



Facing Persecution as a Jehovah's Witness

(total running time: 31 minutes)

Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted under the Nazi regime for their refusal to perform military service or to renounce their religious beliefs. The Nazis imprisoned roughly 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany between the years of 1933 and 1945. Of these, an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 were sent to concentration camps. Jehovah's Witnesses from other Nazi-occupied countries were also sent to concentration camps, including an estimated 200-250 from the Netherlands, 200 from Austria, 100 from Poland, and 10-50 from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, and Hungary. An estimated 1,400 Jehovah's Witnesses, of whom 1,000 were German, died in prisons and concentration camps. Another 250 German Jehovah's Witnesses were executed for refusing to perform military service.

In *Facing Persecution as a Jehovah's Witness* interviewee Simone Maria Liebster (b. 1930 in Husseren-Wesserling, France) describes the discrimination and persecution she endured as a Jehovah's Witness in Nazi-occupied France and Germany during World War II.

First, Simone talks about the challenges she faced in school as a Jehovah's Witness in Mulhouse, France, where children made fun of her for her beliefs.

Second, Simone describes the restrictions that Jehovah's Witnesses lived under in France, both before and after the Nazi occupation. She talks about how her parents joined an underground organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Third, Simone tells of the Gestapo's visit to her house in 1941. The Gestapo personnel interrogated Simone's mother for hours, demanding the names of all of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the underground organization. Simone describes hiding her Bible, knowing that her family could be arrested for possessing it.

Simone recounts that when the Germans occupied France, they instituted the "Heil Hitler" greeting for students at school. Simone resisted this order because her religious beliefs prohibited her from hailing a human being. As punishment for refusing to say "Heil Hitler," Simone describes having to go to every teacher in the school so that they could sign a paper stating that she was rebelling against German peace. Her friends at school soon turned against her.

After receiving a letter for her arrest, Simone went to live at a girls' orphanage in Konstanz, Germany. She recounts the punishments that the girls received if they so much as spoke to one another.

Simone explains that, while living at the girls' orphanage, she was not allowed to read her Bible or to attend church with the Catholic girls.