



## BACKGROUND READING FOR EVA LANG

Eva Lang is a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Canada in 1974 and now lives in Israel. You can learn about her experiences by reading her memoir, "Three Stars in the Sky," in the anthology *At Great Risk: Memoirs of Rescue during the Holocaust*. Below is some background information that will help you understand Eva's story.

### BIOGRAPHY

Eva's parents, Zacharia and Esther, moved from Poland to Belgium and settled in the large city of Brussels, where Eva was born in 1930. Eva grew up speaking French and Yiddish with her four siblings in a home where education and religion were highly valued. When the family fled to France to evade the German invasion, they were soon arrested by the French police and interned in refugee camps in southern France. The conditions at one of these camps, called Rivesaltes, were so terrible that Eva's father contacted a welfare organization that was taking children out of the camps to care for them in healthier settings. Eva and her two younger sisters were freed from the camp and placed in children's homes. After the Germans and their French collaborators began deporting Jews from France in 1942, people in the welfare organization called OSE (Œuvre de secours aux enfants, which translates to the Children's Relief Agency) realized that the Jewish children were at risk and gave them false identities to prevent their capture. Eva spent the rest of the war living under a false name — Yvonne Drapier — and moving between different children's homes. She and her sister Raymonde were reunited with their sister Renée in 1944, as France was being liberated. Their older brother, Michel, survived, but Eva's parents and sister Sarah were deported and killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. After the war, Eva moved to British Mandate Palestine and then lived in Canada for many years. Eva kept in touch with Yvonne Hagnauer and Henriette Chautard, two of the women who had worked in the children's homes and protected her and her sisters during the Holocaust. They were honoured as Righteous Among the Nations in 1974 and 2001 respectively.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When World War II began, Eva's family lived in Belgium, a small country located in Western Europe between France and Germany. When Belgium was invaded by the German army in May 1940, Eva's family fled to France. The German army then invaded France, where they occupied the northern part of France (the Occupied Zone) and put in place many anti-Jewish policies. The southern part of France (the Free Zone) was run by a new French government, called Vichy, that went along with German policies and orders, and even created its own anti-Jewish policies that were applied to the whole country. French police arrested Jewish refugees who had fled into the country and held them in internment camps, like Rivesaltes, where they suffered in poor conditions. Starting in the summer of 1942, Jews were deported to Nazi camps in Poland, where most were killed. The German army occupied the Free Zone in November 1942. As the risk of capture by the French police or the German occupiers increased, many Jews went into hiding by using false identification papers and pretending to be Christian. There were organizations that helped Jewish children, like Eva and her sisters, find safe places to live. France was liberated by the Allies in the summer and fall of 1944. Approximately 77,000 Jews in France were killed during the Holocaust, including Eva's parents and her sister Sarah.



"The children's homes were becoming targets of the Vichy authorities, so OSE decided to try a more radical way to hide French Jewish children. They would change their identities. They would make the children accept that — although it was totally incomprehensible — they would have to become someone else until the end of the war. We were little girls, but we were expected to become grown-ups. We had to play a double game, to completely adopt this new personality and to act normal in spite of everything." (page 28)