

-TITLE-MICHEL DROSDOWSKY

-I_DATE-

-SOURCE-

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND_QUALITY-

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-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES-

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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-

-PERSONAL_NAME-

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-CONTENTS-

00:00:00 Entrance to Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial.
Scenes inside.

00:00:30 Map of Allied offensive.

00:01:00 Scenes outside

00:01:30 More of the same.

00:02:00 Views of the cemetery

00:02:30 View of the beaches.

00:03:00 Map of the landing.
introduction - Cannes.

00:03:00 Respondent is professor of medicine, and a Jehovah's
Witness. my name is Drosdowsky - he spells it.

00:04:00 My father is Peter; my mother is Cecile Schatz. My father
was born in Odessa, Russian, and my mother in Tuchin (ph)
Bessarabia.

00:04:30 My father was born in June, 1895, my mother in Oct.,
1898. I am the only child.

00:05:00 I was born in Paris. Everyone knows the city. At the end
of the revolution, my father was an officer in the White Army.

00:05:30 The Red Army won. My father was imprisoned for one year
in Turkey. From there he went to Bulgaria, where for a few years
he learned to be a carpenter and a wall painter. From there he was
called to Grance

00:06:00 by one of my uncles. My mother left Russia when my
grandfather was shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918. She fled to
Rumania and there an uncle took her to Berlin where she studied
chemistry for five years and then moved to Paris.

00:06:30 Since my parents were from the same town in Russia, they met at meetings and got engaged. As I recall, my family was not very religious then.

00:07:00 With my grandmother I went to the synagogue several times. With my father, who was Orthodox, we used to go to the big cathedral in Paris.

00:07:30 Q: When you were a young man, what were your interests?

A: Before the war, I was quiet, I played at home with my cousin.

00:08:00 On vacation we used to go to the seashore.

Q: Economic times were difficult; what was it like for your parents?

00:08:30 It was difficult. My mother got a job way below her professional level because she was a foreigner. My father couldn't get a job so one time he was catching rats in the sewers

00:09:00 To sell them to the Pasteur Institute. He kept them in cages he made, in the cellar. The rats had sharp teeth and they ate through the metal and got out and we had trouble with our neighbors.

00:09:30 Q: Were people in Paris concerned when Hitler took over in Germany?

A: I was only 3 or 5 years old and I don't remember.

00:10:00 There may have been discussions, but I don't recall.

Q: What about later, when Hitler went into Poland?

A: Yes, that I remember well, because my parents were concerned.

00:10:30 They thought we might have to go to America where we had some family. They wanted to have their hands free so they put me in a Russian military pension (boarding house)

00:11:00 It was a tough year. It was a school run by White army officers. The discipline was strict. The school was about 5 miles outside of Paris.

00:11:30 Considering your background, what happened when Germany began to come around Holland and so on?

A: We were on vacation in 1939, in Brittany, and my father was in the army. My mother decided

00:12:00 that I would stay with a cousin near St. Nazarre and I spent a year there. We met the Germans there.

00:12:30 Q: Your mother was Jewish, did that create a problem for you?

A: No, at that time the Germans weren't looking for Jews and my aunt didn't say anything about her origins.

00:13:00 Q: What happened when the Germans came in?

A: My aunt was running a small pension. The Germans took it over and let us stay in two or three rooms.

00:13:30 And I can say they saved my life because I had an abscess on a finger and I was operated on by a German soldier. When the Germans invaded the Occupied Zone

00:14:00 it was no use staying in Brittany and I went back to the Paris suburb where my parents had decided to live.

00:14:30 My mother was there and my father came back home - he had been disarmed in 1940.

00:15:00 He was not captured but the war was ended.

Q: How did you survive now?

A: I would like to correct you because it has been shown and shown again in the trials, that it was not the Germans who were looking for the Jews, it was the police of the Vichy government.

00:15:30 Wanting to please the Germans, they started looking for the Jews. The Jews caught mainly by the police and the Germans had nothing to do with it.

00:16:00 Jews had either to leave the country, which several did, or to hide, change their identity. The search for the Jews - they had to register and then wear the Star of David.

00:16:30 My mother was clever. She did not register and did not wear the Star. I didn't either. Grandmother registered and wore the Star. The same for

00:17:00 my aunt and my cousin. In 1942 there was a time when the French government arrested Jews in many parts of the country.

00:17:30 My grandmother, who was 70 at the time, was arrested at our house. My mother asked them to take her with my grandmother. She said maybe they could say that she wasn't home.

00:18:00 She was taken by the police and I never saw her again, and the same thing for my aunt and cousin, who were in Brittany at the time.

00:18:30 They didn't take my mother because she was not on the list. They were very administrative. My mother was not on the list so she was not taken.

Q: Did your neighbors know that you were half-Jewish?

00:19:0 They knew because one was a Gestapo. My mother asked if she could jump in his garden and he said maybe she could jump in the next garden.

00:19:30 They all knew that we were Jewish.

Q: Did anyone try to turn you in?

A: I don't know whether it was because of us or the owner of our house

00:20:00 We had a visit from the Gestapo one day. They were looking for papers. Fortunately they didn't find some dangerous

00:20:30 papers that were on the floor. They walked on that.

What was going through your mind at that time?

A: I don't recall being worried at that time. I was very busy in college. Even when I was hiding - I spent three years hiding in different places -

00:21:00 The people who hid me were nice. I had enough food and enough care. I got news regularly from my mother who was hiding in another place in Paris.

00:21:30 I was concerned, but I was not afraid, and I live through it. It was very hard at the end of the war because we had nothing to eat.

00:22:00 Aside from not have my grandmother, who was very nice to me, and my cousin, who was like a sister to me, I lived through it without damage.

Q: At the time that your grandmother was picked up, what was your father doing?

00:22:30 My father tried to find work but it was difficult because he was not specialized. Also he was a heavy drinker.

Q: Did they ever try to pick him up and put him in the armed services?

00:23:00 No, he was older by the, and would not be taken for work in Germany.

Q: when did you realize that you and your mother had to

go into hiding, and how did you find a place?

00:23:30 We started hiding in 1941, when my mother heard there were Jews caught in Germany. My father worked for some Russian people and they agreed to keep me in their home.

00:24:00 I kept my own name.

Q: How were they able to do that?

A: People didn't ask any questions. I went to the same school. It was a very well-known high school about 10 miles out of Paris.

00:24:30 Q: And your mother, how did she find a place to hide?

A: Through her boss, a friend, they agreed to take her as a maid for their children.

00:25:00 She worked in Paris, right under the nose of the Germans but she used a fake name.

Q: Did you ever see the Germans picking up Jews etc.?

A: no.

00:25:30 It happened in Paris in the street, and I knew some who were picked up.

Q: Did you ever see your mother during that time?

A: We were separated for two years.

00:26:00 We used to write letters through somebody.

Q: Growing up like that, you would become mature at an early age, correct?

A: Now I think those years were rather tough.

00:26:30 Looking back, things were difficult.

Q: Do you remember the day that Paris was freed?

A: I remember it well. Since we knew that the French and American armies were coming, I was sent to a farm south of Paris.

00:27:00 We greeted the American army, and were nearly adopted by the soldiers who fed us, with potatoes and butter that I hadn't seen in four years. Of course, there was bombing.

00:27:30 I saw many people killed in the streets.

Q: How does that affect you, as a young person?

A: I was 14 in '44. I found it awful. I remember I was fishing with my father and the big railroad station was bombed and we had to go home by foot.

00:28:00 About 20 kilometers. A bomb fell on a home for kids and there was flesh all over the street.

Q: Do you remember the conversation you had with your father at that time?

00:28:30 We were afraid that another band of airplanes would come and so we thought of running.

Q: When the troops came into Paris, were you and your family able to get back again?

A: Yes

00:29:00 My father found a job with the American army, and for a couple of months we had food because he was getting packages from the American army.

Q: What about the people you went to high school with?

00:29:30 A: I don't know of any who suffered.

Q: And then, when the war ended in 1945?

A: For us, it ended in 1944. The whole war ended in '45

Q: How did you feel then?

00:30:00 People were very happy, but we were already happy when the French army entered Paris in 1944. The war in Germany and Japan, that was far away.

Q: Had you or your family heard

00:30:30 Of the various concentration camps.

A: Because my mother wanted us to hide, she knew about them, but maybe not the names. But I don't recall that at home we ever pronounced these names.

00:31:00 Q: Did your mom explain to you

00:31:00 Why the Germans might want to pick you up?

A: Not in detail. But she probably told me that being a half-Jew, for the Germans I was Jewish because the heredity goes through the mother, so I had to hide.

00:31:30 Because eventually the police would try to catch us.

Q: What did you do after the war?

A: I went on and finished college in 1949 went on to the Sorbonne to become a physician. My mother regained her position

00:32:00 My father kept working on the side, not doing much.

Q: Did the war have any effect on you - you lost relatives.

A: We knew they were dead because in 1945 the deported people began coming back. My mother wrote and inquired, but it was only years later

00:32:30 that we could find the documents that we knew that my family had been killed in Auschwitz.

00:33:00 I have the book with their name.

Q: you have some pictures there, would you like to hold them up for the camera?

00:33:30 Yes. This is a picture of my grandmother. She was Rose Shaatz (ph) This my grandfather who was shot in 1917 by the Bolsheviks.

00:34:00 This is my cousin who died in Auschwitz. And this is my aunt, her mother, Ludmilla, who was sent also to Auschwitz.

00:34:30 This is a picture of my mother, when she was about 25 years old.. She died here, in Cannes, and she was 92.

00:35:00 I don't have a picture here of my father. After becoming a physician, I became a specialist as biochemist.

00:35:30 I specialized in the biochemistry of reproduction. I received my degree in 1962. I did a doctorate in the United States.

00:36:00 I came back and became an assistant professor. Later I was offered a position in the Cannes Medical School, and I became a professor in 1968.

Q: In all of these years

00:36:30 did the war years and the loss of your family affect your belief in God?

A: After the war I became a complete atheist.

00:37:00 My mother, several times, put me in camp run by orthodox priests. I quickly found out this was organized robbery. They were

taken our food tickets and buying sugar and butter for them.

00:37:30 We ate only cabbages, we lost weight and had digestive problems. Once I looked through a curtain and saw the priests eating butter and meat and sugar.

00:38:00 So I decided not to be in touch anymore with religion.

Q: Did that happen during the war years?

A: Yes. They were using our food rationing tickets.

00:38:30 Q: When did you become a Jehovah's Witness?

A: I was approached in 1966. A fellow knocked on our door and I was interested in what he was saying.

00:39:00 Every two weeks -because I was preparing for a medical competition and did not have much time - the discussions went on for two more years, and after I moved to Cannes for two more years.

00:39:30 Being a physician, I was rather puzzled by the blood issue. I had long discussions with a Brother who was a physician himself.

00:40:00 In 1968, my wife also started to study and we were both baptized in Cherbourg in May 1970.

Q: About a month ago, when you were in the United States, you visited the Holocaust Museum.

00:40:30 What did you think about an educational museum like that?

A: I think its very important. As time is passing by, it is important to keep memories because it can come back.

00:41:00 Its an institution helping people to remember is important. Last week this trial about Touvier(ph) was taking place and its a shame that he was declared innocent. I think he killed 10 or 20 people with his hands.

00:41:30 Thank you. Its going to be helpful to young people. What would you encourage young people to think about in re freedom?

00:41:00 A: To share the freedom, to enjoy it, to know that its very fragile. Things change very rapidly. We know from what happened in the USSR.

00:42:30 The military can take power and change the life overnight. Its important to know what happened years ago and that democracy is a very fragile system.

00:43:00 Q: As a physician and a professor, how do you feel about these people who say these things didn't happen?

00:43:30; A: Being a Jehovah's Witness, I don't want to kill anyone. It has to be corrected. I have been in Auschwitz. So I know the camp exists. I have been to Mauthausen so I know the camp exists.

00:44:00 The people who have been in the camps - I know directly because I talk with them. I know its the real story.
.END.