

Interview with Arthur LANGERMAN on June 19, 2017 Uccle, Belgium

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Arthur Langerman was born on August 21, 1942 in Borgerhout, a suburb of Antwerp, Belgium, to Salomon Langerman and Zysla Blajwas. His mother, a milliner, was born in Warsaw. His father, who had a small business making coats from rabbit skins, was born in Crakow, but the couple met in Belgium.

At the beginning of the interview, Mr. Langerman states that he does not remember anything from the period of the war and that this has been a cause of great suffering for him. After the war, his mother never spoke about where she had been or what had happened, or what happened to his father, and children know when they should not ask about certain things. Mr. Langerman has searched the archives at the Kazern Dossin (the internment camp in Mâlines where Jews were imprisoned before they were sent east) and found *réliques*, official documents, pertaining to his parents' civil and religious marriage and deportation. He has gone to great efforts to trace his family tree back to the 15th century and connect with cousins all over the world.

Mr. Langerman explains how and why the two Polish families ended-up in Belgium, although they seemed headed for the United States. His widowed maternal grand-mother first moved to Duisbourg, in Germany, where she married another Langerman, who already had several children and they moved to Antwerp with several more in tow and settled in the flourishing Jewish community there.

When war broke out, like so many Belgians, his extended family fled to France and even settled in Bordeaux for a while, planning to go to the States, but the Belgian authorities wooed Jewish refugees back to Belgium, maintaining they could live there in peace. It was his maternal grand-mother who made the decision that the families should return.

When Arthur's parents were arrested in March, 1944, Arthur was one of the 500 or so Belgian Jewish children that the Belgian Queen Elisabeth, mother of the collaborationist King Leopold III, put under her protection. He was sent by the Sipo-SD to the *pouponière Castro*, a nursery for infants, in the Etterbeek section of Brussels. (The USHMM has a picture of a row of children sitting on the floor in a semi-circle and Arthur is the fourth child from the left. He found another version of that photo where he is crying...)

Apparently, he was sent to several children's homes and then, to live with several families, but he has no memory of this. His mother survived deportation to Auschwitz and when they were reunited, he had no idea who she was. The family apartment had been ransacked, not a single possession was left, and Zysla had no means to care for her son, so she sent him to live with a family which had kept his cousin during the war in Charleroi.

After the war, Zysla married a Mr. Kornblum and had a son named Frank in 1947. At one point, he decided to leave for Buenos Aires, but died in South America not long after he arrived. Zysla married a third time, a Mendel Krymolowski, who sold stockings at outdoor markets for a living. They had a little girl, 14 years younger than Arthur.

Arthur's mother tongue was Yiddish and he spoke French, too. He was sent to a Jewish religious school right down the street, but the teachers were brutally strict and hit students on the hands with a wooden rod when they made mistakes. He was sent to another school a bit further away, but because of the Belgian laws, he had to study in Flemish, which he did not know. He said that he also suffered from anti-Semitic remarks from Belgian kids.

Arthur was an excellent student and would have liked to continue his education, but at the age of 15, his mother thought it was time for him to earn a living. With about 10 friends, he was sent to learn the art of splitting or cleaving diamonds in an "*atelier de clivage*", but apparently, he was not very good at this. His mother nonetheless persuaded a cousin to take him on and the man exploited Arthur for almost a decade, giving him a whole gamut of things to do. Currently, Mr. Langerman runs a business specializing in colored diamonds, which have now become popular.

In 1961, the Eichmann trial was a turning-point in his life – all of a sudden, he started hearing and reading about what had happened in Europe during the war...although he was still afraid to question his mother about her experiences.

It was at this point that he became fascinated with the sources of anti-Semitism and starting collecting pamphlets, posters, postcards and anything else that came his way that he could afford. He now has one of the largest collections of anti-Semitic propaganda in the world, a collection comprising 7 to 8,000 pieces. Not a day goes by that he does not hunt for something to add and he is looking for a foundation to house the entire collection permanently.

Mr. Langerman also has a talent for languages, speaking about 11 of them. He has worked on translating short stories by the author Sholem Aleichem into French and has several other works in Yiddish he would like to share with the public.