

# Life In France For a Seven-Year-Old

By Monique Pope

*I remember being scared when the bombs came, and I remember going to the shelter. But the main thing I remember was hunger, and not being able to eat well. That was the worst thing. Always being hungry.*

**B**orn in 1932 in Paris, I was seven years old when WWII started. During the exodus from Paris, we left too. My family had a house in the country near Fontainebleau and we went there. But, a bomb fell on our house in the country when we were in Paris for the weekend.

We didn't know the country house had been bombed. When we returned, it was not too bad but my room and another room had been hit by the bomb. The Germans occupied the house for the rest of the War, so we went back to our apartment in Paris and stayed there for the rest of the War.

The south of France was not occupied, but Paris was. So my parents sent me to my grandmother who was living in Provence. I left in a cattle train run by the Red Cross. They put a big sign around my neck with my name on it, and off I went. By then, I was eight or nine years old. It was a horrible and frightening experience, being in that cattle train. There were other youngsters, and they were just as scared as I was.

But I got sick in the south of France because I didn't eat too much. Most of the food had been sold on the black market by the enemy to make money. There I was at my grandmother's in the fruit garden of Europe. So, I ate a lot of fruit and it just killed me because my body became full of sores. It was horrible.

My mother came for me. But in the winter of 1941, I became extremely ill for about three months with a high fever. They found out that my lungs were infected, so I had to go away for a year to a children's sanitarium by the border way up in the mountains. I was there because I had tuberculosis from malnutrition. But, there wasn't any food there either. We ate mostly beets.

Then I spent a few months on a farm with two nuns so they could feed me. It was like a nursing home. I was fed well, and when I was better I returned to

Paris. Oh, but was I skinny; only about 40 pounds.

I remember there was always a siren, and we had to go in a shelter once or twice every night. And then I remember my mother would get up around 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning to go to market and wait in line for food. Then, an enemy truck would come and they'd pick up all the food.

Even if we had the money, we couldn't buy food. But many times, my father got food on the black market, and we would land in the hospital to have our stomach pumped because there was something bad in the food. One day, he bought 50 pounds of noodles, and we had noodles every single meal. At the end, the noodles had so many bugs, you couldn't separate the bugs from the noodles. We ate it all—bugs with the noodles.

Then after that, I became ill again from not having any food. So my father rented a house outside of Paris, and we went there. My father was an eye doctor. That's why he could afford to send me away on trips. If I hadn't gone away, I would have died. I was lucky we had the money to do it.

Then D-Day happened, and there was fighting everywhere so we had to walk back to Paris. We didn't want to stay near Normandy. It was too scary. We walked and we slept on the side of the road. One truck passed us full of people. My mother's brother was on the truck! He saw us and he waved. It was so weird. He had been fighting in Dunkirk with the French Army at the beginning.

I think it took a couple of weeks to get to Paris walking from one town to another. We never knew who would be occupying the next town. We kept walking, getting bombed. But we made it to Paris.

Everybody was happy when the Americans took over but I was still too young to go in the street and have fun. I wasn't allowed out because it continued to be dangerous. Slowly, life returned to normal, but I know what it is to be hungry. Everyday of my young life I was hungry. That's not good as a child. People should not make war! The wrong people suffer for it. It changed my life completely. To this day I don't leave any food on my plate, and I don't throw anything away either.