



Simone Arnold Liebster © Arnold-Liebster-Stiftung

## Case Study: Simone Arnold

“They arrested my Dad the day he had his monthly pay packet in his pocket. They closed our bank account and refused my mum a working card, telling her that there was neither work nor help for vermin”. Simone Arnold Liebster.

Simone Arnold was born in 1930. She lived with her parents near Mulhouse in Alsace. Alsace has an interesting history. It has been both German and French. When Simone was born, Alsace was in France but many people living there remembered its time as a German region. In June 1940, with France occupied by Nazi Germany, Alsace became German again. It was a very confusing time.

When Simone was born she was welcomed into a large extended Roman Catholic Family. When she was eight her mum left the Roman Catholic Church to become a Jehovah’s Witness. Some time later, despite fierce opposition from their Roman Catholic family, Simone and her Dad became Jehovah’s Witnesses too and Simone was baptised in 1941.

The Nazis made a great effort to impose their own social and political views upon the people of Alsace. They believed that their dream of building a great German nation, with lands across the whole of Europe, could only be achieved by the exclusion of “Undesirables”, people who did not conform to their rules. Jehovah’s Witnesses were regarded as “Undesirables” because they refused to obey Nazi laws which went against their conscience and beliefs. Jehovah’s Witnesses believed that it was wrong to swear unconditional loyalty and obedience to any State and therefore they found it impossible to obey all Nazi rules or to make the Heil Hitler salute.

The Nazis believed that, if they were imprisoned, disobedient people could be forced to conform. A month after Simone became a Jehovah’s Witness her father was arrested. He was labelled a person “whose behaviour would damage German authority” and sent to a series of prison and concentration camps. His wages were confiscated and the family bank account was closed so life became very difficult for Simone and her mother Emma. It was hard to earn any money and food was scarce. Simone and Emma held onto their religious beliefs. This caused many problems for Simone. In school students were taught that “untermenschen” or “sub humans” had to be kept away from those who were said to be “pure Aryan”. Simone disagreed. She did not perform the Heil Hitler Salute, which students were required to do each day, neither would she join the Bund Deutscher Madel, the female branch of the Hitler Youth. As a result she was expelled from one school, though the head-teacher told everyone that she had “chosen to leave” and became the target of bullies in another but the teachers did nothing to help. One suggested that she could stop the bullying if she simply made the salute even if she believed it was wrong.

Simone decided to **Stand up to Hatred** by refusing to do what her conscience told her was wrong.

Nazi officials had rewritten the law so that they could take Jehovah’s Witness children, who would not follow school instructions, away from their parents. These stolen children were then placed with Nazi families or sent to reform schools to be re-educated.

In July 1943 a letter arrived ordering Simone to report to the railway station. She was sent to a reform school in Konstanz, given a number to sew onto her clothes and told she must use a new name: Maria. She was allowed to own nothing, could go nowhere without a chaperone.

## CASE STUDY - SIMONE ARNOLD

To choose to **Stand up to Hatred** was not easy. Life was harsh. Simone wrote about the school and described it as a place where nothing was allowed “no friendship, no talking, no books, no drawing and no hobbies.” Every day consisted of silence, work and physical punishment. Simone was told that if she made the Heil Hitler Salute and signed a paper giving up her religious beliefs and promising to be loyal to the State then she would be free. She refused.

At the end of the war, after much suffering, Simone and her parents were reunited. The French police gave Simone’s mother a list of the people who had denounced them to the Nazis. On the list were two religious leaders from the Christian community and many of the family’s neighbours.

You can read the whole of Simone’s story, told in her own words, in “Facing The Lion-  
Memoirs of a Young Girl In Nazi Europe” by Simone Arnold Liebster available to order via [www.alst.org/pages-us/books-us.html](http://www.alst.org/pages-us/books-us.html).