

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Arlette de Long
May 23, 1997
RG-50.106*0063**

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Transcribed by Brenda Wakelin, National Court Reporters Association.

ARLETTE DE LONG
May 23, 1997

Question: This is an interview for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are interviewing Arlette de Long. My name is Ester Finder. Today's date is May 23, 1997. This is Tape 1, Side A. Can you tell me what your name is?

Answer: My name is Arlette de Long.

Q: Could you spell that for me?

A: A-R-L-E-T-T-E D-E L-O-N-G.

Q: Was that your name at birth?

A: No. At birth I was called -- my first name, Arlette, Waldmann, W-A-L-D-M-A-N-N.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born June 15th, 1937.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Brocourt, France. It's in the department of Somme.

Q: Could you spell those for me, please?

A: Yes. B-R-O-C-O-U-R-T. Somme, S-O-M-M-E. It's in the north of France.

Q: Did your family have a long history in France?

A: No. My parents are not French. My mother came from Siberia -- she was born in Siberia, lived in China; came in France in 1918 or '20 to study medicine in Paris. My father was born in Chernivtsi, which was Romania, used to be Austria and he spoke German as his first language. He came to Paris also to study medicine and they met in medical school, and got married, and they came in the village, where I was born, in 1935.

Interview with Arlette de Long

4

They chose -- they chose that village because once they graduated from medical school, they had no money between themselves at all. So, they searched for a place that would have no physicians, and I don't know why it was in the north, exactly what was the process, but they found this village in which there were no doctors within about 30 kilometers, or just -- or maybe less than that, 15. So, they rented a house, settled down, and never told anybody that they were Jews. It was 1935 and they must -- they -- they had a good feeling for what was happening, they were really -- had much forethought, and in fact I think this is what saved our lives, because even though in the village I'm sure people knew we were Jewish, because we were this foreign family; Waldmann was the name, Waldmann (vald-man), however they spoke with an accent. My grandparents had come from China to live with us in 1937. So, we suddenly were a very odd family in that village. There were no Jews at all anyplace in this area. But the fact that he was never officially announced that -- when I was a child -- when I was born on -- I have papers. I don't know if it happened in that (?sho-let-ry?) or not, but I have papers that I've been baptised. I think the only person who knew the truth was the priest in the village, who did not speak. No one spoke. No -- no one told the Germans that we were Jews, or no one made a concerted effort to get us out.

Q: When you were growing up, did your parents speak to you about your family background and any traditions with respect to religion?

A: No. Well, during the war certainly not, but I didn't really - no. I have no idea. I know very little about my grandparents on my father's side. They died -- his father died during the war, and his mother just a month after I was born, and my father never, never, never

Interview with Arlette de Long

5

spoke about that. I asked a few questions, but I have no idea who they were, what their life was like. My grandparents; I don't know if they were religious or not. My grandfather died when I was eight and my grandmother died when I was here in America, I forget, 40, and she looked old. If there was a tradition, I don't know. What happened is when I was 10 I moved to the suburbs of Paris; my parents followed a year later. I spent a year with my grandmother there. When my father came, he joined a synagogue in -- in the town where we were, the suburbs of Paris, called Le Raincy, and it was -- of course in France we did not have reform, so it was a traditional synagogue with the woman going upstairs, and then we started going to that. I had no -- really no understanding much. I wasn't told very much about the religion, I don't think. Believing in God or not, I felt was more sort of my business. It wasn't a family thing, and when I was 13-14 I stopped believing anyway, and for me it was more complicated, because I had gone to church when I was little in the village, and so....

Q: Let's back up.

A: Okay.

Q: Do you have any memory of your life before the beginning of the war?

A: None at all.

Q: What were your first memories?

A: My first memory was being under a table with my grandmother holding onto me, to my shoulder. I wanted to get from under the table and she was very determined to keep me there. The reason was -- later on I was told that there were bombs. And now, this was not in our village. At some time during the war, and I don't know when exactly, although

Interview with Arlette de Long

6

I think I was pretty young. I must have been about two and a half years old, or three, my mother -- my father joined the army, the French army, as a volunteer. My mother and grandparents left the village, we had a car, and we went down to (?cam-pare?), or someplace in Normandy. I'm not absolutely sure what the purpose of the trip was. My father later said that my grandparents want, and my mother wanted to leave France. Was it because -- was my mother trying to leave, you know, just go away? The story is unclear. The marriage was bad, so it might have been. Anyway, apparently my father discovered them. It's all very unbelievable. I don't know what the truth is. They will not tell me what the story is. But after a while we came back to our house in the village and my father -- well, the army, the French army, surrendered very quickly. So -- but maybe it was -- I must have been -- it was -- must have been in the beginning of the war, because there was no French army very soon after. So, this is my first memory. After that I don't have any for a long time. I remembered the village, you know, my life in the village. I remember -- I remember really (?bar-is-son?).

Q: After that episode that you just talked about, did you go back then to the village?

A: No.

Q: Did your family make any effort to change their name? Or to, perhaps, conceal any suggestion that they might be Jewish?

A: No, because people already knew them by their name before the war. Since they hadn't said they were Jewish, they just kept on with the same pretense, so-to-speak. There were no special -- there was no special effort that I can think of.

Interview with Arlette de Long

7

Q: Do you remember the war years in this village? Did you -- was -- were you touched at all by the war?

A: No. Well, yes and no. Of course, we were touched by -- the things I remember is the food shortages, but they weren't real food shortages. There was no -- there was no chocolate, for instance, or very little sugar and my -- my parents best friend at the time, and my best friend too, owned a store, a grocery store, and I remember I used to go there every day and looking at the chocolate that was displayed, and the candies and wanting some, but everything was rationed, so I couldn't have them, and so, that was really memory for me. There were no explanation, of course. I remember wooden shoes, shoes with wooden soles that were heavy. I remember one time an American or British soldier on a parachute came down, and I think he died, and the villagers got his parachute, which was stained with blood, I think I saw it, but my mother had taken the - the thread of the parachute and had -- and knitted a jacket for me, sweater, which I absolutely hated, maybe because it had that connotations. Also, it was slippery, it was white, and I remember hating it. I don't ever remember wearing it, though. I must have.

Q: Do you remember German soldiers in your town?

A: Yes. Oh, yeah. I used to play with them, with some of them. We had a big house. We had -- relatively, for the village. We had a house with -- eventually indoor plumbing. I think we had it during the war already. But we had a brick house, and the -- we didn't have a bathroom -- bathroom that I know. I mean, I used to take baths outside in a tub of water, and the house was joined to -- to another house, there were two of them, and in the house next door to us there was an old, old lady who lived there with a -- who had a

Interview with Arlette de Long

8

beautiful garden full of flowers. The Germans took that house, took that part of the house, made her move, and we stayed in our part. We had a garden too, but not so many flowers, we had strawberries and potatoes and things. The two yards were contiguous so that I used to -- the soldiers were there -- when they were in the yard, I used to go there too. I remember my mother saying not -- never to eat any of their candies, if they gave me some, because they could be poisoned. I don't know if I knew, but I knew -- I have a feeling that I knew there was a secret. I don't think I knew we were Jews, especially. It's like I had a feeling maybe they were bad, but I was too young to understand, really, whether they were bad or not. It was confusing. The soldiers were not difficult towards - - I mean, they didn't harm the -- the population. They lived with us, they occupied the village, but to a child they looked like different people, but the people, they were not especially frightened, I don't think.

Q: Was there every any fighting in your village?

A: No. We had a little bit of -- some men joined the Résistance, I think, but it was more a gesture, I think. When -- we didn't have bombs. Bombs didn't fall on us. They fall -- fell on the village not too far from us. Because they had V8s, they had bunkers, the Germans, and they were sending the V8 to Germany from that place. So, they could bomb quite a bit, but not us. There were about 10 kilometers away from our house.

Q: Did your parents seem at all uncomfortable, or nervous, when the Germans were near them?

Interview with Arlette de Long

9

A: Oh, yeah. I -- my parents were very anxious. Yeah. My father spoke German. You know, this was his mother tongue. So, I think that that was very useful. I think he treated the German soldiers as well as the French people, and that was helpful for us.

Q: What languages did you speak in your home?

A: We spoke two languages. I spoke Russian with my grandfather and grandmother and my mother, and French with my father and my mother too.

Q: Did you have any idea what a Jew was?

A: No.

Q: Had there been any discussion about Jews, to the best of your recollection?

A: No.

Q: In those....

A: No.

Q: Did your parents have any discussions that you might have been present for, or you might have overheard, about what was happening in other parts of Europe?

A: You know, I don't think I had any knowledge of concentration camps or any -- any such thing at all. I knew the Germans were bad. There was killing and bombs. There was danger and I knew there was something very bad and that the Germans -- we were hoping would leave. That's about as far as it got.

Q: Did you get a sense from the people in the village that they knew something of your family secret, or they were protective of you in any way?

A: No, I didn't -- no, not at all. I thought -- we had a privileged position, being the doctor. My father was respected. He was a good doctor. He is, yeah. He was well liked.

Interview with Arlette de Long

10

He was quite devoted to his people. He used to go by car, by -- first by bicycle, then my motorcycle, and then by car, all around when people were sick. If people didn't have money he treated them for free. We always had food because the farmers would give us things to eat. So, I felt really a little special being his daughter, but not in any different way than that when I was a child. I didn't know any differently -- I was never confronted by (?____?) or I didn't suffer in any way for being a Jew.

Q: When you look back to those years during the war, are there any episodes, or any memories, that stand out in your mind?

A: Yes. That was at the end of the war; I was -- must have been eight and it was in the spring, or in the summer; it was early in the morning and my -- oh, by that time we had moved. The German had to -- Germans took our house. So, they made us move, and we moved in the village next door to us, but they were detached to each other. So, it was really like (?____?) village with an old lady, and it was very early, my grandmother, she came in the room, shook me, and said, "Wake up, wake up, we've got to run." So, we ran outside and hid in the chicken coup. What had happened is -- and my mother was inside the house and my father and grandfather were running away towards the (?____?). The Germans had come to everybody, but we didn't know that at first, and they made us go in front of the (? Merie ?), they separated the townhouse, they separated the men, the women and the children, they brought trucks and they were going to ship us to Germany because something had happened, I'm not sure what. The food had been stolen, or someone had been killed, but it was really frightening. They shot towards my grandmother and me, but didn't -- didn't -- missed us. But it was pretty scary. And I remember so standing in the

Interview with Arlette de Long

11

garden for a minute, and the old lady who was with us in her nightgown. Then I remembered spending some time with the other children and our teacher. I remember seeing François, the woman who had the grocery store, she was very pregnant at the time and she was crying. I also remember crying, but I didn't know why I was crying, but I saw all the kids crying, so I figured -- I mean, I knew I was feeling bad, but I wasn't sure why -- what the danger was. So, that was a significant memory. I remember that. But again, it was not because we were Jews, it was because we were in the village.

Q: What happened to the people that the Germans had collected?

A: Oh, they collected all of us. The priest talked them out of taking us to Germany. We were lucky.

Q: Can you tell me about your early days in school during the war?

A: My first school -- I don't remember very well, whether I was four or five, five maybe, when I went. It was a Catholic school. The teacher made us sing songs about Vive Pétain, which my parents must have loved when I'd come home. I had no idea who Pétain was, or whatever it was. I remember we had a garden, we were planting a garden, working in the garden on the slope next to the church and I remember loving that. It was fun.

Q: Tell me about this song.

A: I don't know any more than Vive Pétain was part of the song. After that I went -- and that might have been after the war, I don't know the changes at all. I went to one school, one room school, in the village and there were kids from the age of seven -- I might have been -- I might have been there. From the age of -- before the war ended. From seven to

Interview with Arlette de Long

12

fourteen we were all together with one teacher, and I remember the teacher screaming at us because you can imagine boys and girls, everybody in one room, and I used to talk a lot. I would talk and talk and talk. So, they -- she had me sit alone under her nose, which I did not like.

Q: What kinds of things did you study? Was there anything that you studied during the war that you might not have studied if there hadn't been a war?

A: I don't think so. I just studied how to read and write and add. It was really simple. I mean, I was very much behind. When I moved to (?____?) it took me a year to catch up, because I barely -- I knew some things, but very much less than other kids did. It's hard to know how the war affected us, because by the time I have any memory at all, you know, that was all I knew.

Q: Did you have any regular contact with the German soldiers?

A: (?____?)

Q: Except to run into them in the garden?

A: No. No.

Q: Were there any -- to the best of your recollections, were there any restrictions or rules imposed by the Germans on the villagers?

A: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I think we had to blackout the windows, we did that ourselves. I don't -- I have a very, very vague memory, that may have been an early memory of -- we had a trench in the garden and going in there, seems like in the evening, or at night, when -- when there were airplanes above us. The airplanes were scary because you never knew what they were going to do, where the bombs would fall. They never fell on us, but it

Interview with Arlette de Long

13

was -- I think they were -- you know, the food restrictions, which I remember the most. I think -- I was told, I didn't know that, but I was told you couldn't butcher animals. Gas, gasoline was restricted.

Q: Were your movements restricted in any way? Travel or....

A: Not that I knew, no.

Q: When you were in school and you said that you attended church, when you were in church...

A: Mm hm.

Q: ...was any mention ever made of Jews and Judaism? In any way shape or form that you can recall?

A: No, I don't remember anything about Jews. I remember being -- the priest talking about Jesus and me developing a great love for -- for a man who was described as loving children, and I think for me the connection was, my family was not very loving and it was nice to have an idea that someplace there was somebody who was looking after you. So, that's what I remember about the church. It was -- it was a good place. I liked it.

Q: Did your parents attend church along with you?

A: No, no. My parents did not, and I think they were very -- my mother is, I remember, was very unhappy if I -- I always wanted to cross myself and I don't know if -- when I was a kid if I could do it or not, but afterwards, it was forbidden. It was like a very bad thing, and yet, it's funny, even to this day, when something really bad happens, you know, the impulse is still there on me to do it.

Interview with Arlette de Long

14

Q: Was it unusual for adults to miss church attendance? Did -- was anybody -- so, your -- you're shaking your head, you need to give me an answer.

A: Sure. Yeah. No, it wouldn't have been -- especially the men, they didn't necessarily go that much. It was the family we were friendly with, François and her husband, Marcel. For instance, Marcel was a communist. I don't know if he was a communist at that time, or if it existed, but he was fiercely anti-religion. Oh, he hated the priest. He hated the idea of -- it's funny, he still is. His wife, of course, was Catholic. Everybody was Catholic in the village. You know, everybody had been baptised. And -- you know, I don't think she went much to church, either. I mean, you were Catholic because that was part of your -- of your way of living, everyone was baptised, it was normal. But you didn't have to practice. So, that not very many people would go to church. But they would go in the priest if they were sick. I mean, you took no chances, and baptisms were obligated, communion, first communion.

Q: Did you participate in any of the Catholic rituals, other than going to church, was there anything above -- above that level of observance that you engaged in?

A: I didn't -- well, I would have been too young for first communion, and I don't think there is more children take communion.

Q: Were there any church events, or anything like that? Maybe I should have made the question more clear.

A: I very faintly think there was a ceremony, something with flowers, and I don't know if I went or not.

Q: Did your family observe Christmas in your house?

Interview with Arlette de Long

15

A: No. They didn't observe -- observe many holidays, no Jewish holidays, in those days. Not Christmas's. I may have gotten a book, or something like that. May have gotten a present, but no.

Q: And not Easter?

A: No. No, Easter was not part of the (?___?).

Q: When you look back on those days, do you have a sense that people really knew you were Jewish, or do you have a sense now as an adult, looking back...

A: Mm hm.

Q: ...do you have a sense that maybe they weren't sure?

A: I don't think they were sure in the sense that they had proof, or they had seen any signs of being Jewish, or like Yamika, or any of the traditional signs. Of course, there were no synagogues in the village, you would have to go 40 kilometers to the town. So, they didn't have solid proof. On the other hand, I think the name is a Jewish name by itself, Waldmann, apparently, Waldmann (vald-man), my parents were -- they had dark hair and -- everybody in the family looks more Jewish than I do. I'm the only one with this lighter hair and blue eyes, and so, I think everybody suspected. I think it was pretty common suspicion or knowledge. Yeah.

Q: Was your -- to your knowledge, again, was there any incentive for the town's people, or the villagers, to pursue this, or to turn you in as a suspected Jew? Was there any motivation, or incentive, for this kind of act?

A: Yes and no. It's -- it's an interesting story. For -- for most of the people I don't think there was any incentive, because my father was the doctor and he helped everybody and

Interview with Arlette de Long

16

he was well liked. So, there was no reason to kill the village doctor and then be left without anybody. On a personal level, it was interesting and more complicated, because much later on, about 10 years ago, I was -- at first I had believed, that's what my mother had told me that no one knew in the village. It was a very well-kept secret and that's why we never had any troubles. I spoke with a man whose -- whose wife was my father's mistress, and this was common knowledge in the village, everybody knew, and he certainly would have had incentive to get rid of him, and he didn't. He -- he was the one who told me when I mentioned that nobody knew we were Jews in the village, he started to laugh and said, "Everybody knew, but we were not animals." So -- so, we were saved by the grace, in a way, of this man, and of the whole village. Certainly they could have gotten rid of us.

Q: Did the man say any more to you in your conversation 10 years ago?

A: I don't remember. It's interesting, because we -- we have all -- we are all friendly still. But it is also a taboo subject. The relationship between my father and François -- when I speak to François, which I do quite often from here, I call her. We have never, never mentioned -- she calls my father Dr. Valmon (ph), because they have changed their name since, and it's all really kind of funny, but I feel that she wants her privacy and it's not to me -- for me to -- to invade it, although I am very curious and I would like to ask questions about their relationship, and whatever happened back then. But (?__?).

Q: There must have been many other events that occurred during the war years, in your life. Can you reconstruct some of what your life was like during those years?

A: I have very few memories of my childhood. The war years in -- in a way, well it's a

Interview with Arlette de Long

17

paradox, but when I was 10 and I moved to live in the suburbs of Paris, this was to me a much more painful event than any of the war years. I liked living in the village. I was happy there despite the war, and despite the difficulties, it was a better time in my life, and so, the -- the loss at the same time when I was eight, after the war ended my grandfather died and that was a tremendous loss to me, and -- and I have very, very few memories of -- maybe the two years before he died and none -- none at all between eight - - eight and ten and a half. I have absolute no memories at all. It's all erased. But I have one memory at the end of the war, I remember, it was -- we were standing in front of my house with my family, I think, and two tanks came with either American or Canadian soldiers, and the Germans stood in between the soldiers, in between the tanks, and they threw their hands up in the air and their weapons fell down, and the soldiers threw us gum, which we've never seen, like, you kept that piece of gum and chewed on it, I think, for two weeks. At night I would put it away. And that was it. That was the end of the war, and then the woman next -- across the street from us, she was a spinster. Apparently, she had been sleeping with a soldier -- with some soldiers, which -- it makes me laugh, because when I was a child I thought of her as so ancient. You know, it was like a 90-year-old woman; maybe she was 30 or 40, who knows, but she felt very injured, and so, it was -- it was kind of comical to think of her sleeping with everybody. She got her head shaved.

Q: Which soldiers was she -- German or....

A: German. We only had Germans.

Q: Not -- not the liberating soldiers.

Interview with Arlette de Long

18

A: Oh hell, no. They wouldn't have -- nobody in France would shave your head for sleeping with a man, but soldiers, you know, German soldiers.

Q: We have to pause to change tapes.

...TAPE CHANGE.

Question: This is Tape 1, side B. We are interviewing Arlette de Long. And you were telling me about the woman who had her head shaved...

Answer: Yes.

Q: ...for having slept with German...

A: Soldiers.

Q: ...with German soldiers...

A: Or soldiers.

Q: ...or a German soldier.

A: A German soldier. I didn't know anything about it, of course, until, you know, after the war. Her name was Mademoiselle Levon (ph) and it -- I don't know. You know, things were done, I think, people got self-righteous in the village afterwards, but I really don't know much about it. Unfortunately after that, I have no memories. That's my last memory.

Q: You mentioned earlier about moving...

A: Mm hm.

Q: ...to the suburbs of Paris.

Interview with Arlette de Long

19

A: Mm hm.

Q: Why did your family move?

A: Ostensibly the reason was because I needed a better education. The truth was that Amiens, which was a big town 40 kilometers away, could have provided a perfectly good education for me as a boarder and I could home on the weekends, but my mother wanted to move. She wanted out of there, which was understandable. My father did not, but eventually he gave in, and so, we moved.

Q: And you also mentioned earlier that it was in -- in this new home that your father joined a synagogue.

A: Mm hm.

Q: Can you tell me your first memories of your introduction to Judaism?

A: Yes. Unfortunately, they were very, very negative. Even though I was, you know, 11 at least, I don't think my parents had explained to me any -- any of what was -- what had happened. And also, because at the same time I was going to the Girl Scouts and the Girl Scouts were Protestant, the troop, and so, I was -- I went back to church, but this time to the Protestant temple, which again, I liked, because at least they spoke English -- or French. You know, I could understand some of it. But I remember -- and I have it to this day, I am ashamed of the feeling, but I can't help it, sort of visceral dislike for the way the people looked, the Jews looked, because I did not know that those were the survivors. You know? So, they looked battered and they looked sad and they looked grey, you know? I didn't know any of that, and so, they looked awful to me, you know, those people compared to the Catholic who were young and, you know, in good health and

Interview with Arlette de Long

20

certainly didn't have the past. So, I wished I -- I wanted to be like all the other girls. I wanted to go to church, you know, legitimately. I wanted to take communion, I wanted to continue believing in Christ and -- you know, and then -- by then it was a terrible thing, and I was required to hate -- hate the Christians, but I had no whelm of hatred in me for Christians.

Q: Why were you required to hate the Christians?

A: That was my mother's call for allegiance, so-to-speak. If I loved her, you know, I was to love her and hate -- love the Jews, hate the Christians, but you can't make yourself. So, what happened was the opposite mostly, and the synagogue was terribly boring. I had to sit upstairs. I'm an only child, so I didn't have any siblings to commiserate with. I was sitting there with my mother, who didn't believe in anything, and was, you know, just sitting there and I think she was talking with other women. The rituals didn't -- you know, I missed the church ritual and the respect when you go in the church; you're quiet, you pray. There, it was just sort of sitting up there watching men in dark suits downstairs. The rabbi, who was mean and ugly. His wife, who was -- her hair was -- head was shaved, she was wearing a wig and the wig didn't fit, and I was just there and I hated it, but I hated it guiltily because I was expected not to, and it meant no -- I didn't believe in God by then. I felt it didn't make sense to me. And so, I just put in time because I had to.

Q: When did you learn about what happened to the Jewish people in other parts of Europe?

A: You know, I really stayed away from knowledge. I didn't want to learn, I didn't want to know, I didn't want to be part of it; I married a Methodist, who was not practicing. It's

Interview with Arlette de Long

21

not that I -- I hid that I was Jewish. I always said I was Jewish, because I feel you're born this way, you can't erase it. But I never identified with the Jews. I thought it was more of a curse to be born a Jew. And so, I really didn't want to know, and interestingly it's my daughter, when she was 16, she started asking me questions about the Holocaust and I said to her, you know, "I don't know much and you surely don't need to know, it's too horrible, forget it." But she needed to know. She started to read. I started having nightmares, and so, I needed to help her. So, I - I started myself to read a little bit and become, you know, more knowledgeable, so I could talk to her. And it was -- she is now 29, so it was a slow -- a very slow progression. I still, you know, haven't seen (?Schorr?) or I haven't seen that new movie, Schindler's List, because I am very visual and if I see something like that it's going to haunt me for months and months and months, if not years. And I figured, I went to the Holocaust Museum and I went through it in a daze, I don't remember much, except for the shoes and the car -- the wagon. It's about all I remember -- oh no, the picture, the tower of pictures.

Q: After the war, did your parents make any efforts to find some of the people, relatives, friends, that they grew up with before they came to France?

A: No. My mother is an only child. But my grandmother was one of 12, I think. So, there must have been a lot of people in Russia, but they never made any attempt -- any effort at knowing the family, or I wasn't -- I didn't know their name or anything. My father was one of four. I have an uncle who lives in Munich, who I think may have been in a camp and came out. I met him once. Then -- and then the rest of the family, I don't

Interview with Arlette de Long

22

know. I didn't even know their names. So my parents, we -- we really, really cut themselves off entirely from family (?___?).

Q: Did you ever experience any anti-Semitism in France?

A: No, except for an occasional remark. People don't think of me -- people who don't know, don't think of me as Jewish. I think it's because Arlette is such an unJewish name, or when I was growing up. Personally, no. I can't remember having been directly attacked. The funny thing that happened -- the funniest thing that happened to me was in America, and it was a funny story, because I was driving in a car with a woman who was a social worker and also a nun, and her friend, and the nun did not know I was Jewish and as we're driving, some -- some car cuts her off and she says, "Oh, that's a Jew. They are so pushy." At which point I thought, "I can't let you get away with that." So, I said, "I am a Jew", and she was so embarrassed. It was funny, but it was also pretty innocent, I felt. And so, once in a while I hear remarks like that. Some -- some woman who told me about somebody trying to "Jew" her. But I very often -- I didn't -- I knew the woman very slightly, and I -- I don't pick up on those things, because I don't -- I feel they're too stupid, you know, I'm not going to give them -- honour them with a response. So, I've been quite lucky, in retrospect.

Q: When did you come to the United States?

A: I came in 1962, and I originally came for a vacation, three weeks' vacation, then I decided to spend a year to learn the language and also to get away, and then I met my ex-husband at Stanford and within six weeks we were married. We stayed married 10 years, and have two children, and once I had the children I could not see taking them to France

Interview with Arlette de Long

23

and cutting them -- basically it would have been cutting them off from their father, which I did not want to do to them. I'd been enough -- through enough separations that I wasn't going to impose that on them. So, I stayed. I stayed in this country.

Q: When you say you had been through enough separations that you didn't want to impose that on them; what are you referring to?

A: Oh, I'm just thinking, you know, about my grandfather and leaving the village, you know, those kinds of disruptions as a child. When you're a child what you need are roots. A divorce is bad enough, but you don't want any deceptions, you don't want any changes. So, that's why I stayed here.

Q: Did your parents stay married?

A: Oh, yeah. Mm hm.

Q: When you look back to your childhood during the war...

A: Mm hm.

Q: ...are there any other memories, or feelings, that you have, or anything else that might come to mind at this point that you want to add?

A: I think, for me, the war might have been like thunder in the background. You know when you hear thunder at the distance and in a way you don't know whether it's going to come closer or move away. So, there is some sense of danger. Like, there are planes in the night. Years later when -- I don't even know. Oh no, there was one thing I never understood exactly why I felt that way, it was listening to machine gun fire, or any kind of gun shooting. I don't know if it was from that one experience, or what, but that would absolutely make me shake, and that surprised me, because, you know, I was not really

Interview with Arlette de Long

24

part of any very traumatic events that I can think of, but that -- that - I would have a tremendous response to that. I just couldn't stand it. Now, it's getting better, but in movies I'm careful, because it could send me -- it used to. I mean, I saw a movie and I shook for a good hour and cried. So, there was a sense of danger, I think, which I may have repressed or not want to deal with, because there was some other aspects of my childhood that were good. I certainly wish it never had happened. I mean, not only for all the others, of course, but personally that -- I don't know it was damaging in some ways that I don't know. I think it was the atmosphere that was poisonous, but poisonous in a way that does a child to just absorb, but do not understand.

Q: So, you don't -- you don't perceive any lasting fallout from your Holocaust -- your experiences during the war too?

A: Oh, yeah. I think so. Well, I think it was either thinking back on it, of course. I think for me the most difficult thing was being a Jew, because the experience was so mixed and so poorly integrated, and my sense of identity has been being -- being part of a group I never wanted to be part of, but that I could not leave, nor would I want to leave for sense of guilt. I do have a sense of guilt, that's one of the reasons I didn't really want to tell the story because I feel, what do I have to tell, you know, so many people have suffered so terribly, as I know from the group here and children survivors. You know, I didn't suffer, or -- why not? There is this -- this survivor's guilt. It's real. It's a real thing, and it certainly had a profound effect. A sense of insecurity. You know, you never know when you could be asked to move, or asked to leave. You never know if a bomb will fall on your head. But I think it was both, it was the war in general, which all the children,

Interview with Arlette de Long

25

everybody in my time suffered from, and it was personal in the difficulty of being a Jew and having such strong identification with -- with a man, with Christ, with a religion which basically also doesn't exist very much; it's an idea in my head. The Catholic Church, I wouldn't be part of it if you paid me at this time, because there are many things I think they are doing which are not (?___?), because they didn't fight the Germans either very much. So, it's a place that's sort of -- it's sort of no-man's-land, you know? And that's it.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add before we conclude the interview today? I did want to ask you a little bit about your -- your life in this country and your professional career. Would you mind sharing just a few minutes with me on that?

A: No. I think my career -- I have -- I was lucky to -- to have found -- to have found a career that really met a lot -- a lot of needs for me, and in which I have a sense of my life. Having made a little difference, I worked with adults most of my life as a psychotherapist. I'm now going to work with children, which I look forward to. I think I have a sense of -- a sense, a need, a wish, of -- to help those who are less fortunate. The greatest pain I have -- it's funny, it's interesting because it has nothing to do with the war, or maybe it does, is of being in exile. I did not really wanted to leave France. I left mostly to escape my parents, not the Germans. I can't go back. I'd go back, but I cannot go back because my children are here, my life is here, and all I know, I think, I survived much better than other people. I was lucky. And well, you know, like many in New York, Jews are not Jews, we all pay the price for the time we were born.

Q: Are your parents still alive?

Interview with Arlette de Long

26

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Could you tell me their names?

A: My father's name is Joseph Valmon (ph). In 1955, '53, I don't know, something like that, he changed his name from Waldmann to Valmon (ph) when he became a French citizen. And my mother's name is Fanni Valmon (ph), and (?___?) was her maiden name.

Q: One final question.

A: Mm hm.

Q: You mentioned several times that your father was the town physician.

A: Mm hm.

Q: But you also mentioned that your mother went to medical school and that's where they met.

A: Mm hm.

Q: Did your mother also practice medicine?

A: My mother practiced medicine, but only in the house. She never -- she was -- stayed in an auxiliary role. She never went to see patients outside, but patients came to the house and she practiced that way. She was not a very (?___?) practitioner. She preferred not to. But she -- she did help my father. He was really the main one, person, in terms of work.

Q: Thank you, and this concludes our interview today.

...TAPE ENDS.

Interview with Arlette de Long

27

Question: We're going to add a postscript. There was something else that you wanted to add, and I'll give you the opportunity to -- to make a final comment.

Answer: Okay. One of the reasons I wanted to tell my story and this was very strong for me when I first started thinking about it, was it is a story of hope and it is also a story that counteracts so many of the -- of the stories of people who had been turned in by the French, who had been persecuted, who had been betrayed. In my case -- and it feels for no reason in a way, it was just pure kindness, or pure decency, on the part of the people. They were just -- they were not killers. That's what the man said, "We are not animals." Maybe (?__?) human nature is -- is very much that too. That despite the other side of the story, that there is a lot of compassion and I want to say thank you to the people who saved us, and also say that perhaps there were other stories like mine, but I'm not regarded because people may not think about telling them, or being in the position to tell them. That I was not -- we were not alone, my family was not alone in having been helped. As a matter of fact, there was a whole village in -- in the (?____?) in which the priest led all the people, to save the Jews, and so, those are the stories that I want people to know about. And that is it.

Q: Thank you, and now we are concluded.

A: Yes. Yes.

Conclusion of Interview