

Q: Would you please tell us your name, your place and date of birth?

A: My name is Arlette DeLong--my middle name is Weigman (phonetic)--and I was born in Brocourt, in France, on June 15th, 1937.

Q: Where were you living at the time that the Holocaust began?

A: I was living in the village, in Brocourt, where I was born.

Q: What was life like before the Holocaust began?

A: It was a very small village of 300 people. And my parents were doctors there, so we lived a little better, perhaps, than the rest of the people. We had a house with indoor plumbing; sometimes some did not in those days. We had a telephone. Life was the life of a small village. It was very safe, and very uneventful in many ways.

Q: How many Jewish people lived in your village?

A: There weren't any.

Q: Besides your family?

A: Right; no others.

Q: Did you have any sisters or brothers?

A: No; I was an only child.

Q: And who else lived in your household besides you and your parents?

A: My grandfather--maternal grandfather and grandmother.

Q: How did life change in your village when the Holocaust began?

A: Life changed dramatically in the village, not at the time of the Holocaust but at the time when the Germans invaded France and our village was occupied by Germans. We had German soldiers living with us in the village.

Q: What year was that?

A: I think that was in the beginning of 1940, but I'm not absolutely sure.

Q: If you didn't have any Jews living in your village, what did the Germans want to accomplish by taking over your village and living there?

A: I think they just wanted a place to live,-- well, we're not very far from England, from the channel; we were only 30 kilometers--and towards the end of the war they built what we called a "blockhouse," to send V-2's to England. So, it was, strategically, an important position, I think, and that's why they occupied; and that's why, I believe, they were there. They had no interests, especially, in the people.

Q: And what was day-to-day life like with the German soldiers there?

A: Well, for me--of course, I was only two-and-a-half, three, four, so I don't--I think there was--I think there was--I know there was fear. Everybody felt fear. My parents certainly felt a lot of fear, but the villagers did, too, because we were occupied and there were a lot of

restrictions. I think right before the Germans came--and it must have been in the middle of 1940--my father went away to fight; and my mother took the rest of the family, and we ran. We ran away. You know, there was the evacuation. And that--I have one memory, which I think is my first memory, of being under a table, with my grandmother holding me, because there were bombs falling. And I've had a very vague memory, and dreams, of the earth being on fire, because we had to drive through areas that were being bombed. But then we all came back to the house.

Q: How long were you gone?

A: I don't know; some months, I think.

Q: And when did your parents first fear that Jews were in danger?

A: I think my parents had a strong sense long before, even before Kristallnacht. They had the sense that being a Jew was unsafe, and they hid--they hid that fact from the peoples in the village.

Q: What did they do to hide that?

A: They erased, on their passports,--because my mother had a Russian passport; my father, a Rumanian passport--the religion, "Jewish," from it and never told anybody. And it's unclear how much I knew. I think I knew, because things are never hidden in a family. At some level, even as a small child, I knew that we were Jews; but I'm not sure that I knew in a conscious way, because I would think they were worried that if I knew I would speak.

Q: Did the Germans ever knock on doors, looking for Jewish people, or do any activities like that?

A: No.

Q: It was assumed that nobody in your village was Jewish,--

A: That's right.

Q: --according to their records?

A: That's right.

Q: Do you feel that the other people in the village knew that you were Jewish?

A: I think it would have been hard not to suspect something because of our name, Weigman (phonetic), and because we all came from a different place. My parents came from different places. I think it's a thought that would occur, come across people's minds.

Q: And tell me about what you told me, when somebody was asked if they knew you were Jewish and why they didn't turn you in.

A: As a matter of fact, I think I remember my mother saying that somebody did try to--went to the Germans and said, "Those are Jews," and that my father was able to diffuse the situation by saying, "It's an outrageous accusation." And he also was--because, he was a doctor and he traveled all over; my mother stayed at home and saw patients at home--and, he may--I think he was treating Germans, as well as French, that nobody was eager to get us away, because they served a purpose in the community.

Q: And they were the only doctors in the village?

A: Yes. The next doctor was seven kilometers away, and he helped my father. He signed papers for him; when he was no longer allowed to work, because he was a foreigner, that doctor signed the papers so he could continue working. And there may have been a financial arrangement between them. I don't know.

Q: How old were you when you found out you were Jewish?

A: My conscious memory was when we moved. When I was ten we moved to Paris. And then my father wanted to go to the synagogue, and that's when--and I was not allowed to go back to church any more, and, I went--I was told I was a Jew. And that's--as far as I can tell, that was about it. Do you want me to elaborate a little bit on it? Okay. Again, my parents are very private people. They do not talk about feelings; they don't share feelings; they try to say there are no such thing as feelings--you know, you "just live"--so that it's hard for me to really know what they were about, about hiding; but, you have to assume that it was a very, very frightening time, because your life just depends upon somebody's whim, and you can be taken away at any time. For me, it wasn't the same, because I had no real awareness that Jews were being killed all over. I knew it was dangerous to be a Jew, but I didn't know the extent of it and I didn't know

that it could be so--so fatal. At least, I don't think I ever faced it. They pretended that they were just Christians, because I was going to--because I was baptized. They were not practicing Christians, for the village, but, very many people weren't, either; you know, the children.

Q: Did they have you baptized for the purpose of concealing your identity?

A: Yes; yes. The priest knew. My parents told me that the priest knew we were Jews.

Q: And what types of things did you do; you went to church regularly?

A: Um-hmm (positive response).

Q: Were you educated in that--was it Catholic, or which--

A: Yeah; yeah. It was a Catholic church; yeah.

Q: And did you go to Catholic school?

A: Yeah. When I was small, there was a little parochial school, if you like. And the teacher liked Peter so she had us sing songs about Peter; and, can you imagine, I would come home and sing the song, and my parents weren't that warm about that at all!

Q: Did your parents, inside your home, have any symbols of Judaism--

A: No.

Q: --or observe any Jewish traditions?

A: None at all; no. The only thing that they did that I knew was forbidden was listening to the radio, from England.

Q: That was forbidden?

A: Yeah.

Q: And after the war was over, did your life change at all?

A: (nods head in the affirmative)

Q: What happened?

A: Again, it changed not exactly because I was Jewish. It simply changed because the Germans were gone, and there was a great sense of relief. There was danger from the Germans for all of us, because there was a small resistance group in the village and a couple of German soldiers were ambushed and killed right before the end of the war. And at that point they came one morning, about 6:00 in the morning. There was a knock at the door. And my grandmother took me and we ran away. We tried to hide, but the Germans found us and shot--but not to kill us, because we were right there. And then everybody went in front of the mayor (phonetic) and all the village was there; and the women, the men, and the children were separated. Now, I assume for my parents it must have been a terrible moment of anguish, because they didn't know. You know, I didn't know, but I was too young to know the danger. They must have felt that someone came to get them. And, we spent the day there; and the Germans wanted to take us to Germany--you know, in trucks--or burn the whole village; and the priest talked to them; and apparently they changed their mind; and, a few days later, the Americans came and liberated us.

Q: And at what point did your parents actually tell you you were Jewish, and, did you ever start pursuing a Jewish lifestyle?

A: No; not me. I don't remember the day. You know, I don't remember the event at all. I think--it was traumatic for me because I was more identified with the church. I had liked--I liked the priest. I liked the little church, and I liked the kind of religion that we were taught, which, for the children, was very simple: "If you are good, God loves you"; and the Jewish religion, as I was told, didn't offer the same kind of comfort. There was a God that was removed. It was a God that every year looked at you and decided whether you could live or die. I wasn't prepared for that. There was no transition. And I didn't like the synagogue. It looked like just a room; an empty, cold room. The women were above the men. The Rabbi was small and dark and bearded and looked fierce, and I was afraid of him. I never talked to

him. He had daughters that he, later on, married away against their will--one of them. And it looked--it didn't look comforting, the way, as a small child, I knew the church; and it was a tall, a little, a dark church with stained-glass windows. There was a mystery. So, I was not--I did not like, unfortunately, being a Jew; and I, later on, tried to escape it altogether. I even married a man who is not Jewish. And eventually, of course, I came back, because I feel I am a Jew and I will not--I could never convert or never be what--what I am, I am a Jew; but it has been a difficult journey for me.

Q: Have you done any education to educate yourself in Judaism?

A: I have tried to go back to synagogues here and there, but I never--I am never comfortable. I can't find a place. I have gone to church a few times, and I cry when I go; but, I can't go there, either, because I don't belong.

Q: Can you tell me the progression of events that happened after the liberation of your family and how Judaism became a part of your life?

A: Right. There was, of course, an enormous sense of relief when the Germans left. I mean, we were all safe--but it wasn't, entirely, a safe atmosphere. Right after the war they started--then there was a sort of witch-hunt for collaborators, people who either helped Germans or had contact with Germans; and, I remember that. An old lady who lived across the street from us, she was a spinster, and she had slept with a German, and I remember her head being shaved. I remember, also, that the food--you know, the things we missed didn't come back right away. It's not like suddenly we are free and life goes back to normal. There was no--for a long time there was no sugar, still. There was no leather. We were not that terribly deprived, because in the village you get all the basics. We didn't have chocolate, and things like that. I saw oranges, I think, for the first time in my life when I was eight years old--and sardines. And when we were liberated the Americans threw us chewing gum, to the kids, and that was, of course, the first time we saw chewing gum. We chewed on it for a month, it seems! I don't think life changed very much in terms of the practical aspects of it; it was more the feeling that the danger was away. However, for my parents, I heard them say they never felt or feared that there was no danger, that they had the sense that it might occur again, and they really never relaxed. My mother, especially, had a bad--which is interesting to me, and I don't know why--she had a bad feeling about the village, when I felt--and I think my father, too--that we were really saved by the people around us and we owed them a lot. And so--you know, I remember the celebration when the Americans were there and we were liberated, and the joy. And afterwards I think we just went back to living a life that's lowly. It became a little better, but it wasn't a tremendous change right away. And I don't believe my parents ever told anyone that we were Jews. They wanted to keep it a secret. But when--then, when I was--in '47 my grandmother and I moved to

the suburbs of Paris for a year--and my grandfather died in '48. So, she and I spent a year there and--because I was going to school. My parents sold their practice and came later. And then my father joined the synagogue, which was in--where we lived, in Valdoise (phonetic), and then we started going regularly to the synagogue. We did not have kosher food in the house. And we celebrated the main holidays, and the one that stayed with me was Yom Kippur. And, I felt simply reluctant. I just went along.

Q: When did you learn that the Holocaust happened?

A: I don't know. It's a strange--it's a strange notion. I don't know if I knew and I repressed it, or, I didn't know. I know, certainly, I did not want to know; I stayed away from the whole--from the whole subject, as best as I could, and, in fact, it's only when my daughter, who was--when she was 17, or 16, she asked. She started asking me questions; and I said I didn't know and I didn't want to know and she did not need to know, because it was over; and--but she insisted then. She started to read books, and she started to have nightmares. And at that point I didn't want--I felt I owed it to her, maybe, or maybe to--to also know something so I can talk to her about it; and, very slowly I have informed myself, but even now, I haven't read Franco (phonetic), for instance. I mean, there are books on--

Q: (Interposing) Did you--when you left your village and you went to Paris and you were ten years old, you weren't aware of what had just happened in Europe?

A: You know, I cannot remember; I can't remember anything. I'm sure I was aware, because it's impossible not to; but, I have absolutely no memory. All I remember is the people in the synagogue, and they looked so somber and so sad but I don't recall consciously knowing why.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Then I went to Le Seine (phonetic), when I lived in Valdoise (phonetic). It's a public school. And, in my class, again I was the only Jew--wait; no. I think in the class ahead of me was Michelle LaVeigh (phonetic). That's right. In my own class of 30 kids I was the only Jew. And I never really experienced any anti-semitism directly. I wasn't taunted for being a Jew. The kids--the boys made fun of me because I was eleven years old and I had breasts; and so, that was a big event! So, the breasts were what plagued me as a child, not being a Jew!

Q: But were they aware that you were Jewish, your schoolmates?



A: Again, you see, I really don't have much information. I think--I was also taught to hide, and it was very confusing, because--I became a Girl Scout, and I remember going to see a priest who was holding this Girl Scout group, and my mother telling me to tell him that we were Russian Orthodox. So, I trot in his office and he asked me what my religion is--and I think it was a Catholic group--and so, I tell him; and he asked me questions about it, and I couldn't answer; I had no idea; and he got angry at me and told me it was bad to lie. So, I went away in tears and joined a Protestant group--but, I went to church with them, too. You know, I went to all the services, because that's what we did. And so, it seems like that I was both going to the synagogue and, also, I had to hide being Jewish, at the same time; and, unfortunately, I do not--I can't remember what I was feeling about it. I think it was confusing. It was never something that I felt a part of, which I regret because I now have friends who find a strong sense of identification and strength in being a Jew, and a sense of being a survivor.

Q: And what were the events that occurred in your life after; how long were you in Paris and what brought you then--did you come from there to the United States?

A: Yes. I came. I stayed in the suburbs with my parents until I was 18 and finished, you know, the Le Seine (phonetic). Then I spent a year in London, studying. Then I moved out from my parents' house and lived in Paris near the Sorbonne. And in 1962--and once I was on my own I stopped going to any kind of religious services, and in 1962 I came over to America, on vacation, basically, and stayed a year to learn the language, and met an American and got married; and so, we settled here.

Q: And throughout your adult--your early adult years if you were asked what religion you were, what did you tell them?

A: Oh, yes; I always said that I was Jewish, but I never volunteered very much, either; but, I never hid. My ex-husband was Methodist, I believe. He was not religious, either, so the children were brought up without any religious education at all. They asked me if I believed in God, and I said I wasn't sure but chances are there was a God, because I really wanted to give them the opportunity. When we divorced I tried to take the children to--oh; we went to the Ethical Society (phonetic). That's right. I thought maybe that's a way. They hated it! Then I tried to take them to a synagogue; and there was a very good Rabbi here, and the kids liked him; and then he retired to become a therapist, a family therapist; and, after that, there was nothing doing. The kids wouldn't hear of going to another synagogue. So, we left it at that. I left it at that.

Q: And when did you begin to identify with--or are you involved in--you said you are a member of a group of children of (inaudible) survivors?

A: Yes--no; I'm sorry. The Hidden Children (phonetic). Yes.

Q: When did you decide to become involved and identify with that group of people?

A: Well, you know, as ironic as life is, it is really my daughter who showed me the way, because she strongly identifies, very strongly, with the--she--she is a Jew. She calls herself a Jew. I have two children; an older son, and a daughter. My son is not, at all; doesn't consider himself Jewish. He is not part of it at all. It's very striking. My daughter is, and she is now working in Tucson with Russian refugees, Jewish refugees. And in some ways I feel that she opened a door for me; and it was two years ago I joined this group, and, also, because I have had, for many, many years, a friend and a lover who is Jewish, and he was solely identified with the Jewish religion and would get very angry at me for having a Christmas tree! This was a great source of contention. And because of him, too, I started feeling closer to being a Jew. Now I have a feeling--I know a lot about the Holocaust. I have heard many, many stories of the children--I mean the real tragedies of people losing,--as you know--losing family; and I feel more connected, because I am connected to people, not to an abstraction.

Q: Tell us how your parents located in the village that you were in--and your particular situation is unique than other survivors or children because you were Jewish and your life really changed in not many ways when the war was going on.

A: How my parents came to--well, they finished medical school in 1975, and they were both very, very poor. They had absolutely nothing to start with. So, they were looking at the time for a place where they might find a need, where there would be a need for a doctor and they could start working right away and get some money. So, they were searching for very small places,--living in Paris was out of the question--and in that search they settled on the village, and I don't know why there rather than in the south, for instance.

Q: Where did your parents meet each other?

A: They met in medical school. They both seem to have had a strong desire to be doctors, coming from childhood. My father did not pass the exam to go to Vienna, to be accepted in medical school in Vienna--which certainly saved his life--and so he came to Paris--to France--

and then went to Montpellier and went to school in Montpellier first and then moved up to Paris. My mother came from--well, from Harbin (phonetic) because she did not want to go to medical school in China, or it was impossible, and she, also, chose Paris; and so she came by herself when she was 18 years old and learned the language and then went to medical school.

Q: And in your particular situation while the war was going on and before and after, you did not have much of a change in your lifestyle, in your family--

A: Not really, no; or whatever change there was, I am not aware of. I am sure it was dramatic; but, it was internal.

Q: And the reason was because there were no Jews in the community; there weren't any in the neighboring communities;--

A: Right; right. We had--

Q: (continuing) --there was no slave labor; there were no deportations; there was really no sign of Hitler's war against the Jews?

A: There was no sign where we lived; and when I say--you know, you have to realize, this was many years ago, and when you live in the village you are so isolated, because you don't travel. There is no reason to go to the village next door; and so, you live in a very small world; and, going to Amiens (phonetic), which was 35 kilometers away, was a huge expedition. I mean, we went there very rarely, and it would have had to be something very special. We lived in the village. We could have been in the center of the earth!

Q: What was the effect on the village by having the Germans occupying your village?

A: Well, I--we hated them. You always--you hate the people who occupy you. I mean, we felt that we were in retreat. I mean, there was a general feeling. How it affected me, personally, was, the first thing I knew, I remembered there was--living next to us, in the garden next to us, there was an old lady, and I don't know how old she was. I would say 97, now. I am sure she wasn't that old, because, I was so young that she--but, anyway, she lived alone and she had beautiful flowers in her garden. She had dahlias. She had just a gorgeous garden. We had a more pedestrian garden, with fruit, with strawberries and things. After a while the Germans

took her house and made her move, and I don't know where she went or what happened to her. And after about a year or two they made us move. They occupied our house, and we moved in with a spinster near the park in NuMeir (phonetic). So, this was difficult.

Q: In a small town like that you must have seen them everywhere you were;--

A: Yeah; yeah.

Q: --when you went to do your shopping?

A: But we also had access to everything they wanted. It was like you live in your own house but you are no longer the master of this house. You become like a servant. You become second, or second best.

Q: Were you afraid of them?

A: I think everyone was afraid of their potential, yes--but, it was so very humiliating. You know, you are occupied. It's no longer your place.

Q: Was there any resistance to the soldiers being there?

A: There was always resistance. There was just the name-calling, if you like; them being the "boosh" (phonetic). There was that level of hatred; but, it was hidden. We wanted them out.

Q: Did the soldiers speak French?

A: No.

Q: So, you were able to talk and you really weren't concerned that they were understanding what you were saying?

A: No. I think it was behind their back. I think the Germans, you know, got wise pretty soon about what "boosh" (phonetic) meant.

Q: And you said there was a small resistance group in your village?

A: Yes.

Q: What did they do and how did they--

A: Well, there is--I remember one event. It was towards the end of the war. An American soldier had jumped. His plane had been shot down--there were lots of planes flying all over, over us all the time; and he had been shot down, and he jumped with his parachute and hit a tree and he was killed. The men went to find him, but, they couldn't. They couldn't save him. So, in the village we divided the parachute, and we got the threads of it, which were white and silvery, and my mother had a lady knit a jacket for me--we had no wool at the time--; and it was just a frightening experience, because I thought of the dead man to whom the parachute belonged. Then we divided the material and I don't know what we did with it.

Q: Were there any incidents of rebellion with the resistance?

A: Open? No; no.

Q: How many years were they occupying?

A: From 1940 until the end of the war. We were liberated in June, '45. But towards the end we knew the Germans were frightened, and we knew they were going to leave. It became more dangerous. That's when they came and almost killed us. No; it was not a peaceful time. You know, it was not like life was going like usual. But it was more a sense of helplessness that we already had, and it was a life that I was born into. I did not know any different. I didn't know the difference. I can tell the difference when I think back upon it. Okay?

Q: Is there anything you would like to add to end this presentation?

A: I am thinking of Elie Wiesel, who says--and I think this is what--this is being done: "If you remember, it will not happen again. If the world remembers, it will not happen again." I am also thinking of what is happening now in Somalia, but more so in Bosnia. It doesn't feel like "remembering" is enough. And what troubles me is, you think back in horror; how could the world have let it happen? How could there have been trains taking people away? And yet we--me, as a person, I know what's going on in Bosnia, and yet I don't want yet to go there. And, somehow, it's happening again; and that is what is frightening.