

HENRI, ODETTE AND LEON BORLANT

Henri Borlant was imprisoned in several concentration camps; his sister Odette hid with their mother and younger siblings; and Léon, the oldest, served in the French Resistance.

"I remember the day when the Germans came to take away my family. I could not cry for about ten days; I was as if frozen by not being able to change anything." -- Odette Borlant

Léon, Henri, and Odette Borlant were among the ten children of Aaron and Rachel Borlant. They were born in Paris in 1917, 1927, and 1931 respectively. Their father, born near Odessa, was a tailor; their mother, from Bessarabia, helped him and took care of the household. Both parents worked at home and the family led a happy life. In August 1939, with war threatening, the whole family left Paris for a village near Angers, where they adapted to country life.

Léon, who was serving as a soldier in the French army, was captured by the Germans in May 1940, but, as the oldest child of a big family, he was released a year later. Afraid of being caught again because he was Jewish, he escaped to the Free Zone in Lyon, where he soon became a member of the Resistance, working mainly in broadcasting. After a member of his group was arrested, Léon returned to Paris, where he continued his Resistance activities.

Meanwhile, Henri, their father, and several other family members were arrested and deported in 1942. All but Henri, died in Auschwitz a few months later. Henri was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau and later to Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Ohrdruff, from which he and a friend escaped. When they were found by American troops, they led the Americans to the concentration camp. Shortly thereafter, Generals Eisenhower, Patton, and Bradley and a host of journalists arrived

Alerted by a French policeman, Odette, her mother and younger siblings were able to escape and to hide until the end of the war, often changing their place of refuge and their identities. Odette nursed her mother, who was seriously ill.

After the war, Léon, Odette and Henri returned to Paris and were reunited with other surviving family members. Léon took care of his mother. He is retired from the men's clothing business. Odette worked in the wholesale industry. Henri became a doctor and practiced surgery for 25 years. Both brothers are active in recording survivor interviews and speaking about the Shoah.