected to extensive interrogation, both in form and their duration, in order to get them to divulge all kinds of information which, when put together, would be specially useful. There was a lot of pretty sordid haggling; eventually allowing those who had agreed to provide as much interesting information as they could, to leave France for a country in South America, usually Argentina or Brazil. It was a pretty despicable state of affairs, but thinking it over, probably not so unreasonable.

On board these passengers assumed a triumphant and overbearing look which infuriated me and made me boil with anger and hatred. One of them noticed a small discreet ribbon of the Croix de Guerre attached to the lapel of my uniform jacket, and with a movement of his chin, asked: "war?" I was able to raise a sardonic smile that put an end to the interrogation. In their South American host country they were taken in hand by a network of other German Nazis who had already created a community, this would enable them to integrate locally in the best conditions. Moreover, they did not arrive empty-handed. In addition to their knowledge and skills; personnel, engineering, technicians, farmers, drivers, etc., they generally brought a comfortable fortune established by an international financial organization. Were the French or Allied authorities aware and even, why not, fully complicit? Think about it. Still, the local authorities looked upon these immigrants with complete approval because of their knowledge; their skills, their money and their courage (why not say it?). They would make an effective contribution to the economic development of their host country, of which most were indeed going to get citizenship. It have gone on at length no doubt, in sharing the story of these Nazi émigrés, but I couldn't ignore it, seeing that I was scared by them; I, who was still steeped in the fighting that we had carried out against them.

Before resuming the story of these two and a half years of flights to South America, I should return to France where meanwhile two important events were taking place. First of all what had become of my father, Jean Poutet?

He was picked up by the army in the Tyrol sector with a small group of the Milice headed by Marcel Déat. He was initially imprisoned in the de la Santé prison in Paris, then in Nîmes where he would be tried in the Assize Court. During the fifteen days of proceedings one could read headline articles in all the newspapers, printed on the front page, things like: “Traitor Poutet...”, “Poutet, Head Collaborator...” and even worse. Personally it didn’t bother me. I could hold up my head as high as anyone else and if anyone questioned it, I was quite able to put him in his place. I could understand however that my little Opéra-Métro fairy, Simone, who was more and more in love with me, should take umbrage at my sad association with this name which was now so well known. It would stay that way for the next sixty-three years.

The case took on an unpleasant socio-political aspect. Although the investigation proved more and more that they would be unable to prove my father “guilty of taking a man's life”, it became increasingly clear that he was a leader with extreme right views who was a collaborator, and should pay for his collaboration with the most serious sentence available. The trial would take place in Nîmes, in a very Communist region. The lawyers were pessimistic and hoped that my intervention at the bar, with the agreement of the presiding judge, could swing the scales. Agreement was reached and the presiding judge asked about my relationship with my father and my career. He did this with tact and in a tone seemingly regarding me approvingly regarding me as a tough, resistance soldier. The public gallery was silenced as they appeared to have considerable interest in my story. The jurors also took a lot of interest. Was this good sign? Let’s keep it short.

As expected, it would be the death penalty with the confiscation of all his goods and property. For three weeks, in his cell, every morning my father listened out for the noises in the corridor. In the end the sentence would be commuted “in perpetuity”. It would seem that the part that I had played in this drama could have had a positive influence in the decision. Perhaps!

Jean Poutet would be transferred to Corsica, to the Casabionda penitentiary, in the eastern plains, South of Bastia. His extensive and wide ranging knowledge would be greatly valued in the Roman archaeological excavations at Aléria. This very interesting work earned him considerable privileges; allowing him to lead a much less painful detention than might have been the case. He would be finally released after five years, but completely ruined; he would therefore have to earn a living as a teacher at the convent at Pino, a pretty village in Cap Corse, partially used as a school. This activity was complemented in various ways, by lectures, calculations of stresses and strains in concrete for architects (?), tutoring, etc.

When we met again in 1958, after twelve years without seeing each other (no, don't ask me why), we found it difficult to even recognize each other. With his dedicated and faithful wife, they lived in the rectory near Pino Church. He was barely sixty-nine years old, but he was already an old man. Why therefore had he stubbornly chosen to follow this evil path? I couldn’t help but see the autocratic leader that he was, the gourmet always on the lookout for tables at which the stars ate, the man of culture always surrounded by books. Was there not, permanently in our toilet, three or four books on science, classical literature (Latin, Greek, French...), history, with especially a remarkable chronology of French history as a result of which certain key dates remain, to this day, in my mind.

Sim, Olivier and I were then living in Brazzaville in the Congo where I was Regional Manager of UTA⁵⁹. Each year, during the holidays, we spent a week in Grasse, with my father and Tariq, at Bastide St-Avril, a beautiful property made available by a rich and generous cousin of Louloute’s who was Swiss and very Germanic. They took advantage of this generous offer upon their return from

Corsica in 1959. We also invited them to spend a month with us in Brazzaville where they were received very kindly by President Fulbert Youlou, who could not deny me much, and for good reason. I will come to that later.

For the two years that I flew mainly to South America, in 1946 and 1947, the second important event was in the evolution of my relationship with the charming girl with whom I was in love. Between trips, while I was resting in Paris, we saw each other every day. Simone, to whom I gave the diminutive “Sim” (which she didn’t like much, as she confessed to me later), was a twenty-one year old fashion designer at Jacques Fath, one of the major haute couture houses. She shared her studio with another designer, Dominique, a young, talented, homosexual and quite captivating. I went to see them once and was flabbergasted by the ease and talent with which, with a flick of a pencil, they could give rise to new designs which would, after being made up in workshops, take this famous brand round the world. Sim asked me to come to her workplace, fashion parades and workshops, causing a few sympathetic whispers as we went by. Coming from the provinces I was uncomfortable and, in this refined atmosphere, felt like a bull in a china shop. This surprising unease came to a peak when I had to attend a prestigious fashion show where new designs were presented; among the chic and elegant staff, predominantly female, I was surely the only young, single, inelegant, embarrassed, ruffian. That is how I felt. Meanwhile my lovely fairy moved with ease and grace in the large room, welcoming a client, answering a question, helping here and there, completely familiar with her surroundings and still finding the time to give me a smile or a kind word when passing by, to give me some encouragement. She introduced me to a few personalities who would shortly become important to me. One of them however, Jacqueline Auriol, would become a friend. Surely less elegant than the haute couture salons were the restaurants where we sometimes enjoyed lunch or dinner. They matched my financial means and usually had paper tablecloths, and as I loved to see her draw, when we left, the tablecloth had some beautiful sketches on them. My great pleasure was that when the waiter, or sometimes the owner came with a friendly smile to clear up, he would remove the tablecloth by carefully folding it instead of crumpling it up. We were not at the stage of paying the bill with a simple sketch; but still.

We occasionally went to the cinema or theatre, but we preferred to walk in the open air. I was to discover the wonderful Valley of Chevreuse, very different from what it is today. I was also introduced to her parents who were very charming. Her mother confided that she had found “a little trickster”. She was surely right.

Little by little the idea of marriage began to take root in my head and heart, constrained somewhat by the prospect of the loss of my independence. The conclusion was obvious.

We would be married on 29th April 1947, in the Town Hall of the sixième district; it was the greatest thing that had happened to me in my life. Selfish, boorish and wild, I wanted this to take place in the intimacy of a small group of friends, not inviting members of our two families, with the exception of Sim’s younger sister. The very successful wedding breakfast held in the apartment of my former boss Jean-Pierre Banzy and his wife Annette in the Avenue Wagram, Jehan Dupuis, our “doctor” of the 3rd Commando, and two or three others were our guests. Sim and I then headed to the Gare de Lyon. Our destination was Sanary, arriving in Toulon the next morning; we took a coach to Sanary from outside the station. It took twenty hours to get there, today it would only take five or six.

The Mediterranean, the strange accent, Provence, all this was new for Sim and I was pleased to return to my country, its beauty, its cuisine, a few friends, the cemetery, etc. It was a very short honeymoon as I had only got three days. On our return we set up home in Rue Leconte de l’Isle, near Auteuil Church, in a nice apartment which belonged to Daniel Dupin, Pearly’s brother-in-law who was very willing to let us have it. It was a reciprocal agreement because this apartment was vacant and unless occupied was likely to be compulsorily commandeered due to the severe housing shortage in

Paris at the time. We took advantage of this windfall for two years. Sim would take over the various roles, obligations and pleasures of a hostess, probably too quickly and unwisely, because I wanted my wife to cease work which was what was done in the Poutet family and in many other middle-class families. She therefore resigned from her exciting job as fashion designer for Fath, leaving behind her the reproaches and regrets of the fashion house and her team of designers. It was my fault that she relinquished a good career which had started so well. A little later it would be in this nice and comfortable apartment that we would have the joy of sharing life with a beautiful baby to whom we gave the name of one of my mother's brothers: Olivier

But let's get back to Air France and Argentina. Antonio Santa Marina and his lovely wife were excellent friends and entertained me often in Buenos-Aires. In Paris, where they came from time to time we went out and spent many happy times. It was a pleasure to discover the beauty of Paris, but also our national and regional cuisine. One day we had enjoyed an excellent aioli, a thick garlic paste well washed down! After this excellent lunch we accompanied them to a jeweller on the second floor of a building in the rue Ste Anne, where Antonio had made an appointment to purchase a pink pearl necklace for his beautiful wife. We quickly realized what the jeweller was doing discreetly and courteously, our jeweller had put sufficient distance between us to be able to hear what we said without having to breathe in the smell of aioli. Subsequently it gave us a good laugh when we remembered the amusing circumstances when we went to buy this necklace with our friends. Antonio was not only chivalrous towards his wife, but also in everyday life. When we went to collect them one morning his face was quite swollen. Getting back to their hotel late the previous evening, he was eager to rush to the rescue of a young woman who was being beaten up by a man. In a few seconds he landed a few good punches on the aggressor but without having the time to organize his own defence as a man of his massive physique should be able to do. Without a word, the couple walked off into the night. I explained to the surprised and outraged Antonio that it is better not to intervene when a pimp "reprimands" his protégée.

In Buenos Aires one day, Antonio arranged for his parents to invite me to the family mansion, a beautiful mansion in a less salubrious area. On this occasion, to honour their French guest, they had assembled all the children with sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. Antonio was happy and proud of the exceptional attention that was accorded me. I was determined not to let down my friend by showing my best attributes, by trying—modesty aside—to make a good impression on my hosts. To start off with I arrived a quarter of an hour late, despite him telling me to arrive on time as his parents got on their high horse where punctuality was concerned. A ravishing young girl, after a few kind words of welcome said to me, with a killing smile: "I believe that where you come from they say that "Punctuality is the politeness of Kings". Behind these words all I could see were smiles all round and I felt that I was in an embarrassing situation, but rescue was at hand; Mr. Santa Marina, Antonio's father, took me by the shoulders and guided me, followed by everyone else, to a very long room, to show me, covering the walls, the pride and joy of his life. There was an extraordinary collection, coming from previous generations and added to by him over time, of some sixty paintings by some great masters, mainly Spanish. It was certainly, at that time, one of the most important private collections in the world, both by its quality and quantity. I had no difficulty in expressing my very sincere admiration, despite my relative ignorance of the subject. This long visit cheered up the atmosphere and the excellence of the meal and wine, little by little, brought a friendly smile to all these beautiful faces which really brought me back to earth.. Their son, who was a surgeon, their son-in-law a lawyer, the young woman with the smirk, and all the others were very kind to me, giving me the impression that they loved me, not only because I was the friend of their brother Antonio, but that they always respected the lead set by their parents. I was quite impressed by the high quality of this family where the term aristocracy was appropriate in every sense. No false stiffness or fatuous behaviour, but a natural simplicity showing quality, with a respectful attitude towards the parents. Madame Santa Marina gave orders as a matriarch, but always in a measured tone and a clear voice, a short, precise and

pithy phrase through which one could see a strong personality. Facing her, at the other end of the huge table, her husband watched with pride and admiration.

I cannot dwell on this remarkable family for too long, but I have very special memories of my association with it. Three or four years later almost the whole of Mr. Santa Marina's priceless collection was stolen by a very well organized, specialized gang. The event was widely reported in the international press. It was through the Figaro that I found out about it, and imagined with sadness how helpless the old patriarch must have felt.

In January or February 1947, when it was summer in the Southern hemisphere, my two stewards and I arranged to spend three or four days in Mar de Ajo (Garlic Sea), a small seaside village 200 Kms to the South of Buenos Aires. At this time the place was isolated and difficult to get to. On the last hundred kilometres the outdated and rickety bus in which we were travelling repeatedly got stuck on the sandy track. We gave them a lot of help to get us out by putting branches under the wheels, which earned us the appreciation and sympathy of the driver and passengers. We had to tell them, as best we could, who we were and the reasons for our presence among them. All these chiselled faces, most of them with the high cheek bones of the local Indians, expressed great astonishment. For some we were certainly the first European foreigners they had encountered. Until we got to our destination we would have to dig deep into our poor vocabulary and accept a few drinks which were forced upon us.

We eventually arrived in Mar de Ajo. The houses were very simple, half wood, half concrete, the streets bare sandy tracks, a few rare bushes. Here we found silence, isolation and an authentic native environment that we had been looking for. It was all the better for the basic accommodation on a huge beach that offered Spartan comfort, but was perfectly satisfactory for our needs. The owner, a big fellow if a little simple, proved pleasant and really put himself out to make our stay enjoyable, as his wife did to give us reasonable meals. There was four kilometres of beach for us alone, with very few bathers. An old man offered to hire us two old emaciated nags that he treated as if they were beautiful limousines. Sandt, who was a reasonable horseman, persuaded me to accompany him. Dressed in only our trunks, we climbed on our hobby-horses; it was my first experience on a horse, and there was nothing very good about it. I was to learn that the trot was the very worse step for the beginner but our beasts only knew this one type of step, unless one counts a desperately slow hobble. After some laborious progress along the immense beach we discovered that our two nags, without even asking us our opinion, took to the gallop when it came to returning to their master. Personally I hung on to its neck and held on tightly with both arms. I was not discouraged by this initial ride, and even found some pleasure in it on our next three rides, having become, thanks to the help of Sandt, a just about acceptable horseman, which would be very useful to me on one of my next trips.

Indeed, early one morning, Alberto de Ridder took me to BA's second airport of Morón, where he kept his twin-engine Cessna which he flew like a professional. We would take a flight of between ninety minutes and two hours to one of the four estancias owned by the family. Landing on a grass runway parallel to the long drive which led to the old homestead, we deposited our luggage in our rooms. We mounted, with the estate manager, horses which had already been saddled for our use. I had hesitated to join them for the long ride that awaited us but Alberto insisted and reassured me, knowing of my inexperience, that they would give me an easy horse with a calm disposition. It was actually a very nice black mare, very different from our two nags in Mar de Ajo. On the principle of taking every precaution, the estate manager introduced us, and my mare, sniffing me, obviously found me a stranger to this equestrian world; inhaling deeply, she sniffed my head and neck for a while to the delight of the other two. Looking in the black eye of my mount I could see that I had been accepted and this contact had had a beneficial impact

The estancia on which we were was not the most important of the four. The smallest was six thousand hectares, the largest twenty-four thousand and this one almost twenty thousand. These are incredible figures for us Europeans. They are no doubt large but not extraordinary in these regions of South America; the area where we were corresponded to an approximate rectangle of 10 Kms by 20 Kms. During the day we would visit a good part of it, all dedicated to cattle rearing. I was very ignorant of this world and had a lot to learn. At the two extremities of the estancia were located small villages where the various personal, peons and other workers, lived. In one of them we were invited to have a meal of a magnificent “asado”; charcoal-grilled meat. Being a good employer, Alberto wanted to chat with everyone, dealing with all their problems. I was amazed by the diversity of skills and the qualities of my friend Alberto; effective businessman, organizer, sportsman, farmer, pilot, head of the family, both sensible and authoritarian. He would be one of the few men that I really admired during my life.

We left the group of peons after having to drink a ritual cup of maté, a stimulating herbal tea that may be considered to be a drug if abused; unfortunately this was often the case in this huge country. This pretty well put in context the impression of melancholy and sadness that emerged from this endless plain. I would have the opportunity to experience this the following winter on a thirty-six hour journey, returning from a short stay in the Andes, crossing from west to east,. Back at our base, my two companions, probably very indulgent, told me that, for a beginner I had done very well, and acquitted myself honourably. True or not, my sore legs reminded me of this beautiful and noble ride for quite a few days.

In the evening after a delicious dinner at the manager’s home, whose wife was from Brittany (!), we went by car to visit the other village, at the other end of the estancia. The following day would be Sunday, so out came the guitars and accordions, we sang and danced, played and drank. Alberto and his manager sang and danced along with them. It was really a great time. It was both rough and poetic, a haunting and sad poetry of the pampas and its people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood. I tried to be part of it, and I succumbed to a cup of maté, which I drank slowly with deliberation, and then another but no more. I then fell in with the mood.

This was one of the best days of my long life, I tried to prolong the pleasure and before going to sleep, I quickly went over what I had experienced. The thousands of wonderful cattle, the huge pedigree bull whose belligerence convinced us to jump quickly out of his enclosure, the beautiful black mare that so kindly allowed me to join the party, the smells, colours, the endless plain so sad but so gripping, captivating. Thanks Alberto but also to all the peons with chiselled faces, gravelly voices and black eyes which I had felt fall upon me, the gringo; an inquisitive look but full of friendship.

During my next rest period in Paris, I would be part of a strange episode. In the two or three years following the surrender of Germany, several groups more or less eccentric, but nevertheless sufficiently determined to interest our intelligent service, attempted to forment plots to seize power in France. One of them was particularly vocal: the “Blue Plan”. It claimed to establish a constitutional monarchy in France. Wars always produce, after they have ceased, adventurers of all kinds. There was no doubt that in this Blue Plan there were some mediocre politicians, some more or less convinced royalists, but also a few military officers demobilized for the most part, but still full of the army and fighting life, for whom such a plot would be the opportunity to live out a new adventure.

It was thus that through my friend Michel Junguenet (with whom I would quickly sever any relationship because he became alcoholic, and began to go astray in a general way), I met a strange character to whom Michel had spoken about me as being someone quite able to participate meaningfully in the seditious action instigated by the Blue Plan team. In reality he had said a great deal more, without even telling me about it, and I practically fell down dead at the first words of my interlocutor who seemed to already be certain of my membership in the project of his nutty group. I

had in front of me a man of about forty years, slim, slender, thin aquiline face, clear and sharp voice, good looking in a dark grey civilian suit, with the discreet badge of the paras. He told me that indeed, he had been paratrooper Colonel, familiar with the Commandos of France and Commander Viotte, and he quoted some other names I knew, to put me at my ease. I tried to interrupt him to tell him that he was wasting his time, I didn't want to know anything about their organization and that I had absolutely no intention of joining, but to no avail. For a quarter of an hour he continued to tell me of the action already taken, plans that needed to be developed, and finally what was expected of me. Because of my work,

I was based at Orly, which was of major interest. I would be required to get detailed plans of the airport and its various facilities. As a former commando, I would join a group of soldiers, gendarmes and police presided over by a superior officer to whom I would report and be second in command. On the day, and at the time specified, we would take control of the entire airport. It was as simple as that! In addition he tried to give me confidence by saying that he would recruit to "our cause" other influential people: d'Astier de la Vigerie, my friends from commando school, Air France navigators, and others; and why not, let's see! I didn't know if I should laugh or get angry at this silly business. But I was also not at all pleased that they had revealed to me so much of their stupid and delusional project; you never know. I gave him no hope of my participation. He would not listen, and as we left asked me to think about it again but not delay, trying to convince me by assuring me that the Blue Plan had been endorsed by the Count of Paris. This incredible case brought together quite a large membership before it was halted by the security services. There were several arrests; my infamous colonel, not wanting to lose face, and probably a little light headed committed suicide.

BARILOCHE

We were in 1947, wintertime in Argentina. We had had a particularly tiring trip with turbulence and incessant thunderstorms all the way from Recife to Buenos Aires. Two passengers panicked and communicated their panic to all the other passengers. All our attempts to calm them down were ineffective, my stewards and I were obliged to threaten to knock them out with our "teaspoon". This was a solid wooden stick, a good metre long, enabling us, when closing it, to catch hold of the heavy folded open cabin door. It was so named because the stewards sometimes used it to mix water and Nescafé in the large thermos provided for this purpose.

We brandished our club, certainly with the firm intention to carrying out our threat if necessary, but also with some funny facial expressions and gestures to try to relax the electric atmosphere that had been established in the cabin. The two troublemakers felt pretty ridiculous and, with help from their friends, calmed down and ceased their antics.

I should say that during my five thousand five hundred hours of flying I had never experienced so much bad weather that lasted for so long. The cabin was littered with all kinds of objects that the buffeting of the 'plane had thrown in all directions. By the time we got to Buenos Aires we were completely exhausted and after a good shower we hastened to get into bed.

For me the night would be short. At the hotel was a message from Alberto inviting me to go for three or four days to San Carlos de Bariloche. A driver would collect me the next day at six o'clock in the morning to take me to Moron airport. On this morning there was a genuine pea souper enveloping the city and airfield. I was certain that the flight would be delayed or cancelled; no aircraft could take off in this almost total lack of visibility; but our pilot had other ideas, a rotund and stocky German on whose face I saw the look of a warrior, and he made sure everyone got on board. I imagined him in action with the Luftwaffe, he had, in fact, been a member of that organisation not so long ago. A Jeep preceded our DC3 when it taxied to the end of field in this incredibly dense fog. This secondary

aerodrome did not have a runway, simply a large grassed area; the pilot positioning the 'plane as he saw fit facing the wind. In this fog, wind speed was obviously zero so he had to fully open the throttle in this complete white-out. Very odd the feeling that one experiences during those fifteen or twenty seconds before take-off: it is not fear, simply a matter of attentive listening, ears alert to hear the slightest drop in engine speed. If there was a problem at take-off, it was a near certainty that we would end up flattened. We were unable to relax. The fog layer was not thick and we emerged into a beautiful blue sky at an altitude of just one hundred metres. The atmosphere warmed, faces lit up, everyone started to talk and joke. We were right in not applauding the pilot who had just committed an unforgivable error that should have merited his immediate dismissal, at least as far as this flight was concerned. In any airline worthy of the name it should not have happened; in commercial aviation there are sacrosanct principles that one cannot transgress. Personally I had never known, during my five years of flying, of another similar situation, and when I spoke about it to other pilots they could hardly believe it. Sometime later I learnt through an acquaintance who worked for Aerolineas Argentinas that many of their pilots had been dismissed for various safety violations. It was too late, because rumours had spread, and the company, as already reported, was to experience a long period of decline, to the benefit of Air France.

It was a monotonous five hour flight to the southwest, with a stop in Bahia Blanca; there was nothing to see, who knew how to decipher this sad, and infinite pampas? Then looming on the horizon rose the majestic landscape of the Andes, and very soon we were flying over this same snow covered landscape. Our Nazi pilot had no problem landing our DC3, on a runway covered in a little snow. It was very pleasant but very cold. Alberto came to greet me and took me for a quick visit of the area by car before taking us to the family home. The landscape was very beautiful, which justified the name "Colonia Suiza" (Swiss Colony) given to this region, that did indeed look like some beautiful corners of our Alps. San Carlos de Bariloche (more simply known as Bariloche) was, at the time, a village which had a bit of the Wild West combined with the Savoie region of France. A strange mix, surprising and exotic, but very successful; winter sports, as far as we could see, was not very popular or advanced. First of all there were no ski lifts and certainly no draglifts. One could only manage four or five descents daily, something which we managed, we deserved them after taking one or two hours climbing as high as we could, using seal skins over our footwear. It was good exercise.

We were in the southern Andes, much less high than at its centre, nearer to the altitude of our Alps or the Pyrenees. The highest peak, Mount Tronador, was three thousand seven hundred meters. The significant difference lay on its wild side, both apparent and real. I would only be there briefly.

Near Bariloche, was Lake Nahuel-Wapi, surrounded by pine trees, from which one had a beautiful view of Mount Tronador. The large, beautiful chalet which belonged to the de Ridders overlooked the lake which reflected the majestic silhouette of Tronador. On the other side of the lake, one could see, isolated in the natural surroundings, a beautiful and impressive home where I'd dearly like to spend my holidays. Having followed my gaze, Alberto told me that the owner was a wealthy and influential Frenchwoman. She lived there with a former Austrian ski champion who was the principal advisor on the development and facilities of the fledgling ski resort of Bariloche. It may have been a silly question on my part, but yes, this Tyrolean champion was Hans Nöbl, the former fiancé of my cousin Monette. Alberto knew him well and arranged for us to meet.

For the time being I took possession of my room overlooking the lake and Mount Tronador. Alberto had really spoiled me, it was magical. He then gave me the choice from among all the clothes of the various members of the family which filled the hanging rails and wardrobes. So I equipped myself from top to toe with pullovers, shoes, shirts of high quality, and in particular a brand-new Nikker which gave me much pleasure, but it would be the cause of the only brush that I would ever have with Alberto.

We had a quick breakfast in the village before starting our first climb. It was the first time that I had used sealskins. I had to adapt to them and I handled it pretty much as well as Alberto and three or four of his other friends. After a good hour of effort, we tackled the downhill which taught me to be humble and get back to reality. My skiing experience had been fairly rudimentary, I had not had the opportunity to practice, and at first I just endeavoured not to fall, and then not to throw myself about too much. We then went on a second slightly longer climb, and from this point matters took a turn for the better, I felt less ridiculous. Put quite simply, the sun began to set and with the sudden cold, the snow became ice and required more concentration and effort, I should have remembered.

The next day, still very cold but in beautiful weather we would do five ascents, skiing down, and I felt better and better. Not bad technique, but by taking some risks I kept in contact with the others.

In the tearoom of the only hotel, I met Hans Nöbl, a meeting arranged by Alberto because of my wish to see him again. We hugged, and from the outset he felt obliged to apologize for breaking up (perhaps a bit cowardly, truth be told) with Monette. I immediately put him at his ease and confirmed that he had done nothing apart from saving his own skin, but I regretted having lost a cousin such as him. All three of us had a drink. I saw again in Hans a naturally attractive personality emanating from his good looks, his kindness, his manner of speaking, and his attention towards others. I noticed, when he walked, that the injury he sustained in 1937 had left its mark; he limped slightly. Alberto and he seemed to get on well, they were roughly the same age of thirty-five years approximately; they were two dynamic, enterprising, fine and cultivated men. The difference in Alberto, is that in him was an authoritarian streak, somewhat hidden behind his perfect courtesy, but it was used well, and was also necessary to conduct his businesses. I understood that the very charming Hans, although perfectly effective in his work, was also very dependent on his rich and beautiful French companion who was reputed to be highly strung. Sort of sad, don't you think?

I shall end with Bariloche with the final descent late in the afternoon, the evening before my departure for Buenos Aires; we climbed higher than usual, for nearly three hours. The scenery was beautiful, and the anticipation of the long descent towards the valley excited us. The sun began to set in the west behind the mountains of the Andes, and in a few minutes the cold became intense while the snow hardened to ice, lessening the friction hence increasing our speed. I was tail-end-Charlie, but did not intend to be influenced by these crazy people who seemed to take too many risks. Those in front of me must have been aware of their own ability, it was clear to me that they were breaking the ice ridges at about 24kms/hrs and my friends were not aware of my abrupt halt. I must have been dazed. Before reverting to royal blue, the sky seemed to be misted up. The snow took on its immaculate white hue again but spoiled by a red stain that seemed to be my blood. Actually the tip of one of my ski-sticks had made a long, deep gash in my right thigh. Of course, there was the same long tear in the fabric of my beautiful Knikker; Alberto would no doubt gripe about it, my precious blood had also caused a significant mark. Well, I bit of luck, nothing broken, I had got out of it not too badly, but I wanted to stay on this beautiful white carpet for a while to give me time to recover. What was this? More blood on my face and on the precious sweater. Oh! there, there, Alberto!

There were two large birds circling majestically a hundred metres above me, magnificent, but what were they doing? They were two condors of impressive size: as fast as my sore body allowed, I stood up on my skis, with a great desire of shouting at them: "well fellows, you see, I'm alive and fit! Go to hell". In Mendoza, we had had a talk from a specialist in Andean wildlife, and of condors in particular; had he not told us how these large raptors could deal with injured animals, even quite large ones, starting by pecking their eyes out? They quickly got my meaning and flew forlornly away. My eyes, which I had surely saved, confirmed to me that I was isolated in this beautiful wilderness, but the setting of the sun made it suddenly more hostile. My leg was bleeding and hurt, I had no desire to hang around. I noticed on my right at the same height as me, about two hundred meters away, a wooden hut

from which wood smoke rose limply in a welcoming manner. I decided to investigate and was greeted by four soldiers corresponding to the "Alpini" at home; nice, well trained and efficient people. In a few minutes my face was cleaned up, my thigh had a solid dressing applied to it and one of them had even roughly sewn up the tear in my Knikker. I got mixed up with my "muchas gracias, amigos" which earned me a hot cup of maté. Being assured of my ability, two of them came with me on the way back, the way was not obvious because night had fallen and it was dark. Halfway back we met the team that was coming up to search for me. I made my friendly goodbyes to the two soldiers. "Adios, amigos". In the darkness Alberto was unable to realize the injuries I had received, he could only discern the damage caused to the Knikker and sweater, which I could understand, but I rather resented it, at least initially; afterwards he politely apologised and I would repay him and equalise our account by bringing some gifts of perfume and other things on my next trip from France.

My return to Buenos Aires would be by train just like a train out of a western film. Alberto had reserved a first class couchette for me and he was quite right to suggest that this long crossing of the pampas was an experience not to be missed. I must confess that this journey of one thousand eight hundred kilometres in thirty-six hours left an indelible memory on me. First of all by the faces, mostly Indian, apparently impervious, motionless and expressionless, however the half-closed eyes were alive to everything about them. And then the monotonous landscape which risked putting one to sleep, which seemed to have no wish to please you, remaining mysterious and misunderstood for those who did not wish to know or didn't want to see, to read, understand, or deserve its hidden depths. Because one should not just look with one's eyes but also with heart and mind, seeing it thus, one can get a privileged link to the natural world. This is how we should see colours, small but discernable dips in the environment, the variety of birds changing the further we get from mountain and ocean, changing grassland vegetation, etc. And then the stations! No, not stations, they were non-existent, with the exception of two or three. No, they were stops in the middle of the pampa, deserted places. No city, village, building or dwelling. A hoarding with several place names, those of the villages served by this stop. More often than not we didn't even see them; they were often located at a significant distance from this "locus". Sometimes there was a simple wooden hut or brick shed; riders who had brought a passenger, or had come to pick someone up, to drop off or pick up some goods. Rarely one or two cars, military 4x4s would be waiting. Shouts, galloping horses, it was the same as a western without the revolvers and Sheriff. These pampa-stops without any proper station were alone worth the trip.

I am sorry if I have been unable to convince you.

Back in France it was the middle of summer and very hot. In 1947 there was still food rationing, in particular as regards milk. We were provided with ration stamps for Sim who was pregnant and expecting Olivier in late October. Even coming out of the store, she could not wait, and drank it in big gulps on the pavement. I should have been ashamed to accept just a few sips, but I was not.

At the end of August I could not resist the pleasure of going to the Roland Garros stadium to see the final of a major tournament that pitted my friend Yvon Petra against a young Hungarian by the name of Asboth. Roland Garros stadium at this time had some bare cement terraces, without any seats or numbered places. One could move about at will, wherever one wanted to. We were late and ran down the steep concrete steps to reach the places that we wanted. This was important because Sim's swollen tummy limited her downward viewing angle. Stupidly I rushed rather than help her, and she had a terrible fall on the cement staircase. Fortunately she was more alarmed than harmed but still, she had a few scratches. However the spectators, anxious about the dangerous fall of this pretty pregnant woman, moved around noisily. The play on court was disturbed, and Petra, who was losing, recognised and acknowledged our presence by shouting loudly "Ah Jacky", which earned us some funny looks, generally sympathetic. Yvon would lose his match and jokingly held me responsible; Asboth from that point on began a very successful career.

I slowly got used to being a husband to a wonderful person, in looks as well as in heart and mind. I seriously wondered about the miracle by which I had been able to convince her to share my life, for better or for worse. My provincial selfishness, boorish behaviour and having been out of countenance by the war had gradually dissipated and I became civilized and fully aware of the condition of a man in love. I would learn the essential imperative of keeping to this state of affairs for the long term, not to let it fade through time, but to keep a gentle progression to arrive at an absolute certainty. One should not give too much importance to death, it is important not to be obsessed, not to shut one's eyes to it, but to tame it in a wise and friendly way. There is a story in this.

During my next stay in Buenos Aires, I was invited to lunch by Madame de Riddler in the large family home. The family were getting together on the occasion of the baptism of the first baby of the youngest daughter, Beba, of this large clan. I found the formality a little overbearing, but it seemed that this is the way that things were done here. Two waiters on each side of the large table, rushing to do every minor little thing, I really didn't like it much. Conversation began to flow quite freely. The youngest son, my tennis partner, wanted to me to relate my impressions of Bariloche and how I had got on; it had been his Knikker I had ruined. Tactful Alberto interrupted him and asked about his studies which had not been too good it seemed and an embarrassed silence ensued; thanks Alberto. I then announced the coming birth of our baby at the end of the month; lots of congratulations interrupted by the shrill voice of Beba: "but you were married only last April". I interrupted in my turn by stating in an authoritative and learned tone that in France pregnancies only lasted six months. Immediately Madame de Ridder added: "didn't you know that, Beba?". "I should have married a Frenchman" replied Beba, with a look of one convinced. Madame de Ridder would be Olivier's godmother.

Between flights to South America, I occasionally did a flight to some of the countries in Africa.

I found myself in Lagos, the huge and bustling capital of Nigeria, at the time it was an English colony. We eventually found the small bus which took the crew from the airport to the hotel; it did not travel any faster than the pedestrians in the dense, motley crowd. Close to our mini-bus, on my side, was a large Hausa leading behind him at the end of a long lead, a tall ostrich, at least two meters fifty. Those around him were surprised and showed a lot of interest. I had never walked along next to such an animal, and was not going to lose this opportunity to exam it in detail. I was forced to look upward to see above me perched at the end of its long neck, a little head, not much larger nor looking any more intelligent, than a knob on a walking stick. I could clearly see, in its small black eye, a spark of unfriendly interest toward me. My companions were having quite a lot of fun at my expense. Our driver thought it as well to explain that our ostrich had probably mistaken my bald pate for an egg of a one of its companions. It was then that I remembered having heard that a blow from this bird's beak could be very dangerous and even crack a skull. I quickly covered my head with my cap, and from that moment my beautiful ostrich took no more interest in me.

In March 1948, I made one of the first Air France flights to Mauritius. I didn't have the cheek or audacity to organize myself to try to make contact with any de Chazals, my maternal family. In either Madagascar or Mauritius I could have made contact with the family which could have perhaps completely altered my life. I've always regretted not doing so.

On board we had a Madame de Chazal. She was an elderly person accompanied by her daughter-in-law also named de Chazal. I didn't know if we were related, neither did I take the trouble to try to establish our kinship, which would have been easy, because she seemed to have known my mother Suzanne, quite well. At the airport in Mauritius she introduced me to her son, a doctor or lawyer I think, telling him, very excitedly: "This is Suzanne's son". But the lady's son did not seem concerned about me, or seemed to have any interest in our relationship be it close or distant, and he quickly took his mother away. She seemed to be upset about it and really, I was too.

Also on our plane was a renowned writer: Georges Duhamel, accompanied by his wife. We chatted a bit, and he told me that they were travelling to Mauritius as tourists but it was also, and above all, to meet a character from my family who fascinated him, with whom he had been in correspondence for some time. This was the first time I had heard of Malcolm de Chazal, whom my passenger certainly held in high esteem. I subconsciously felt some pride. Georges Duhamel then took from his hand luggage a pretty wooden box made from rare woods which enclosed a set of instruments: altimeter, barometer, compass and thermometer. He was like a kid in a toyshop, and took much pleasure in showing it all to me. They were indeed very beautiful instruments. He also took from his bag a small, new, book only recently released by its publisher: "Deux Amis" which he very kindly offered me after having written in it: "A guardian angel of travellers" and then signing it. Madame Duhamel told me quite sincerely that I had made a considerable contribution to their comfort, soothing her husband's impatience, who hated long trips requiring him to remain seated for a long period. I got on well with "this elderly couple of about sixty-five years old".

The night arrival in Mauritius was in dreadful weather, seasonal we were told. It didn't matter as we would be off again tomorrow morning, if the deluge didn't oblige us to remain stranded at the (Continental?) hotel in Curepipe. While having a drink in the central hall which was also the bar, I heard a call for "Monsieur de Chazal" on the phone. I looked at the tall fellow who stood up and when he returned, decided to introduce myself. It was Malcolm. We chatted for a few moments. He seemed to know our genealogy well enough, and knew where I fitted in, through Suzanne my mother, concluding that our relationship was quite distant. I was descended from Edmond, whereas he was from the Furcy branch. On the other hand, despite the eighteen years that separated us, we were both of the same tenth generation. I told him of my trip with Georges Duhamel and the admiration he had for him.. My (forty six years) old cousin was very pleased and told me that, in one of his letters, Duhamel has said of him "that he was a great genius". I was a little surprised by this direct admission, a little naive and vain, but at the same time this simple approach touched me and made me think that after all Duhamel had every right to make a judgement on the value of a writer, and my distant cousin Malcolm might indeed be a genius.

Since then, with the discovery of his works, I am certain of his genius, although reading them can be quite arduous for some; of whom I am one. Sim however, whose literary culture is certainly far more philosophical than mine enjoyed what most readers consider difficult, nebulous writing.

Before leaving the subject of Argentina, I must say a few words about three interesting characters, each in its own way, that were part of my life there.

Melley Wersma was a pianist and composer of Hungarian extraction, 40 years old, and owner-performer, with his associate Jean Tavera, of a major "musical" show put on by the very popular Buenos-Aries company: "la Coupole". He was a cultured, gentle, courteous man, and a wonderful poet. Several of his songs had had been appreciated worldwide. The older ones of my generation will remember: "Second hand serenade". He did not live for material things, but possessed with his charming wife, a (reciprocated) devotion for life, a small apartment very nicely laid out where we spent some very pleasant evenings together, more through conversation and music than Madame Wersma's culinary efforts which had more originality than flavour. Of course, after dinner, Melley sat at his beautiful mini-grand piano, a good make, which he called his "Mistress", and gave us an enchanting recital encompassing the best classics to modern jazz through a variety of intermediate styles. My thanks are due to Melley Wersma for making me appreciate the talent of a great artist as well as enjoying the friendship of a man of quality.

Jean Tavera, Melley's partner was very different, but also very endearing; he was handsome with a Romanesque face and a beautiful baritone voice which stole the hearts of many of the fairer sex.

But he was also a solitary individualist so his rare amorous adventures were short-lived. Like many Corsican artists, he took the name of his native village, notably our friend César Vezzani. We were particularly impressed with his tennis which he played at a very good standard but often allowed himself to be beaten. One day he set a trap for me by asking me to play with an “old man” of fifty years old, or thereabouts, who was a better player. It was soon verified when I met Mr. Robson, he was one of Argentina’s best players, in the Davis Cup team in particular. Despite the age of this veteran he taught me a great lesson and I was really humiliated on court. Robson had unfortunately a second passion, after six o’clock he would hit the bottle; I was saddened at the bar after the game, to see how this man, an artist around the tennis court, could become a drinker, determined to destroy himself.

During a stay in Corsica, four or five years ago, I made some enquiries about Jean Tavera. He had died two years earlier in his village, as he had told me he had wanted to.

Madam Rodier was an elderly lady of some seventy years. She was an excellent seamstress, the best, it was said, because she had several clients from the great families of the city, and in particular, relatives of the dictator Perón. She called us 'her children' and we often met at her home for lunch. A very simple meal, we were usually given “lomo biffe” (sirloin steak) and cooked ourselves “vuelta y vuelta” (i.e. blue). Our friend seemed to know all Argentine society, and liked to talk about them, so much so it was difficult to get away. In her French she would often insert some Castilian words (in Argentina they do not speak pure Spanish, but Castilian Spanish). If she was looking for her “cartera”, it meant her handbag. She lived happily, slowing down a bit, in her “departamento”, her apartment.

I would have liked to continue my memories of South America, of Argentina in particular, but it is now time to tell of the Far East. I was assigned to this route for two and a half years as well, and it was just as interesting.

Itinerary: Paris - Rome (or Athens) - Tripoli (or Cairo) - Karachi - Calcutta - Saigon. Sometimes we continued on to Hanoi.

Depending on the route, the distance varied from twelve thousand to thirteen thousand kilometres, that is to say 42 to 45 hours flight time. Depending on the season we changed crew in Cairo or Tripoli, then an overnight stopover was allowed for in Karachi (capital of West Pakistan⁶⁰) or in Calcutta. All this depended on the “monsoon” and the very heavy rain that fell during that time.

In Cairo I could obviously visit the site of the pyramids, imposing and impressive by its multi-thousand year old history. I spent a couple of days in Alexandria, certainly the most beautiful city in Egypt. Many spoke our language and liked France. In Cairo I met up again with my friend Henning who, in Casablanca had belonged to our gang of four that we had formed with Michel Junguenet and Dimitris X... He lived with his mother in a small villa on the outskirts of the city. We had a very cordial and friendly reunion around a well-set table that his old mother had taken pains to make as pleasant as possible. Oddly, sometime later, his behaviour gradually brought me to understand that he wished to cool our relationship. It became apparent that, although he was still teaching, he had a parallel activity in intelligence which didn't fit easily into a friendship with a member of Air France flying crew such as I. I was saddened, but eventually came to understand his attitude, realizing that airline crew and their agents abroad were often contacted by the 'services' of their country to become “honourable correspondents”. My friend Henning maybe had his suspicions. He was wrong, at least on this occasion. We will come back to this.

Tripoli (from Tripolitania) was a great stopover for us. The former Italian colony was not yet part of independent Libya; the country was at that time under British control. The Italian influence was still real and the kitchen of our small Neapolitan restaurant was the best in the whole city,

Obviously we visited the ancient Roman cities of Sabratha and Leptis Magna, on the coast, with their imposing ruins, unfortunately over time; they were inundated by the sea.

Calcutta was a huge city, sad and dirty. The faces of the people were sad and firm, impressive. Every morning, the highways services picked up some dead bodies, even in the city centre, sometimes even under the arches not far from our hotel. The awesome “great market” where, it was said, it was possible to find anything you could wish for; two or three acres where all sorts of goods and produce were displayed for sale.

But we now come to a wonderful area, at the time still a French colony: Indochina, comprised of Cochinchina (Saigon), Laos (Vientnam), Cambodia (Phnom Penh), (Hué) Annam and Tonkin (Hanoï).

If South America represented an important change of scenery for us as Europeans, then here we seemed to arrive on another planet, and for me in any case, it was an enchantment. Everything was a discovery: landscapes, vegetation, the city, its streets, its crowds, the yellow faces with slanted eyes, the different and tasty cuisine, smells, colours, the market with its vegetables, the fruit, the activity, rickshaws (on foot or by bike), air, sky, light, then suddenly, away from the busy streets, randomly spread, the heady smell of opium sizzling above the small flame of a lamp, by the magical gesture of the pipe-boy religiously focused on his task as a priest at the elevation of the host.

We were staying at the Continental hotel, near the theatre in Catina Street, the “Champs Elysées” of Saigon. It was a fairly old relatively comfortable hotel, but the only “palace” in the city. Franchini, the owner, a Corsican with other activities of a very doubtful nature, was a good friend of the crews, always ready to do us any service. Well yes, that’s how it was. He also maintained very friendly relations with most of the local senior officials as well as personalities from the private sector. Franchini was, when all is said and done, a force within Indochina, a species of unofficial Vice-Governor, especially influential in the financial field. The country was destabilized by the conflict which started in 1946, when our army became involved, until their defeat which took place in 1954 after the disaster at Dien-Bien-Phu. This resulted in a very large disparity between the official rate of the dollar, the currency of the country (fixed to the French franc) and the unofficial rate which was at least 50% more. This difference between the two rates made for a highly successful black market that would last several years, which would involve many people and personalities at all levels of society, and even the daughter of a Governor. This would cause a huge scandal. Personally I was surprised to discover the number of my friends and acquaintances who took ample advantage of this black market - but this is another story - which would be very detrimental to the French economy.

In Saigon, strolling around, every corner was a revelation. It was a city full of gardens with rich and varied vegetation. The avenues and streets were lined with beautiful mango, flamboyant, banyan trees, cheese trees and jacarandas.

No large dominant buildings or bad modern architecture. The whole aspect created a sense of pleasant harmony for both eye and spirit; a great achievement to the credit of the “awful” colonizers. Success was also in multi-culturalism, here it was embraced, something which was not obvious elsewhere in the colonial empire, anyway very unevenly practiced across regions. Many expatriates would catch the Indochina “bug”, also among the military that went there to fight, many of them, despite their suffering, would be unable to resist it. One of our many pleasures lay at the level of the taste buds and the nostrils. The smell breathed in when passing in front of the restaurants, even the simplest, meant much more than reading an excellent menu. The subtlety of the cuisine is certainly a significant component of the quality of a civilization, its aesthetics. It was there, really, that lay one of the essential charms of this wonderful country. Moreover the food, so attractive to look at, served with

flavour and spicy smells, was not aggressive to our stomachs, which happily digested it when the produce was of so fresh. It often happened, because of the time lag, that at about four or five o'clock in the morning, we got very hungry. As early as six o'clock we were down at the opening of the market to eat from one of the small wooden stalls from which came the good smell of Chinese soup served in a white earthenware bowl decorated in blue or orange. The native workers who were also enjoying their morning soup before attacking the day looked on, and we exchange a smile and a few words not always well understood, but with people appreciating their meal.

Two hours later we would have no difficulty in eating breakfast at our hotel.

Two or three kilometres from Saigon, arriving in Cholon, one had the impression of entering China. It was in a way only the outskirts, but here everything was Chinese: the people, shops, language, colours, cuisine and buildings. It was also the trading and money exchange area. In all the countries of Asia everyone gambled. Cholon was a gambling centre and many buildings were dedicated to it. This ranged from the disreputable gambling den to a reputable casino where one could play for very large stakes. We were recommended to go to "The Rainbow". It was a beautiful building set on six modern floors, very brightly lit, where, obviously, there was a lot of activity.

A large Chinaman, with a gorilla like smile, dressed in a loose-fitting traditional bright robe, opened the door of our taxi with a surprisingly soft and feline bow for this huge framed man. At the entrance we were given a chitty which was nothing more than for our return fare in a good taxi to take us back to Saigon. This was the custom, in the case that a punter should have bad luck, and be completely destitute; nice thought don't you think? We were escorted in an elevator to the fourth floor; the first two floors were reserved for relatively small players of the lower classes, but gamblers nevertheless, as in all levels of society.

The third floor was reserved for employees, managers, traders, people with average incomes. So we were on the fourth floor which had been delegated to the pleasure of the pale faced foreigners; we were among other Europeans as well as reputable indigenous people, a sort of pseudo-bourgeois mixture among whom we were put by those who had summed us up at the entrance.

The fifth floor was not for us. The stakes were high and very large sums were won and lost there. Yellow or white, the difference was only illusionary; money has no colour. On the sixth floor were the offices and some wonderful apartments.

The French friend who had brought us here introduced us to "Thai Savy", the most popular game here. It looked a bit like our roulette, embellished with an aesthetic design which was special by its designs and colours accompanied by gestures, and melodious voices. Indeed pretty and very young women replaced the croupiers seen in our casinos. They used deft, graceful, practiced movements. They had kind, smiling faces and very high, often too acute voices that caught everyone's attention as they sang their equivalent of "les jeux sont faits, rien ne va plus" in their own guttural language, in a drawn out and contrasting melody,

Men with smiles frozen on their hard faces oversaw and controlled everything; friendly Triad members perhaps? A particularly shrill voice was heard coming from a young and lovely croupier; some of the Chinese laughingly exchanged understanding glances. Our friend explained that a shrill voice meant virginity; not a very scientific diagnosis was it? What will they think of next?

Our first experience at the Rainbow should have shown us a world of gaming quite different from western games; but the originality, aesthetics, colour and the general atmosphere, despite their diverse nature, led ultimately to the same two "values" that reign everywhere: money and venality.

We returned to Saigon after a pleasant and interesting experience. For getting around in the city, other than walking, we called like everyone else, for a rickshaw or the cycle-rickshaw. The first consisted of a two-seater bench mounted on a two-wheeled handcart pulled by a boy set between two shafts. Personally I always hated this system and tried to avoid it. To see this thin boy running just in front of me with muscles bulging, making a big effort as if desperate and dripping sweat, was a curse to my eyes and nostrils, I felt disgusted and revolted. The tradition of rickshaw-boys requires them to run virtually non-stop, just a shortening of stride on the steep areas. I had sometimes seen two big passengers insult their rickshaw-boy, who was four times lighter, and twice as old, as they were, to try to get him to go faster. Expressing my anger had no effect. My sixty-five kilograms seemed too heavy, and I never wanted to ride in a rickshaw, I wouldn't have forgiven myself.

A co-pilot, who had fought in the R.A.F. and knew of my commando pedigree, tried to tell me that I had, what he termed, an excess of sensitivity. I didn't answer realizing that only three or four years earlier it was without hesitation and with the wish to kill that I could shoot a man, whereas here my little heart was bleeding for this native running between the shafts. Be sensible, don't get it all mixed up. I am sure you understand

Much less philosophical and sometimes even fun was our relationship with the cycle-rickshaw. Fun when we swapped places with the boy, the boy sitting on the passenger seat and we pedalled. We were not the only ones laughing out loud at this change, until police officers simply indicated that we should resume our places without actually saying anything.

Now, I must confess to a certain pleasure that I indulged in once or twice a month, as with meditation, during each of my visits. What are you thinking of? No, it simply relates to opium. Simply, well maybe, the way I took it. It was like a connoisseur tasting a high quality scotch from time to time, but this was not alcoholic. I was not an opium addict, far from it. I was fascinated by the ritual, the smell, the atmosphere, and there I stopped. I didn't particularly appreciate the taste of the smoke, which I didn't inhale thereby avoiding almost all the bad effects. Franchini, our billionaire hotelier, advised me well and warned against making the mistake of venturing into any opium den with the risk of being given an inferior product which could be much more toxic and addictive, in an unhygienic, dirty environment, and doubtful reputation.

Among some twenty opium dens in Saigon I chose the best, according to all the information I could obtain, both in terms of the professionalism of the staff as by the quality of equipment and the purity of the product.

The extraordinary time, lasting perhaps one or two hours, spent in this wonderful setting was on its own relaxing and energy giving, at least for me, an occasional smoker of not very much, unlike some who came out of there in a comatose state.

Entering the den one is assailed by the smell of opium, comparable to no other except perhaps the smoke of incense and spice mix. This first contact unfailingly draws one in.

In the entrance hall, decorated with lacquered panels representing characters or the countryside, there was some beautiful furniture of red and yellow, traditional colours of China and this region of Asia. Arranged in a nearby room were four or five booths hidden by screens. One settled down in one of them, lying on a rice-straw mat spread on a raised bed made of precious wood and to put one's head on an ergonomic pillow in white porcelain. It seemed odd the first time but one soon got used to it. A man of about forty years old with the face of an ascetic, dressed in black trousers and jacket, greeted me ceremoniously by bowing low. He would be my pipe-boy, a "priest" of opium, who had probably had twenty years' experience. Quickly and discreetly he ascertained that he had found a disciple, in this

case a student, to initiate. Smoking in this place had been elevated to an art, or at the very least, a technique. I was immediately taken in by it.

He brought in well-designed opium-chest made of ebony or ironwood and presented me with a magnificent pipe, the look alone of which filled one with anticipation, like the opium-chest it was made of some black wood. At the end of the pipe was a small metal bowl in which there was burning charcoal, this was closed with a lid pierced in its centre with a small hole on which is put an opium ball expertly prepared by “the minister”

My pipe-boy asked how many pipes he should prepare. On his advice, as I was only a novice, I would have just three or four.

As a result, he poured some opium powder into a small cup and kneaded it using a thin metal rod with a drop of special oil, to make it into a blackish paste ready to be smoked. He then lit the wick of a small oil lamp and with a quick and deft movement lifted, at the end of his wand, a little of the paste, rolling it around to make a ball no bigger than a chickpea. He then pushed the needle through the small hole in the pipe and retracted it quickly leaving the opium ball on the hole in the pipe. This would be the moment of truth, the magical moment when the two participants must work together. One, the pipe-boy, held the ball of opium a little distance from the small flame, so that it would burn slowly, but without “blocking”, due to the intake of the smoker. The other, the smoker, pulling in long regular intakes of breath positioned the pipe close so that the opium burnt in the best possible way. There is in that brief moment, only twenty to thirty seconds long when something almost mystical takes place, in any case surely aesthetic, both relaxing and a tension, dreaming with physical and spiritual awareness.

The rising smoke of the opium paste, a sizzling sound of a cicada in conjunction with the powerful and refined smell of super-incense, was a wonderful feeling, a nice paradox.

I inhaled deeply, four times, rather awkwardly judging by the odd smiling face of my “minister”. After a break of a few minutes he prepared another pipe which I tried to enjoy as if I was an old regular. Similarly for those which would follow.

This first encounter with opium had been like a mixture of Mozart, Vigny, Veronese or a mountain landscape, a pleasure achieved through serenity, calm and vitality. I was far from the dilapidated state of the addicted smokers, some of whom could consume more than fifty or seventy pipes a day. Incredible but true. Many smokers did this only at home; they had done it so often and knew how to go about it without any assistance. These were either those dependent on the drug, or people of any social class, who smoked two or three pipes after their meal, as they would take a coffee or a glass of cognac.

I made a second visit to Angkor. Of the first I kept a very special memory. We were flying and it would be three hours before we arrived in Saigon, it was fine and we were flying at low altitude. We approached Angkor and a feverish curiosity manifested among the passengers who were hoping to see the site. I went to tell Commander Delaunay, a wise old man (forty seven or forty-eight years old) of Dabry’s generation, who was prudent and would not take any risks. To my surprise he told me to warn everyone to prepare their cameras. I should have been wary of his smile, and should have remembered that the “old man” had been a fighter pilot. He was going to prove it to us. We did some daisy cutting; we visited Angkor with Delaunay as our guide, taking us ever closer, circling sharply and heeling over, wingtips seeming to touch the tops of trees, really at the limit. Everyone squeezed their bum cheeks hard but nevertheless took this unique opportunity to take pictures. Later they would again go through it all with their families telling them of this exciting flight, having no need to exaggerate. I don't think that a DC4, a big four-engined long-haul aircraft, had ever been put through such an aerobatic display.

Be wary also of sleepy, immobile eighty year olds, they can have amazing youthful moments. Moreover, twenty years ago, Delaunay had his hands horribly burned landing a plane which was on fire. One wondered how, with his two stumps, he could still fly. It was a wonderful come-back.

I had made friends with one of my Vietnamese passengers named Phuong Tan, (they were then all labelled Indo-Chinese) he was a native of Annam or one of the other four regions. He had quickly made a fortune in re-victualling the French army, which earned him death threats from the Vietminh. He therefore lived in Perreux, in a large villa of which he was very proud. He and his wife knew the pleasure we took in the cuisine of their country and sometimes invited Simone and me to lunch or dinner. It was always excellent and we made the most of it. If it were a dinner, they loved to prolong the evening in a room where the latest television model had been set up. TV's were still fairly rare in 1950.

I was a sort of messenger between Phuong Tan and his aged parents who remained in the large family house in Saigon. So, going back to my history of opium, Phuong Tan and his wife were somewhat stunted, their faces leathery, with many deep wrinkles, their bodies bent in a permanent curve. She had, in honour of her son's friend, used her prowess in the kitchen and the resulting smells came to meet me as I arrived. All the dishes tickled my palate, but I was somewhat saddened by having to sit alone in front of my host, while the old lady was busy around the table, always smiling serving us. I voiced a polite word which was silenced by a gesture and a brief response from her husband. It was the tradition followed by everyone and considered as normal. After the meal we both lounged on a thick brightly coloured carpet for tea. He then invited me to smoke some pipes, it was a normal continuation of this meal, but I didn't have my pipe-boy and very quickly appeared awkward. He kindly came to my rescue. This was a new experience that made me see how much opium was part of this civilization.

The arrangements that Phuong Tan had with France was short-lived. One evening, they invited their nephew, who had been studying in Paris, to dinner, and he murdered his uncle and seriously injured his aunt in the TV room. The long arm of the Viet Minh had carried out its threat.

I liked Hanoi and Tonkin in different ways but just as much. Why should we compare Provence with Alsace? It was the same for these two beautiful parts of our old Indochina, one as beautiful as the other despite the difference in the people, the atmosphere, and even the climate. It was hot throughout the year in Saigon but in Hanoi one needed a winter coat. One was permanently noisy, the other almost silent, the craftwork more bright in one, but of better quality in the other. It's a bit like anywhere, the contrast between the North and the South, preferring blondes to brunettes; it was a matter of taste. Anyway it was Indochina as a whole which was so attractive; I have never met anyone who lived there who didn't catch "The Bug".

A quick word on Angkor, this unique world heritage site, of astonishing size, a huge aesthetic wonder where lies the old Khmer capital with its many temples in the middle of fantastic vegetation. Today everyone knows it more or less, or will have been there, or possibly knows it through numerous reports and documentaries. There is no doubt it should be classified as the eighth wonder of the world. It was at that time, a very rare privilege, not only to visit it as you would most other wonderful sites, but in being able to survey the whole site over many square kilometres, something I was able to experience in exceptional circumstances. We were the only three visitors, shown around by an old guide who loved his subject and spoke passionately in an academic French throughout the three hours spent with him, in the middle of this extraordinary blend of nature and architecture. We exhausted him with our amazement and questions about everything, including the two magnificent cobras playing among the roots of the giant trees.

Before you conclude this first part of my memories and to go on to our years in Africa – never mind if I go on a bit longer to bore my victim-readers - I can't resist the pleasure of relating one or two of the unique stories that have marked my flying career.

One of our pilots, Captain Reynaud had a hobby which he practiced constantly, at home, and as far as possible around the world, participating at the Congress of professionals of this 'art': conjuring. He was quite talented. As a result of an engine failure, Reynaud and his crew had to make a stop-over at Fort Archambault, today Sarh⁶¹. Accommodation was at the only hotel in this corner of the world, with the brothers Gérin; two true legends of sub-Saharan Africa, hunters, hunting-guides, traffickers, smugglers, generous, funny, brave adventurers in all things, as a side line they were hotel owners.

After dinner one evening, around a glass, we asked Reynaud to show us some of his tricks. He asked for two or three rolls of toilet paper to be brought which he began to unwind with some care. All the boys of the hotel approached to see the “magician” at his work, faces tense, attentive to all his gestures, prepared to be surprised. And it would be well justified. Indeed our magician, as he unrolled the toilet rolls he started to find banknotes of 5 francs, 10 francs and even 100 francs, slowly, carefully unwinding, seemingly surprising himself by his discoveries. We were all astonished, blown away, but the boys’ eyes rolled like marbles, fascinated by what they saw. It was a moment both funny and pathetic, where naivety and wonderment take on an almost poignant human sense that it would be wrong to mock. But we laughed heartily together, for different reasons probably, but laughed nevertheless. That is what mattered. There was a moral to this story. When Reynaud returned to Fort Archambault a month or two later, he learned that the brothers Gérin had had, for a few days, to use all their powers of persuasion to convince their boys to stop unwinding rolls of toilet paper in the hope of finding banknotes. They were sure in their minds that if the magician could find a fortune in a toilet roll then they should be able to do so as well.

The Gérin brothers had a lioness they had saved, her mother having been killed. As a very large cat, it was part of the household, taking however a few essential precautions. Sometimes after dinner, if the place was quiet (exceptionally!) and not many customers, it would be brought into the bar. She was happy to go from one to the other to be petted, thanking the odd one with a lick, a little too rasping for my liking, my uniform trousers suffered from it. Two or three members of the crew on a stopover (I was not there), as we often did after dinner, went out to take a stroll to get some fresh air along the beautiful avenue of mango trees lining the stony desert track which was the main road through town, when they saw the Gérin lioness which seemed to playing behind the mango trees. They told Gérin about this but he gaffawed, their lioness has never left its premises, and what they had seen was a real wild lioness. Our walkers were greatly relieved to have lived to tell the tale.

Another feline story. On a night flight to Karachi, at the time capital of West Pakistan, we had in the hold, separated a little from the luggage, two young panthers in appropriate bamboo cages. The morning before boarding we threw a glance in the cargo bay to see if everything was fine, and we realized that one of the Panthers could get out of its cage and prowl among the baggage. Commander Maurens, who liked me well enough - but on this occasion seemed not to care - assured me that with my sporting qualities it was my responsibility to solve the problem. “It is very small, it will be easy”. “No Commander, small but not that small, and what about my beautiful uniform”. In short, we laughed, he gave me a shove and I climb into the cargo bay. I was not concerned with the other one but through the bars of his cage with a stroke of his claw it ripped my shirt sleeve, just playing it seemed. Simone would have some sewing to do and would not be pleased. Well, it could have been my arm which was torn, a bit of luck I should say. I advanced courageously but cautiously, towards my goal, whose eyes shone between two pieces of luggage. I was very hopeful, she seemed calm. Calm before the storm; I moved my hand with the intention of grasping it behind the neck, quickly and firmly, I would catch it. But it gave me a horrible grin and started growling and spitting with considerable force, all the while pawing furiously in my direction. I made one or two attempts but did not succeed in

holding on to him. I was about to abandon the effort when the Commander, fearful of losing his purser, persuaded me to come down. We had to appeal for two Indians from the baggage handlers to volunteer. They manage to retrieve the “tiny” panther and lock him in his cage, but not without difficulty, one having been seriously scratched. We had stopped laughing, and Maurens kindly put his big paw on my shoulder.

So, I will end the story about the first three decades of my existence. I was in fact thirty years old when Air France put an end to the short career of on-board pursers. There were about twenty of us made redundant. Not too worrying for most of us as we had youth on our side, a small nest egg for sure (of whom I was one) and a carefree attitude resulting from the difficult years of war, which anyway was part of my makeup.

I however had responsibility for my little family and should hasten to get a job. But I had a total and pretentious trust in myself and did not doubt for a moment that I would find one easily when it became absolutely necessary

In the immediate future, having pretty much convinced Simone to agree to my fabulous idea, we decided to take a sabbatical. We had, over this long period, benefited amply from a disorganised life, sometimes accompanied by our son Olivier, or leaving him with my in-laws, so as to take advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves. Winter sports, sea and sun, Italy, Spain, four star hotels, renowned restaurants, such wonderful things that perhaps at the time we were not aware. The pinnacle was reached when we slept or woke up at around one in the morning, look at each other, and decide on the spot to fill a suitcase and hit the road for a destination which was decided almost like a lottery, sometimes even after getting into our wonderful 15 CV Citroen which was always ready and happy to take us anywhere.

I will elaborate more on this period of madness when sometimes a certain sense of guilty pleasure came over me, without taking me away me from our aim, somewhat like a child in front of forbidden fruit.

Let's meet again in 1952. We had spent all our money but through a sailing friend, Albert Bouchard, I had contacted the U.T.A. the management of which, in the light of my C.V., had agreed to hire me. Here begins the second part of my memories.

See you later for a long episode in Africa, sometimes quite spicy.

Translator's final note:

Now that you have read volume one of Jacque's memoires you will wish to read volume two. I regret that I have no news of when and if it will ever be seen.

Jacques accepts that he has lived his life acknowledging the changes that have taken place, but with the passing of time the historical impact of the age he lived through is not well known.

Who among you have any knowledge of the Rif war, the colonisation of French Indo-China, the effect of Joséphine Baker on race relations or the long lasting effects of the French Revolution? There are very many other examples of historical events and social differences which we would do well to try to understand; the progress of commercial aviation, the French political relationship with North Africa and the Spanish Civil War being just some of the topics of interest

Our grateful thanks are due to Jacques for sharing his journey through life with us. We anticipate the appearance of volume two with a real sense of excitement.

Christopher C. de Chazal
January 2016

All these endnotes are mine, mostly from Wikipedia. I hope you have found them informative.
Christopher.

¹ “Wisteria House”

² Jacques now begins to refer to his mother as “You” by which name she was usually known

³ Believed to be radio. TsF or Transmission sans Fil=Wireless

⁴ Singer in cafés and concerts

⁵ Josephine Baker (1906-1975), American-born dancer, singer, and actress known as the "Black Pearl," or "Bronze Venus" worked in the Folies Bergere, became a citizen of France in 1937. Known for her Banana Dance in the Folies Bergère she achieved worldwide fame.

⁶ Radio stations?

⁷ The *Croix-de-Feu* was an organization set up by veterans of the First World War.

⁸ A Right wing weekly paper.

⁹ *Beau cadre, bon goût*: Good Class; Good Taste

¹⁰ Best known for an around-the-world flight he made as co-pilot and navigator in 1927-1928 which included history's first flight across the South Atlantic Ocean, and for record-setting nonstop long-distance flights he made or attempted between 1929 and 1931.

¹¹ “Objets : Guerres et Paix? Translating to: Objective: War and Peace”

¹² Renowned garden designers at Versailles Mansart more architectural; André Le Nôtre natural esthetic. Mansart rebuilt some fountains.

¹³ Gypsum quarry. Used to make plaster.

¹⁴ The use of the familiar “tu” and impersonal “vous” is fundamental to a relationship. Not easily explained in English. This paragraph I feel is very important in the context of these memoirs.
Your Translator

¹⁵ *Louis XIV* in the *Edict of Colbert* limited the use of the name *Savon de Marseille* to olive oil based soaps manufactured in and around the Marseille area.

¹⁶ Famous for travels in the Red Sea, Aden & Yemen, the Arabia & Suez, he sailed on his various expeditions as adventurer, smuggler and gunrunner escaping from Royal Navy coast-guards more than once.

¹⁷ PLM=Paris Lyon Marseilles Line

¹⁸ The Swedenbourg idea is to accept God for oneself through love and understanding; passion and faith are excellent attributes but if not allied to understanding they can appear hollow.

¹⁹ *Le Petit Chose* (1868) translated into English as *Little Good-For-Nothing* and *Little What's-His-Name* is an autobiographical memoir by French author Alphonse Daudet.

²⁰ A wind blowing down the Rhone valley blowing at specific times of day

²¹ The Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps motor-racing circuit is the venue of the Formula One Belgian Grand Prix, and of the Spa 24 Hours and 1000 km Spa endurance races..

²² Alfred Denis Cortot (26 September 1877– 15 June 1962) was a Franco-Swiss pianist and conductor. He was one of the most renowned 20th-century classical musicians, especially valued for his poetic insight into Romantic period piano works, particularly those of Chopin and Schumann.s

²³ Flying School: “Salon” is a room, hence there may not have been any practical flying

²⁴ In the first pages of this book we read about the Jacque family. The daughter “Dany” married Jacque’s (your author’s) brother.

²⁵ Paid supervisor of schoolchildren—in all French schools

²⁶ ‘Boss’ or ‘Kingpin’

²⁷ The Col d'Aspin is a pass. Climbing from the west: average gradient 5%, maximum gradient 9%, length of climb: 12.8 kms

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- ²⁸ The Armistice of 22 June 1940 signed by the top military officials of Nazi Germany and more junior representatives from the French Third Republic established a German occupation zone in Northern and Western France that encompassed all Channel and Atlantic ports, and left the remainder "free" to be governed by the French Vichy Government.
- ²⁹ The Basques are an indigenous ethnic group who primarily inhabit an area traditionally known as the Basque Country a region at the western end of the Pyrenees on the coast of the Bay of Biscay and straddles parts of north-central Spain and south-western France
- ³⁰ A paramilitary force created in 1943 by the Vichy regime (with German aid) to help fight against the French Resistance
- ³¹ *Milice* (pronounced *milis*), was a paramilitary force created in 1943 by the Vichy regime with German aid to help fight against the French Resistance .It participated in summary executions & rounded up Jews and French *résistants* for deportation.
- ³² US & UK amphibious operation code-named ‘Torch’ against French-held North African territory. By chance, the number two man in the Vichy French hierarchy, Admiral François Darlan, happened to be there. He has a place later in these memoirs.
- ³³ On the French-Spain border
- ³⁴ Goat-antelope species; native to mountains from Spain to the Caucasus, including Poland, Balkans & parts of Turkey.
- ³⁵ Supporters of Franco, an autocratic dictator, head of a totalitarian Spanish State, supported by the German Nazi regime.
- ³⁶ A *Caudillo* was a military-landowner exercising political power considered authoritarian. It could be translated as *leader* or *chief*, or more pejoratively as *warlord*, *dictator* or *strongman*.
- ³⁷ Béarn: a Province, located in the Pyrenees and in the plains below them in southwest France, it’s capital is Pau. With other provinces it forms the current Département of Pyrénées-Atlantiques bordered by Spain to the south. The Béret is named after this region.
- ³⁸ Simone
- ³⁹ More than 190 concentration camps, holding 170,000 prisoners in 1938 and between 367,000 and 500,000 prisoners in 1939, were created during the Spanish Civil War and in the following years. They held mainly Spanish Republicans and anti-fascists including homosexuals
- ⁴⁰ Sadly not in this volume—your translator
- ⁴¹ An “Aspi” is surely an “aspirant”. I suggest “Officer Cadet School”. Your translator
- ⁴² Henri Giraud, French General. Vichy ministers tried to send him to Germany (from where he had escaped) and probable execution. But Eisenhower secretly asked him to take command of French troops in North Africa during Operation Torch and direct them to join the Allies. He decided to take retirement in 1944 after continual disagreements with De Gaulle. Wikipedia
- ⁴³ European colonists from Algeria, mostly French, “Pied noir” means “Black foot”
- ⁴⁴ This is operation Torch alluded to earlier. Did the Americans wish to “control” Algeria and Morocco? Appointing Giraud seems to contradict this theory
- ⁴⁵ It would be useful to have a quick look at Wikipedia concerning these generals. The French political scene at this time needs to be better understood. Darlan’s role is mentioned on this page. Eisenhower asked Giraud to command the free French troops after Operation torch.
- ⁴⁶ French soldier, leader of the Vichy French collaborators with Nazi Germany, and a Waffen-SS officer.
- ⁴⁷ Déat was a supporter of Philippe Pétain in Vichy: He founded National Popular Rally (RNP) which advocated Collaboration with Nazi Germany and antisemitism. Post war he fled to Italy and died in 1955 still in hiding.
- ⁴⁸ In this context, having a parliamentary seat
- ⁴⁹ "Midnight, Christians" also known as “O Holy Night”
- ⁵⁰ The forced enlistment and deportation of hundreds of thousands of French workers to Nazi Germany .

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- ⁵¹ *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP), was an armed resistance organization created by leaders of the French Communist Party.
- ⁵² Some say assassinate, yet others say murder—see Wikipedia and decide!
- ⁵³ On 10 June 1944 the village of Oradour-sur-Glane was destroyed and 642 of its inhabitants were massacred by a Nazi Waffen-SS company. General de Gaulle decided the village should never be rebuilt, but would remain a memorial to the cruelty of the Nazi occupation. To this day it may still be visited.
- ⁵⁴ Didier Daurat a boss admired by many, feared by all and hated by some. Latécoère Air, and later Aéropostale, achieved a level of punctuality and reliability unknown for the time on the Toulouse-Santiago route, crossing the south Atlantic and the Andes.
- ⁵⁵ The Latécoère 521, "Lieutenant de Vaisseau Paris", was a French six-engined flying boat.
- ⁵⁶ Alix d'Unienville served as a courier for the Special Operations Executive and the Free French resistance in Paris. She died only 23 days before this section was translated On 10th Nov 2015
- ⁵⁷ The austerity in war-torn Europe contrasted considerably with the affluence of neutral Argentina
- ⁵⁸ Henri Guillaumet carried the mail between Argentina and Chile. In 1930, while crossing the Andes for the 92nd time, he crashed near Mendoza. He walked for a week over three mountain passes eventually rescued by a local peasant boy. This exploit made him stand out among the 'stars' of Aéropostale and was eventually appointed managing director of Air France. His friend Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, tells of the adventure in his 1939 book *Terre des hommes* (published in English as *Wind, Sand and Stars*).
- ⁵⁹ Union de Transports Aériens (UTA) was the largest wholly privately owned, independent airline in France. It was also the second-largest international, as well as the second principal, intercontinental French airline.
- ⁶⁰ West Pakistan became plain "Pakistan" and East Pakistan was named Bangladesh after the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- ⁶¹ Capital of Middle-Chari Region and of the Department of Barh Köh, in Chad.