René was born in 1934 in Luxembourg. His parents, Mira and Wolf, emigrated from Poland in search of better opportunities. René had a happy childhood surrounded by lots of friends and family members. René’s parents descended from Jewish families in Poland and they practiced some Jewish religious traditions. When the Germans invaded Luxembourg in May 1940, René’s family moved to Belgium, which was also occupied by the Germans, and they lived there for two years. In hopes of escaping Europe, the family fled to the south of France with plans to travel to South America by boat, but they were arrested by French police. René’s mother was deported and he was sent to live in a group home run by a Jewish organization in 1942. The organization, recognizing the danger that Jewish children faced, sent him to live with foster families and then in a Catholic convent school under a false name. After the war, René hoped to reunite with his parents, but they never returned after being deported. He continued to live in France and then moved to Poland, China and the United States before settling in Canada, where he worked as a professor.

“I did feel like a stranger in a world that was not my own and was compelled, paradoxically perhaps, to be true to my false identity at all times.”

— René Goldman