

## **Audio Oral History Interview with Ms. Nicole DORRA recorded June 19, 2010 in Paris, France**

Nicole Dorra was born in Paris on June 9, 1932. Her father, Elie Dorra, was born in Syria in 1901 and was considered a “protégé français” after Syria became a French mandate after the First World War. Her mother, Hinie or “Annie” née Feingold was from a Viennese Jewish family. Nicole Dorra says that she was born in Bukovine and she thinks that this was part of Slovakia (it is currently divided between Romania and the Ukraine). Her parents met in Vienna when Mr. Norra’s father; an international businessman, settled there for a while in the 1920’s. In 1928, the whole Norra family emigrated to France, where the father was involved in selling fabric.

Because of the Depression, Nicole’s mother went to work designing hats. She had exquisite taste and was quite nimble with her fingers and soon the Dorra’s opened two boutiques in the 9<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Her creations were sighted at horse races and other fashionable places.

In 1938, two cousins from Vienna came to live with her family. Nicole appreciated no longer being an only child. With considerable effort and funds, the rest of the Feingold family was smuggled out of Austria and obtained visas for South America. Nicole remembers them all taking the train at the Saint Lazare train station, on their way for a ship to take them to Colombia and eventually, Venezuela. Elie and Annie Dorra were planning to join them later.

During the “drôle de guerre” from September, 1939 to September, 1940, the family lived in the coastal resort town of La Baule, in southern Brittany. They returned to live in Paris from the fall of 1940 until April, 1941.

Although Elie’s parents were on the list of *Djugutis* or *Djougoutes*, Iranian Jews who were considered Aryen, apparently he did not benefit from the same protection (their passports were Iranian, his Syrian). His boutiques were “aryanized” and assigned a non-Jewish administrator, who won a law suit after the war and kept the business.

Apparently, Nicole’s father crossed the demarcation line before his wife and daughter. Nicole remembers waiting until the concierge was not there and moving out major pieces of furniture from their apartment in Paris, notably the Pleyel grand piano. She describes taking the train alone with her mother, who had never done anything on her own. They left in April, 1941, well before the June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942 law imposed the wearing of the Jewish star in the occupied northern zone.

The family settled in Nice and her father even purchased an apartment there. Her father reasoned that they would be safer there than in a hotel. Nicole was baptized by a priest in Monaco, Father Arrighi, who was later chastised by the Church for baptizing so many Jews. (See digital photo of the certificate on accompanying CD.) Nicole went to the local school and soon took on the local accent.

She remembers that things started changing with the departure of the Italian troops and the arrival of the Germans in the formally unoccupied zone in the fall of 1942. The family nevertheless stayed on in Nice till early 1944. Every Sunday, they would ride their bicycles into the countryside to get food. Everyone suffered from hunger, rich and poor.

Nicole remembers distinctly realizing how mortal she was and how short our time on earth could be. It sobered her. She remembers walking with a friend and arriving at their apartment as the rest of her friend's family was being rounded-up.

In early 1944, the family went to a small hamlet in the department of the Isère, 20 kilometers from the city of Voiron. She thinks the name was "Le Charra", near Saint Etienne de Crossey. Her mother had to scrub and clean to make the little place they were given to live habitable. Nicole was obliged to attend mass at the local church every Sunday so that the peasants and farmers would not become suspicious about her family. Nicole remembers that they heard about the Liberation of Paris in Le Sarra and moved back to Nice several days later.

Elie Dorra joined the Forces Françaises Libres and went on to liberate Germany. Nicole and her mother stayed on in Nice. The family stayed there till late 1946.

Nicole's mother wanted her to become a professional concert pianist. Wherever they went, a piano followed. When the family returned to Paris, although their former apartment and boutiques had been pillaged and taken over by others, a businessman who left for South America sold his apartment and several clothing shops to Elie Dorra. Their new home was on the avenue Suffren in the chic 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Nicole remembers being teased about her provençal accent and decided to become studious and show the other students at the Lycée Victor Duruy that she was just as bright as them. She was interested in chemistry, but a family friend advised her to get her medical degree and then work with chemistry. She did so, and then specialized in anaesthesia.

Dr. Dorra ended up working as an anaesthetist in the same maternity clinic in the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris where she was born.

After she retired, Dr. Dorra became involved in several associations involved with preserving the memory of resistance activities and deportations. She later created an association which organizes screenings of various films connected with history, "Cine-Histoire". In February, 2010, the City of Paris bestowed its highest honor on her, the "Médaille de Vermeille". It was given to her by the former and present city official responsible for Veterans Affairs and Commemorations.